



THOMAS WILLIAMSON, JR., ESQUIRE

Oral History Project
The Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit

**Oral History Project
The Historical Society of the
District of Columbia Circuit**

**United States Courts
District of Columbia Circuit**



THOMAS WILLIAMSON, JR., ESQUIRE

**Interviews conducted by:
Precious Boone, Esquire
September 8, 2013, August 5, 2014, August 26, 2015, March 29, 2016**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface.....	i
Oral History Agreements	
Thomas Williamson, Jr, Esquire.....	iii
Precious Boone, Esquire.....	iv
Oral History Transcripts of Interviews	
September 18, 2013	1
August 5, 2014,.....	37
August 26, 2015	88
March 29, 2016	136
Index	A-1
Biographical Sketches	
Thomas Williamson, Jr., Esquire.....	B-1
Precious Boone, Esquire.....	B-4
Tributes	C-1

NOTE

The following pages record interviews conducted on the dates indicated. The interviews were recorded digitally or on cassette tape, and the interviewee and the interviewer have been afforded an opportunity to review and edit the transcript.

The contents hereof and all literary rights pertaining hereto are governed by, and are subject to, the Oral History Agreements included herewith.

© 2017 Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit.
All rights reserved.

PREFACE

The goal of the Oral History Project of the Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit is to preserve the recollections of the judges of the Courts of the District of Columbia Circuit and lawyers, court staff, and others who played important roles in the history of the Circuit. The Project began in 1991. Oral history interviews are conducted by volunteer attorneys who are trained by the Society. Before donating the oral history to the Society, both the subject of the history and the interviewer have had an opportunity to review and edit the transcripts.

Indexed transcripts of the oral histories and related documents are available in the Judges' Library in the E. Barrett Prettyman United States Courthouse, 333 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C., the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, and the library of the Historical Society of the District of Columbia

With the permission of the person being interviewed, oral histories are also available on the Internet through the Society's Web site, www.dcchs.org. Audio recordings of most interviews, as well as electronic versions of the transcripts, are in the custody of the Society.

August 29, 2012

Ms. Linda J. Ferren
Executive Director
Historical Society of the
District of Columbia
Room 4726
E. Barrett Prettyman United States Courthouse
333 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20001-2866

Dear Ms. Ferren:

I have talked with Precious Boone about my intentions for the disposition of my oral history in the event I should die or become incapacitated before its completion.

The purpose of this letter is to confirm my intention that, at the time of my death or incapacitation, my complete oral history, or as much of my oral history as has been completed, along with the related materials, is to be donated to the Historical Society of the D.C. Circuit. I hereby request and authorize Ms. Boone to provide to the Historical Society at such time the tape recordings, digital recordings, transcripts, computer diskettes, and DVDs (including editorial changes which I ask Ms. Boone to make to correct typographical errors, misspellings, incorrect names, etc.), and other tangible embodiments of the interviews of me conducted under the auspices of the Society's Oral History Project.

I hereby authorize the Society to publish, reproduce, distribute, perform and otherwise use any portion of my oral history in any place and in any medium, including on its Website, except to the extent I have, during our recorded interviews, indicated that public access to some portion of an interview should be restricted in some manner. If I make such a request, I expect it to be honored by the Society. I also authorize the Society and its sublicensees to use my name, likeness and biographical information to indicate the availability of my oral history.

Should any question arise relating to the donation of my oral history to the Historical Society of the D.C. Circuit or public access to it, I authorize the Society and my executor, heirs, or representative to resolve such matter in a reasonable manner in light of, and consistent with, my intentions expressed above.

Sincerely,


Thomas S. Williamson, Jr.

cc. Precious Boone

Standard Form for Interviewer

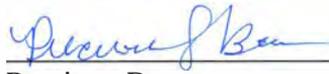
The Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit

Oral History Agreement of Thomas S. Williamson

1. Having agreed to conduct an oral history interview with Thomas S. Williamson, Jr., for the Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit, Washington, D.C., and its employees and agents (hereinafter "the Society"), I, Precious S. Boone, do hereby grant and convey to the Society and its successors and assigns all of my rights, title, and interest in the voice recordings (digital recordings, cassette tapes) and transcripts of the interviews as described in Schedule A hereto, including literary rights and copyrights.

2. I understand that the Society may duplicate, edit, or publish in any form or format, including publication on the Internet, and permit the use of said voice recordings (digital recordings, cassette tapes) and transcripts in any manner that the Society considers appropriate, and I waive any claims I may have or acquire to any royalties from such use.

3. I agree that I will make no use of the oral history or the information contained therein until it is concluded and edited, or until I receive permission from the Society.



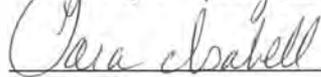
Precious Boone

8.10.2017

On this, the 10th Day of August 2017, before me a notary public, the undersigned officer, personally appeared Precious Boone, known to me to be the person whose name is subscribed to the within instrument, and acknowledged that he executed the same for the purposes therein contained.

SWORN TO AND SUBSCRIBED before me this

10th day of August, 2017.



Notary Public

My Commission expires: October 31, 2020.

Commonwealth of Virginia
Tara D Isabell - Notary Public
Commission No. 7512767
My Commission Expires October 31, 2020

ACCEPTED this 2nd day of August, 2017, by Stephen J. Pollak, President of the Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit.



Stephen J. Pollak

Schedule A

Tapes recordings, digital recordings, transcripts, computer diskettes and electronic media resulting from four interviews of Thomas Williamson, Jr., conducted on the following dates:

Interview No. and Date	Number of Tapes or CDs	Pages of Final Transcript
No. 1, September 18, 2013	}	1-36
No. 2, August 5, 2014	}	37-87
No. 3, August 26, 2015	} All on one CD	88-136
No. 4, March 29, 2016	}	137-173

The transcripts of the four interviews are contained on one CD.

ORAL HISTORY OF THOMAS WILLIAMSON, JR.

First Interview
September 18, 2013

This interview is being conducted on behalf of the Oral History Project of the Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit. The interviewee is Tom Williamson, and the interviewer is Precious Boone. The interview is taking place in Tom's office in Washington, DC on September 18, 2013. This is the first interview.

Ms. Boone: Good afternoon.

Mr. Williamson: Good afternoon. Nice to see you, Precious.

Ms. Boone: Nice to see you, too, Tom. So we should start by getting a little bit of your background and some of your foundation. So I wanted to know how far back in your family's history can you go? Did you know your grandparents? Your great-grandparents?

Mr. Williamson: I know a little bit about my grandparents even though I only met my grandmother on the paternal side twice and I never met my maternal grandparents, in part because of my maternal grandmother died of—I think it was tuberculosis—when my mother was only three years old. So she never really got to know her mother. And my maternal grandfather—I don't think it mattered if I did. I was just an infant and I didn't remember that at all.

Ms. Boone: Do you have any stories or anything that your parents told you about them that you found interesting?

Mr. Williamson: Well, yeah. On the, as I say, it would be mostly on the paternal side. My father grew up on a farm in North Carolina, near Evergreen, North Carolina. There were thirteen kids in the family, I think twelve of them were biological children and one was adopted. My grandfather

was named George Williamson, owned his own land. My dad told me that made a significant difference in how you were treated as a black person in North Carolina during that time. Also, he, my grandfather, had strong views about what the girls in the family would do. I forget whether it was eight girls and five brothers, or I think that's what it was, or whether it was the other way around. But, my dad, my father told me that my grandfather forbid any of the Williamson girls from working in the houses of white people.

Ms. Boone: Interesting.

Mr. Williamson: He did not want them to be employed as domestics growing up. Now, I think some later ended up working as domestics as adults, but as the Williamson girls, he did not want them working in the house of any white person.

Ms. Boone: Interesting.

Mr. Williamson: Now, my father said that his father was a fairly, sort of tough guy who mainly wanted the boys to help on the farm, and that created a conflict with my dad, because he wanted, my dad wanted to get an education. And, in this county, when you got to junior high school, apparently you had to take a test to qualify for junior high school. And the place where you took the test was about twenty miles from where my dad lived. And my grandfather had a car or truck and he could have driven him, but since he wasn't interested in encouraging an education, he didn't do that. So, my father got up very, very early in the morning,

and really in the middle of the night, and walked the twenty miles so that he could take the test.

Ms. Boone: Impressive.

Mr. Williamson: Amen. He kind of, I don't know if it would be fair to say that he ran away from home, but he left North Carolina after junior high school, I think, so he could come North to go to high school and later to college in Baltimore, Maryland. One of his, maybe one or a couple of his older brothers had already relocated to Baltimore. And his favorite older brother, Roosevelt, was both a dock worker and an entrepreneur. And so my dad came and stayed with him.

Ms. Boone. And so after that, I understand that your dad also joined the military, correct?

Mr. Williamson: Well, he went to Morgan. It took him seven years to get through Morgan, because he didn't have enough money to pay his fees. And just before they would allow students to take exams, they would bring up a list of students who hadn't paid their fees and he would get kicked out of the exam class and go and appeal to the Dean. So he would find jobs. He did all kinds of jobs. This was probably the worst time in modern American history to be going to college. This was between 1930 and 1937, so this was the Depression. As you know, often conditions in the black community are Depression-like when they are normal in the white community, but you can imagine how much worse they were in the 1930's for African-Americans. So, he eventually got

his degree. And I think he had wanted to go to medical school, but he couldn't afford that, so he, I think, was getting ready to be a teacher, or decided he might try teaching. But then World War II came along and he was drafted I think in late 1941. After he reported for duty, he was offered the opportunity to take a test to qualify for officer candidate school. And he took that test and succeeded so that he would start a training as a-- to become a second lieutenant when he first started in the military.

And then, as it turned out, he did most of his training at Fort Huachuca in Arizona. As you may know, at this time, the Army was still segregated. He was not actually deployed overseas. He had wanted to be one of the Tuskegee Airmen, but he couldn't qualify because he had vision problems. And so he-- his vision wasn't good enough to be pilot. So the war came to an end, and really before he could get himself out of the military he was informed that he was being assigned to be a part of the occupation of Japan, starting in 1947. And so, the whole family, as did many American military families, moved to Japan. My dad was stationed in Yokohama. My mother and I-- I was born in 1946, so I was about a year old when we headed off to Japan. And it was a pretty good time for my mother, actually, because even though the army was segregated, because my father was an officer, he may have been a captain by then, we were entitled to have two servants. So my mother had one child and two servants for

those years. And then my brother was born in 1949, just before we left Japan. And I think after that everything was downhill domestically because she had two children, and my sister was born in 1951. No more servants. We're back in the U.S.

Ms. Boone: (Laughter) Right.

Mr. Williamson: My father was sent off to Korea to be in combat in the Korean War. I think it was 1950. And by that time, President Truman had issued an Executive Order in 1948 ordering integration of the U.S. military. So I think-- you know I was actually reading an article the other day about General Ridgway, who may, I think may have been in charge of— well MacArthur was there, and Ridgway was one of the generals in charge of our forces in Korea—but he was apparently a believer in integration. And so, I think my father was among the first black officers to command white troops. At the time there was a great worry that white people would just say, “Well, we’re not going to take orders from a black man.” And there were plenty of racial tensions in the military, but my dad served there. I believe he won a Bronze Star. And then the family was, before he left, he had been stationed in the Oakland/San Francisco area. And so that’s where we were while he was away at war. You know, I was only four or five years old, so I had some sense that he was-- well when you are a small kid, you tend to think of war like a football game or something, like a competition, and not worry as much as I’m sure my mother did about what could

happen. But fortunately, Dad was not wounded or killed and so he came back from Korea.

And around that time, he-- when he came back, he was later assigned to Fort Story, Virginia. But, my mother and father had decided that when I started school-- I was the oldest of the three children. I think I mentioned that my brother George was born in Yokohama, Japan in 1949, and my sister Brenda was born in San Francisco, at the Letterman Army Hospital, at I think the Presidio in 1951. And I guess by '51, I was getting pretty close to school age. My parents decided they wanted us children to stay in the same school system rather than move around the country the way military children typically do. They didn't tell us specifically, but I think one of the concerns was that many of the military bases were in the South and they didn't want us to be going to segregated schools. And so we-- the sacrifice that our family made was that for a period of about six years where my dad was stationed places—he was in Fort Story, Virginia and he was sent to Alaska for a while, and then he came back and was stationed at the Pentagon and was at Fort Myer, Virginia. During those years we usually only saw him one month out of the year when he was on leave, except for a couple of summers when we came East. In the summer of '53 the whole family came East and spent the summer visiting with him when he was at Fort Story, Virginia.

And then in the summer of '58, I think it was '57 or '58—'57 I guess, yeah I think it was '57, yeah summer of '57. I persuaded my mother, well I persuaded my parents to let me come and visit my father by myself. Now today, they would probably be either sued or arrested for allowing me to do what I kept pestering them about, but I was very fascinated with trains. This was back when people actually used passenger trains. In fact, when we had come back in '53, we had, my mother, brother and sister and I, had come on, taken a train across the country. And I wanted to do it by myself, and I was like ten years old. And what they agreed to, after extensive negotiations (Laughter), was that I would fly back to Washington. I haven't questioned my mother about that, but I think the theory was, if somehow I was going to disappear, they wanted me to spend the summer with my dad before that happened. Then I could take a train back, by myself. Because taking the train meant that you, when you went from Washington to Chicago, you not only had to change trains, you had to change train stations. Because of the way the American railroad system was set up. I had studied a lot about that as a ten year-old. So I knew I wanted to take the Capitol Limited train into Baltimore-- Baltimore, Chesapeake and Ohio, no it was the Baltimore, Ohio, Chesapeake—they called it the B&O for short—and then I was going to change stations and get on a train called the California Zephyr, which had dome cars.

Ms. Boone: Okay. What's a dome car?

Mr. Williamson: It's a two level railroad car, where on top, there is, it's a glass top, glass or plastic. Anyway, you can look out of the top of the train. And so, I knew that there were going to be very scenic vistas that you could see sitting up in the dome cars, traveling through the Rocky Mountains, and then later through the Sierra-Nevada, when you go to California. And you know, obviously to be allowed to do this, I had to be a kind of strange child. (Laughter) So, I actually, of course, I didn't think it was all that strange, since I was used to being whoever I was. But I suspect the other people on the train, who were just about all white, though it odd that I would give lectures in the dome car about what things we were going to see and do during the day. Like I would tell them we were going through forty-six tunnels and this was the town where they're going to wash the train cars and that sort of thing.

One of the things, well I never talked to my parents about it. Well one reason, in retrospect, that I think they really didn't need to worry much about my being by myself, even though I was so young, is that the, you know, the people who made the beds and took care of the passengers on the train were Pullman Porters, all of whom were African-American then. You didn't know about Pullman Porter.

Ms. Boone: No.

Mr. Williamson: You should know about Pullman Porters. A. Phillip Randolph was the head of the union of Pullman Porters, which was one of the most, if not the most important African-American union in the first half of the

twentieth century. And also, if you read the story about the migration of black people from the South to the North, you'll find the kind of early scouts and pioneers for moving were these Pullman Porters because they actually went outside of the South and travelled all around the country and saw that you didn't have to have a segregated society in America.

But anyway, there were all these brothers who, I am sure, when they saw me, you know, on the train, I – for all of them – they were going to be my uncle.

Ms. Boone: Right.

Mr. Williamson: Well anyway, I made it back.

Ms. Boone: So tell me a little more about your childhood. So your mom was for the most part, raising you by herself.

Mr. Williamson: Well, I say for the most part. From the age, I'd say, six to eleven. Also, it's very different, when you say "raising by herself," obviously, my Dad was providing for us. We didn't see him as often as we would like. But, we were certainly aware that he was an important, positive presence. If we got too out of line, our mother would point out that this was something she'd have to tell our dad about. That was a major deterrent to getting out of line. You didn't want to cross Dad. He was a wonderful, loving father; but, you know, back then, if you misbehaved, your parents got a strap out and gave you a whooping. It was normal.

So, what my mother—who's an incredibly resourceful person, who did have a big challenge because the town that we settled in—not really by design, but just kind of by chance—was an all-white community where there had never been any black children in the school system before. And so there was my mother, with her three kids and, for reasons I still do not understand, my mother refused to learn how to drive. Here you are in 1949, 1950. We moved into Piedmont in 1952. Before then we lived in East Oakland. East Oakland now is all black, although at the time that we were there, it was a more racially mixed community. Piedmont was right next to Oakland. It was a much more affluent community. The range in Piedmont was pretty much solid middle, to very, very rich. It didn't really have poor people in Piedmont, and didn't really have very many working class, blue-collar people. My father was an army officer, so we were not wealthy, and we did not live in the sort of mansions that many of my classmates did. But, we had a perfectly nice four-bedroom house.

So there were many challenges for my mother in terms of just, you know, how do you get groceries when you have three kids? So as a child growing up, I had a big basket on my bicycle. I would often be sent to the grocery store to get stuff. We all had to learn how to use public transportation, which some people think nobody in California during the 1950's knew how to use the buses, but my mother certainly

did. She said, “You don’t have to wait for the bus for long if you know what the schedule is. You just are there a few minutes ahead of time.” And, I am trying to remember how she used to get out to the place where she could buy groceries most inexpensively at the base Commissary. And right now, I have to go back and ask her how—when she wanted to really go buy a lot of groceries—how did she get back and forth to the Commissary. Because the buses that we took from Piedmont—we had to take three different buses to get out to the base. When we were a little younger, we had lived on the base. And that’s when my dad was, I think, before he went to Korea. Then we moved to East Oakland. Again, I think before he went to Korea, and lived there for a while. And then he went to Korea. And then, when he came back, we moved to Piedmont, which is where my mother still lives.

Ms. Boone: Same house?

Mr. Williamson: Same house that we grew up in. But she, well both of them, I think, are part of the greatest generation that doesn’t really get the notoriety and attention that has been focused on Caucasian members of the greatest generation. And I think it’s because we haven’t really had, I don’t know, a good book or a good movie about what an extraordinary challenge it was for black parents to be raising children in an America that was in the midst of beginning to integrate. In the 1950’s, especially in the South, but also in many northern cities, if you didn’t

understand the written and unwritten racial laws, it could be very dangerous for you. I don't know if you knew, in the 1960's, there was a black kid who was looking for a summer job in Cicero Chicago. And he was killed just because he came up to somebody's door and asked for a summer job. I think it was-- Cicero was a Polish neighborhood in Chicago.

Now in California, the neighborhoods are not, they were not in the 50's as racially polarized or tribalized as they were in the East. When I came East to college, I learned there were Italian neighborhoods in North Boston. The Irish neighborhood was South Boston. In New York there were Jewish neighborhoods, and Irish and Italian, and Puerto Rican. People, they really knew their territory. In California, the white people were not as tribal. Because many—obviously not just black soldiers like my father—but there were many people who moved to California after World War II because they had been uprooted from their homes and shipped overseas to fight in Japan. And that meant they had to go through California. They said, “This looks pretty good here. And it's warm.” And you would hear these stories of people who would say, “Well I'm not going back to my home state. Just send my stuff here. I'm not leaving here.” So there were, in California, there were a lot of newcomers from all over the country. There was still plenty of discrimination and racism, both against blacks and Hispanics and Asians—because also out in

California we had a lot of Asians—but you didn't have de jure segregation the way you did in the South.

And there was more integration. Although there were many neighborhoods that were racially segregated informally because the real estate agents wouldn't show black families homes in certain areas. The reason, in Piedmont, that we had got our house, actually, was that the former owner was a very interesting white guy, sort of iconoclastic white guy, Mr. Stotten, Rio Stotten. He didn't like Piedmont, which was very conservative. It was a very conservative community back in those days. Very conservative. Primarily Republican community. He didn't really like the environment there. So, I think in part, one of the ways he decided he'd get back at Piedmont would be to sell the house to a black family. (Laughter) So he fixed Piedmont with the Williamsons. (Laughter)

Ms. Boone: So tell me a little bit more about growing up in a segregated—Well the country was segregated, and when you were like in the third grade, there was—I think about that time—there was *Brown v. Board of Education*. And you were already in an integrated kind of environment. Did that have any impact on you or your family? Do you remember discussions about that?

Mr. Williamson: No. As a third-grader, I don't remember having discussions about national politics or the civil rights movement at that age. You know, I think as a third grader, I wanted to be like other kids in my community

and in my school. Maybe by the third grade, the *Mickey Mouse Club* was on TV and I would watch that, and care about those things. I was conscious of racial tension because some people would call me names or they would make comments because they thought it was so odd that I would be at the playground or go on fieldtrips with all these white kids. And so, America is sort of drenched in racial awareness and different types of discrimination or, if not discrimination, signals that you were not entirely welcomed, or you were not viewed as normal. And so I had to learn about that as necessity as a young child.

But my parents adopted an approach that—I think there were a number of African-American parents who were, who would move their families into integrated situations and concluded or believed that—if you started talking about race it will encourage your children to feel hatred toward white people. Particularly if you told your children the truth about how racist America was. So, they did not bring us up with explicit racial consciousness. They brought us up with the view that, “You are as good as anybody in this community.” That’s the basic value. And “We want you to take advantage of the schools, the recreational programs, to the fullest extent.” And “Do your best.” Now they didn’t say it in so many words, when they said, “Do your best,” you just realized even as a black child, that really meant that you had to do better than all the white people.

In retrospect, I had this awareness that would play out in ways that, in retrospect, were unfortunate to have to deal with as a child. But, they are ways that shaped me a lot. For example, understanding that somehow, whatever I did, particularly if it was bad or deficient, would be attributed to all black people. Nobody said that in so many words, but you got that fairly early. When you outdid white people, they didn't attribute that to all black people. Then they shifted to, "Oh, you're an exception."

So for example, there was a game called Rover Red Rover. Do you know what that game is?

Ms. Boone: No, I don't.

Mr. Williamson: It's a kind of tag game where you have one kid that starts out in the middle of the playground. The other kids are lined up. And you can call out people to get to the other side of the playground—either individually or in groups. If you call 'em out in a group, then for all the kids you tagged before, they can help you tag other kids. When I would play that game, I was just fortunate that I could run fairly fast and be elusive. I was always the last kid who was tagged, because it was going to take all the rest of them to catch me. (Laughter.) But when I played, I would do each one of them one at a time to send the message, one on one, "None of you will be able to get past me." Now that's not really the most fun way to do it. But, and as I said, I didn't really think about it beforehand, but somehow I said this, I had this

instinct that this is part of sending this signal that you wanted to be treated equally, but you found that you had to excel.

So in class, if you got the second or third best grade, there were white kids that would feel high. “See somebody did better than Tom.” Because they somehow had the view that if any one of them did better than you, they won. But you kind of had to do better than all of them to send the message that you had won as the black student in the class.

Ms. Boone: And was that the case often? Were you were the best in the class?

Mr. Williamson: Yes. We were fortunate that all of us Williamson children did well in school. Actually all of us were actually admitted to Harvard for college and we all did well in school. Our parents, they weren't pointing us toward an Ivy League school. My father, I told you, had graduated from Morgan. My mother grew up in Bel Air, Maryland. Her mother died when she was a young age. She was raised by her grandparents. Her family was of such modest means, they couldn't afford for her to go to college. Her brother did go. My uncle LeRoy. And he was both a great athlete and a top student. I think on my mom's side of the family there is a fair amount of athleticism and a fair amount of smarts that even though my mother herself didn't go to college, I am sure that the Hall genes – my mother's maiden name was Hall – helped us out that way.

And it was, you know, it was something that-- we were all kids that enjoyed learning, so that we didn't really see it as a racial crusade

as such, but it was more to have status. And particularly, because of the kinds of jokes that people made and portrayals of black people, as kind of slovenly and stupid, I felt from a very early age that's not how I want people to think about me. And I am willing to expend as much energy as it takes to demonstrate that you should not think of me as stupid or lazy. Again, I don't know how conscious I was of this at the time, but I ended up having the sense that if I always get higher grades than you, it'll be awkward for you to suggest that I am dumb. 'Cause even if I am dumb, you are dumber. (Laughter.)

Ms. Boone: Right. A good comeback. So, when you were younger, did you have an idea of what you wanted to be?

Mr. Williamson: Well, at different stages I did. I think I originally wanted to become a comedian.

Ms. Boone: Interesting.

Mr. Williamson: I thought it would really be cool to make 'em laugh, to make them happy. I didn't as a little kid, I didn't have as much laughter in my life as I wanted because I was always sort of worried about excelling and worried, trying to figure out why there were some people who obviously didn't like me, or drew certain kinds of lines about what they would share. Some kids never invited me over to their house, even though that was very normal for children in my community. My brother had an experience—I didn't run into this directly—where he was invited to someone's house, and when he got to their doorstep or

their porch, the mother of George's friend said, "Well, you can't come in here. We don't, you know, allow anyone black in our house." You know when you're a little kid that's pretty crushing and bewildering. It's like, "I didn't steal anything from you and I didn't beat up your kid. Why would you feel that I can't come into your house?"

On the other hand there were families that were very welcoming and warm. So that, I think it really didn't make sense for me to develop a stereotypical view of white people. I knew a whole lot of white people. I knew how different they were, both toward me and toward each other. For some things I didn't pick up on until later were just ironic, -- just remember it's a small town. Piedmont is only twelve thousand people. It had three elementary schools, one junior high and one high school. This is really small town America. Twelve thousand people. In my elementary school, there was just one class of 25 kids. So that means in your grade you have twelve or thirteen boys and twelve or thirteen girls. That's small. But that also meant you were aware of what happened to everybody. So when we were old enough to be Cub Scouts, all the boys wanted to be in the Cub Scouts den. But Jerry Goldstein for some reason didn't become a Cub Scout. And it wasn't until a couple years later I learned that the Den Mother, I think it was Donald Graham's mother, he was a kind of pudgy, blond white kid, she was anti-Semitic and ironically, apparently did not object to a black kid being in the Den, but she would not let a Jewish

kid join. Again when you're in a little, small school and everybody knows each other and what you're doing, you're very conscious then of being left out of what the other boys are doing, because there is literally ten or twelve boys in the class.

So we were embraced by the teachers in the school system. You know how sometimes you run into these teachers who-- they don't seem to like children and you're wondering, "Like, why are you a teacher?" The third grade teacher seemed like that to me. But particularly my second grade teacher, my fourth grade teacher, my fifth grade teacher—they didn't seem to like kids too much either—and my sixth grade teacher she just loved the Williamson kids.

In our little town, our neighborhood, your social life, if you will, for the boys revolved around being at the playground and that was when, in those days, you would have a college kid who was hired by the recreation department—or two of them, usually a guy and a girl—to be playground directors. They would help to organize activities. They would just watch over the kids to be sure nobody did anything really stupid. And if you got hurt they would take care of you. To a person, all of the playground directors were very supportive of me and my brother and my sister. The girls didn't come down to the playground as much, but my brother and I pretty much lived there. To the point where if anything, there was kind of discrimination in favor of us in some instances. For example, once somebody stole

twenty dollars from the purse of the female playground director. The police were called to the playground and they interviewed all of the kids who had been on the playground, except me because the director Joe Maroux had said, “There’s no way he did it.” So that was very different than the experience of black kids around America.

Once I was walking down the street and, actually, somebody in our little group threw a rock and broke the window in someone’s house. My friends, of course all white, they ran away. I just kept walking down the street and I am sure the police were all told there’s one black family in this community. I was the captain of the, first-- well you start being the traffic patrol and you’re a sergeant and then a captain. So I was in charge of the traffic patrol and we worked with the juvenile officer. So in that sense, I was known in the police department. But I just decided to keep on walking down the street and they just came up and asked me if I’d seen any other kids around who had done anything. I lied to them and said I hadn’t. (Laughter.)

But, again, there were dimensions of the experience that were really quite positive and welcoming. But in some ways they were not the greatest training for getting ready to understand what was out there in the larger American society and understanding how most black people oriented to what was going on out there and understanding how most white people thought about you. So third grade, *Brown v. Board of Education*, would have been too early and also it didn’t result in any

change in my situation. I had started in kindergarten in 1952. I think it was 1951. I think it was 1951 or '52. But, for me, I showed up at school and knew the kids from being on the playground. And it didn't really occur to me until maybe the fifth grade when there was this white kid who was maybe a couple years older who said, "They're not gonna let you go to the high school." I, by then, knew the civil rights movement was going on and there were these school desegregation issues. So everybody knew in '57 there was an enormous amount of publicity around what happened in Little Rock at Central High. I don't remember if I asked somebody or my parents about that remark. I didn't like the guy who said it to me. And I didn't trust him in other ways. And there was nothing else signaling that I wouldn't be going to the junior high or the high school and there were things suggesting that some people were looking forward to my coming there. It was a small town, but if you were a good athlete, everybody knew about that, too. We played -- there were three elementary schools -- we, you know, we had a little league where we'd play against them. Other than this one guy, John Batalie, no one ever said anything like that and that was not an issue. But, I was becoming increasing aware that there were parts of the country where there were these—what seemed to me even as a little kid—these kind of savage, insane reactions to black kids coming to the same school as white kids. When you're a little kid,

it's pretty difficult to understand why that would be a source of controversy and violence. You just wanna come to school.

I started to read at a fairly early age. I had a funny incident, to me in retrospect, I went to the Oakland Public Library. Piedmont, I'm not sure if it had its own library system. I don't think so. The town was too small. For some reason, between the first grade and the second grade, I really got into reading. My second grade teacher was very nice to me. Very encouraging and supportive. I think it was probably the second semester, I went to the public library and I had already developed a technique at my elementary school, well I think the teachers must have been able to figure this out, but I don't know what it was like at your elementary school, but they had part of the library for the kids from the first to third grade, and they had another part of the library for the higher grades. So, I would crawl under the table to sneak over into the upper-grade section, pull a book off of the shelf, and then I would crawl back under the table and try to pretend that I had gotten it from the lower-grade section to check it out. Because the big book of fire engines and that stuff got to be pretty boring, pretty quickly.

And then, when I was seven, I went to the Lakeview branch library. I don't know if I knew about it before or I just happened to pick out Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. I said, "I'd like to take it out." This white lady-- I'm sure-- I had a sense she was trying to be

nice. But she said, “Maybe you should pick another book.” I said, “No, this is the book I would like.” I could sense that she didn’t think I would be able to understand or read this book. I don’t know if that was just because I was seven, or because I was black, or probably some of both. I don’t know how this idea came to me, but I said to myself-- because it was a fair distance. I’d either walked or ridden my bike down to this library, so I really want to take this book home with me. So let me make a proposal to the teacher. I said, “Let’s make a deal. You open the book to any page you want. If I read that page, would you let me take the book out?” She said, “Okay.” She opened it. I read the page and took the book out.

Ms. Boone: Your negotiation skills are tip top! From seven! So you were saying, when you were younger, you didn’t have a concept of the larger issues that were going on in America. At what point did you have that introduction, do you think?

Mr. Williamson: Well, I think certainly in ’57, when Little Rock occurred, I would have been—how old was I—eleven years old. So I’m in the sixth grade. That, I think, greatly, dramatically heightened my consciousness. But you just knew from the culture—the name calling and the stereotypes—you know you didn’t see any black folks on television. Of if you saw them, you had Beulah, somebody’s maid, and you had—what was the guy for *Jack Benny*? What was his name? He was like his butler. It was like Rockster. I liked *Amos and Andy*. My Dad

didn't like the show. Because to me, actually, I don't know if you've ever seen it.

Ms. Boone: I haven't.

Mr. Williamson: Well, a number of the people in *Amos and Andy* are buffoonish. There was a lawyer. Used to call him Catfish, or something like that. There was a kind of bumbling guy, Andy. But Amos was a taxi driver and he was a very savvy, mature guy. What was the lawyer's name? He was a real caricature. But when I watched *Amos and Andy*, I thought it was funny, and I always identified with Amos. I didn't realize that white America was assuming that black people were the buffoon types, which my father didn't like. So I used to kind of have to sneak around to watch *Amos and Andy*.

And then also around ten or eleven years old, I started reading *Newsweek* magazine regularly. I used to read it cover to cover. I don't think I was that into reading the newspaper each day, but I really liked reading *Newsweek*. So that increased my consciousness of what was going on around the country. You couldn't avoid knowing that people tended to think there was something strange about your being successful in school and being part of a white community.

Now, at that time, I wanted to be like everybody else. I wished I had freckles and straight hair. I asked my mother if I could straighten my hair. Back then there were black entertainers and a lot of political figures, a lot of ministers, they would conk their hair. My

mother said absolutely not. She said, “Are you crazy?” So I got the signal that was not cool. But, most kids, I think, want to be like their peers. And that was the world I lived in. I was coming to the realization I couldn’t be like everybody else and I had to start figuring out how to deal with being, you know, the only “Negro” in my class. Until I got to high school, we were the only black family in the community. The only other black kids in the school systems were my brother and sister for a while. There was one of my aunts, her children lived around the corner from us, but they moved out when I was in high school. We were the only black people.

At the same time there was that growing consciousness of discrimination in American society and there were things that were happening in the Bay area: there were demonstrations, and sit-ins, and there were lunch counters at whatnot where blacks were not allowed. Woolworths, I think, was a chain that didn’t allow that. And they didn’t hire blacks to sell cars on Auto Row in San Francisco. So I am reading about this stuff. And of course, I would read *Jet* and *Ebony* and you would read about the atrocities that occurred.

But at the same time, for example, when I finished with the Cub Scouts I joined the Boy Scouts, and by chance, the troop that I joined was run by a school teacher who was very resourceful and creative about the programs that he established. We had the largest troop in Piedmont. Most troops had 20-30, we had 100 kids in our

troop. It was really big. He seemed to recognized positive qualities in me very early. Even though I couldn't swim, and in order to become, I think it was, a first class scout eligible to be a patrol leader, you had to have the swimming merit badge or something, he granted me a waiver because he wanted me to become a patrol leader. And it was also pretty clear to me that he wanted me to become the senior patrol leader, so that I was in charge of Sting Ray Patrol-- I was the scout, the highest ranking scout in the troop. And he was very good about teaching leadership skills. He would prepare an agenda, and we would consult about what would be on the agenda. To me, it seemed natural, because, by then, around the time I got started in scouts, Boy Scouts, my father had been able to arrange to get himself stationed back in the Bay Area. Being who my dad was, he wanted to make up for this time away. A lot of these scouting things—camping trips and whatnot, but mainly camping trips—you know, they asked dads to come along, but only a few come. My father never missed a camping trip. Plus he was an Army officer and so when he learned, you know-- he was a country boy and an Army officer, so camping was just second nature to him. He was a Lieutenant Colonel by then. So, people would refer to my father as just the Colonel.

Here, again, my childhood experience wasn't, it didn't really resonate with what was going on generally in America, because when I visited my father at the office, we'd walk down the hall, and these

white people were saluting him. And so, when the scout master said, well, you know, “You should be the leader of the patrol,” you wore uniforms, and you gave orders, and whatnot. That’s what my Dad did. And so, I thought that was natural. To me there was nothing strange about that or particularly pioneering or trailblazing. I thought you had to earn it. So my patrol, we-- there was a competition in terms of various things that you did to show that your patrol was being run well. The scout master used to have a point system. So we just obliterated the point system with the Sting Ray patrol.

I’m not sure if there was an election. I think the scout master decided who would be the senior patrol leader. But that was-- since my patrol had outdone the other patrols that wasn’t-- I don’t think that was a controversial issue in the community that I was operating in.

I think the first incident that really brought home just how strange and racist the society was, was when I was in the eighth grade. I ran for vice-president of the junior high school and was elected. You know, being a Williamson child, I didn’t think it was that big of a deal to be the vice-president, since I wasn’t the president. But I am not sure why I decided-- I probably figured there was some other kids that were more popular, so I’d have a better chance running for vice-president. But to my astonishment, my election to be the vice-president of Piedmont Junior High School became a front page story of the San Francisco-- in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which was the

biggest paper in San Francisco then. It was covered by the radio stations.

Ms. Boone: Wow.

Mr. Williamson: I think it's pretty weird. I'm just the vice-president of the junior high school. But it's clear this seemed quite remarkable to white America. And you also have to understand that Piedmont was known to be this very socially elite community. You have San Francisco society on one side of the Bay and then on the East Bay Side—Oakland, Berkeley, Piedmont—Piedmont was the place where there were debutants and coming out stuff. A lot of wealthy people. So yeah, front page of the Chronicle. On the radio stations. Probably would have been on the TV stations, but my parents wouldn't, they wouldn't allow me to be videotaped or photographed. And I came to understand fairly quickly why. Because after this publicity, we started to receive hate mail.

Ms. Boone: Interesting.

Mr. Williamson: We started to receive threats on my life, which, you know, again, when you're thirteen, this is a very strange country. Why are there people that feel threatened that there's some thirteen year-old black kid who's the vice-president of the junior high school—an all-white junior high school. But it was sobering. In a way that helped me connect and understand these things that are going on in the South could happen here. In fact, I used to always have to walk to school, but for two

weeks after these articles came out, my father drove me to school because they were concerned that something might happen.

Ms. Boone: Because of your different experience living and going to school in an all-white community, did you feel that the civil rights movement didn't necessarily, wouldn't necessary advance you? Did you feel it was something that was contained to the South?

Mr. Williamson: No, no, no, no, no. I felt, I think as was the case with many black kids who were being raised in white communities, for the first time—and I talk about this greatest generation of black parents—it's very tricky to protect your children from the attacks on their self-esteem, while at the same time saying, "You need to go out there and be a credit to your race." We understood that was our job. I understood-- it wasn't a particular choice, it was just that, that's part of who I have to be. For me, it was more that I've been given certain gifts. Good Lord has given me these gifts. I can do well in school. I can compete well in sports. I should use those gifts to try to advance the interest of my people. That will be, to me it seems that was kind of my role in the civil rights movement; to make sure that white people who came into contact with a black person such as myself... As it turned out, it wasn't really possible to do on the scale that I had hoped. I very naively thought that if I set a positive example, white people in general would understand that you shouldn't stereotype black people as a group, that you should appreciate that there are black people that have

the same or greater abilities as you do, and that the society should be interested in supporting and nurturing black people just as white people are nurtured, so that the best and the brightest could contribute to society.

Ms. Boone: But instead you were seen as an exception?

Mr. Williamson: Yeah. I mean that was underscored when I graduated from high school. Graduation night when I was the, I gave the-- I wasn't really the valedictorian. I didn't have the highest grades. I may have actually been fifth in my class. But at my high school, they didn't do it just on grades. They picked the student who was considered the outstanding student-- who was deemed to be the outstanding student, and you gave the speech at graduation. And classmate after classmate came up to me and said, "Tom, it's really been great being in high school with you. You know I really don't even think of you as being black anymore." And so, I knew I was going far away for college and this reaffirmed why I wanted to, or why this community wasn't fulfilling to me and it of course frustrated and depressed me to think that the model Negro approach was largely ineffective. These people didn't generalize to the rest of the black community what they thought about my positive attributes or qualities that they regarded as superior to theirs. They moved that into the exception category, as if somehow I didn't belong to my own race because I was so much better than they were.

Ms. Boone: I'm curious, what kind of interaction did you have with the black community growing up? Did you go to a black church? What kind of interaction did you have?

Mr. Williamson: No we-- My parents wanted us to be fully integrated into Piedmont. So even though my father was of the Baptist tradition, he wanted us to be at Piedmont Community Church. I went to the church-- You know I had a funny incident that in retrospect, may have been a little bit of discrimination. I was eight or nine years old. I think I went up by myself, because again, my mother, she didn't have a car and they wanted me to go the church and I asked how I could join. They said, "Well, you have to memorize the 23rd Psalm and the 100th Psalm in a week in order to qualify to be at church." I have a feeling if I had been a white kid, they wouldn't have asked me to do that. But it didn't faze me, since to me that was just another student task, and "Oh I can do that." So I just memorized the psalms, came back and recited them, and, "Okay, you can come here." And there was a church youth group, Pi Kai group, that I became active in and a student administrator and all that. So that was my religious world.

I had an aunt who came to live with us for a while. She went to a Baptist church. And you know if you aren't familiar with the Baptist church and you are a little kid, particularly a little kid who's been raised in a white church, white Protestant church, I would go a few times to my Aunt Berta's church, Reverend Richardson's church.

I can't remember the name of his church now. But things seemed a lot more ruckus in the black church. It was kind of exciting—the singing and whatnot. But then, when the minister started to preach and people began to testify, and women started to pass out and then the women in white outfits and the white gloves came and you're worried, "Am I going to pass out? What's going to happen to me?" It actually was kind of scary.

So I didn't grow up in that tradition. And I remember once—I think I was a junior or senior in high school—there was a program where they were bringing together youths from different church groups and I gave some sort of sermon or speech and afterwards they had college girls from Mills College—it was a women's college out there—and a bunch of them came up to me and congratulated me on what an impressive speech they thought that I had given. None of the black kids said anything to me about the speech. And I was beginning to realize that there was a really huge cultural gap, in that my sermon, speech, whatever it was, was a very kind of white, analytical approach. I didn't use any of the rhetorical flourishes of a black minister. It was a very logical speech from a nice little essay. And so I didn't connect with—my presentation didn't connect with black folks. Also Piedmont was this very, I already told you, very socialite, upper-class community that did not associate really with any of the surrounding communities. If you were a white kid and you started to date a girl

from Oakland High, Piedmont kids would kind of suggest, “Why would you be going out with such a low class person.” So in other words, very few events were-- social events, where kids from any other school came to Piedmont, were so parochial.

And I was part of that, and I think like other kids, I yielded to peer pressure. I was okay with that. I wasn't really very adventurous. And also I didn't know-- I knew enough to realize that I was not at ease just walking in the black community.

The black people I knew were my relatives who were a few out in California. My mother's sister's family. And then back East, there were zillions of relatives. And when I had visited, everybody respected and loved my father and my mother, and so the Williamson kids got an automatic pass. And we were exotic, because we came from California. I was overwhelmed with affection and embraces. But also I was cognizant that this was a different world than the one that I live in. All these relatives, they lived in the black community. Be it Baltimore. Be it Nyack, New York. Or Evergreen, North Carolina. Or Bel Air, Maryland, the small town about 20 miles north of Baltimore where my mother grew up.

I particularly remember, I was excited because my Dad had told me that my Uncle Gardy owned a grocery store. I thought that would be really cool to see. You know, my uncle owns a grocery store, maybe he'll give us candy for free. And we went. It was in

Baltimore. And we went to the grocery store. It was a little place on the corner. The store was smaller than this room. Now, we didn't have Giants, or big super markets in Piedmont. But Faughty's Fine Foods, which was owned by the father of one of my classmates, it was much bigger. You know what these corner places are like. I was just kind of amazed at how many different kinds of things he could stuff into this little place. But it was very little. And I had these very mixed feelings. I was disappointed. On the other hand, Uncle Gardy said, "You're a bright kid. You can work the cash register." And so, he let me handle the sales. He showed me how to work the cash register. And in that sense, he was much more empowering than white people where I grew up. They weren't saying, "Oh we'll let you run the cash register at our store." They weren't hostile to me, but they weren't saying, "Yeah, you can do that." And so I was confused because part of me wanted to feel ashamed that he didn't have a bigger, nicer store. But part of me was grateful that it was so much fun to be able to add up things, and say this is how much it costs, this is what your change will be. To work the machine. And kind of run a little business.

But the worlds were-- they were worlds apart. They were 3,000 miles apart, when I was in the east. When we went to visit New York City, we stayed at the Hotel Theresa. You know what that is?

Ms. Boone: No.

Mr. Williamson: You better work on your black history, black culture. Hotel Theresa was the black hotel in Harlem. During the Black Renaissance, all these black performers could not stay at the hotels where they were performing. They all stayed at the Hotel Theresa. Actually when Fidel Castro first came to the United States, when he became the ruler in Cuba, one of the ways he sort of thumbed his nose at the United States was, when he came to the UN in New York, he stayed at the Hotel Theresa. All the big entertainers at the time, that's where they stayed. Lena Horne, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington. Because literally, it's crazy in New York City, it's in the North and all that sort of thing, but plenty of hotels were still segregated. I don't know if you saw-- did you see the Jackie Robinson movie.

Ms. Boone: No, I haven't seen that yet.

Mr. Williamson: You have to see that. Well they talked about in 1947, they didn't want to let the Dodgers stay at a hotel in Philadelphia, city of brotherly love segregated hotels.

So, my contacts were very limited. The athletic league we played in was-- we were the only school in what's called Alameda County, which is where Oakland and Berkley and those schools are. We played in a suburban league at the next door county. It's called Contra Costa County. And there are almost no black people at those schools either. I wasn't much of a hang-out guy. I wasn't very adventurous. And I wasn't a hang-out person because if you're going

to be good at sports and you're going to be good at school, you have to practice and study a lot. I wasn't such a great natural athlete that I could just show up and excel. I had to work at it, and try to hone my skills. And so I didn't have much spare time. And I lived in a very parochial community where there weren't other kids who were saying, "Let's go to Oakland." or "Let's go to San Francisco." And so, I didn't have much contact at all with African-American peers while I was an adolescent, until I got to college. When I got to Harvard and there were 36 black guys in my class. That was like a huge number of people to know about and have some sort of peer relationship with. Even though that was only about three percent of the class, there were only three black girls at Radcliff, and one black girl at Wellesley. So, but that was my beginning of starting to have contact with significant numbers of blacks.

Ms. Boone: Well I think that's a good place for us to stop: wrapping up your high school years and starting your college experience. So, I think we will stop there. So thank you.

ORAL HISTORY OF THOMAS WILLIAMSON, JR.

Second Interview

August 5, 2014

This interview is being conducted on behalf of an oral history project of the Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit. The interviewee is Thomas Williamson, Jr. and the interviewer is Precious Boone. The interview is taking place in Tom's office in Washington D.C. on August 5, 2014. This is the second interview. Good afternoon, Tom.

Mr. Williamson: Good afternoon. How are you?

Ms. Boone: I'm doing pretty good, doing pretty good. So last time we talked, um we ended with your high school graduation and you were on the brink of going to Harvard. And so this time, I'd like to talk a little bit about your college experience and also when we ended last time, you were talking about how, particularly in high school you didn't have very much interaction with other African Americans and I found that kind of interesting and I suspect once you went to Harvard, that kind of opened up. So I'd like to start there. First, what lead you to decide to go to Harvard, as opposed to staying on the west coast?

Mr. Williamson: Well, I was being recruited to play football at several different schools. And in the end it came down to a choice between Harvard and Stanford and my mother actually had an unexpected influence on me. When I was being recruited at Stanford, they said they would offer me an athletic scholarship, a full ride to pay for my tuition and room and board. In the Ivy League, at schools like Harvard, they don't actually have athletic scholarships; they do have financial aid, but it's not tied to whether you're playing in a varsity sport and my mother was

adamant that she did not want me to go to college on an athletic scholarship. I tried to persuade her that actually you both have status in your school and you're...it's more likely the coaches will pay attention to you if they know they're paying for you to be there. And so I was thinking, you know, maybe she doesn't understand what a good deal it would be to be at Stanford and the coach who was recruiting me at the time, it was a very persuasive member of the coaching staff at Stanford, who later went on to be one of the most prominent football coaches in America. His name was Bill Walsh. And he later became the head coach at Stanford and then he later coached the 49ers to several Super Bowl wins. But anyway, as I thought some more about my mother's wishes, I, you know, I said well maybe there's more to this than I was originally thinking because the point she was trying to make was that she did not want me to be participating in intercollegiate football just because I was concerned that if I didn't do that, it would be a heavy financial burden on the family. She said, "Its fine," you know, "if you want to play, but I want you to be at, you know, a university in the position to take advantage of the full range of educational benefits." And at Harvard, they don't have athletic scholarships and also I thought about it some more, the Ivy League schools don't play post-season games. So that means the season ends after your last game which, for Harvard, is always the Yale game.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: And that means you're not practicing in late November or December getting ready for some bowl game...

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: At the end of December or January 1. In addition, it's changed a little now, but back then, the Ivy League schools did not have spring practice whereas at a place like Stanford, to keep your scholarship you'd have to come out for spring practice unless you were in another varsity sport. And so it wasn't the only thing that influenced me, but it was a significant factor that I thought I would be able to take greater advantage of all the resources that the university offered if I went to Harvard than if I went to Stanford. It was also a little bit of a sense, even though I think young people exaggerate this, that Stanford was 50 miles from my home and I said, "Well I really want to get far away," and Harvard was 3,000 miles, but that...if I had gone to Stanford, I doubt they would have spent their time hanging around Palo Alto.

Ms. Boone: Okay. Did your dad have any opinion one way or the other?

Mr. Williamson: No, he was neutral. He was neutral. His philosophy was that he wanted me to choose the college where I thought I would be happiest. My mother was a little more assertive about that.

Ms. Boone: I think that's interesting because I think my mother, when I went to college, she didn't know how to direct...she just let me make all the

decisions there, but your mother seemed to really think through what the college experience was going to be like for you.

Mr. Williamson: My mother, she did not attend college herself, but she had some very basic, very sound values. So my mother was kind of the opposite of a soccer mom. She never got a driver's license, so we never were driven anywhere by my mother. My brother and I both played a lot of sports throughout our junior high school and high school years and indeed my younger brother, in his senior year, he was the leading scorer in California in high school football. He scored 25 touchdowns in eight games.

Ms. Boone: Wow.

Mr. Williamson: But my mother never cared whether we won or lost and she would come to the games sometime. I don't know whether she actually shouted. The only thing she cared about was whether we...she did not want us to be injured and she made it very clear that if playing any of these sports, be it football, basketball, or track for me, was going to cause my grades to go down, then that would be the end of playing sports.

Ms. Boone: Okay. Sounds like my mom, actually. So what activities were you involved in at Harvard?

Mr. Williamson: Well...

Ms. Boone: Or tell me a little bit, back up a little bit, about the transition to Harvard. Like after you made the decision and going there, what were your first impressions about the school?

Mr. Williamson: Well, I partly went there because the school has such an iconic reputation and I would say in 1964 when I started was the end of what I call the “token Negro era,” where if you were able to excel, your community and the white community seemed to expect that part of your job was to be a positive example for your race, if you will. And so I, you know, I went to Harvard thinking I don’t know if these people are really going to be as friendly and as enjoyable to be around as I would like, but I feel like I should try to do my best to be a credit to my race.

So I was kind of relieved actually when I first got there, I was worried because of something I had read in the handbook or whatever they send to you, where they said there was a student radio station and they played classical music. And I liked some classic music, but I was not really knowledgeable about classical music or a regular fan. But when people were moving in, it turned out for those people who had record players, which is what we had back then, the first thing they would move into their room would be their sound system. They would...the record player and the speakers would be connected and out of those speakers came a very, in the first day there, what was

coming out was Motown and rhythm and blues and so I said, “Well maybe these people will be alright to hang around with.”

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: And then for me it was, you know, a much bigger place than the small town where I had grown up, just town of 12,000, the high school had about 200 kids in a class. So, you know, Harvard we had...there were 1200 guys in the class and 300 women over at Radcliffe. So that seemed like a much bigger universe. I was personally very excited about being able to meet people from all over the country, you know, there's a lot of brouhaha about affirmative action these days in connection with race. But back then, there wasn't affirmative action on racial grounds, but Harvard had decided that it wanted to have more of a national student body instead of just people from New England and the New York area. So that students were being admitted who were very smart, but there were other students who had higher scores from New York City or the New York City area and various prep schools that had a long tradition of sending people. Now there didn't seem to be a lot of excitement among white people that kids were being admitted from Idaho and Wyoming and South Dakota who maybe didn't have, you know, I mean they're plenty smart, I don't want to suggest that...

Ms. Boone: Yeah.

Mr. Williamson: Because people came from other parts of the country, they weren't as bright, but the places that were really in the business of producing Harvard freshman were these prep schools on the east coast and some of the big city schools in New York or around New York and around Chicago.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: So to me, it was really stimulating and fun and interesting and educational that I was meeting people from, there was a guy from New Mexico in our dorm who had been a rodeo champion or something, state champion there. There was a really...there were a couple of guys actually from Idaho; I think they were both maybe from Borah High School. There were of course kids from other parts of California since California's a big state and I didn't know everybody there. And there were students from the South. Now, we're talking about how was I making the transition, that things open up with my going to college in terms of becoming acquainted with the...then we always said Negroes, Negro students. First of all, there weren't that many.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: They were only three percent of the class, 36 guys, in my freshman class out of 1200. At Radcliffe, there were only three black women and actually I happened, today I was over at the Barnes and Noble bookstore, I ran into the one black woman in the class of 68 at Wellesley. A good old friend named Diane Renfroe, who,

coincidentally, she and I had been on the same plane flying to Boston to come to college. So first the numbers were not that great and then I was in a sort of peculiar situation because I had grown up in an all-white community, I was actually more accustomed to dealing with white people than black people. And in some ways my, I think, my readiness to connect with white students caused some of the black students to be wary of me. “Why is this brother so comfortable talking to white boys?”

Ms. Boone: Right.

Mr. Williamson: I was thinking, oh wouldn't it be great to not have race be the defining characteristic for who I am because we were the only black family in an all-white community, then race inevitably does become the defining characteristic. And so I was really more focused on other interests, like I went out for the football team. It turned out that I had a very disappointing freshman season. Back then they had freshman teams that were separate from the varsity which is too bad they stopped doing that, but the coach of the Harvard freshman team was an elderly white gentleman from Virginia and it became readily apparent that he was not that interested in having black players play on the team or be a starter.

Ms. Boone: Were you the only freshman player that was black?

Mr. Williamson: No, no.

Ms. Boone: At that time? Okay.

Mr. Williamson: There were several others, but he clearly was not enthusiastic about having us around. Now this experience was very humiliating for me personally because I'd been recruited by these other major schools and I thought geez maybe Harvard would be pleased that instead of my going to a Stanford or a UCLA or someplace like that or Brooklyn. I was coming to play at Harvard, but nobody seemed to notice that I was not getting much playing time. Actually, the lowest point in my athletic life was when we went to our first game, an away game at Tufts and back then, you played both ways, meaning you played offensive and defense.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: So they took fifty players. There were eleven players on a squad of football players, so that meant four teams of eleven and six leftovers.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: And I was listed on the depth chart as one of the six leftovers.

Ms. Boone: Oh.

Mr. Williamson: So that was pretty depressing.

Ms. Boone: Oh yeah.

Mr. Williamson: And by February when it was cold, I was lying in my bunk bed saying you know, maybe I should have gone to Stanford. I would be warm and I didn't know for sure that I would make the team, but I said, "I know the coaches would have given me a chance to play because I would have been on scholarship." And it caused me to be a somewhat

unpleasant person to be around because it was so disorienting for me to not have football as an activity that was satisfying and rewarding for me. And then people have a lot of attitudes or make assumptions about Harvard students and there's no shortage of pretentious Harvard students, but there are a good number who I think, once you get there, you say, "Whoa, I wonder if they made a mistake by admitting me." And so, you know, when you get your first grades, you're very anxious...

Ms. Boone: Yeah.

Mr. Williamson: When you're being evaluated, you wonder, because so many students were the top students at their high school, where are you going to fit in in a community of people who were all like you. So where you grew up, you could count on certain kids who you knew from the third grade, they weren't that sharp. You'd be able to outdo them. Show up at Harvard, I wonder if there's anybody here I can, you know, outdo.

Ms. Boone: How did you do academically your first semester?

Mr. Williamson: I did fairly...I was on dean's list, you know, I had a...what, in retrospect, was a funny experience in the first class I went to. It was a French class and even though I didn't want to be a French major, I had studied French for six years in high school and gotten a high achievement score and I had passed the French requirement. Nevertheless, I took this intermediate literature class French because in the back of my mind, I said, "You know, just in case I happen to flunk

out of this place, I want to pass at least one course and I know I won't flunk a French course."

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: Just we would read a play or a book and then we wrote a paper. I had to write nine papers in French my first nine weeks in college.

Ms. Boone: Oh.

Mr. Williamson: But the ironic thing was that the teacher asked the students in the class on the first day, who has actually, you know, visited France and there were about 12 or 13 guys in this class and about half of them put up their hand. And I could tell these guys were well off, preppies. And so I just kind of took a deep breath and so okay, well they've been to France, but I've studied a lot of irregular or, you know, kind of conjugations of a lot of irregular verbs. Let's see what I can do.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: Then the professor invited each of us to breakfast to get acquainted and so a couple of weeks into the course was my turn and he said, "Well how things are going in the course?" I said, "Well I think things are going fairly well except for one thing." He said, "Well what's that?" And I said, "You know the guys who said that they had been to France and visited or toured there? I can't understand their French when they speak in class. So I'm wondering, you know, is that reflecting on some deficiency that I had." He paused for a moment, he

said, “The reason you can’t understand their French, Tom, is because it’s so bad.”

Ms. Boone: Okay. [Laughter]

Mr. Williamson: As it turned out, two of us from public schools that we got the highest grades in the class.

Ms. Boone: That’s interesting.

Mr. Williamson: But it was a lesson for me and it’s a lesson, actually, I often share with young people how you can make all these assumptions and create a reality that is a false reality because your assumptions are so wrong. I had one course where I got a D, I think, on the first mid-term. I had never really seen that part of the alphabet before. [Laughter] So that was kind of alarming. And then I somewhat over-reacted. I just started studying my brains out.

Ms. Boone: Yeah.

Mr. Williamson: And so by the end of the year, other students were coming to me, the word had gotten out that if you want to talk to somebody who knows what’s going to be on the exam, and what you better be ready to do, then you should go see Williamson I overcame that. And then the course that I actually learned the most in is the course where I got the lowest grade of my college career, I got a B minus in the course, but it was literature textual analysis course. It was a very close study of how poets and authors use words. They knew that you would probably do

poorly at the beginning so instead of your grade being your average, your grade was what you worked up to over the course.

Ms. Boone: Okay. Interesting.

Mr. Williamson: I still think about lessons I learned in that class and, as I say, I didn't receive a high grade, but I learned a great deal. Another thing that happened freshman year, actually, it's reminiscent of some issues on Harvard's campus today, which I'm sad that those issues are still present. But you have to remember 1964, when I came, was the year that the Civil Rights Act was passed and that meant there were a lot of white people who thought that "Okay now that the Civil Rights Act has been passed, we don't have any more racial problems," which was, of course, grossly simplistic and wrong and led to a lot of conversations. I don't know if you've heard about this campaign called, "I too am Harvard," where there are black students, in fact the sister of one of our godsons, who's one of the leaders of this, talking about how there are white students who perceive the black students as inferior or as not belonging. That sadly reminded me of an incident when I was a freshman. There was this course called Nat Size Six. An evolution course, where other students were actually coming to me to be a tutor for them. There was a friend of mine, a classmate, who asked me to come over to his room to help him get ready for the final exam, a guy named Lenny Saphear and his roommate was a guy named Chris St. George. There I was sitting next to Lenny when Chris

walked into the room and he knew that Lenny actually tutored some of the local high school kids, black high school kids at Ridge Tech and so when he comes into the room, he says hello to me and asks me if I'm one of the high school students that Lenny was tutoring. It put Lenny in an awkward position.

Ms. Boone: Yeah right.

Mr. Williamson: He knew who was being tutored by whom.

Ms. Boone: Yeah exactly.

Mr. Williamson: This was before there was affirmative action or anything like that. It was just, to me, an example of how the stereotypes, the racial assumptions, are much deeper than any current program or much deeper than affirmative action strategies. We've had this sort of problem in America for a long time. By the end of the year, I had had a pretty successful academic year. My high school girlfriend, this was another reason why I went East, she made up her mind early on she was going to Smith and that partly influenced me too. But she decided to get rid of me in the middle of freshman year and so there I was: had not gotten much playing time on the football team, it was cold, my girlfriend had dumped me and, you know, I'd gotten a D on this mid-term. So I had to rally from all that. There was an incident. You're talking about what started to bring the black students together. As I said, this was the end of the token Negro era, it was just before the beginning of the Black Nationalist era, but there was a gentleman who

was then, I think in graduate school. He later became a dean, a long-term dean at Harvard and he was a member of the glee club, Harvard Glee Club. They went to do a concert in Atlanta and the people in Atlanta said that, Archie Epps was the name of the black guy, that Archie could not be allowed to perform with the other white members of the group before a white audience. The head of the glee club, the faculty member who was in charge of it, agreed to exclude him, Archie Epps, from performing. So that was publicized in the *Crimson* and as black students, we came together, it was mostly freshman, to talk about what we should do to protest or challenge this. We were all, of course, very unhappy about it. We didn't really come up with an action plan then. There's something that I'll tell you about later, about how much things changed three years later when Dr. King was assassinated. But it did bring us together including oh he gets along with the white guys, Tom, showed up as well, although I didn't play a leadership role. I was somewhat frustrated, disappointed in myself that I didn't have any better ideas about what we should do. I later learned, though I've never confirmed this story, but I was told that in the 50s, the football team came down to, took the train down and played the University of Virginia in the early 50s, and there was a black guy on the Harvard football team. They said, "Well, you know, whatchamacallit there, he can't play on our field." My understanding is the football coach said, "Then, we're not playing, we're getting back

on the train and going back to Cambridge.” I need to run that down, see if that story is true because that certainly was the right thing to do.

Ms. Boone: Yes. What groups did you gravitate towards then? I know you studied a lot and then you did football. Did you gravitate towards a certain group of students? Were you more of the sports group? Who did you hang out with outside of academics outside of studying and playing sports?

Mr. Williamson: There’s a premise in your question that there was some time and energy left after I finished playing ball and studying.

Ms. Boone: Gives you an idea of what I did in college.

Mr. Williamson: I didn’t really hang out.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: During the football season, it was very demanding. My sophomore year things changed dramatically. At the varsity level, there was a different coach. I wasn’t a starter as a sophomore, but I was moved up so I practiced with the first team and then I played special teams and I was clearly being prepared to be a starter as a junior.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: So the football got resolved in a way that I was pleased with.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: I got into a major that’s called Social Studies.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: At Harvard at that time, it was called a limited honors major. Everybody in the major was expected to write a thesis and do an honors course. It was an interdisciplinary major where you took history, economics, sociology, and most places they called it political science. At Harvard, they called it government courses, but you could organize your study around problems of industrial nations, problems of developing nations, and international relations.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: I chose problems of developing nations and then used that as a kind of cover to create my own African studies program.

Ms. Boone: Interesting. Okay.

Mr. Williamson: Now there wasn't an African studies program so it meant I would have to find courses where I could end up writing papers about whatever issue you were supposed to address in the course. I would write about African countries. There were a few African courses and I got acquainted with Martin Kelson, who I believe became the first tenured African American professor at Harvard. He was an Africanist and he became a very good friend. There was a club or a fraternity that most of the football players belonged to, I didn't join that. My view was, I liked my teammates, but I got to see plenty of them during the football season and there were a lot of other people who I wanted to meet and interact with during the rest of the year. So I didn't join that. I eventually was invited to join a very sort of elitist club that was at least

ostensibly based on merit, rather than your social standing or something like that. At Harvard, they don't have fraternities, but they have something called final clubs where it's mostly students who came from wealthy families and society families who would be invited to join. I was asked to be in one of the final clubs, but I didn't have the money or the time to go and hang out at the clubhouse. I wasn't really interested in drinking and playing cards, which is what they spent a lot of time doing and there were other reasons why I didn't feel it would be a comfortable fit. However, there was this thing called a Signet Society where it was a kind of lunch club. When you were a member, you were entitled to a certain number of lunches at the clubhouse that were better than the lunch that you could get in your dorm. They would invite people who had distinguished themselves one way or another as undergraduates. So you would have the editors of the *Crimson* newspaper there, you would have people from the Loeb Drama Center. There was something called the *Advocate*, actually a literary magazine, not a lawyer magazine. I got in because I was social studies major. I didn't know when I applied to social studies that that was viewed as a prestigious thing to do. I was looking for a vehicle to study about Africa.

Ms. Boone: What prompted that? Had you always just been interested in Africa or was there something that happened at college that sparked that for you?

Mr. Williamson: You know, that's a good question. What prompted that? I think it was a growing awareness of race consciousness and understanding that the American system, if you will, did not value people of African ancestry based on that heritage. It only valued you to the extent that you could show that you were better at being a white person than they were. I remember my first couple of months at Harvard, everybody has to take a basic writing course, because they know most people just aren't trained that well. I wrote an essay about a game that used to be played, which I was afraid to think about in a focused way, when I was growing up in Piedmont where somebody would say, they'd point to the fence on the other side of the playground and they'd say, "Last one to the fence is a nigger baby." I was the fastest kid on the playground, so I was always the first one to the fence, but what I wrote about was the realization that I was still the nigger baby. So I think in my own mind, I was saying the way the white world has tried to shape my values and my sense of self-worth was not going to work for me. I need to come up with my own way of doing that. I realized that there was something instinctive about saying, you know, these people or this society doesn't really value your heritage and your ancestry. And so you can't count on white America to both introduce you and encourage you to appreciate that heritage. So even though I was this black kid who had grown up in a very conservative white community,

I said I need to begin a journey to find out who I am on my terms, rather than their terms.

Ms. Boone: Was there press about some of the independence movements in Africa in the mid-50s?

Mr. Williamson: Yes. It was a really exciting time. That's a good point that you make. It was also exciting to think about studying countries that had recently thrown off the colonial chains and become independent. So Ghana, I think was 1957, Nigeria may have been 1960s, 1964. So I was also very curious about the opportunity to learn what was involved in anti-colonial struggles and what was happening in countries that were newly experiencing independence.

Ms. Boone: That's interesting. Okay so your first year of college had some disappointments, but you came out on top, did well. Did you go home for the summer and did being out East make you feel a little uneasy at home or different?

Mr. Williamson: Well, I didn't feel uneasy I had grown up in Piedmont. I did go home, been living there since I was five years old. That summer, the father of one of my friends from high school was an executive with the telephone company, he had gotten me a job working as a fray man where you connect telephone lines inside the summer after senior in high school, and he arranged for me to have the same job summer after the first year in college. I slipped back into a very familiar routine except my high school girlfriend, she was home too. She was not

having anything to do with me. So I had to try to figure out how to get a date with somebody new or a couple of people, so that was interesting. And then I had to mull over this part of my life that had been such a central component really was football and how hard was I going to work to try to prepare to try out for the varsity when I knew that the freshman coach had not given me much of a chance to play and I'm sure that he had not ranked me among the more promising freshman. I'm going to try this, I've invested a lot in football. In my town, that was a big sport growing up, but if it doesn't work out, I said I'm not going to just hang around and sit on the bench. I think it's unfortunate how many college athletes have to spend an enormous amount of time practicing and preparing and then they don't get any recognition or real opportunity to play on the game days. Many of them feel they don't have much of a choice because they are on scholarship. So I said, if this doesn't work out, I think I'm going to go out for the school newspaper. I was interested in maybe being a reporter.

Ms. Boone: Okay. Good. Interesting. Okay so I'm going to jump ahead a little bit. You mentioned this briefly, but the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. This is your senior year, what kind of impact did that have?

Mr. Williamson: Well that had an enormous impact for me because there was this overwhelming sense of grief and shock and frustration with white

America, that our beloved hero had been felled by an assassin's bullet. I think that it shocked us because in a way, when we started as freshman, we were aware of the atrocities that had occurred in the south when we were in high school. Medgar Evers in Mississippi and the four little girls blown up in Birmingham and you had Little Rock when we were in the sixth grade, you know, the idea that they had to bring United States Army, the 101st airborne to allow black kids to go to high school and then Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Civil rights demonstrations had become kind of main stream and accepted so that the idea that there was this kind of hatred that would inspire somebody to kill Dr. King infuriated us, frustrated us, saddened us. I was a senior and by then, through the Rhodes Scholarship, that's announced in December of your senior year. And I was you know, finished now with my football career. And I think mainly because of football, I was pretty well known among the black students. One of the things you're skipping over, the black Nationalist student movement exploded in the mid-60s and so we went from people, you know, having pressed hair and nice little parts and things to the big old bush or Afro and saying "I'm black and I'm proud." The class behind me, they really played a leadership role in nurturing that identity, although it created a lot of friction on campus because then we were young people and somewhat immature. So there were a lot of discussions about whether so and so is black or

not. So it was particularly ironic because many of the leaders of the student movement on these Ivy Leagues campuses were these light-skinned Negroes talking about. “Is so and so black or not?”

Ms. Boone: We still have that today.

Mr. Williamson: But what that meant actually was that a schism had developed among the black students between those who were the Afro black students and those who were not an Afro and there was a social split. Now I wasn't really part of the black social scene. By then I had reconciled with my high school girlfriend and that, particularly as this nationalism stuff was exploding, it made it more complicated. When I came, people thought, when I was a freshman, that I was the almost the height of progressive liberal activity to be involved in an interracial relationship, but that kind of got moved aside when the “Black Pride” came in. Then brother and sisters were supposed to maintain solidarity. I was playing my sport and studying a lot and I would go see my girlfriend from time to time at Smith or she would come down. Both because I was involved in a relationship that I took seriously and also I was used to being a football player, but I wasn't used to being a player.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: I used to envy in college these guys who would talk about rap. I didn't have a rap and it wasn't until later I learned that actually sisters had heard so many of these raps, they were really tired, but I didn't know

that. I remember going to parties and seeing somebody just start saying, “Hey baby,” and just kind of, I don’t know, “Hey,” or just put the hand up or something and then expect a girl to come.

white boys said you’re supposed to go up and introduce yourself and start. I decided I’d just be cool. One way to be cool is you don’t expose yourself to people finding out how inept you are, just kind of stand around and look cool. The big drawback of that, of course, is that means you don’t really meet anybody.

Ms. Boone: Right.

Mr. Williamson: But you’re cool.

Ms. Boone: Yeah.

Mr. Williamson: Some people thought I was not so friendly because I didn’t seem to know how to socialize casually and readily and I didn’t in a lot of black settings. I had my own attitudes. People were talking about how they were so black and proud and they wanted to identify with their African heritage. I was studying about it, okay. If I wanted to be unpleasant, I could say something like, “Well, so you’re really into Africa, it’s like can you tell me like the names of three tribes, doesn’t have to be in the same country, just for the whole continent.” There weren’t very many black people who could tell you the names of even three African tribes even though there are hundreds of them, hundreds. So I had my own ambivalence about that, but there were certain people who, they understood what my limitations were. There was a guy

named Elvin Montgomery, he was from New Orleans and he was very much of the black community. I don't know if his father had been a minister or what, but there were a lot of things that I needed to learn like I had never heard the expression "high yellow" until I got to Harvard. Because where I grew up, we had these different shades in my family, but we were the niggers in town.

Ms. Boone: Yeah.

Mr. Williamson: That's who we were. It was very dismaying to me, even though there was a lot of Black Nationalism stuff that was going on, there were also these were other traditional, certain types of traditional black folks who would discriminate or make disparaging remarks about other black people based on color and hair and stuff. That was all news to me because if you're the only black family, you're the only black family. But anyway, come senior year, there was this split in the black community, but after Dr. King was killed, the leaders of Afro, a guy named Chuck Hamilton and Jeff Howard, came to me. They were a year behind me, they were juniors, and so as I said, the nationalist thing really came with the class behind me, not my class so much. They said, "We need to try to seize this moment, to change this university in major ways, and to do that, we need to have all the black students united and we think you're the person who can bring everybody together."

Ms. Boone: Interesting.

Mr. Williamson: And their thinking was, they knew me, not everybody liked me, but a lot of people respected me. You know how black people are, they may think you're kind of a nerd, but, if you're out on the field, outdoing white folks, they'd be up in the stands cheering.

Ms. Boone: That's our guy.

Mr. Williamson: That they know that you're actually getting better grades than the white folks, they kind of like that too.

Ms. Boone: Yeah. Yeah.

Mr. Williamson: You may not be down...

Ms. Boone: But you're ours.

Mr. Williamson: That's right. That's right. That's right. So I was sort of positioned in this kind of remote way, but a way that also by not being involved in social things, there was no history of so and so did this or that to her or lah-dee-dah. I didn't have any of that history. They had this one thing, he's still dating this white girl which was true, we were still dating, but they didn't know her very well. She was, in a lot of ways, she was a lot blacker than I was, and she's the one who said, "I'm coming down if Miss Stokely Carmichael's coming down." There wasn't a whole lot of receptivity to that, but in this moment they said, "We think you can bring everybody together." Because I had won the Rhodes and was in this major that was respected around the campus. I had some credibility with the faculty and the administration that we all had an interest in trying to organize and deploy our resources as

effectively as possible for the moment. Because this was a time when we had to decide, are we taking over buildings, are we going over to Roxbury to, mean to me it was always crazy for black people to be burning down their own parts of the community. If you wanted to burn down something because you were mad at white people, you should go burn down the white parts, but black people knew instinctively that was way too dangerous. That white America would let you burn down the black community, they were not going to let you burn down the white community. In fact, we'd spent time, as part of this Afro...patrolling in Roxbury because there were white kids coming in, trouble makers, you know, throwing Molotov cocktails and whatnot. But the big thing was, would I agree to be the head of this -- we had to create an organization. We couldn't call it the Afro Group because then that would bring that baggage, so we called it the Ad Hoc Committee of Black Students. In terms of group dynamics and group politics, since I was a senior and going to be leaving in a few months, whatever I was up to was not going to have anything to do with "How is Tom trying to position himself, you know, for the future here?" I was out of there. I'm going out of the country. And I said, "I'll do it," And there was a very poignant moment early on where a faculty member who had been a very good friend to me and had also been one of my professors in this major had asked me to speak at a service in memory of Dr. King in Memorial Church. But the black students had

decided that they wanted to do a separate service at the same time outside Memorial Church.

Ms. Boone: Wow. Why?

Mr. Williamson: Because they wanted to make a statement to the white community that our loss is much greater and more painful than anything that you can feel. One of the things that had spawned the Black Nationalist group was tension actually between white liberals and black liberals and radicals about who should be in charge of the tactics and the organizations of the movement. I chose to decline the invitation to speak to the broader university community inside the church. I was one of the spokespersons at the separate service outside and that led to a picture in the *Crimson* of our separate service. I thought for the role that I was going to assume it was important to send a message. I didn't know if I was going to be successful, but Tom is stepping up to assume a new identity in our community. And that it's very important for the university community to understand that we are a distinctive voice that has not been heard loudly enough and clearly enough in the past and we will fashion a strategy for how to honor Dr. King. We will take the leadership role in that and we will measure you by your willingness to commit to a direction we are going to define. So that was a long ways from saying well here I am at Harvard, supposed to be a credit to my race and let me see if I can show the white people that I can be as good as a white person.

Ms. Boone: No, better. Interesting. Okay. So Rhodes Scholar, how did that come about? What made you decide to apply? Was there a particular professor, you said Martin Kelson, was he your professor at the time?

Mr. Williamson: He was my thesis advisor and I had taken a couple of courses from him because he was one of the few Africans on campus. It actually happened not so much because of any individual, no, it was a whole -- it's really more that applying for Rhode scholarships was part of the culture at Harvard.

Ms. Boone: Oh okay.

Mr. Williamson: Just remember, it's a pretty elitist place in many ways. I love Harvard College and there are actually a lot of things about being with very bright people and having these extraordinary resources that I think are quite compelling. But I didn't realize until after I got there, I knew about Rhodes Scholars because when I was younger, I had wanted to go to West Point and there was a quarterback from West Point named Pete Dawkins who was an all-American quarterback, who was a Rhodes Scholar. So that seed had been planted in my mind, that that might be something I would like to do. Then when I got to Harvard I found I was focused more on my girlfriend dumping me and I got to make sure I don't get any more Ds on mid-terms. So I wasn't thinking about Rhodes Scholar then, but what happened, when you're in a culture...do you have any idea what I mean by it's a culture? There are 32 American Rhodes Scholars each year. When I was a

sophomore, ten of the 32 American Rhodes Scholars were from Harvard. So unlike most places where -- what's a Rhodes Scholar, it's like are you somebody from Mars or something? There were people all over the place who were Rhodes Scholars. And one of the reasons is that the school -- there were deans and house masters who would identify promising candidates and encourage you to think about it, particularly the master of Elliott House. He very much would try to get or hoped he would have students in the house, that's what we called the dorms at Harvard, where he would write these fabulous references letters for them. I'm trying to make my way, really dealing with things month to month or semester to semester. So enjoying my major, football got turned around. And Harvard is a place where they notice if you're a football player and you're doing well academically, people notice that and they start talking about you to apply and they almost make you feel like you will be disappointing the school if you fail to apply. And my senior year, by then I was thinking well something that maybe I do want to do, been given a lot of encouragement, but also I was thinking, gosh there's a lot of pressure because now I'm being made to feel like it's my duty. Also I was aware of the Rhodes Scholarship because in 1963 there were two black Rhodes Scholars, Stan Sanders who was a football player at Whittier College and John Wideman, he was a basketball player at Penn. That was really played up in the black press and *Ebony* and whatnot

because those were the only the second and third African American Rhodes Scholars. I didn't actually know at the time the first one was Alaine Locke in like 1906 because I actually stumbled a bit in my Rhodes interview where I made some smart aleck remark about how some questions as to whether it really is appropriate for me to be applying to a scholarship funded by someone who was one of the wealthiest business men in the history of South Africa, now an apartheid country. Then the committee informed me that in 1906 Alaine Locke was the first African American Rhodes Scholar and that Cecil Rhodes did not discriminate on that basis. So it was in my mind and, as I said, I knew people who had, by the senior year - I knew people that had won it. They had been in classes ahead of me. Bill Bradley garnered a great deal of publicity my freshman year. He was an all-American basketball player at Princeton and voted the top college player in the country. He was a white guy. He was a fabulous player. He later became a Senator. And so one was very aware of the Rhodes for all those reasons and then in my senior year, a guy who had been one of my freshman suite mates and also had been a football teammate throughout named Al Bersin and I were on the cover of the football program with the caption that said Harvard's leading Rhodes Scholar candidates.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: Well it's not okay. That's a lot of pressure because it's very fickle how you actually end up getting it. There's no guarantee that you're going to be a winner. So now there are thousands of people in the community that think, well you're our two leading candidates. It turned out both of us did.

Ms. Boone: Yeah, I was going to ask.

Mr. Williamson: Alan is an amazing man. He was an amazing student and a great football player and he won from New York. I would have liked to have competed through California, but that would have meant I would have had to pay to fly home for the state-level competition which was \$400 or something whereas if I had stayed in Boston and competed through Massachusetts, you can do it through your home state or the state where you're going to college. It's \$0.20 each way on the subway.

Ms. Boone: Is the application process pretty involved, such as you have to have some kind of a proposal or plan of what you would do. How does it work?

Mr. Williamson: There are a number of things. You have to talk about what you have done in college. The Rhodes people are looking for folks who they feel will be potential future leaders and they interpret that as meaning you'll have more than just good grades, you will have been involved in extracurricular activities and the scholarship gets remembered because of certain athletes, although very few of the Rhodes Scholars are really

top athletes, but the ones who are remembered were top athletes like Bill Bradley and Pete Dawkins and folks like that. So my year, there were, I think out of the 32, maybe only a half dozen or so actually had varsity letters. But you have to talk about what you have achieved as an undergraduate and then you do have to describe what you would like to do at Oxford. For most of us, you don't really know enough about yourself and Oxford to do that in a definitive way, but you have to make up something that sounds interesting. And you write an essay that is a kind of life story essay to try to persuade the committee that you're an interesting person who is likely to go on to achieve important tasks and goals.

Ms. Boone: Have you ever looked back at that essay like years later, have you looked at it at all recently?

Mr. Williamson: No, I never look back at that. Once started to read my undergraduate thesis, I was so embarrassed. I put that away.

Ms. Boone: Totally can relate to that.

Mr. Williamson: But for the times I knew my story would be an engaging one for the committee members who were then, I think it's still former Rhodes Scholars that, you know, white people were. America was really such a segregated country and had been for so long that even very well-educated and sophisticated white people usually had very little contact with black folks, if any. I think by dint of the civil rights movement, we were a popular curiosity among moderates and liberals, but that's

different from saying these are people who really know you and understand you. It also meant that there wouldn't be anybody on the committee who had an experience growing up and maturing like the one that I had. So in some ways, that gave me more control over where the interview was likely to go and also a greater sense of predictability of what questions they would likely ask and how they would be reacting to me because at that point, I was someone who presented myself as having been both nurtured and conditioned in my youth in the white world but was emerging as an African American man. There were a number of professors who said you ought to apply. The school, they said, encourages students to apply for the Rhodes and the Marshall and the Rockefeller and Harvard isn't that big a place, so that the message certainly got delivered to me that we expect you to haul in one of these prestigious scholarships.

Ms. Boone: And you did. Okay so tell me about that experience. Tell me about Oxford. Tell me about your reaction, your initial reaction once you learned that you did receive the Rhodes scholarship and you would be going to Oxford.

Mr. Williamson: Well I was very pleased and relieved because I thought I'd been put in a position where if I don't win this, people will think I failed.

Ms. Boone: Yeah [laughter].

Mr. Williamson: So I was glad that I didn't have to deal with that. My dad didn't really understand what it was. He was the first person I called. I said, "Dad,

you know I won a Rhodes and I'm going to Oxford and next year I can study for two or extend it to three years." And my dad, bless his soul, he's over at Arlington Cemetery, he's a Morgan State grad, he says, first thing he says is, "Tom, you know, we're going to have to pay for your brother and sister to go to college. So I'm not sure what you're talking about going over to..." "Dad, let me start again." [Laughter]

Ms. Boone: Yes. Yeah. Yeah. [Laughter]

Mr. Williamson: My dad was a college graduate. That helped to remind me and keep me grounded that I was living in a world that was so removed from the world of most black people that if you walked down the street or you were sitting in a barber shop and said "Hey, I'm a Rhodes Scholar," most people would have no idea what you're talking about. Whereas in white America, actually if you weren't from a prominent family or some sort of pop celebrity, that scholarship was considered so special that a lot of white people would say, "Whoa," or "Can I come over and shake your hand?" These people don't do that ordinarily for young people and particularly young black people. So it was a reminder of how separate the black and the white worlds were in so many ways. I wasn't that sure what I was really going to study and I had some ambivalence because I really did like speaking French and if I could have, well I could have, but I didn't. In my heart I thought it would be more fun to be a graduate student in Paris than in Oxford. I still think that's true although in terms of meeting other Americans who might

become good friends and interesting people later, being a Rhodes scholar at Oxford was very good for that, very good for that.

Ms. Boone: And so you studied Ethiopian politics?

Mr. Williamson: Well I eventually got there, yes. I was talking about getting to know people, you know, when we were setting sail on the boat that may now be just sent to salvage, there was an article about it in the *Post* on Sunday, the SS *United States*, and so I'm leaning over the edge and like a number of guys, you're waving to your...

Ms. Boone: Wait a minute; you took a boat to England?

Mr. Williamson: Yes.

Ms. Boone: Do they still do that?

Mr. Williamson: They did it for one more year and then airplanes just killed the trans-Atlantic passenger ships. It used to be a grand way to go to Europe and it was a great bonding experience. I don't know if you've ever been on a cruise ship.

Ms. Boone: I have, yeah. [Laughter]

Mr. Williamson: When you're on a ship, no place else to go. So I'm looking over the edge, waving to my high school and college sweetheart who was there on the dock in New York City. And this guy comes up and says, "Hi, my name's Bill Clinton, glad to meet you."

Ms. Boone: No... really?

Mr. Williamson: Yeah. I found out...

Ms. Boone: Are you serious?

Mr. Williamson: Yeah.

Ms. Boone: Sorry. You see he was a politician from the beginning, introducing himself randomly to folks.

Mr. Williamson: Well it wasn't random. I remember I was the fifth African American Rhodes Scholar. There was Alaine Locke, there was John Wideman, there was Stan Sanders, then there was a guy from Dartmouth, I think, in 65 or 66, I didn't know him-- never met him. I was the only one in the group.

Ms. Boone: Yeah okay.

Mr. Williamson: Bill was interested in meeting everybody, but he was -- well he was particularly curious about how this was going to work with me because we were all in the sixth grade when Central High in Little Rock was integrated and that was a big national news story. Everybody would say, "Well where are you a Rhodes Scholar from?" I said, "From Arkansas." So he knew that I would be wary of him, but he also -- Bill is very insightful, positive person and he said, "Well I know this guy, he's going to have some reservations about me, but I know I'm a good guy and I'm going to persuade him that he'll like being my friend." Which he then proceeded to do. That's when we first met on the boat and then Bob Reich, who I later worked when he was the Secretary of Labor. He and I had competed against each other in the middle Atlantic -- no, I guess it was the New England region. You first competed at the state level and there'll be somewhere

between 20 and 40 people at each state who'll be considered and they pick 2 and then you compete at the regional level where they'll be 16 and they pick 4 of the 16. Bob and I had met at the competition and so I was able to renew the acquaintance with him. So it was a three and a half day cruise.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: We got acquainted. Bill played the saxophone for one of the dance parties that we had and I guess Bob got seasick. It was this ship that left in October. There were like 160 students on it, so we also put energy into figuring out if you could find somebody to get acquainted with who was better looking than you. So I met a very nice woman on the ship and we started dating for I guess a year or two or a year and a half. She was going to Trinity College, Dublin. So it was kind of cool. It was a lot of fun.

Ms. Boone: Yeah, so...

Mr. Williamson: But anyway, you asked about my major.

Ms. Boone: Yeah.

Mr. Williamson: I kept changing my degree program because I found when I got to Oxford I was more adrift than I had ever been in my life. Because Oxford allows you an enormous amount of academic freedom to figure out what you want to study and how you want to study. You could do an accelerated undergraduate degree, do it in two years rather than three or four years. You could do a graduate degree. So I started out

thinking I would do an undergraduate degree, it's called PP (politics, philosophy, and economics). This tutorial system is one where you meet with your tutor either individually or in a small group, two or three students, once a week, the tutor gives you reading assignments and you write a paper you turn in to the tutor. The lectures, they just have a calendar of lectures that you decide whatever lecture is interesting to you. It's not connected to the course, specifically structured with the course the way our courses are. It turned out that was too much freedom for me. I was used to being told okay, you pick a major and then here are all the requirements you have to satisfy and say okay I'll go do the program. Then I shifted to a graduate degree program, the equivalent of a masters here, but they called it a B-lit. I was going to do something about violence and political movements in West Africa. So I had written my undergraduate thesis on neocolonialism and Ghana so I already knew quite a bit about West African history and political and economic issues. But I really was having trouble getting myself focused and motivated. I had a little bit of fun playing some rugby for my college.

Ms. Boone: I played rugby too. [Laughter]

Mr. Williamson: I was a winger and the problem with being a winger is everything has to work perfectly for you to get the ball in American football, they call your play, but in rugby...

Ms. Boone: It's, yeah, it's...

Mr. Williamson: What position did you play?

Ms. Boone: I didn't know what I was playing. I don't know.

Mr. Williamson: Were you the scrum or a winger?

Ms. Boone: I was in scrum. Like I was like in the...when we got the ball.

Mr. Williamson: Yeah, you were the scrum.

Ms. Boone: I had never heard of rugby before. I tried out for it, I figured I could get on the team because I had never heard of it and I did get on the team, but it was a lot more violent, a lot more action than I was expecting.

Mr. Williamson: It was rough. So I was kind of drifting around, but I found if I changed my degree program, then I wouldn't be held accountable for having to do anything for the prior term and Oxford has a nice set up, Oxford and Cambridge have eight weeks of school and six weeks of vacation, eight and six and eight. I think you were supposed to go off and study during the six, but the Americans went and travelled and so the first six week thing I came back to the U.S. because my college roommate was getting married and I came back and I met the mother of the girl I had started dating and then the second one she and I hitchhiked through Italy and Greece and Yugoslavia, what was then Yugoslavia. But I wasn't seriously into the books and actually one of the nice things about being a Rhodes Scholar is that nobody ever asks you how did you do at Oxford. Because if you were in the know, no one says were you a first, which would be like being a Phi beta in

campus or something like that. So then I got a summer job working as a consultant to the Peace Corps, evaluating Peace Corps training programs and a friend of mine, a wonderful man named Lew Butler, had helped me get that job, right down in San Francisco. And I told him I wanted to go to Africa because I had studied a lot about Africa and he said, "Well let me see if I can get you a job where maybe they'll send you over there." And sure enough, I was assigned to evaluate the training programs for Libya and Ethiopia. They did part of the training in the U.S. and they were supposed to do part of the training in country.

Ms. Boone: That's great.

Mr. Williamson: They never made it to Libya because that summer, while they were doing the training out at Utah and in Arizona, a young Air Force officer named Muammar Gaddafi deposed King Idris and that brought an abrupt end to the alliance between the United States and Libya. We had a big Air Force base there, Wheelus Air Force Base, and it meant the Peace Corps people didn't go, but the Ethiopian group did go to Ethiopia and I went there for two weeks, I think it was about two weeks, to observe the training program and then come back to the U.S. and write a report about that. So while I was there, I had been apprehensive about going there because I knew from my studies of Africa that Ethiopians looked down all the rest of Africa and actually all the rest of the world. They're very proud and haughty people and

they particularly looked down on people of African descent who had been enslaved because the Ethiopians had not been colonized. When the Italians tried to colonize them, the Ethiopians defeated them in the Battle of Adwa 1896 and so they look down on all the rest of -- they thought it was shameful that you would have half slave ancestors. That's who my ancestors were. I'm thinking when I'm flying over there. "Do I really want to be with these people who are going to be looking down on me?" What I didn't anticipate was that when an Ethiopian sees me, they're absolutely convinced that I must be an Ethiopian and you get a different welcome in countries where people think you look just like them. So I had a fascinating two weeks and I said these women are unbelievably beautiful. What am I doing in England with all of these pale people? I need to figure out a way to get back here. So that's when I went back and changed my degree program to a DPhil in Ethiopian politics.

Ms. Boone: That's so funny. It really is. Okay.

Mr. Williamson: The DPhil program made you eligible to take a leave of absence.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: And I wasn't very happy at Oxford anyway. I made some very good friends, made some terrific friends among the Rhodes Scholar group and made some friends from some of the other countries in the commonwealth but I didn't -- I wasn't very successful in making good English friends, but at the end of my -- what is called the, I think the

first term is called a Michaelmas term, I worked out so I was now a DPhil candidate taking a leave of absence to study student politics in Ethiopia.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: Even though I actually knew that would be kind of a dangerous thing to do because the Emperor was in power and the students were often being imprisoned, sometimes being killed by the intelligence people or the police or if they did -- the students hijacked some airplanes and the Emperor told his minions he did not want any hijackers coming back alive.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: I lost my head. That's how I got to stay in Ethiopian politics because I wanted, before going to the country, I wanted to fit in to go back to Ethiopia and I wanted to know as much as I could about the history and the culture, politics before I went there.

Ms. Boone: Interesting. Okay. And then at what point...how long do you pursue the doctorate...or your doctoral studies, DPhil?

Mr. Williamson: It was just one term. The first term in the fall was called a Michaelmas term and then I took a leave of absence and the warden at the Rhodes house was very gracious to me because he actually offered to pay for me to study in Ethiopia while still having the rest of my scholarship at Oxford. I told him I couldn't accept that because the only condition would be that I would have to come back to Oxford.

Ms. Boone: How did you support yourself then?

Mr. Williamson: Well that's another story, but anyway, he was very gracious in saying to me that, for some Rhodes Scholars, one year is enough. But why he was extraordinarily kind was to tell me that if I change my mind about wanting to come back to Oxford, he said there would be no hesitation about reinstating my scholarship. It was very nice of him particularly since I said I'm blowing this place and going to where it's warm and there are all these beautiful women. He was a wise man, but I never did return to study. To answer your question, I had been offered a job to join the Peace Corps staff. I'd gotten acquainted with the Peace Corps Director when I was doing my evaluation, he and I got along well and he had an opening, a position to be the training officer and he thought it would be a good fit for me since I had been evaluating training programs. I didn't really know much about how to run a training program, but I knew a little bit. Unfortunately, he was a very left wing guy and he made the Ambassador to Ethiopia very angry, particularly when he gave an anti-Vietnam War speech to the Ethiopian University students. So around the time I was leaving Oxford, he was being fired from his position as the Peace Corps Director. I had been told I had to come through Washington to be processed and the Acting Director and the successor, who was going to be coming over, were both here in Washington. They interviewed me and I was a pretty cocky guy by then. I had a very good run of

interviews ever since. The Bank of America one in high school where they discriminated against me and I didn't get picked for a scholarship. I was in senior year in high school. After that, every interview I did worked out pretty well. But I was a little bit too cocky for this one and they told me the next day that they were withdrawing the job offer; they did not want to hire me. So I didn't feel like I could go back to Oxford. I had left with some flourish about how I'm going to fulfill my personal destiny; you guys are just sitting around here in a decadent Oxford life. So that wouldn't be cool to go back and say hey I'm back. So I went home to California and moped around and felt sorry for myself. Then I came back to Washington and one of the guys who had worked with me evaluating Peace Corps training programs gave me a pep talk about how I said if you want to go to Africa, you are the sort of person who can figure out how to make that happen for yourself. And that placed me in an odd predicament because I didn't want to try to rebut that argument. On the other hand, it meant, if that were true, I'm supposed to take care of business. So I decided to take care of business and I got a job here in Washington for about six months and then there was somebody who I befriended who he hired me to work in Cameroon as a group leader for an organization called Crossroads Africa where they would bring American and African students together in a work camp and he wanted to hire me mainly because I was a French speaker and they had trouble

getting leaders who were French speakers. And then he said, if you want to go to Ethiopia, we'll get you halfway there. You can just send the students back and you can stay in Africa and make your way to Ethiopia. And so that's what I did. I showed up without a job because the Peace Corps had said we don't want you and the person who I thought was going to help me get a job didn't answer any of the letters I wrote to him. But, you know, it was going to be warm, all these beautiful women. [Laughter] I'll be okay. This is 1970, so I'm like 24 years old.

Ms. Boone: Did you have a master plan about how this was going to fit into your life or was it just this is where I want to be and I'm just going to get there and it wasn't a part of any kind of broader idea about what you wanted to do?

Mr. Williamson: It was the latter. I said I had been doing things according to the plan and following a very proper course for advancing yourself for the previous 23 years. This is just what I want to do.

Ms. Boone: Any feedback from your parents or your siblings or did anyone get afraid, like what's going on with Tom?

Mr. Williamson: Yeah my parents thought I had lost my mind. They said, "Well, if you're going to leave Oxford, shouldn't you just go to law school?"
No.

Ms. Boone: Oh, so they mentioned law school back then?

Mr. Williamson: I had applied to law school before I went to Oxford because it was just easier to do all the junk that you have to do. So I had been admitted...at the time I thought I was going to Yale, but I applied to Yale and Harvard and Berkeley. So that was something they thought I was going to do. They were horrified and scandalized that I was dropping out of Oxford and that I had no plan except to say I wanted to go to Africa or Ethiopia and I didn't have a job in Ethiopia either. So it was going to be 10,000 miles away from them without any clear goal or refuge or anybody who I knew who was going to help me.

Ms. Boone: Is that what you needed at the time? It seemed like you were somewhat burned out.

Mr. Williamson: Yes, I was tired of academic learning. That was part of my problem at Oxford. Oxford is a wonderful academic center, but I had studied very hard in college and I think I was just burned out in terms of that type of learning.

Ms. Boone: Okay. Okay.

Mr. Williamson: When I got to Ethiopia, I had to get a job.

Ms. Boone: What did you do?

Mr. Williamson: Well there was this friend who owned a company who had told me he would help me find a job. I had written to him, but when you write letters or even when you send cables from one side of the continent to the other, you don't know if the person got it and when I arrived, I knew in Ethiopia it was a big deal to go to the airport and either send

people off or meet them and I had sent a cable saying I'm coming in, hope you remember who I am and remember you said you'd help me get a job. It was a red-eye flight from Ghana, as I had traveled after I had worked in Cameroon, I traveled around to several West African countries and was in Ghana and I looked around the airport.

Ms. Boone: And nothing? [Laughter]

Mr. Williamson: There was nobody there to meet me.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: So I said well, you know, this is part of the adventure. Maybe people just say they're going to help you, but they don't really mean it. You have to learn to adapt to different cultures. This is where you said you wanted to be and you're now in Ethiopia. So I went to the hotel, taken this red-eye so I went to sleep and woke up and I said well, maybe it was before I went to sleep or I don't know if I stayed at a hotel overnight or not, I forget because I was mad that this guy.

Ms. Boone: Yeah. [Laughter]

Mr. Williamson: I did stay the night at the hotel because maybe it was a Sunday that I arrived. Monday night I said "Look, Tom, you are resenting the fact that your friend, later to become the godfather of my oldest son, that Dereje didn't meet you at the airport. So you think he's a dog, but maybe something happened. Maybe the cable never got through, so if you call him up and say, well here Gino, I'm here and I was just wondering if you remembered me." If he says, "Look, I don't

remember you, then would you please get out of my...,” then you’ll think the same thing you already think about him, but if there was some mistake or confusion, that can be rectified. If you don’t call, it can never be rectified. So I call him up, he’s profusely apologetic. He said, “Tom, I was having a party at my house,” and I knew he gave great parties. I sent my driver to the airport and told him to pick an American who would be coming in. I forgot to tell him that you--

Ms. Boone: That you were black. [Laughter]

Mr. Williamson: That you look exactly like an Ethiopian. So he came back, said, “That guy was not on the plane.” [Laughter] This time he sent his cousin over who actually had been in college in the States to pick me up, bring me to his house and I moved in with Dereje and then it turned out he hired me in his company.

Ms. Boone: And what was his company?

Mr. Williamson: It was called Alem Public Relations Consultants and he did a variety of things. It was advertising and public relations and also he had these contracts to train Peace Corps volunteers and he wanted me to run the division of the company that trained the Peace Corps volunteers. Now life is funny because when I got to Ethiopia, this is now September, because I had been rejected the previous December, and now the successor guy was in country running the program and he heard that I had shown up, he asked me to come to his office and he apologized for how I’d been treated before and said that that was a mistake and they

should have offered me the job and if I was willing to take the job now, he would be very pleased to hire me.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: I said well, you know, before you guys were going to pay for my travel and everything to get here, but I've done that now myself and I want to have an experience where I'm not part of the U.S. government. So thank you, but I'm not interested. Then I go back to see Dereje, he says, "I'd like you to work for my company and run the training programs." In a lot of ways, it was different, but the functions kind of overlapped. I could have coordinated things out of the Peace Corps office or more directly out of Alem's office. Alem was the name of that company, Alem Public Relations Consultants. And I said to Dereje, I said, "Dereje, you know, I grew up in a white community, I've traveled, you know, all the way from the States to be here in Ethiopia, I want to immerse myself in Ethiopian culture in this environment and see if I can adapt and find a niche for myself. If I do what you want me to do, then that means I have to spend time negotiating with Peace Corps people and supervising a staff taking care of mostly white people. And, you know, I've already had enough contact with white Americans, I don't need any supplementary corps. So I don't want to do it."

Ms. Boone: Okay. You turned down two jobs in a week, I'm hearing with no alternatives. [Laughter]

Mr. Williamson: It was odd. It was the only time in my life that's ever happened. I was being viewed as the only person in the country who could do the job that they wanted to hire me for, both of the ones they hired me for. So I'm living in his house and he says, "You know, we have these fairly small contracts now to train these Peace Corps volunteers," and he was a real pioneer and unusual in that most Peace Corps training was done by U.S. consulting firms. Dereje had the vision to say you're coming here to develop Africa, then an African company should have the contract." When I evaluated the program, they just had the language training.

Ms. Boone: Okay. I'm going to pause this.

ORAL HISTORY OF THOMAS WILLIAMSON, JR.

Third Interview
August 26, 2015

This interview is being conducted on behalf of the Oral History Project of the Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit. The interviewee is Thomas Williamson Jr., and the interviewer is Precious Boone. The interviewee is taking place in Tom's new office in Washington, D.C. on August 26, 2015. This is the third interview.

Ms. Boone: Hi Tom.

Mr. Williamson: Hi. How are you doing?

Precious Boone: Doing well. How are you?

Mr. Williamson: Fine. Thank you.

Ms. Boone: Good. So the last time we talked, we were talking about your experience at Harvard and how it started off somewhat rocky your freshman year and ended on a high note. You were selected as a Rhodes Scholar, and then you decided that you wanted to take a different course. You decided that you wanted to go to Ethiopia, and you were determined to make it happen. So where we left off...

Mr. Williamson: Well I did start out. I did do a full year and one term in my second year at Oxford.

Ms. Boone: Right. So when we last talked you had decided to take a different course. You had dropped out of Oxford.

Mr. Williamson: Right, right.

Ms. Boone: Made your way back to Ethiopia, but you were there with no plan, no job, and one contact (laughing).

Mr. Williamson: Right.

Ms. Boone: And on top of everything else, and when we last spoke you had just turned down two jobs, and then that's where you left us at that cliffhanger.

Mr. Williamson: Well I guess I think I'd got up with my contact by then – Dereje Deressa. And Deressa is D-E-R-E-S-S-A. And he owned a public relations company that among other things had contracts to train Peace Corp volunteers. And as I think we talked about before, the Peace Corps had offered me a position as their training officer. And I had declined that even though...well about 10 months earlier, I had been seeking that position and they had decided to reject me. But I had originally been seeking it because I thought of it as a means to end way to get to Ethiopia and actually get there at the expense of the U.S. government since I was going to be a Peace Corps employee. But now I had gotten to Ethiopia on my own expense, and so I wasn't so inclined to accept the Peace Corp's offer. But then my contact who owned this company asked if I would become the head of the training division for his company and manage the contracts that they had to train Peace Corps volunteers, and I initially resisted because I had come to Ethiopia looking for a totally different cultural and personal experience than I could have had in the U.S. or in the United Kingdom at Oxford. And so it was not so appealing to me to take

a job that would involve my working regularly with an American government agency and dealing with Americans. As I had said to him, “I already had 22 or 23 years living with and getting to know Americans.” And in Ethiopia since I had come so far to Ethiopia, I wanted to have a very different experience.

He persuaded me to accept the job with his company for a couple of reasons. One was that he felt that I would be able to train the Ethiopians on the staff in how to use English in a business context and to enhance their skills in dealing with Americans in a professional and business way. Also he felt that if I accepted the position they would be able to, or that we would be able to develop our management scheme and our people skills so that we could handle larger contracts, and that would mean that more young Ethiopians could get jobs with the company. And most of our employees were university graduates who actually had aspirations to study abroad particularly in the U.S. I thought that was a marvelous aspiration on the part of these young people. They were really around the same age that I was. I maybe shouldn't just call them young, or I need to qualify that they were young and I was young.

Ms. Boone: Yeah.

Mr. Williamson: At the time as well. And so even though I wasn't particularly relishing spending so much time or as much time as I would have to with U.S. officials, I decided to accept the job.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: Although there were some mixed views over at the Peace Corps about how much I should be paid because there was an administrative officer who said, "Well if Williamson wants to go native then he should be paid as if he were a native." I made clear to the Peace Corps director that they would have to pay me exactly the same rate in U.S. dollars as I would've been paid in the U.S. because I had been working in the federal government before I had left to go to West Africa, and he was fine with that. He overruled his administrator so that it was a very ample salary for life in Ethiopia since the cost of living was drastically lower than in the U.S., but I actually needed the money to save up for law school expenses, and I knew I'd be going to law school back in California where I'd have to buy a car so then I made a good salary. I didn't spend very much of it during the time that I worked there.

Ms. Boone: So at this point, you knew that you wanted to go back to law school. It seemed to me when we talked before that your decision to go to Ethiopia was to free yourself somewhat from the structure of academics. It sounds to me like you had in the back of your mind at that point that you would be going back to school.

Mr. Williamson: I think by that time I did have that in the back of my mind. I had left Oxford. I found that the university wasn't as flexible about the study areas I was interested in as I had hoped it would be, and that's when I realized that at a university if you don't have faculty who are interested in sponsoring your academic interest, it can be very difficult whereas if you go to a law school and you come out as a lawyer, and if there's some large law firm that doesn't like you, you can still just walk out the door, and start practice on your own, whereas it's kind of difficult if you're at a university and things aren't working out. You can't just walk out and start your own university.

So yeah things had evolved to that point. By the time I reached Ethiopia, I viewed it as kind of my last hoorah before surrendering to the authorities.

Ms. Boone: So you had already decided at this point that you would be going to back to the west coast? Had you applied to Boalt Hall at the same time as you applied for the Rhodes Scholarship, and to Yale your senior years?

Mr. Williamson: I'm trying to think. When do you apply to law school? I think I may have applied a little earlier. The Rhodes stuff is done in December. I'm not sure. Anyway I did my law school applications during my senior year of college. I applied to Harvard and Yale and Berkeley.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: I had thought that I was going to be going to Yale Law School. I came back. During my first year at Oxford, I came back to the States for the wedding of my college roommate and visited Yale and decided...this was in December...that it was too cold for me to spend another three years in a cold climate and that I should just go home. Also at that time I thought that I would be spending my legal career practicing in California and that it would make the most sense to go to a California law school.

Ms. Boone: Okay. So how did your experience in Ethiopia end, and how was the transition back to the States? Did you get from Ethiopia what you thought you were going to get?

Mr. Williamson: Well I didn't get all of what I was hoping for. In part, I'd hoped that I would learn to be fluent in another language, and I learned enough so I could kind of fake being able to speak Amharic, but I can't really speak Amharic. It was a very, very rewarding experience in the sense that I made some very, very good friends, worked with wonderfully capable people, fell in love with my first wife, and lived in a fascinating, very beautiful country for 10 months. As I said, after I accepted the position with the Ethiopian company -- it was called Alem Public Relations Consultants ...Alem is spelled A-L-E-M...I shifted my occupational goal a little bit because I realized that the training division was suffering

because the Peace Corps viewed the Alem company as not measuring up to American business standards or best practices for American business.

Ms. Boone: Did you think that assessment was warranted, or was it unfair?

Mr. Williamson: Well I felt it was unfair. In addition, I thought it was very ironic that a U.S. government agency seemed to be suggesting that a private business in Ethiopia wasn't operating as efficiently and effectively as Americans would expect and was also consistent with the idea that even though I think the Peace Corps director was a very open-minded, liberal person, the culture of the Peace Corps, like the culture of the State Department, was that America is much more technologically advanced. We come from a culture that is more sophisticated, more rational and progressive in their management techniques so that generally we're superior. But since I was someone from that culture I said, "Well if we were in the United States, people would not be saying the government is a paragon and effectiveness."

Ms. Boone: Right.

Mr. Williamson: So I'm going to work with our division to demonstrate that we will be the ones who set the standard for efficiency and effectiveness in the relationship and see if that way we can get our payments in a more timely fashion. We had very talented people, but they were new to American-style management techniques, but they very

quickly adapted. Within a few months, we were getting our invoices pulled together and performing at a level where it was evident that the delays really were a function of issues at the Peace Corps. We didn't know why initially, but after about six or seven months it turned out that there was an employee of the Peace Corps -- he was an Ethiopian guy, but he was an employee of the Peace Corp -- who was embezzling money.

Ms. Boone: Ouch.

Mr. Williamson: And that was the reason for the delays in processing.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: We increased the size of the program -- the first program was maybe 28 volunteers -- up to about 60 or 70 on the third contract that we did. So that meant we were able to accomplish what Dereje had been seeking which was to expand the size of the contract so that more Ethiopians could be employed and his company could make more money. As I said, I made tremendous friends, fell in love while I was there.

Ms. Boone: Did you get married in Ethiopia or was that later?

Mr. Williamson: No. Maybe that would've been a wiser thing to do, but I came back to the States, and I bought this ticket that had 16 stops on it.

Ms. Boone: On purpose?

Mr. Williamson: Yes. I viewed it as surrendering to the establishment authority and getting back to what my parents wanted me to do and go to law school and get a law degree. But I had about 9 or 10 stops in different places in Africa and then 4 or 5 stops in Europe before I came back to the States. But the reason I came back was that it was June of 1971. We were completing our third contract, and in order for me to have time to see other parts of Africa before I would have to show up at law school, I needed to leave in June to begin that journey. When I hit Berkeley, it was the last day of late registration. I had to go directly from San Francisco International Airport to the Berkeley campus to get registered.

Ms. Boone: By the hair of your chinny, chin, chin you made it, right?

Mr. Williamson: I made it.

Ms. Boone: What was your impression of law school? You graduated in 1968. It's been three years, so you didn't go directly from undergrad to law school like a lot of students do. So you had perspective, international perspective at that. Did you feel different from the other first year law students?

Mr. Williamson: Well from some. As you say, a lot of people go directly from college to law school, maybe the majority, but also there are a great many who had also done other things before going to law school. When I sat down that first day of first year orientation, the guy in front of me was one of my Harvard classmates who had

gone to Berkeley High School. We had met each other initially when we were high school kids and invited to an event for high school students accepted at Harvard, and there was Rob Goodenson right in front of me. He had been in the Navy for a couple of years.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: There were people who had been Peace Corps volunteers, and there were people who had spent time in the business world, so I certainly was not unique, but I did feel it was an advantage to have worked in a real world job between college and law school. I say that because, as you know, law school is a very intense academic environment. If you've only gone to college, I'm afraid that you are more likely to define your self-worth and your sense of your future capability based on what grade you get. Whereas if you've had a job and you had some serious responsibilities, as I did when I was in Cameroon and then when I worked in Ethiopia, you have a sense that you can actually be a useful person in the economy regardless of whether you have a law degree and regardless of whether you have the highest grades based on written exams. I found law school to be challenging, I had to work harder than I really was hoping I'd have to work in order to do well. I was, I wouldn't say relaxed, but I was much calmer about the exam process.

Ms. Boone: The Socratic Method didn't intimidate you as much?

Mr. Williamson: Most of us had not had prior experience with that. I was intimidated by that, but if I didn't do well, I didn't go back to my apartment -- that first year actually I was living in my parents' house -- and say, "Oh my gosh, there's no way I can be a successful lawyer." I would just sort of feel bad, wish I'd done better, but it didn't bother me that much. At the end of first semester when some people got really, really high grades; I wasn't particularly in awe of them. I was somewhat frustrated that I had not done as well as I'd hoped I'd be able to do. Although back then at Berkeley, they were all full year courses, so your final grade wasn't going to be until really the end of the spring semester, your final grades. My exam experience was that for the first three exams, I was trying to respond to the questions by writing a treatise in order to demonstrate that I had learned everything that had been taught in the course. But when you use that approach, first of all you run out of time. Rather quickly and you begin to wonder, "Should I maybe be paying more attention to the facts in the question than just saying let me tell you everything I know about what I learned this semester?" So it took me three exams to figure that out that maybe it would be useful to focus on the factual circumstances presented in the question and try to actually use them in the answer. When I got my grades, it was clear that the

first three exams were mediocre. I didn't really know what I was doing. Then the last two were much better.

Ms. Boone: Want to go back to this concept of this plan for your life, the fact that you decided during your senior year that you were going to go to law school.

Mr. Williamson: I hadn't decided. I had applied to law school so that I wouldn't have to go through the hassle of pulling together applications from overseas. At the time I applied actually I was still considering whether maybe I would become an academic. I was leaning toward law school, but I hadn't definitely decided. You've used the term life plan a couple of times. I didn't really have a life plan. I had a sense of what would be the next step that would supposedly both ensure and expand options for me if I ever became wise enough to figure out what my life plan should be, but I didn't actually figure it out before I got to law school.

Ms. Boone: Who were your models at that time? I know Thurgood Marshall's name was well out there in our community. Did you have a sense of other black attorneys?

Mr. Williamson: No. I didn't really look at the world. Are you talking about when I was in law school?

Ms. Boone: Yes.

Mr. Williamson: First of all, there weren't that many black lawyers to pick from as models. Everybody admired Thurgood Marshall, but there were

in 1971, there were very few African American federal judges, and I didn't know of the few that there were, I don't know that I knew any of them. While I was in law school, one of my mentors was a guy, he's not African American, named Bob Gnaizda. He and two other lawyers had set up something called Public Advocates, a public interest law firm in San Francisco. Sid Lewinsky and Tony Klein were the other two. And I had met Bob Gnaizda the summer before my senior year in college when I worked for California Rural Legal Assistance. He was the one who put me up to being an undercover investigator, the camera fraud. I don't know if I told you about that or not. That summer before my senior year I worked at California Rural Legal Assistance. I thought I had mentioned this.

Ms. Boone: You maybe have.

Mr. Williamson: This had really significantly inspired me to want to be a lawyer because those lawyers there were representing rural poor people, many of whom were rural farm workers. It was very inspiring to me to see what sort of difference they were able to make in the lives and the protections that were available under the law but weren't because these people just didn't have representation.

Ms. Boone: Right.

Mr. Williamson: Gnaizda -- he's a very creative lawyer, really charismatic, imaginative litigator. He was working in the Salinas office and I

happened to be driving back from the Bay Area down to L.A., and I stopped off in his office and he said, "Look I've got a case where a woman on welfare bought a very expensive camera that cost \$400 or \$500." He said, "I'm sure that when you get back to L.A., you will find an ad in the *L.A. Times* for sales people to sell this camera." I'd like you to answer that ad. Take the training course and find out how it is they're persuading people who don't have any money to sign up to buy this very expensive camera. And sure enough, when I got back to L.A. there was an ad for the company, and I went out and interviewed and told them -- I tried to play a bit on a stereotype because I thought they'd be rather suspicious if I told them the truth, that I was there for an undercover investigation.

Ms. Boone: Don't do that.

Mr. Williamson: Even to tell them that I was a Harvard student that would be a problem, so I said I was football player at BU and that I'd had a falling out with the coach and so I'd lost my scholarship, and I needed a job to make some money. As I said that's sort of applying on the stereotypes that these people are -- a lot of my people are very comfortable and find you very credible if you as a black man say, "Well, you know, I'm a ball player, but I'm not such a smart one that I can actually even stay on the team." So they hired me.

Ms. Boone: Sorry.

Mr. Williamson: I took the training course, and then toward the end again playing on the stereotype, the training course was in a couple of weeks, I said, "Well, actually the coach had contacted me and they decided they're willing to take me back on the team, so I'm going to go back on scholarship at BU." That seemed perfectly plausible in that that's what black people are here for, to just play ball. About two or three weeks later, there was a complaint served on the guy who was in charge of that office and that company for consumer fraud in large part based on the investigative report I had done.

Bob Gnaizda - he was one of my role models because he had left California Rural Legal Assistance by the time I got to law school, and he and these other guys had set up a public interest law firm. They were suing the San Francisco Police Department and the San Francisco Fire Department for discrimination against minorities and discrimination against women.

Ms. Boone: So when you were in law school, you had an idea of what kind of law you wanted to practice. You wanted to do that kind of work?

Mr. Williamson: I wasn't sure. I knew that I wanted to have a legal career where I would somehow be positioned to try to advance social justice for poor people and minorities. I hadn't figured out really how I was going to get there. I got somewhat detoured here for most of the forty years working in a large law firm, but that was what I had in

my mind. At the time, I wanted to get acquainted with progressive left wing lawyers in San Francisco, and I thought I wanted to practice in the Bay area. I thought I'll probably end up at some small or medium sized law firm, probably some kind of litigation outfit, either a public interest firm or a private firm where people were of a similar political persuasion who would do pro bono projects and otherwise try to be a constructive presence and resource in the community.

Ms. Boone: During your summers then, did you, by this time Bob Gnaizda had the Public Advocates law firm. Did you try to get summer positions there? Did you reconnect with him at that time?

Mr. Williamson: No. I got married at the end of my first year of law school. I had to go back to Ethiopia and participate in a wedding and collect my wife and bring her back. So I definitely needed to earn some money to pay for that, and so I did secure a job with a San Francisco law firm. It's no longer in existence. I think it was called Peddally Everson Martin that summer. Then in my second year in the second semester I made arrangements at Berkeley to do what's called an externship where you were allowed to work full time, and you only had to take one course at the law school, and the course I took was one that was given in the evening, which was unusual at Boalt. There was a course being given by an adjunct professor on land use developments, so it may have only been once

or twice a week that you had to show up. I would take that course and do the coursework for that, but during the day Monday through Friday, I was an intern at Public Advocates, helping to prepare those cases. My second summer, I got this somewhat peculiar idea that I wanted to be an entertainment lawyer, and I backed into the rationale for that. I was hoping that I could somehow have a practice where my clients would mainly be African Americans other persons of color, but particularly African Americans. Sadly, when you reflect on where African Americans were in the U.S. economy back then and even today, but particularly back then, you say well who are the African Americans who would be able to afford having -- you hoped you could offer first rate legal representation. You'd want to be compensated as if you were a first rate lawyer. Well it pretty quickly narrows down to athletes and entertainers.

That's not a good reflection on where our community is, but that was the reality. I said, "Well, you know, maybe I could establish myself hopefully as a capable entertainment lawyer and build a distinctive practice with entertainers and athletes as clients." So I interviewed for and accepted a position with a Beverly Hills law firm, which also now is no longer in existence. It was Caplan, Livingston, Goodwin, Berkowitz, and Selden. At the time, they actually were one of the leading entertainment firms

in Beverly Hills, and there was a very good friend of mine -- he was an associate there, and I thought it would be helpful to go someplace where I already knew at least one of the lawyers. He's somebody who would be honest with me about what was going on along with partners at that law firm, how welcoming and positive the environment could really be. He's a friend named Dan McIntosh. He's still a very dear, close friend. As it turned out, what was most useful about having that experience was that it taught me I was not going to be a good fit as an entertainment lawyer.

Ms. Boone: Why?

Mr. Williamson: Well there are a couple of reasons. Particularly, if you're representing talent, which was ultimately what I thought I wanted to do, it's a business where most of the transactions really are based on form contracts. The only thing that's really interesting is what the specific terms of the deal are going to be, but there's a huge amount of boiler plate, and just intellectually that was not very interesting.

I'm not somebody who was all that fascinated about whether you made more money. There just was sort of a space where you put in whether are you are going to get a percentage or not. I realized that a lot of the people who are in the industry are people who are young people who have been rewarded,

particularly younger people, for having some very narrow talent. To me it was very analogous to people being athletic stars, and it was particularly analogous because they had a talent that was very admired. Indeed often they were surrounded with adulation, but that meant they had grown up in settings where people weren't holding them accountable to behave in reasonable and decent, even just healthy, ways.

Ms. Boone: Right.

Mr. Williamson: Because I can sing or I can play ball or something like that, I somehow get exempted from being a responsible, lawful, ethical person. Not everybody, but there was a high proportion, and you couldn't blame people for that. We all react to the incentives in our lives. Since I had been a football player, I knew what it felt like when people would want to be introduced to you or say hello and believe it or not our team was successful enough my junior year, so actually people would ask for your autograph and stuff when you were walking around. So I had some sense of that.

That it seems like fun, but it's pretty superficial. If you start thinking you're really different and special -- I don't know if superior's the right term, but just the way that you don't feel like you should be held accountable for your conduct the way other people are, or people just keep deferring to you because if you're the one making the money for them, they don't want to make you mad. And so it

leads to a lot of these folks not being very mature personalities, and then the lawyers end up being like the adults and the camp counselors to try to manage at least some pieces of their lives. I don't know if you've seen this new movie *Out of Compton* yet?

Ms. Boone: No, I haven't. Have you seen it?

Mr. Williamson: Yes. We saw it last week. Watching it, you'll see one of the themes is really it's the same old same old that there are these people making a lot of money in the music business who have no idea how much they're being ripped off by their so called managers and agents because they don't understand the contracts.

Ms. Boone: Right.

Mr. Williamson: I wasn't that keen on having to deal with -- to me it wasn't so much being a lawyer and using your analytical skills as being a counselor and a kind of surrogate parent for people. For my generation, I was way at the stick in the mud end of the continuum as far as drugs. I didn't use any drugs. I actually could honestly say that I've never smoked marijuana or anything like that. Everybody else was doing it. I got my highs playing ball and I just wasn't part of that scene. I could see in the entertainment world, one of the ways you get ahead, one of the ways you do business development is you give parties and you go to parties and you give people the sense, "Hey whatever you want to do that's cool. Let's have fun." And what I saw up close really was that the

entertainment business is a very rough business, and what I mean by that is people would be going to parties and there would be lawyers telling them I can do this and that for you. As long as you were popular, you could generate money for them.

But popularity doesn't endure for most people. And what happens to the relationship then? How do you treat people? Maybe that's the way you have to be if you're going to be successful. That's probably too strong, but I think there are a lot of people in the business who, they're just lawyers, who are users of their clients as long as the clients generate income for them. Then once it's clear or even maybe before it's clear that you're not going to be helping them with a percentage, they're dropped pretty abruptly and precipitously.

So emotionally for me Precious, as an African American man, I just couldn't be that cold in the way I was going to deal with people. I felt I didn't want to have a career where it was important to be really shrewd about when it's time to just cut people loose who often -- if you were good at what you're doing -- would be quite dependent on you.

So I learned. I got some insight into that. Then there was something else that was I smile now, smile for the tape -- at the time I thought it was ironic, but it was bitterly ironic, you also came to learn that black people really had so internalized the

values of white America. Most of these entertainers actually did not respect a black lawyer.

Ms. Boone: That's interesting, so interesting.

Mr. Williamson: If I have to have a really smart lawyer, I need to have a white lawyer.

Ms. Boone: Right.

Mr. Williamson: Well, you know, like maybe I have many flaws and I'm not at all such a humble person that I would be comfortable with some black person looking at me and thinking I was a second class lawyer just because I'm black. I mean it's aggravating enough if a white person does it. To have your own people...

Ms. Boone: To have your own people... especially since you're looking at this field because you're like I want black clients. I can get them into this industry, and they're looking at you and saying, "I don't want a black lawyer."

Mr. Williamson: So that was pretty galling to me to realize that would be part of the environment. And it's true, it wasn't so much actually an intelligence thing, but there's a network of people who are regulars in the entertainment and business, business and lawyer regulars, that was almost entirely white, almost entirely white. I had a strategy for breaking into that, but still the idea that your own people...it's not like these are people who have their PhDs from MIT. Obviously a lot of these folks didn't finish high school,

didn't go to college and looking at me as if I'm not smart enough to represent you. Please.

Ms. Boone: Not the ideal attorney client relationship.

Mr. Williamson: It was sort of ironic that in that the business and professional world where these people were fully intimidated, the elite white business and professional world, actually there was a greater likelihood that those people, when they were introduced to me, particularly if they had any idea of what my credentials were, would be more respectful of what I can do for them. Then some of my own people I don't want to say the Rhodes Scholar thing is the be all end all, but a lot of these folks had no idea what you're talking about. What Rhodes, where's that at? I think it was good that I had that experience. Realize that my kind of superficial analysis, "Where are the black people?" "They're in this industry. I'll just show up and this will all work out." Not that simple. Now it could be done. I grew up in northern California so you have your biases about southern California. I don't know if you know.

Ms. Boone: No, I don't.

Mr. Williamson: Northern California people are very kind of snobby and parochial about how we're really superior to the southern California people. There's some brothers who've done some very...brothers and sisters...some very interesting things blazing trails in that industry. I just realized this is not a very good fit for me. They're going to

think I'm boring. They're going to think you should be working on your art and trying to stay healthy, and these drugs, they may seem like that's cool or what not, but that's going to hurt you. Of course it's heartbreaking when you see what happens to Whitney Houston and people like that. Look at Michael Jackson. I don't know if you saw the story. Did you see how much debt he had?

Ms. Boone: No.

Mr. Williamson: 500 million dollars.

Ms. Boone: Michael Jackson?

Mr. Williamson: Now he had a net worth that actually was greater than that. Since he died, he's been making more money than he made when he was alive. But how do you end up in a position someone like Michael Jackson where you got 500 million dollars of debt. That doesn't make any sense.

I think there are ways to break into those worlds, but I didn't see it happening for me. You might have gone to school with somebody. I mean I went to an all-white school so I wasn't going to school with any future black performers. You might have played ball with somebody where you could get a reputation. I had a very naïve, idealistic notion that if people knew that there was somebody out there who was a very capable lawyer who had a very sort of reasonable percentage or where he was going to compensate himself, and that he really felt my goal was to make

sure that you are able to maximize your artistic and creative development in the most positive way, that people will hear about that and...

Ms. Boone: Flock to you [Laughter].

Mr. Williamson: Flock to you, right. Because I came to realize that's very naïve.

Ms. Boone: So then what was your plan B?

Because 2.0 year, I don't know if it was the same back then, but after your 2.0 summer you're pretty much accepting your position for what you're going to do after law school.

Mr. Williamson: Well if you have the opportunity. I mean the firm did make me an offer. But by then my first wife had made clear that she wanted to move to Washington, D.C. And that was because she's Ethiopian. As is the case today, the largest concentration of Ethiopians in the United States is in the Washington area. I thought she was going to fall in love with California. It's where I grew up and where I thought I wanted to practice so I was dismayed to hear how strongly she felt about this. But I also felt I had taken her 10,000 miles from her home and said, "Come be with me in California." How can I now say, "Well, no we can't go to Washington, you have to stay in California even though you think you would be happier in D.C."?

Ms. Boone: So how hard was that to make the transition? What kind of connections did you have? I know your mother's family was from

the Baltimore area. What kind of connections did you have to Washington, D.C. to get here after law school?

Mr. Williamson: Other than relatives in Baltimore, my father's relatives and my mother's too.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: I didn't really have any professional connections, so it was dismaying. I had not studied the Washington legal community so actually I had no idea what [garbled] was. I now had to embark on plan B in my third year with interviews, and so where I started out was thinking I was taking a course on communications and I thought that would be an interesting area. Now that I was thinking about Washington I said, "Well they're regulated by the FCC. Maybe I should try to sign up with some firms that specialize in communications." Then when the word got out that I was thinking about going to D.C., there were a couple, maybe several, faculty members who -- I guess they summoned me and said, "You need to apply to places like Covington and Wilmer." I said, "Why do I need to do that?" I said I spent my whole life applying to all the right places that I'm supposed to. Isn't there some point where I should be grown up enough to just go and do what I feel like doing? And they said, "Yeah, that's understandable." What proved to be persuasive as far as opening up my perspective about large firms in Washington is that they

said, “You know, law school is not really a good place to figure out what you would like to do in practice because we don’t teach you what practice is like in law school.” So you may think you’re interested in something. You get to a firm and you find out that what’s actually done in the practice in communications. I was thinking, “Oh well, I’ll have a fair measure of First Amendment stuff and la de da de.” It’s really much more regulatory. It’s very rare. And they said, “You go to a large firm like a Covington. If you decide you want to change your practice focus, you can do that within the firm and that’s much less disruptive than having to change firms.”

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: And then as I studied more about Covington, I learned that the firm had a rotation program where you could spend six months at Neighborhood Legal Services on a regular associate salary but actually be full time as a poverty lawyer.

Ms. Boone: That’s great.

Mr. Williamson: So I’m thinking I want to figure out a way to persuade Helen, my first wife’s name, to go back to California. I think the summers will be so miserable in Washington that will persuade her that we should move back, but for this couple of years, I’m going to be there. It’s a top firm so I can get some training. I’ll rip off the

firm for some training. I'll go do the legal services for six months, and then "Hey, we'll be back in the Bay area in two years."

Ms. Boone: Right. I love all these plans you have by the way. So tell me how that worked out for you.

Mr. Williamson: Well I did start in the communications area and after a year and a half, I did, I guess about a year and three months, I did get assigned to the Neighborhood Legal Services office at 6th Street between L&M.

But things were not working out well in my marriage, so I spent a lot of time concentrating on work, and then when I came back from Legal Services or by the time I'd gone to Legal Services, I realized I didn't actually like doing communications work that much. And the guy who had been my patron really, the one who had recruited me most aggressively, is now a retired partner named Chuck Miller. Chuck had grown up a mile or 2 from where I had grown up. He grew up in Oakland. I grew up in Piedmont. He'd gone to Berkeley Law School, and he had been very aggressive in recruiting me, including having his wife take my wife around Washington while we were here. She also felt she was attended to. But Chuck was the leader of an area of practice that was being invented while I was in law school, representing state governments against the federal government in disputes about health and welfare programs, mainly the Medicaid program.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: Because there's a huge amount of federal money that goes to the states through the Medicaid program. A lot of people don't fully appreciate that Medicaid covers much more than healthcare for poor people. It also actually pays for nursing homes that are filled with many middle class people who, when they find out how much nursing homes cost, they -- most people think that Medicare pays for that, but it doesn't. Medicaid does. So Medicare does not pay for long-term healthcare. It's just when you go to the hospital or for your doctor visits.

Ms. Boone: Yeah, I didn't know that.

Mr. Williamson: Most people don't know that. So there is this huge amount of money in the Medicaid program. Chuck very shrewdly let me try some other areas of practice because he didn't want to make me sort of totally dependent on his patronage. But when I came back from Legal Services, he said that I could work with him in this states practice, and that's what I started doing. Here I was thinking that this was somewhat ironic also this would have been in the mid-70s and then as I got more into it the early 80s -- here I was representing state governments.

Ms. Boone: What was the issue by the way? What was the issue that they

Mr. Williamson: Well it's not intuitive to understand because it's a highly specialized area, but there were a whole range of issues about

whether the states were complying with all the federal regulations that you have to meet when you provide Medicaid services. Now it could be something like, how did you figure out the charge for services? Well, partly it's hard to understand because you aren't intuitively aware of what Medicaid actually pays for.

One of the things was for these nursing homes. This became my specialty area. Medicaid paid for people, developmentally-disabled people, who were then mostly in large state operated hospitals. There's been a deinstitutionalization movement, so now they're more dispersed in community-based facilities when back then they were in these large state operated hospitals where a state like New York back then it cost \$300 - \$400 a day to provide care to severely or profoundly mentally retarded and handicapped people.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: But in figuring out what billing rate you could use, and the feds might challenge how you came up with your indirect cost rate because the indirect cost can be -- the overhead can be a very significant proportion of that. There were also certification issues. They're saying, "We don't want you to just warehouse people. You have to provide a range of services in what we call active treatment." They had a whole bunch of regulations that would send out surveyors to see whether people were just sitting around

and overmedicated, or are they engaged in training programs where you're keeping track of what progress they're making and trying to further their development to the fullest extent it could be done. My main specialty ended up being defending these large state operated facilities. They're called intermediate-care facilities for the mentally retarded, ICFMR. When the feds would come and do a survey and say, "You are not complying with our treatment regulations or the facilities are not well enough maintained, and so we're going to take back the money."

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: Or if they said, "You came up with an indirect cost methodology that overpays you. You have to keep in mind, these are millions of dollars. When I was a fifth year associate, I had one case for the State of New York where it was a 58 million dollar disallowance, and we were able to persuade it's what they call the Department of Appeals Court to reinstate 55 of the 58 million dollars.

Ms. Boone: Now you said that this was a burgeoning practice when you first entered into it. Is it still? Because I don't really hear about this area of law

Mr. Williamson: No. There are a variety of other issues that arise under the Medicaid program. There are what they call waiver issues that you may want to have a somewhat different approach for how you're going to deliver the services, and there are regulations about how

you can get a waiver and questions may arise about whether you complied with the waiver. Under the Affordable Care Act, there's been a huge expansion of Medicaid. How do you take full advantage of that? There are certain things that used to not be covered. It used to be that Medicaid did not pay for what they call IMDs, to basically a mental health hospitals. They did mental retardation, but Medicaid didn't pay for what were traditional state mental health hospitals. Now I've left the field so I don't know all the current issues. Under the Affordable Care Act, one of the inducements for states to buy into it is to say the federal government will now start paying for or paying a significant portion of your cost for mental health facilities which is a big chunk of the budget. There are a lot of issues where for some reason, either they're too boring or too complicated for the media to present them to the public, so people don't really know what's going on. So when you hear about these Republican governors or conservatives who say, "Well maybe we're thinking about buying into Obamacare." What is going on is that their budget division people have told them, "We're walking away from huge amounts of money if we don't have an Affordable Care Act in our state. We may have to start raising taxes to pay for the stuff that was put in there as an incentive." To get states to support or participate in the program, you just have to know a lot of background to know

what's really going on in the Medicaid area. States have to realize that's a very powerful incentive to join up even if you're a state or you've got a governor who doesn't ideologically want to align with Obamacare. It's really fiscal suicide to not come into the federal program.

Ms. Boone: I'm trying to think. I'm from Michigan, and I know there was a huge debate about whether or not to accept the expansion, the Medicaid expansion, in Michigan. I can't remember how that came up. I kept wondering. I'm like, "What is the debate?" It seems pretty black and white to me, but of course like you said, I'm not getting the full information.

Mr. Williamson: Well the counter argument to accepting is to say, "Well, they say they're going to pay, or they now say they're paying 90%." But can we trust the federal government in the future, and then if they pull the plug, are we going to be stuck with burdens and expenses that we can't afford?

Ms. Boone: Yeah.

Mr. Williamson: That's the counter argument.

Ms. Boone: Well you said you started in that area and then you transitioned.

Mr. Williamson: Well no. I stayed in that area. That's what I transitioned to when I came back from Legal Services.

Ms. Boone: Right.

Mr. Williamson: I had a wonderful experience at the NLSP office where you're in Landlord/Tenant Court. You're dealing with consumer fraud, and you're dealing with poor people's problems and their challenges and wrestling with the bureaucracy. One of my most memorable cases was an elderly woman, probably almost passed away now 40 years ago. Mrs. Robinson had been represented by the lawyer who was my predecessor in the office when she had applied for veteran's benefits, spousal benefits. Her husband had passed away, and she was denied. And she was denied because even though she had been living with her husband for like 20 or 25 years, they hadn't gotten married until about six months before he died, and there was a regulation saying you have to be married at least nine months. And that's a reasonable regulation obviously intended to avoid fraud and undue influence on elderly people to get married at the last second so somebody can start getting these benefits. Mrs. Robinson was a very religious woman and to her it was as if the federal government was saying we have no respect for your marriage, your dignity as the spouse of this man that you had cared for 25 years. Here was this document that says, "You don't count as a spouse." So there had been an initial determination and when the file was handed to me, the question was that we needed to appeal this. I remember looking at the reg and saying well on the facts, she pretty clearly doesn't qualify, but I had been at

Covington for a year and a half and I had begun to realize that just because the facts don't look good doesn't mean that you give up as a lawyer. As Covington lawyers, we will research and analyze the law as thoroughly as it can be done to see if we can figure out a strategy that will either win a case or improve the result for our client.

I was on 6th Street but I said if I were back in the firm I'd be in the library into the night looking through these regs and cases trying to find an answer, so we usually didn't stay at this office at night because they didn't have a big library there. So when you came on back to the firm's library, I said, "I've got to fully understand this regulatory scheme and see if there's any way we can help Mrs. Robinson." As it turned out, after several hours of paging through the CFR and realizing that the table of contents and the index were not set up for you to easily find a provision that was in effect an equitable exception to the rule, sort of said, "If x, y, and z, other factors can be satisfied, then you get exempted from the 9 month requirement."

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: So I said, "Okay I've got a legal angle. I've got to develop the facts." I got in the facts and found out that Mrs. Robinson when she was a young woman had been married in South Carolina, and I forget whether she was the one that left or her former husband left,

but the marriage ended, but no divorce was granted. So that was another challenge. Under the rules, we basically had an invalid marriage license. You're responsibility as an advocate is to try to be resourceful and creative, and I knew this meant the world to her, so I said, "Let me do the best I can in trying to draft a brief that says we do meet all the requirements." It was really a kind of equitable exception regulation, so that gave you some room to run with what is going to be fair. We were going to be up front about, the facts that she's an older woman so back in the 30s and 20s it was hard to get divorced before the 1960s when they invented no fault divorce.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: The only people that were getting divorced easily were like entertainers who could afford to go to Nevada for a weekend because they had very lax divorce laws in Nevada. I don't remember exactly how I fashioned the arguments, but to make a long story short, we won the appeal. Mrs. Robinson came in to see me and she said, "You know, the Lord brought me to you Mr. Williamson."

Ms. Boone: [Laughter]

Mr. Williamson: She was just glowing with happiness that now the government realized that she was the wife of her husband.

Ms. Boone: And do you find that the relief that the client was seeking was not necessarily the relief that it looks like is on the service, or yes she wanted the benefits, but for her it sounds like what was most important was this recognition.

Mr. Williamson: This went to her core sense of dignity and self-respect. She and her husband were people of modest means. She had been a good wife to this man. How could the government say in some official paper, you don't count as your husband's spouse? You're right. She needed the money. It changed her whole demeanor. It was just wonderfully gratifying to see what you could do as a lawyer. You know, she thought it was the Lord. I thought my training as a Covington lawyer had something to do with it.

Ms. Boone: How would you describe yourself as a lawyer? What do you feel like your motto is, and does it change when you're dealing with these pro bono cases or when you're dealing with poor clients as opposed to corporations and businesses?

Mr. Williamson: I don't think I change as a lawyer. I'm not sure how to summarize myself. What's different in the legal services context is that you are able to change the equation for balancing the scales of justice so that the most modest, the most humble, the most vulnerable can speak with the strength, the same force and volume as the wealthiest people, and that's very satisfying to me because that's what I think the scales of justice should mean in practical terms

and to the extent that I can be someone who plays a role in getting those scales tilted back so they're balanced. It doesn't mean you'll always win, but so that everybody who has suffered an injustice has a chance to prevail and have their rights vindicated. It's very satisfying, sometimes exhilarating for me to play a role in that.

I also take satisfaction in the commercial context. As a lawyer you're not moralizing about whether every case is sort of morally worthy, but we are very committed to the highest ethical standards and so if you have a business problem, I also take pride in trying to help you figure that out and try to solve it in accordance with the highest ethical principles. Corporations also can suffer wrongs. There are other times when what you're doing is you're being resourceful about giving your client an additional advantage. That's part of the system. In telling you this story about Mrs. Robinson what I've realized is that developing that skill for commercial clients gives you a capability to do important progressive things for pro bono clients.

Ms. Boone: So do you like the balance that you have then between your corporate clients and then the work that you do pro bono? Do you feel like that's actually necessary to have that sharpening?

Mr. Williamson: It's not necessary. To me part of the appeal of law practice at this firm is that I'm able to engage in both types of practice. The firm is supportive. If I need a first rate paralegal or you need some kind

of an IT support, there's not IT support for pro bono cases and IT for commercial cases. They're Covington cases. As you get older you begin to realize -- like I found this in some of the disability stuff I've done, just by writing a letter to the general counsel of a company on our letterhead when there's pretty clear noncompliance with the ADA, Americans with Disabilities Act, the company's general counsel is going to say, "These are kind of serious people. And if we're wrong, you should understand if we mess with them, even if we go out and hire our own big law firm, they will relish taking on the challenge."

If in this particular context I found that it's pretty clear they aren't fulfilling their obligations, they usually write back and say, "Let's have a meeting, and let's talk about how we can work this out." You don't even have to file the lawsuit.

Now that comes from the credibility that you build as an effective lawyer for commercial interests. I mean obviously there are other public interest lawyers who have credibility because they are well known for what they do as public interest lawyers, but another way of getting into these sorts of issues is to be lodged in a law firm and be someone who's committed to spending at least some portion of your time handling pro bono matters. I don't do death penalty cases, but I take great pride that the firm handles those cases because they're very, very extensive, very time consuming. I

had a discrimination case, what used to be called The Holiday Spa Health Club Organization, turned out they were running a segregated health club system in the Washington metropolitan area. They hired a major defendant employment law firm, and they started to try to put our plaintiffs through the usual drills that big law firms do, a lot of discovery and motions practice and what not. But, you know, we're Covington & Burling. That's our home court. Bring it on. Just bring it on. And there was a fair amount of luster and motions and stuff. We won all the motions. Well, not all of them. Actually they got the case transferred out of the D.C. Superior Court to federal court. We were in federal court in D.C. They got it transferred to federal court in Baltimore, and that was because they knew that court. The jury in that court would be drawn not just from Baltimore, but in federal court they also draw from the Eastern shore. However, the case was assigned to an African American judge who had been former general counsel for the NAACP. So we got in motions practice. We got some pretty good rulings out of him. A week before the trial they settled on our terms.

Ms. Boone: Have you lost a case?

Mr. Williamson: Sure, sure.

Ms. Boone: And how do you deal with that?

Mr. Williamson: Well I think it's unrealistic to think that you're going to be able to win every case. My approach is that I'm just going to try to work as hard as possible and be as thoughtful and imaginative as I can be, but there are times you lose and you lose for different reasons. Sometimes you lose because the merits are very weak for you.

Ms. Boone: Yeah.

Mr. Williamson: There was a heartbreaking pro bono case that I lost for a support center for legal services grantees. They did social science research for legal services grantees. We were before an African American judge. We had some serious problems on merits, particularly the productivity of the center. But at the oral argument it sounded like the judge was buying all our arguments, but then he ended up ruling against us. Now in the interim, because the oral argument had gone so well, the other side had offered to settle on terms that would've been actually pretty good, but I thought the oral argument had gone so well that we were just going to make some new law that would be helpful for other centers in the future. It was the wrong judgment was lost.

Ms. Boone: Caught you by surprise?

Mr. Williamson: Yes, very stunned. I wish the judge had said -- you know, sometimes judges will be more balanced at oral arguments and say, "Well I think you people should think about settling this case," where both sides kind of sense what's going to happen and feel,

“Maybe we should settle it.” Where we had a problem on merits, I didn’t focus on it as early as I would’ve for reasons I won’t go into. I’m not sure if it would have solved it. I wish the judge had given a little different signal. It kind of ended up making me feel too cocky.

The other case where I lost another one of these Medicaid cases was a big case for a New York State facility. We had very unfair ALJ, outrageously unfair. It was an interesting case because the facts looked bad on the surface. One of the things you worry about with these large facilities for severely and profoundly mentally retarded people who also have behavioral problems is that the staff will give them excessive amounts of psychotropic medications so that they just kind of sit around doped up. The records showed that the residents of this facility were receiving two or three times the recommended dosages of the medications. It also turned out that they had a full time psychiatrist overseeing this program who was an expert in these medications, and when I came to talk to him, he explained that -- the recommended dosages are for normal people. He said where you have people who particularly have severe behavior problems, there are people who are head bangers, there are people who bite themselves, there are people who are doing things to either injure other people or what they call pica behaviors, injure themselves. He said we have an

obligation for the facility to provide programming for those people, which means they should get some kind of training. You know, there are daily living skills and things you try to make something more meaningful in their lives.

He said, “We give these increased dosages, but they’re part of a treatment plan where we’re closely monitoring for side effects. He actually told me, “We don’t know why these drugs work. We just don’t. We know they can have a calming effect.” He said, “We don’t really know exactly how they work, but we know they do work, and we do know what sort of side effects to look out for.”

So he says to me “Tom, you have to choose between whether you want to give them higher dosages so they can participate in the programs, go out of the facility, get to go to the park, get to go to a workshop, or we can put them in a straitjacket in their room.” See how different the picture is.

Ms. Boone: Yeah.

Mr. Williamson: Present that case.

Ms. Boone: Yeah.

Mr. Williamson: Okay. So, it’s uphill. Stuff doesn’t look good in the opening. So the government comes out and puts out all this stuff about how here’s what this treatise says about what the dosages are, and here they’ve given them three times. So we start to put our case on. We said, “Well we have an expert that we want to put on.” It was

then called HCFA, the Health care Financing Administration. They didn't have any experts. After I've offered the qualifications of our expert, the ALJ says "I'm not going to let him testify Mr. Williamson. Now my colleague who actually was a much more experienced litigator, an amazing one, resourceful guy, he leans over to me. He says, "Tell them we are withdrawing from the hearing if he does not allow our expert to testify." "Mark, what are you talking about?" I said, "Your honor, may we take a recess for a few minutes?" I can't just walk out on the hearing.

Ms. Boone: Can you do that?

Mr. Williamson: I said Mark is a very shrewd guy. And one of the great things about working at Covington is you get to work with people who are very talented, a lot of times smarter than you are, and he said, "In the whatever system he's working under, he's not going to be able to explain or have a box to check off for our walking out of this hearing. There's no point in going on if he's not going to allow us to put on our expert, we can't possibly make our case. So we don't have anything to lose by walking out. "I said, "Well, I'm going to have to explain to the client that we're going to get up to the State of New York, we're going to tell the judge because you were unwilling to rule in our favor, we are withdrawing basically in protest of your unfairness. Goodbye." And I thought about it. I

said, “Yeah, I think you’re right. We don’t really have much to lose.”

Ms. Boone: So he was betting that the judge would find it more inconvenient to try and explain why the hearing wasn’t going forward if you walked out of the hearing.

Mr. Williamson: I came back in after the recess and got up and gave a speech about how this is the United States of America, and we’re entitled to due process and fairness. This is outrageous that here we have this well qualified expert. We’re not being allowed to put on our case. This is manifesting unfair, unconstitutional, and improper. We’re withdrawing your honor. Then the judge says, “We going to take a recess.” About an hour later he reconvenes the hearing, “Mr. Williamson, put on your witness.”

Ms. Boone: [Laughter]. Good.

Mr. Williamson: That’s the ruling.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: What do I do when I lose the case? Here, after the ALJ ruled, I called back and said, “Well, have a record and we were going to appeal it.” When I came back, there was another partner at the firm who was a friend of mine who was a legislative expert. He said, “Look, if the guy is that unfair we can come up with some legislation and undo his ruling.” And here’s an example of how you take the expertise that people have developed for commercial

businesses where there are provisions that are put into laws that extensively look like they're intended to accomplish some general legislative objective, actually they're designed to advance either a particular company's or a small group of companies' interests or protect their interests. He said, "Let's think about how to draft something to undo the ALJ's ruling." So he thought about it and then he said, "Okay, now the State of New York won't be able to do it by itself. We have to come up with a coalition. As it turns out, New York is not that popular on the hill even though they have a lot of representatives. He said, "We need to get..." because the issue was one that actually would benefit other states.

Ms. Boone: Right.

Mr. Williamson: Because in the states practice we've represented every state in the union, we knew state officials at other states and knew which ones might be interested. So we put together a coalition of Arkansas and West Virginia. Who else was in that? Missouri, actually Missouri was very important. So I was able to put a very different face on it than this is just for the State of New York because they were all interested in the protection that was going to be built into this provision. And we ended up getting it. I mean I said when he first brought it up because I was so naïve since the hearing was in May or June the legislative Congress goes out in August, I said, "Rod, don't you have to introduce a bill, have it referred to a

committee, get that committee to report it out.” So now we just have to have a vehicle. I don’t know if you know what that means. Particularly at that time, there were these omnibus pieces of legislation going through then. When they were running out of time to get everything done, they would come up with these bills that had a whole bunch of actually unrelated provisions on them, and you could in effect circumvent the normal process that I just described. If something like that was going through and you were able to persuade a Senator or a Congressman, particularly the chair of the committee, to throw that in, you didn’t have to go through all that other stuff.

Ms. Boone: And so how did it turn out?

Mr. Williamson: It was adopted. We had to do a fair amount of lobbying, but it was enacted into law and that invalidated the ALJ’s ruling.

Ms. Boone: That’s great! So it wasn’t a loss?

Mr. Williamson: I’ve just given you these examples. They’re different reactions, you know, depending on why you lost. There are a number of cases you should lose if the judge is really doing his job.

Ms. Boone: Okay.

Mr. Williamson: You ask yourself, did I put the highest quality, maximum effort into trying to achieve the most positive result that I could lawfully argue for on behalf of my client. If I’ve done that, that’s kind of like sports. When you lose a game, if you played as hard as you

could you're disappointed that you lost, but you don't need to be ashamed of that. If you lost because you weren't thorough enough in the research, you didn't put energy into interviewing witnesses and preparing them. That would be different. To me another element of losing is trying to determine what lesson should I draw from this? Listen, this is unfortunate that you picked that judge, somebody who either has a certain bias or was unwilling to take account of information you produced. With both victories and losses, I try to analyze them to see if I can understand how I can do a better job first to satisfy myself that I did the best job I could, and if not to subject myself to lashes for not having done that, or if I thought I did the best I could, trying to analyze the loss to figure out is there something else that I could've done better, to kind of quality control that experience.

Ms. Boone: Well I think we should probably stop here for today. I think I am getting an idea of the kind of lawyer you are. And I'm also getting a sense of how committed you are to Covington and how you really feel like this place has changed you. In our next session I'd like to get into your decisions to leave Covington for a little while and the transition back and into your time as the president of the D.C. bar.

Mr. Williamson: Okay.

Ms. Boone: So thanks again for your time.

Mr. Williamson: All right.

ORAL HISTORY OF TOM WILLIAMSON

Fourth Interview

March 29, 2016

This interview is being conducted on behalf of the Oral History Project of the Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit. The interviewee is Tom Williamson, and the interviewer is Precious Boone. The interview is taking place in Tom's office in Washington, DC on March 29, 2016. This is the fourth interview.

Ms. Boone: In our last session we did cover a lot of ground. We started in Ethiopia, moved on to the West Coast of the United States, came back to the East Coast at the beginning of your time at Covington, and we discussed your practice, including your time at the Neighborhood Legal Services office.

So, in this session, I'd like you to set the scene for us. At this point you've been at Covington & Burling for a couple of years, and you're working a lot of hours, winning a lot of cases. And I'd like to get your idea of what you're thinking. Are you at the point where you feel like, I could do this forever, or are you waiting for something? Are you looking for something different? Were you satisfied?

Mr. Williamson: Well I was somewhat unsettled because I'd had a tremendous experience representing poor people at the Neighborhood Legal Services program. And, when I had gone to law school I had mainly been attracted because of my admiration for lawyers who were bringing civil rights cases, or representing poor people. And so it seemed kind of ironic that here I was now going back to a large corporate law firm. I think Covington was probably the largest one in

Washington at the time. And trying to figure out, how can I find a niche in this practice where I would be comfortable, or is it may be time for me to think about going someplace else?

I didn't give much thought to going someplace else. It turned out that the practice area I had been doing before I went to Neighborhood Legal Services was communications, and for better or for worse I had learned that I wasn't as interested in communications law as I thought when I originally came to the firm. One of the advantages of being in a large law firm is that you can switch, or at least at Covington, you could switch around to a different practice area without having to go through the trauma, if you will, of changing law firms.

My patron at the firm and mentor was a partner named Chuck Miller. He had been pioneering a practice area that Covington pretty much invented, representing state governments against the federal government in disputes about health and welfare programs—mainly the Medicaid program but also sometimes the food stamp program and a program-- What is it called now? I've forgotten the name, but it used to be AFDC, Aid to Families with Dependent Children. It's generally referred to as welfare programs, income assistance to poor people. Because the federal government was paying a substantial percentage of the cost of these programs, the federal government issued regulations about how the program should be administered in

the states. There were various disputes that arose as to whether the states were in compliance with the federal regulations.

When I came back to the firm, Chuck Miller indicated that he had a need for some additional assistance from an associate in this area. My first client was the State of Oklahoma where they had a problem that was about a \$7 million dispute with the federal government.

Ms. Boone: Not small change for your first case.

Mr. Williamson: He wanted me to spend some time in Oklahoma documenting the claim that the state wanted to make. I went down there with another associate, who had some more experience in the area, but he left after the first day and said he had to go off to Florida to assist Florida with its claim. I spent the next week or so in Oklahoma City, reviewing documents and talking to lawyers and administrators of the Oklahoma programs that were subject to review, to try to figure out what they could claim from the federal government.

I was concerned about whether I was handling my responsibilities efficiently and effectively, because I think the expectation originally was that it would just be three or four days, but I spent either a week or maybe two weeks. The reason I did is I kept finding things that I thought would allow us to increase the amount of the claim. As it turned out, I was able to develop documentation or arguments to support a \$14 million claim instead of 7 million.

As a result, Chuck Miller was pleased with that and the client was pleased with it, and so I got launched into the states practice. I handled some other matters for Oklahoma. They actually asked that I be sent back down there to handle some other disputes they had with the federal government.

Ms. Boone: So this is within the first-- your first year or two?

Mr. Williamson: This would have been-- I'd been at the firm about 18 months before I went to Legal Services. And I came back in August or September of '76, and got started on this Oklahoma matter. Since I started at the firm in '74, this would have really gotten into my third year, when I was getting experience handling these state claims.

Ms. Boone: That's unheard of now at a big firm. Was it just as unheard of then for a third-year associate to manage a case?

Mr. Williamson: The tradition at Covington was to give associates as much responsibility as the partner thought the associate could handle. I was getting into much more than what I really understood in the first instance. I was definitely learning and making it up as I went along. That was part of what made the practice interesting and attractive to me.

In our states practice it was not like being an antitrust lawyer, or being a communications lawyer, where you had extensive regulations, substantial amount of federal precedent. It was kind of new to the federal government to have states arguing back against the

federal government when it was mainly the Department of Health Education and Welfare, which later became the Department of Health and Human Services.

I forget the year that it changed its name to HHS. So part of the appeal was that you were-- It wasn't so much that I was managing anything, but it was an area where it was important to be creative about figuring out arguments because there was not an extensive amount of precedent to work with. So I enjoyed that flexibility. I was fortunate that I had someone like Chuck managing me, because he's a brilliant lawyer, and when I would run out of ideas he would give me good suggestions or very incisive guidance about how we could accomplish something more for the clients.

I also enjoyed building relationships with the clients since now my clients were not commercial corporations, but they tended to be state health and welfare agencies. Like the Department of Social Services or State Department of Welfare. Well, there was something that happened in between, but in the early 80's when I was doing this practice, the Reagan administration was in office and the federal government was attempting to cut back on support for health and welfare programs that were funded by the federal government. So they would do audits or challenge the certification of various facilities in order to lay the groundwork for imposing a sanction of taking money back or cutting off money in the future.

When we were offline, you asked me about Wes Williams— Wes Williams was the first African American partner at Covington. He specialized in representing financial institutions in matters involving regulation of financial services, and he also was a personal mentor for me. Now my house here on Poplar Lane, Wes and his wife, Karen Hastie Williams, who was a distinguished lawyer in her own right at Crowell and Moring, used to live just two houses -- now there's a new house that got built -- now it's three houses up the street. At that time I'd moved into my first house around the corner over on Primrose. But Wes was somebody who was there to reassure me that I was making good progress at the firm. He provided really very thoughtful kind of intelligence and reflection on different personalities in the firm.

When you're young, for a law student you are prone to stereotype large law firms in very categorical terms. When you're actually working at an institution it's really important to know who the personalities are, what their priorities are, how they approach training lawyers, how to interpret their assessments of you. There are definitely partners who are enamored of a tough love approach where they may be saying quite a bit that's critical of your work, but they're doing that because they want you to improve as rapidly as possible. Wesley was a very helpful interpreter of those sorts of dynamics and nuances within the firm.

I think he was unhappy with me in late '78 when I told him that I had been offered an appointment, a presidential appointment, to become the Deputy Inspector General of the then newly-formed Department of Energy.

Ms. Boone: That was pretty early in your career then. At this point, '78, you're starting your fifth year?

Mr. Williamson: No. Fourth year. I started in '74. It happened around the time I was 32 years old, I think.

Ms. Boone: And why did Mr. Williams think that wasn't the best?

Mr. Williamson: Well, Wesley was very invested in the firm as a quality institution to train lawyers, and he was consistently supportive of my prospects of becoming a partner at Covington. The normal time you have to spend at the firm before you become a partner is eight years. I think his inclination was that, before going and taking some federal government position, which was also part of a Covington tradition, it would be best if I secured tenure or some permanency at Covington by making partner.

To be saying after my fourth year, or toward the end of my fourth year as an associate, that I was planning on leaving gave him considerable pause and concern that I might wander off to doing public service in the federal government and never come back to the firm. He wasn't adamantly opposed but I think he felt his loyalties were very much divided, because he had such high hopes for me as

someone who would end up being the second African American partner at Covington. But I was young and it seemed like an unusual opportunity.

Ms. Boone: How did the Department of Energy hear about you?

Mr. Williamson: I'm not exactly sure how it came about. The person who recruited me was a gentleman named J.K. Mansfield or Ken Mansfield. At that time there was only one other statutory IG office in the federal government, which was at the Department of Health and Human Services. This was a new office. There was a new statute that created the Department of Energy in '77. Probably '77, because Carter was elected in '76, so the first year of his administration would have been '77.

And this guy, J.K. Mansfield, just called me out of the blue. J.K. has passed away so we can't call him for confirmation now, but somehow he had heard about me. He asked if we could go out to lunch and he told me that he had worked for many years with Senator Jackson from Washington, who was the chair of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. The Deputy IG position at that time was subject to Senate confirmation. That's not true now, but in that legislation it was. Senator Jackson had told Ken Mansfield that he had persuaded the president to nominate Ken to be the Inspector General, and that he also had an understanding that Ken would be allowed to

designate whom he wanted to have as the Deputy IG. He asked me if I would be willing to accept that appointment.

I didn't really know anything about energy law. I just knew really what I had read in the newspapers about the new department. I had to sort of weigh, did I want to stay at the firm and continue on the path that I'd begun to carve out in the states practice to see if I could solidify my position or my progression toward making partner.

Ms. Boone: Did Chuck Miller weigh in at all? Did you seek his advice?

Mr. Williamson: I think Chuck made it clear that he felt I had a very promising future at the firm, but he's a very wise, sensitive man. He knew that I'd come to Washington with a strong interest in public service, and I think he felt he should be sensitive to that priority on my part. And so he didn't try to unduly influence me one way or the other. Obviously he had started to invest in me as somebody that clients could rely upon, and so that was another issue. If you leave, are you going to disrupt client relationships? That could be a significant consideration in whether the firm would make you a partner.

But as things played out, I decided I wanted to explore this new adventure.

The firm made clear that even though they would have preferred that I stayed, that I went with their best wishes, and they asked me to keep an open mind about coming back to the firm when I finish my government service. But I did decide to go off to Energy,

and I was sworn in in December of 1978 as the first Deputy Inspector General of the newly formed Department of Energy.

Ms. Boone: And what kind of work did you do in the Inspector General's office?

Mr. Williamson: Well the mandate of an IG's office is to investigate fraud, waste and abuse, and to do so in a way that is independent of management control. So we had three major divisions. One was investigations, both criminal and civil, looking to see whether there was misuse of government resources. Then we had an audit division, that was the largest group, and they were doing audits of how the Department of Energy was spending its money, making sure that funds were properly accounted for and that people were not engaging in wasteful or improper financial practices. Third we had an inspections group. The inspections group tended to be people with technical and engineering backgrounds. A lot of people don't realize that, I believe second to the Department of Defense, the Energy Department is the largest employer of private contractors to carry out its functions. That's because a huge responsibility borne by the Department of Energy is researching, designing and manufacturing nuclear weapons. I think many people assume that that's done by the Defense Department, but it's actually done by the Energy department through these very large contractors that were called National Laboratories. There's one, Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, the Los Alamos Laboratory, there's Oak Ridge

down in Tennessee. There's a whole complex of these facilities. There's research going on in all of them.

New weapons or refinements of weapons are developed, the design. Then there are places like Oak Ridge and Savannah River where the weapons are actually produced; manufactured. Nuclear weapons are a very expensive type of weaponry, and the United States has massive numbers of those weapons. We had technical people to take a look at how those contracts were being carried out.

Ms. Boone: Did you enjoy the work that you were doing in the Inspector General's Office?

Mr. Williamson: Yes. It's because I always had aspired to be involved in public service. As the Deputy IG, I was not primarily a lawyer. I was the number two management official for our office. We weren't a huge office, we had about 120 people, but that was a lot for me, going from being an associate, taking orders from partners at the firm, to becoming somebody who was a spokesperson for a major federal office. You had to develop management directives for your staff. You had to oversee the progress that they were making in carrying out the work plans and priorities, or responding to allegations.

There would be things that would come up in newspaper articles, or people from the Hill, oversight committees, saying, "We understand that such and such misconduct is going on at the Department of Energy and we would...." Also, you would have

whistleblowers who would pass on information, sometimes confidentially, about matters that needed to be investigated or audited. It meant that you would sometimes be meeting with people on the Hill about the status of your investigations, or being asked to testify.

One investigation we did was of the situation at one of the National Laboratories. It turned out that there were publications in the parts of the library that were publicly available that contained secrets relating to how to make an H-bomb. We were asked to investigate, how is it that that sort of highly classified information was put in a public space where someone from a foreign government could just come and read or compile that information that might then be used to help their design of H-bombs or thermonuclear weapons.

At the time another big area of controversy had to do with the strategic petroleum reserve, because this was during the time of the Arab oil boycott. Tens of millions of dollars were being spent buying oil and putting it in special storage facilities so that if there was a national emergency, the U.S. would be able to use its own strategic petroleum reserve to meet the country's oil needs. They were trying to get together enough oil to be able to operate for six months without having to import oil.

Whenever you have big construction projects and a lot of money being spent, you have to worry whether there's any corruption going on, and how efficiently are they managing these projects? Are

they doing them in places where it's sensible to be right there in the facilities? The Energy Department also was involved in innovative technologies that would reduce dependence on oil. So we went in, took a look at some wind projects, wind power projects, solar projects.

Whenever you got new types of contracts you have to worry, are these businesses that are receiving these contracts legitimate businesses? Is there any fraud going on? Even if there's not fraud, are they operating in an efficient way?

So it was a fascinating time. There was also a huge regulatory program to try to control the price of oil. It was back in the late seventies because of the oil Arab boycott. The government tried to create incentives to increase US production, and that ended up spawning a big reseller industry, because there were different prices for oil depending on whether it was new oil or old oil. But trying to keep track of what was new oil and old oil was a pretty complicated process for the government.

Ms. Boone: I've seen, like pictures of cars lined up at the gas stations trying to...

Mr. Williamson: It's that era. Another area of course was alleged misconduct by government officials within the department. We did a major, pretty controversial investigation of a very high level official who had been accused of using government funds to take her son on government trips.

Ms. Boone: Ouch.

Mr. Williamson: Take her son, I think it was to Alaska, at government expense when he didn't seem to have a real official role.

Ms. Boone: So how and when did your time there end? Was it with Carter's transition?

Mr. Williamson: While I was there, one of the things that I tried to accomplish was to actually involve more women and minorities in the more senior positions and more important investigations. This isn't directly responsive to your question, but it's part of what I was most proud of, facilitating opportunities for people of color and women to play a higher-level role in the operations of the IG's office. Because traditionally, you know, women had been largely limited to clerical or administrative support roles. I hired a couple of lawyers, one from the National Labor Relations Board, another lawyer, even a couple of lawyers from the Justice Department. Brought them into the GS-15 level and I put them into supervisory positions, and also tried to make sure that people of color received opportunities to demonstrate how they could contribute to advancing the department's mission.

But anyway, as far as my transition, I told Ken Mansfield that I wasn't aspiring to stay in the IG, Deputy IG position for the long term. We got rolling in late '78. I got brought in late '78, and we finished staffing up the office toward the end of '78, early 79. There was an election in 1980. The Carter administration lost the election and I was

a political appointee. As is the tradition in the federal government, all the presidential appointees are asked to submit their resignation.

Now there is an ironic twist with regard to the inspectors general because later in 1978 there was a new law passed, the Inspector General Act of 1978, that created statutory IG's at all the cabinet departments and a few other places. It was supposed to be a non-partisan appointment. So when President Carter was defeated and the Reagan transition team began to circulate memos, they specifically requested that the presidentially appointed IG's--and there were two presidentially appointed deputy IG's--not submit their resignations. And people in the IG community interpreted that as meaning that the office would be treated as a non-partisan office.

It turned out it was a political stunt, because I had told Ken Mansfield that I was planning to return to private law practice in early 1981. And I had actually drafted and sent a letter to President Carter thanking him for giving me the opportunity to serve and letting him know that I'd be willing to serve for some interim period while the new people came in.

But as it turned out, on Inauguration Day, which was sometime around January 20, 1981, President Reagan issued a press release-- no, no, issued an executive order, that was communicated in a press release, stating that he was firing all of the statutory IG's and the two deputy IG's, and he was going to replace them with inspectors general

who were meaner than barnyard dogs, I think was the language that was used.

So people had been lulled into some complacency to think they would be allowed to stay on when in fact they just wanted them all in place so that they could include everybody's name in this executive order.

I think I have the distinction, perhaps, of being the only person who has a very nice letter from President Carter accepting my letter of resignation, and then being included in an executive order where I was fired by President Reagan.

Ms. Boone: (Laughter) So you returned to Covington. There was no hesitation about that.

Mr. Williamson: No, no. I did look around at other firms. I didn't just mindlessly or blindly go back to Covington. I thought, well this is a transition time, I should do some looking around. Interestingly, I mainly spoke to friends of mine whom I had met initially at Covington, who were now working at other law firms, and asked them, did they think their firm might be interested in hiring me? To a person they all said that their firm would be delighted to have me. This is what they told me personally, this is not what their firm said, but they said that their firm would be delighted to have me join. But they personally advised me that if I had the opportunity to return to Covington and become a partner there, that that would really be preferable for my own interests

and my professional goals. Even though they were working at these other firms, it was quite striking that they had such respect for Covington.

The firm had made clear that if I were to come back, I would be given full credit for my two years and two months at the Energy Department, and that I would be coming up for partner in about 18 months. It was quite instructive to me that there was such deep respect for Covington that people at other firms were saying I would be better off going back there, if I was in good shape for partnership.

Ms. Boone: So, as Mr. Williams wanted, you did become the second partner at--

Mr. Williamson: Second African American partner at Covington. Yes.

Ms. Boone: What did you have to do to become partner?

Mr. Williamson: You have to demonstrate that you can provide legal services up to the firm's quality standards, that you have a track record of effectively taking on responsibilities and fulfilling client expectations. The early 80's was the beginning of a time when law practice in Washington, D.C. was about to undergo a drastic change.

Ms. Boone: Why is that? What change?

Mr. Williamson: Well into the 70's, the early 80's, law firms mainly or exclusively practiced in just one city. Covington's one city was Washington, D.C. Indeed, most of the firm's business came through referrals from other law firms. The lawyers in major firms in Chicago or Los Angeles or

Denver, Houston would say, “Well, if you have a Washington problem, here’s a top firm that you should go to.”

Then other major firms decided, why couldn’t we get some of that legal services in Washington, DC? Let’s set up our own office there. We’ll refer our clients to our office and start competing with firms like Covington and Arnold. The big ones then were Covington, and Arnold & Porter, Wilmer Cutler, what was then Hogan & Hartson. There are several others. They either only had an office in Washington, or might have had a very small office in New York City, but not an office that was really there as a convenience for your Washington-based lawyers. Covington just had an office in Washington.

When that sort of competitive pendulum started to shift, it created a different sort of environment for the Washington law firms. They had to decide, “Well are we going to set up offices in other cities?” Covington didn’t think that made much sense for Covington to do, because our specialty really was what we could do in Washington. What would be the point of somebody coming to us in Los Angeles to do work that involved California law? On the other hand, it created radically different and more aggressive, competitive pressure in Washington because these other firms were looking to do the same thing that we did for their clients back in the days when they used to refer them to us.

When I started law practice, actually it's another big change, it was a violation of the Code of Professional Responsibility to solicit business. It was a Supreme Court decision in the 70's that held that was unconstitutional. It used to be, generally speaking, against the law to advertise for legal business.

Ms. Boone: I did know that you couldn't advertise, but I guess I didn't realize what that actually means.

Mr. Williamson: Well, advertising is a type of solicitation.

Ms. Boone: So you become partner during this shift.

Mr. Williamson: I was there primarily in '81.

Ms. Boone: So you became a partner in '80?

Mr. Williamson: In '82.

Ms. Boone: In '82. Did your practice shift?

Mr. Williamson: No. I had returned to the states practice. I don't know if it was before or after I left that I was able to expand the clients I dealt with. I did a lot of work with the State of New York. There was one case that was about a \$55 million case for New York where we were successful in being able to hold onto 55 million the federal government wanted to take back. I continued to do matters for Oklahoma. I'm trying to think of some of the other clients. There was a case from Massachusetts.

I can't remember which ones I handled before or after I became a partner, but I returned to the states area and was representing

states from different parts of the country. I handled a matter for Illinois. Let me think if this is before I made partner or not. I guess I'm getting too old to remember that far back.

Ms. Boone: So as a partner, you're working a lot with younger attorneys. You're staffing your cases with associates. Did you have a certain philosophy on what you were looking for in the people you had staffed on your cases?

Mr. Williamson: Well, you wanted bright, energetic people. I was particularly interested in people who thought they would enjoy representing a state government, trying to figure out strategies to hold onto or increase resources that could be made available to support social welfare and health programs.

One thing that makes Covington such a delightful place to work is you wanted colleagues whom you enjoyed working, who had a sense of humor, who were hard working because it was demanding work, but respectful of each other, were very collegial. A key distinguishing characteristic of the firm, was that, even though you had a lot of high-energy, ambitious people, you didn't want people who were somehow trying to be competitive with each other, or make someone else look bad, or undercut anybody else's work. I found there were, the types of folks we recruited, frequently reflected these very positive, collegial characteristics.

Ms. Boone: I'm jumping around and if you want to take me back please do. After you become partner, you're doing that for about ten years, and then you get on another president's radar, President Clinton, and you are nominated the Solicitor of Labor.

Mr. Williamson: Yes. During that time I stayed with the states practice. One of the other things I did as a partner, I developed a specialty and a bit of a national reputation defending against federal efforts to take funding away from large state-operated institutions for severely and profoundly retarded individuals. There was a lot of controversy during this time because there was a national movement to de-institutionalize people from these large facilities. Most of our clients were trying to adapt to that, but they still had a number of these large facilities. The federal government had very elaborate regulations for how those facilities were supposed to be run, because they were quite expensive. Back then, for some states, it would be \$300 a day per resident for the healthcare and what they called active treatment. You tried to provide training exercises to improve the abilities of these profoundly and severely retarded or developmentally disabled, as they refer to them now, people so that they could take better care of themselves. Or they might have some kind of sheltered workshop where they'd have a sort of a job they were doing, so that their lives would be more meaningful.

The de-institutionalization movement was justifiably motivated by concerns that people were just being warehoused in these large

facilities and weren't really getting care that helped to develop their capabilities. There was a facility in Massachusetts that we defended, although ultimately we were unsuccessful in that case. But there were places in Oklahoma, Kansas, New York, New Jersey, West Virginia.

West Virginia might have been the most traumatic one.

Normally, when the federal government did a survey and said, we're going to decertify your facility, the state could keep receiving funding until there was a hearing and a decision confirming the decertification. You'd have an administrative law judge make a ruling. These hearings sometimes would be two or three weeks.

In West Virginia, this would have been in 1989, or they may have been surveyed in '88, the federal government said, well the conditions at this facility, it's called the Colin Anderson facility, are so bad that they present an immediate threat to the health and safety of the residents. The regulation said if the facility posed an immediate threat, then the federal money would be cut off immediately and the state would have to pursue its appeal rights in the absence of continuing federal funding.

I was asked to come to West Virginia and speak to the people in the cabinet department in charge of this facility, because they—I think they had lost \$5 million of federal funding, which was a lot of money in West Virginia in the late 1980's. They wanted me to testify before the state legislature about how the state needed to appropriate

new money because the federal government wasn't going to pay. I looked at the federal report and I had some questions about it. I asked if I could go to the facility to speak to the people there to understand why there had been such a negative review. I spent a day or so talking to people at the facility, and when I came back I informed the state officials that I thought we could prepare a case to reverse the federal decertification.

Ms. Boone: So they hired you to talk to the state legislature so that they can get the money that they needed from the State. You investigated, and you believed that you could build a case against the federal government, to at least keep the funding there until it went through the normal process of a hearing.

Mr. Williamson: Well, they'd already cut off the funding. We were having to build a case—

Ms. Boone: To reinstate the payment?

Mr. Williamson: -- to get the \$5 million that had been cut off, and then to have the funding reinstated going forward.

Ms. Boone: That's good.

Mr. Williamson: I pulled together my team. I had some great young associates. We had to work pretty hard. We had either two-or three-week hearing. We got to know the people at the facility quite well, and we did a very thorough review of their records and the investigation of what the federal surveyors had been relying upon.

We turned in our post-trial briefs or brief. About a week before the federal government had to turn in its brief, they called up and said that they were prepared to reinstate the \$5 million in funding and recertify the facility going forward.

Ms. Boone: That's a great result for your client. That was great. So it sounds like this was a really fulfilling practice for you.

Mr. Williamson: Yes. It was very interesting. What made it distinctive and interesting is that we were able to bring to bear the resources that are normally deployed by large corporations to fight for the legal rights of state agencies, many of whom were intimidated by the federal government.

South Dakota was another client where there was a couple of million dollar dispute. Again, that was a lot of money for South Dakota back then. They wanted to take away the money. I don't think it was an ICFMR, that's what they call these big places, Intermediate Care Facilities for the Mentally Retarded.

On that case one of the interesting things was that I asked Phyllis Thompson, who was then a Covington associate, she's now an Associate Judge at the D.C. Court of Appeals as you know, to help me on the case. Phyllis was a little concerned about our going out to South Dakota. She said, "Don't you think they're going to be troubled by having two black lawyers representing them?" I said, "Phyllis, that's their problem. That's not your problem. Your job is just to get ready to defend this case," up to the standards that she had already set.

I said, "Well, I'm going to inform them that they're very fortunate because I was able to secure the assistance of one of the top young associates we have, one of our rising stars, and that they should really be grateful and that it was good luck for them that I was able to get such a strong associate."

So we went out there and, sure enough, they fell in love with Phyllis. She did a brilliant job. She even helped examine some of the witnesses, and we won the case. So South Dakota got a couple million dollars back.

Ms. Boone: So you dropped a couple of names. Give me some more. Who are some of the other people that you worked with during your tenure at Covington? Some of your contemporaries.

Mr. Williamson: The way we did the states practice, the partners usually worked with just one or two associates. We didn't have big teams of partners working on cases. The cases were big. The dollars were significant. There are a lot of associates who came through that practice area. I can't really recall everybody's name offhand. There are some who are partners today in different areas.

There's a guy, Don Ridings that worked on a case in New Jersey. There was a guy, Stanlake Samkange. His mother was from Mississippi, his father was from Zimbabwe. He's now a high level official with the UN World Food Programme. There was another guy, Jamie Sterin. He's a partner at another law firm. I don't remember the

name of the law firm. Jamie was terrific. There was another lawyer named Kelly Knivila. She's a lobbyist out in Oregon.

You know, Covington is a place where a lot of people pass through. Phyllis later became a partner in the states practice area. There were only limited opportunities to do that because, unlike corporations where you really have an unlimited number of potential corporate clients, there are only 50 states. Phyllis was a bona fide star performer, and she ended up being a partner in that area.

Ms. Boone: I'm going to fast-forward a little bit. I want you to talk a little bit about your time as the Solicitor of Labor.

Mr. Williamson: In 1992, I got involved in the Clinton campaign. I had been in graduate school at Oxford with Bill Clinton. He and I were in the same class, so I'd been friends with him for a long time. Actually, I worked on a matter for the State of Arkansas. We got Arkansas involved in a coalition with New York and Missouri and a couple of other states for some legislation that benefited the states in proceedings where they had Medicaid disputes with the federal government. I helped with some of the fundraising.

I wasn't actually planning on going into the administration. I didn't have a particular goal to do that. I was having an enjoyable time in my practice representing state governments. I was looking forward to the Clintons coming to Washington, since I would sometimes visit with them. If I was out in that part of the country, I

might spend the weekend with them in the guest house at the Governor's Mansion in Little Rock. I was very enthusiastic in supporting his candidacy in 1992.

After he got elected, another one of our Oxford classmates, Bob Reich, was nominated to be the Secretary of Labor. Bob and I had been good friends for many years, in addition to Oxford, when he was a lawyer in Washington at the Solicitor General's office and at the FTC. His wife was an associate at Covington, so she and I were both associates at Covington. When I would do recruiting, I would do some recruiting up at Harvard and he when they left Washington, he became a professor at the Kennedy Institute and Clare, his then wife, became a professor at Harvard Law School-- I would sometimes stay at their house.

He started inquiring about whether I would be interested in serving as the Solicitor of Labor, to help him run the department. I agreed to do that.

Ms. Boone: How was your time at the department?

Mr. Williamson: I had a wonderful time. It's a very important responsibility. Most people don't realize that the Solicitor's office at the Labor Department is one of the largest legal offices in the federal government. It was over 500 lawyers-- or close to 600 when I started. We actually reduced the size of all the staff in the Labor Department, including the Solicitor's office, so I think it was closer to 500 when I left. But the

Labor Department enforces a very wide range of employment laws. They don't enforce the National Labor Relations Act. That's the National Labor Relations Board. There is quite an array of federal employment laws, ranging from the wage and hour laws, minimum wage and overtime, to RISA, to Mine Safety & Health, to OSHA the Occupational Safety and Health Act. There are certain laws relating to victims of black lung disease.

There are international aspects of what the Labor Department does. It's a member of the International Labor Organization. There are 130 or maybe 150 employment laws that the Labor Department enforces. There is the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, an antidiscrimination office, that regulates government contractors. You're not allowed to discriminate, and you also have to engage in affirmative action. That authority is enforced by the Labor Department.

It's a very interesting, diverse array of responsibilities when you're the Solicitor of Labor. I was able to hire a really talented staff. My deputy was another African American fellow, Oliver Quinn, who was spectacular. He had tremendous credentials and was just an incredibly smart, wise, hardworking guy. He was very much an alter ego for me when I was the Solicitor of Labor. My executive assistant was an African American woman I brought over from Covington who was protégé then, Thomasenia Duncan. She's now the Chief

Executive for the Federal Multidistrict Litigation office, if you know that part of the federal court system, where we have these really big, complicated cases that involve more than one jurisdiction. They get referred to the MDL panel.

Ms. Boone: Yes. I worked on a MDL case. Very unwieldy. I had a very small role.

Mr. Williamson: She's the chief executive of that now. Then earlier, she'd been the General Counsel of the Federal Elections Commission. She was a fairly young lawyer then. Tommie turned 30 her first year she was working with us. We had a very strong team. Judy Kramer was another.

Ms. Boone: When you were in a position to do so, you always reached out to look for qualified African Americans to fill some position?

Mr. Williamson: I wanted to be sure that they were given a chance. For my deputy at Labor, the white House kept sending over names of people who they thought should be considered, but I was concerned that, within the community of lawyers who did employment law, women and minorities were underrepresented. I wanted to be sure that they got a fair shot.

As it turned out, I would interview people and there were some who were fairly good but very few minorities. And then, lo and behold, they actually sent over the name of this guy, Oliver Quinn. I seized on that because, on Inauguration Day, I was sitting next to

another one of our Rhodes Scholar, Oxford classmates, a guy named Doug Eakeley, who was a very prominent lawyer from New Jersey, and Bill later appointed him to be the chair of the Legal Services Corporation. He had told me, you should keep your eye out for this guy, Oliver Quinn. He's a fantastic lawyer. So Doug himself is not an African American but he's a very keen judge of top legal talent.

I was into very high quality people, but I was also committed to the idea that very high quality people of color were often not either given opportunities or recognized as easily or readily as high quality white people.

Ms. Boone: Did you get any pushback about that?

Mr. Williamson: I did. There was somebody who came to talk to me, an assistant to another high-level official in the Department of Labor., and said maybe I was sort of having too many black people in the top positions. I told that person, I said, "You go back to your boss and you tell him, any time you'd like to have a conversation about the qualifications and the abilities of the people I've chosen, I am drooling with anticipation about how much I am going to enjoy that conversation.

Ms. Boone: (Laughter)

Mr. Williamson: So what do you think happened?

Ms. Boone: Like you were allowed to do, make the best decisions for your hiring. That was great. I do want to be respectful of your time, but I wanted to get into your current time at Covington, your family life. I want to

get into your decision to become President of the D.C. Bar, and then get an idea of what you see as the future of litigation-- of the legal profession. So I don't know if you want to try to tackle that now.

Mr. Williamson: We can probably do a little more. I probably should stop in about a half an hour. My stamina's not so great these days.

Ms. Boone: Let me take you back then to your return to Covington in 1996.

Mr. Williamson: Didn't want to talk about what we did at the Labor Department?

Ms. Boone: Let's talk about that.

Mr. Williamson: You know, when you have these opportunities to be in government it's not something that you just want to do so you can have that on your resume. You want to try to participate in meaningful reforms or improvements of the law, or enhancement of people's rights. We were very proud that our first big project related to the first law that was signed by the Clinton administration, which was the Family Medical Leave Act. We were in the Rose Garden saying, isn't this amazing that Bill has been elected. When we first started, we had majorities in the House and the Senate, Democratic majorities. Really, within a few weeks, the Family Medical Leave Act was signed by the President. As part of the law, they said they wanted to have the regulations issued within, I think it was, 120 days, as final regulations. I'm trying to remember whether they were issued as final or proposed. Either way, that's a very short time to get a complicated federal statute transformed into a full set of federal regulations. We welcomed the

challenge. There were a lot of terrific career lawyers at the Labor Department, whom I enjoyed working with. Even though we were asked to do this in a different format than the traditional format, the initial regulations were actually organized as questions.

Ms. Boone: The regulations were issued as questions?

Mr. Williamson: You have a question then you have the answer.

Ms. Boone: Was that the first time that that format was being used?

Mr. Williamson: I'm not sure it was original, but when you think about it, it's a much more logical way, actually, to do regulations. If you do it by the traditional kind of subject matter classification, you often have to cross-reference things and jump all over the place to get an understanding of what these rules really mean. So we tried to organize them into, what are the questions people are likely to ask? And then put the answers in as the subsections of the regulation. So it was both that we had an extensive task, we were using an unconventional format, and we had a tight time limit. We got that done on time so we were very proud of that.

During our time, the Secretary's focus was really a lot on job retraining, and we had a division that helped to support the efforts to develop legislation for that. Of course, there are various controversies that arise when you're in office, where the Solicitor's office is called upon to defend what the Department is doing.

There was something that was very controversial, succeeded for a while but ultimately the courts ruled that the law-- the regulation that we had come up with -- was not supported by the law statute. That was a regulation to prohibit the use of replacement workers when a strike was going on. Was it that simple or was there another nuance to it? That was the basic issue. We actually won at the district court level. That was a big project for the Labor Department, to come up with a defensible regulation to prohibit replacement workers being used to break strikes.

During our time, the white House wanted people to do what they called reinvention projects, to have government operate in novel ways. We came up with a project, relating to the Mine Safety & Health Administration, to try to get lawyers involved earlier in investigation and enforcement of mine safety violations. During our tenure, not so much because of the Solicitor's office, but the efforts of Mine Safety & Health working with our lawyers, there was a significant reduction in fatalities in mines. That was something we were proud of.

Also during this time there was something called MEWAs, which-- MEWA is something Employee Welfare Association. What was going on, and this was another one of our reinvention projects, was to develop special teams of lawyers working with ERISA lawyers to bring litigation or get injunctions to break up these MEWAs. What

was going on is that people were going around setting up so-called health insurance plans, and getting members of unions to pay premiums to them, and they would just collect the premiums and then take off with the money. There wasn't really a health insurance plan behind it. We developed some strategies for how to detect when that was going on, and then bring aggressive enforcement actions.

There was an effort where we assisted the Secretary when there was a determination that people out in Los Angeles, although it wasn't just limited to Los Angeles, were working in sweat shops. They were largely people who were undocumented workers, Filipino workers or something like that in Los Angeles. Basically, it was late 20th century slavery. We were able to focus enforcement resources on trying to expose that type of exploitation and get major companies, particularly big brand name companies, to develop monitoring efforts and compliance programs so that they would be able to say accurately that their clothes were not being made by workers who were being exploited like slaves.

Ms. Boone: Tell me a little bit about, maybe an inside scoop on, Robert Reich. He's had a lot to say about this election recently, but I didn't really know much about him. One of the things I read said that he's considered one of the top 10 Secretaries of Labor ever. What was your impression? What made him such a great Secretary?

Mr. Williamson: Well, Bob is an amazing combination of skills and talents. He's a very extraordinary human being just flat out. I mean, he's not just a very thoughtful, really brilliant commentator on fairness and social equity in our society, he's also a painter, he's a poet. When he was at Oxford, he directed and performed in dramatic productions. In fact, the way he met Clare was he cast her in a production of "The Fantasticks", where both he and she were in those roles. So you have just an extraordinarily intelligent human being. He was also very shrewd in understanding how to give visibility and prominence to the Labor Department. You see, most people today they probably don't actually know the name of the Secretary of Labor.

Ms. Boone: I don't.

Mr. Williamson: See, guilty as charged. Tom Perez is his name. You should know because he's actually from Maryland. Bob understood how to integrate the way the media operates and the types of issues that were important to workers, so that they were on the network news and part of the national discussion that was going on. Those are key reasons why he is considered such a successful Secretary of Labor.

Ms. Boone: And were there any memorable briefs or arguments that were being made before the Supreme Court at that time?

Mr. Williamson: We had a number of cases before the Supreme Court. They actually tended to be in areas that are not so readily understood by the public. Like, there was some stuff relating to the Labor Department's

responsibility for compensating people for black lung disease. I'm trying to remember whether we had any really hot issue that made it to the Supreme Court. There were important issues but there weren't things that were sources of major public controversy and widespread coverage, at least while I was there.

There was something early in the term that I went to talk to the Solicitor General about. I can't remember the issue now. I remember having the conversation and weighing in.

Ms. Boone: Let me get to your time back at Covington, 1996, when you decided to return to Covington after your time at the Department of Labor. At that time, were you considering anything else besides Covington?

Mr. Williamson: No. No. This time I had been a partner for, what '82 to 93, for 10 years. I didn't lightly leave the firm, even if I viewed the Solicitor job as a wonderful opportunity to return to public service. At Covington at the time that I left I was the Chair of the Pro Bono Committee. Was I chair before I left or after I came back? Chair of the Public Service Committee? You know, I'm not sure now, but I've been active on pro bono matters and the firm's pro bono policy during the time I was a partner. I think I was Chair before I left. By then I had developed extensive relationships with other partners. I was going to come back, and when I came back I decided to shift practice areas. When I left Covington before, I'd left as an associate, so I didn't feel as bound to

the firm and as identified with the firm as I did when in '92-- early '93
I was leaving as someone who'd been a partner for more than 10 years.

Ms. Boone: So you were rooted.

Mr. Williamson: So that was my home I'd come to understand why my former
colleagues had recommended to me that, if you're going to go back to
private practice, Covington is a really distinctive place.

Maybe we should stop here and we can talk about that next
time.

Ms. Boone: Okay. Will do. Well thank you for, [inaudible] for your time, and I
look forward to the rest of our conversation.

Mr. Williamson: Okay.

ORAL HISTORY OF THOMAS WILLIAMSON, JR.
Index

16th Street Baptist Church bombing, 58

Ad Hoc Committee of Black Students *See* Harvard University

ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act), 126

Advocate (magazine), 54

AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), 138

affirmative action, 42, 50, 164

Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), 119-33

 expansion of Medicaid, 119-20

African-Americans, 37, 53, 70, 108, 127-28, 141, 143, 152, 163-65

 challenge for parents to raise children, 10

 economic status, 3

 few federal judges, 100

 legal representation, 104

 Rhodes Scholars, 67, 73

See also discrimination; integration, Kelson, Martin; Locke, Alaine; Marshall; Thurgood, racism

Afro (Harvard student group), 59, 61, 63

Alem Public Relations Consultants, 85-86, 93-94, 104

Amharic language, 93

Amos and Andy (TV show), 23-24

anti-Semitism, 18

Arab oil boycott, 148-49

Arnold & Porter, 154

Bank of America, 81

Battle of Adwa, 78

Berkeley. *See* University of California School of Law

Bersin, Al, 67-68

black lung disease, 163, 171

Black Nationalism, 50, 58, 61

 student movement, 64-65

Black Renaissance, 35

Boalt Hall. *See* University of California School of Law

Boy Scouts, 25-26

Bradley, Bill, 67, 69

Brown v. Board of Education, 13, 20

Butler, Lew, 77

California Rural Legal Assistance, 100, 102

 inspiration to become a lawyer, 100

Cameroon, 81, 84, 97

Caplan, Livingston, Goodwin, Berkowitz, and Selden, 104

CFR (Code of Federal Regulations), 122
 Civil Rights Act, 49, 58
 civil rights movement, 13, 21, 29, 69
 See also Little Rock Central High School
 Clinton, Bill, 72-74, 165-66
 presidential campaign, 161
 Colin Anderson Center, 157
 Covington & Burling (formerly Covington & Wilmer), 113-14, 122-24, 126-27, 131, 135, 137-40,
 142-44, 152-54, 156, 160-66, 167-73
 African American partners, 142-43
 Neighborhood Legal Services, 114-15, 137-38
 pro bono work, 125-26, 128-29, 171
Crimson (magazine), 51, 54, 64
 Crossroads Africa, 81
 Crowell and Moring, 142
 Cub Scouts, 18, 25

Dalton, Clare, 163, 171
 Dawkins, Pete, 69

Defoe, Daniel, 22
 Deressa, Dereje, 84-87, 89, 95
 Depression, 3
 desegregation
 school, 21
 See also discrimination, Little Rock, racism, segregation, U.S Army
 discrimination, 12, 14, 19, 25, 31, 61, 67, 89, 163
 minorities and women, 81
 United States Army, 4
 Duncan, Thomasenia, 164-65

Eakeley, Doug, 166
Ebony (magazine), 25, 66
 entertainers
 lack of respect for black lawyers, 121
 Epps, Archie, 51
 Ethiopia, 77-78, 80, 82-85, 88, 90-94, 97, 103, 136
 culture, 86, 89
 Ethiopian population in Washington area, 112
 politics, 72, 78-79
 Evers, Medgar, 58

Family and Medical Leave Act, 167
 regulations, 167

Gaddafi, Muammar, 77

Gnaizda, Bob, 100-103
 Goodenson, Rob, 97
 growing consciousness of discrimination, 25
 Haile, Rahel (Helen) (first wife), 93, 103, 112, 114-15
 Hall, LeRoy (maternal uncle), 16
 Hamilton, Chuck, 61
 Harvard, 16, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 49, 51, 53, 55, 61, 64, 65, 70, 83, 88, 92, 96, 101, 162
 Ad Hoc Committee of Black Students, 63
 Advocate (magazine), 54
 Afro (Harvard student group), 65, 67, 29
 Crimson (magazine), 51, 54, 64
 creation of African studies program, 53
 first contact with significant numbers of Blacks, 40
 major in Social Studies, 52
 racism, 44
 Signet Society, 54
 social split among Black students, 65
 HCFA (Health Care Financing Administration), 131
 Hogan & Hartson (later Hogan Lovells), 154
 Holiday Spa Health Club Organization, 127
 Houston, Whitney, 111
 Howard, Jeff, 61

 ICFMR (Intermediate Care Facilities for the Mentally Retarded), 118, 159
 Idris of Libya, 77
 Inspector General Act of 1978, 151
 integration, 11, 31, 73
 California, 13
 See also desegregation, discrimination, Little Rock, racism

Jack Benny Program (TV show), 23
 Jackson, Henry, 144
 Jackson, Michael, 111
Jet (magazine), 25

 Kelson, Martin, 53, 65
 King Idris. *See* Idris of Libya
 King, Martin Luther
 assassination, 51, 61, 63-64,
 impact, 58
 Klein, Tony, 100
 Knivila, Kelly, 162
 Korean War, 5
 Kramer, Judy, 165
 Lewinsky, Sid, 100

Little Rock, Arkansas, 23, 58, 73, 163
 Central High, 21
 Clinton, Bill, 179
 heightened consciousness, 23-24
 integration, 73
 Locke, Alaine, 67, 73

Mansfield, J.K. (Ken), 144, 150-51
 Marshall, Thurgood, 99
 McIntosh, Dan, 105
 MDL (Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation), 165
 Medicaid, 115, 116, 117, 118, 120, 129, 137, 161
 developmentally-disabled people, 117
 IMD (Institutions for Mental Diseases), 119
 incentive for states to join, 119-0
 states complying with federal regulations, 116-17
 waiver issues, 118
 mental health
 Colin Anderson Center, 158
 de-institutionalization movement, 157
 MEWA (Multiple Employee Welfare Association), 169-70
Mickey Mouse Club (TV show), 14
 Miller, Chuck, 115, 138-40, 145
 Mills College, 32
 Montgomery, Elvin, 61
 Morgan State University, 3, 16, 71

NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), 127
 National Labor Relations Act, 163
 National Labor Relations Board, 163
 Neighborhood Legal Services, 114-16, 120-21, 136, 137
Newsweek magazine, 24
 NLSP *See* Neighborhood Legal Services

Obamacare *See* Affordable Care Act
 Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, 164
 See also United States Department of Labor
Out of Compton (movie), 107
 Oxford University, 69-72, 74, 76- 83, 88-89, 92-93, 162-63, 166, 171

Peace Corps, 77, 80, 82, 85, 86, 87, 89, 91, 94, 95, 97
 Peddally Everson Martin, 103
 Perez, Tom, 170
 Piedmont, California, 10, 11, 13, 18, 22, 25, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33, 34, 55, 56, 115
 Public Advocates, 100, 103-04
 Pullman Porters

influence, 9
union, 8

Quinn, Oliver, 164-66

racism, 12, 14, 16, 27
Harvard University, 44
University of Virginia, 51
See also discrimination, segregation

Randolph, A. Phillip, 8
See also Pullman Porters

Reagan administration, 140
Reich, Robert (Bob), 73-74, 163, 171
Renfroe, Diane, 43
Rhodes, Cecil, 67
Ridings, Don, 160
Robinson Caruso (book), 22

Samkange, Stanlake, 160
San Francisco Chronicle, 27-28
Sanders, Stan, 66, 73
segregation, 4, 6, 9, 13, 35, 69
health club, 127
schools, 6, 21
United States Army, 4
See also discrimination, Little Rock, racism, segregation
stereotypes and racial assumptions, 18, 23, 29, 50, 101, 102

Thompson, Phyllis, 160-62
token Negro era, 41, 50

United Nations World Food Programme, 161
United States Army
discrimination, 4
segregation, 4
United States Department of Energy, 159-63
National Laboratories, 162
United States Department of Health and Human Services, 156
University of California School of Law (Boalt Hall), 92, 103
University of Virginia
racism, 56

Voting Rights Act of 1965, 58

Walsh, William Bill, 38
Washington Post, 72

Wheelus Air Force Base, 77
 Wideman, John, 66, 73
 Williams, Karen Hastie, 141
 Williams, Wes, 141
 Williamson, Brenda (sister), 6
 Williamson, George (brother), 6, 18
 Williamson, George (paternal grandfather), 2
 Williamson, Roosevelt (grand uncle), 3
 Williamson, Thomas Jr. - Personal
 Alem Public Relations Consultants, 85-86, 93-94, 104
 Amharic language, 93
 Boy Scouts, 25
 childhood
 different from most Black children 22
 interest in West Point when young, 65
 reading
 Jet and *Ebony*, 28
 started at early age, 22
 racial tension, 14
 role of church, 31
 traffic patrol, 22
 Cub Scouts, 18
 Ethiopia, 85- 89, 91-93, 95-96, 98-105, 108, 115, 152
 culture, 86, 96
 Ethiopian population in Washington area, 125
 politics, 79, 86, 87, 88, 89, 94, 104, 106, 125
 training Ethiopians in English, 100
 grandparents, 1
 growing awareness of race consciousness, 55
 Harvard, 16, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 49, 51, 53, 55, 61, 64, 65, 70, 83, 88, 92, 96, 101, 162
 Ad Hoc Committee of Black Students, 63
 Advocate (magazine), 54
 Afro (Harvard student group), 65, 67, 29
 Crimson (magazine), 51, 54, 64
 creation of African studies program, 53
 first contact with significant numbers of Blacks, 40
 major in Social Studies, 52
 racism, 44
 Signet Society, 54
 thesis, 75
 social split among Black students, 65
 impact of King assassination, 63
 high school
 increasing awareness of racism, 24
 interaction with other African Americans, 39, 41

- valedictorian, 30
- Japan, 4, 5, 6
- junior high
 - death threats, 28
 - hate mail, 28
 - class vice president, 27
- law school, 107
 - academic environment, 97
 - Socratic Method, 98
 - University of California School of Law (Boalt Hall), 103, 115
- model Negro approach, 30
- Newsweek* (magazine)
 - increased consciousness, 24
- Oxford University, 69-72, 76- 83, 88-89, 93, 161-62, 165, 170
 - academic freedom, 74
 - tutorial system, 75
- Peace Corps, 85, 89, 91, 95-96, 99, 101, 104-06, 108
- peer pressure, 33
- Piedmont, California, 11-12, 14-15, 20, 24, 26, 30-31, 34, 36-37, 60, 62, 129
- Rhodes Scholar, 58, 62, 65-73, 76, 78-80, 88, 92, 110, 165
 - application and interview process, 68-69
- role models, 99, 102
- summer jobs, 56, 77, 103
- token Negro era, 41
- Williamson, Thomas, Jr. - Professional, 14-15, 20, 24, 28, 30-31, 34, 36, 37, 60, 62, 129
 - California Rural Legal Assistance, 100-02
 - Caplan, Livingston, Goodwin, Berkowitz, and Selden, 104
 - Covington & Burling (formerly Covington & Wilmer), 1, 42, 114, 126-27, 136, 146, 151-53, 155, 157, 159, 168-70, 172, 177-78, 180-81, 184, 189-90
 - Neighborhood Legal Services, 127
 - pro bono work, 103, 124, 125, 126, 128, 171
 - Chair, Pro Bono Committee, 171
- D.C. Bar President, 166
- entertainment law, 104-05, 116
 - intellectually not interesting, 105
 - lack of respect for black lawyers, 108
- Family and Medical Leave Act, 166
- Holiday Spa Health Club, 126
- ICFMR (Intermediate-Care Facilities for the Mentally Retarded), 132
- Neighborhood Legal Services, 128, 135, 152, 153
- Peddally Everson Martin, 103
- philosophy
 - hiring, 155
 - losing cases, 127, 134
 - ro bono work, 115, 139, 140, 141, 143, 190
- self description as a lawyer, 139

- specialty defending against federal efforts to take funding away from states, 173
- United States Department of Energy
 - involvement of women and minorities, 149
 - Deputy Inspector General, 143, 144-47, 150
- United States Department of Labor
 - Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, 163
 - reinvention projects, 169
 - Solicitor, 161, 179
- Williamson, Thomas Sr. (father), 1-7, 9-11, 12, 18, 24, 26, 29, 31, 33, 43, 78
 - Morgan State University, 3, 16, 78
 - United States Army
 - assignments, 4, 5, 6, 26
 - occupation of Japan, 4
- Williamson, Winifred Hall (mother), 1, 4-7, 9, 10-11, 16, 24-25, 31, 33, 37-40, 76
 - challenges raising children, 10
 - college decision influence, 37-40
 - Japan, 4
- Wilmer Cutler (WilmerHale), 126, 170
- World War II, 4, 12
- written and unwritten racial laws, 12

THOMAS S. WILLIAMSON, JR.

Thomas S. Williamson, Jr. was born on July 14, 1946 in Plainfield, New Jersey. His parents, Mrs. Winifred Hall Williamson and the late United States Army Lieutenant Colonel Thomas S. Williamson, Sr. -- one of the first black officers to command white troops in the U.S. military -- were later stationed in Yokohama, Japan where young Tom reportedly spoke Japanese before he spoke English. The family ultimately settled just east of the San Francisco Bay in Piedmont, California where Tom grew up with his two younger siblings -- his late brother George and his sister Brenda. They integrated Piedmont and experienced the vicissitudes it brought with the mix of well-meaning and less well-meaning neighbors, classmates and teachers.

Tom's parents instilled in their children the importance of education and doing their best in all they did. It paid off. His work ethic earned him letters in track, basketball and football, and an MVP trophy, and led him to become his high school student body president. Moreover, Stanford University's assistant coach Bill Walsh, who later became Stanford's head coach and a triumphant NFL head coach, relentlessly recruited Tom given his prowess on his high school gridiron. Despite Stanford's full athletic scholarship offer, Tom chose to accept Harvard's academic scholarship to enable him to experience the full range of student life. His student life in the wake of Dr. King's assassination included chairing a black student committee that successfully negotiated with Harvard's administration to broaden opportunities for enrolling African American students and to establish a department of African American studies. Tom also lived the grueling life of a gifted all-Ivy League defensive back, All New England and All East (second team) on Harvard's football team. He received the Allston Burr Prize for the outstanding scholar athlete, graduated magna cum laude from Harvard in 1968 and was elected to the Phi Beta Kappa honor society. His academic and leadership achievements earned him a Rhodes scholarship to study at Oxford University. He later spent a year in Ethiopia training U.S. Peace Corps volunteers for an Ethiopian company. But it was largely Tom's summer experience before his senior year at Harvard as an advocate at the California Rural Legal Assistance program on behalf of poor people and migrant workers that propelled him to become a lawyer.

Tom enrolled in law school at Boalt Hall at the University of California, Berkeley in 1971 where he later became a Notes & Comments Editor of the California Law Review. In his first year, he joined fellow students in protest over the school's decision to cut back on diversity admissions and went on a strike that shut down the law school for two weeks. He later spent time working as

an extern in a public interest law firm called Public Advocates. Enticed by Covington & Burling's program that permitted young associates to be on loan to the Neighborhood Legal Services Program for a six-month rotation, he accepted Covington's offer to join the firm and moved to Washington, D.C. in 1974 after graduation.

Government service lured Tom from Covington twice. In 1978, he was appointed as the Deputy Inspector General of the newly established United States Department of Energy in the Carter Administration. Soon after returning to the firm in 1981, Tom became its second black partner. He left the firm again in 1993 when President Clinton nominated Tom, and the Senate confirmed him, to be the Solicitor of Labor in Secretary Robert Reich's Labor Department.

What followed his return to Covington in 1996 was a continuing extraordinarily accomplished and celebrated career. Within the firm, he led the employment practice group and was a member of the management committee. Tom also led a team of Covington litigators before the federal trial and appellate courts out west defending a constitutional challenge to various restrictive regulations that had been adopted by the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). The leadership of LSC credited Covington's defense of the regulations with sparing LSC from a total cutoff of Congressional funding. Tom chaired the court-appointed Texaco Task Force on Equality and Fairness that monitored and evaluated Texaco's nationwide efforts to reform and enhance diversity initiatives and equal opportunity. He was retained by the National Football League as special advisor to the Owners' Workplace Diversity Committee and the General Managers' Working Group established to facilitate increased diversity in the head coaching and front office ranks of NFL clubs. He played a key role in developing the NFL's "Rooney Rule," designed to promote increased opportunities for minorities to become head coaches in the NFL. More recently, Tom co-led a team that assisted in the defense of the District of Columbia's same sex marriage law. He also worked on race and disability discrimination class actions, including a nationwide class action to obtain dramatic improvements in American Sign Language interpreter services for thousands of deaf employees of the U.S. Postal Service and \$3.5 million in compensatory damages. He chaired the monitors implementing the Sodexo class action race discrimination consent decree.

Tom served our community in countless capacities. His contributions to the D.C. Bar included chairing the Family Law Task Force, and serving as a member of the Board of Governors, the Bar Foundation, and the Pro Bono Committee. He was elected President of the D.C. Bar, and pursued as his priorities supporting legal services for those who cannot afford them and strengthening relationships with the local courts. He was appointed to the D.C. Access to Justice

Commission, the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs (Co-Chair; Trustee), the D.C. Judicial Nomination Commission, the D.C. Commission on Judicial Disabilities and Tenure, D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton's Federal Law Enforcement Nomination Commission, and the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Trustee). He served his alma mater as a member and the President of the Harvard University Board of Overseers, and as a director of the Harvard Alumni Association. He was recognized as one of "The 50 Most Influential Minority Lawyers in America" by the National Law Journal, and was featured in *Washington DC Super Lawyers - Employment & Labor*, and *Best Lawyers in America*, Employment Law - Management.

Tom's numerous accolades and awards included the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law Segal Tweed Founder's Award, the D.C. Legal Aid Society Servant of Justice Award, the Council for Court Excellence Justice Potter Stewart Award, the District of Columbia Law Students in Court Celebration of Service Award, and the Washington Lawyers' Committee Wiley Branton Award. Conversant in French, a fan of classic Motown R&B, and a member of Epsilon Boulé of the Sigma Pi Phi fraternity, Tom enjoyed travelling, was an avid Lawyers Touch Football League player into his mid-30s, and later was a committed cyclist completing several 100-mile bicycle rides. He is survived by his devoted wife of 28 years, Shelley Brazier; sons Thomas III (Tommy) and Christopher and daughters Taylor and Kai; mother Winifred Williamson; sister Dr. Brenda Malone; brother-in-law Sherman Malone; sisters-in-law Sylvia Williamson and Benita Brazier; nephew Tony Williamson and niece Audrey Williamson; and a host of relatives, colleagues, and friends. We will miss him deeply, but his memory shines brightly inspiring us to do more for others in need.

Precious S. Boone

LITIGATION ATTORNEY

cell: 810 813 3393 | email: booneps@gmail.com

SUMMARY

- Litigation experience at Top 50 law firm representing financial institutions in consumer class actions.
 - In-house experience managing litigation for mortgage-related technology company.
 - Clerkship experience at highest court for the District of Columbia. JD from Top 25 Law School.
 - International experience working abroad in France and studying abroad in Quebec and Hong Kong.
-

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

MERSCORP HOLDINGS, INC., Reston, VA

Nov. 2013 – Present

Associate Counsel, Litigation

- Defend company and its subsidiary against consumer-related complaints, maintaining an active case load of approximately 250 cases.
- Work with outside counsel to develop and implement litigation strategies that are consistent with the company's unique business model.
- Collaborate with business units and company clients to support non-litigation projects that include reviewing company press releases, presenting at yearly conference, and revising company procedures.

HUDSON GLOBAL RESOURCES, Washington, DC

Oct. 2012 – Nov. 2013

Contract Attorney

- Conducted due diligence review of 300+ pooling and servicing agreements in anticipation of merger.
- Reviewed non-disclosure and confidentiality provisions of software licensing and service agreements.

HON. ANNA BLACKBURNE-RIGSBY

DIST. OF COLUMBIA CT. OF APPEALS, Washington, DC

Aug. 2011 – Oct. 2012

Judicial Clerk

- Reviewed appellate briefing, analyzed issues of first impression, and provided recommendations to Judge regarding criminal, civil, and administrative appeals.

GOODWIN PROCTER, LLP, Washington, DC

Jan. 2010 – Aug. 2011

Litigation Associate

- Focused on complex commercial litigation, handling individual and class-action consumer complaints, insurance disputes, and products liability matter.
- Drafted motion for summary judgment in case alleging violations of the Truth in Lending Act (TILA) and the Real Estate Settlement Procedures Act (RESPA).
- Interviewed and prepared corporate witness for deposition in putative class action case.
- Managed all aspects of civil discovery, which included hiring and supervising contract attorneys, collecting and organizing electronic documents, preparing and responding to discovery requests, and briefing motions to compel.

Precious S. Boone

cell: 810 813 3393 | email: booneps@gmail.com

GOODWIN PROCTER, LLP, Washington, DC & New York, NY
Summer Associate

Summer 2008

- Prepared legal memoranda based on research and analysis of federal and state consumer protection laws.

VARNUM, LLP, Grand Rapids, MI
Summer Associate

Summer 2007

- Prepared legal memoranda based on research and analysis of federal and state labor and employment laws.

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CIVIL RIGHTS, Flint, MI
Civil Rights Representative

June 2004 – June 2006

- Investigated claims of discrimination for the State of Michigan, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the areas of employment, housing, education and public services.
- Filed complaints, drafted interrogatories, interviewed witnesses, conducted informal mediation and negotiated settlement agreements.
- Successfully reconciled a matter resulting in an employee's reinstatement.
- Educated and advised citizens, businesses, and students regarding anti-discrimination laws.

TG FLUID SYSTEMS USA CORPORATION, Brighton, MI
Assembly Technician

Sept. 2003 – June. 2004

- Operated robotic processes to form and assemble thermo-plastic automotive fuel line components.

ACADÉMIE D'AIX-MARSEILLE, Aix-en-Provence, France
Teaching Assistant

Sept. 2002 – Apr. 2003

- Taught English courses to high school students at the Lycée Georges Duby in Luynes, France.

EDUCATION

JURIS DOCTOR, Cornell Law School, Ithaca, NY

2009

- Teaching Assistant for First Year Writing Course
- Study Abroad at Hong Kong University Faculty of Law

BACHELOR OF ARTS, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN

2002

- *Magna cum laude*, Double Major: English (honors) and French
- Study Abroad Vanderbilt-in-Aix, Aix-en-Provence, France
- Study Abroad Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, Québec, Canada

BAR ADMISSIONS

New York Bar, 2010 – Present

District of Columbia Bar, 2011 – Present

Virginia Bar (Corporate Counsel), 2014 – Present

Michigan Bar Application, Pending

TRIBUTES

ERIC HOLDER

Tom Williamson was a quiet - and effective - warrior for justice. In a life and career filled with accomplishment it was his dedication to equality that truly defined him and connected the disparate parts of a life well led. In ways large and in deeds unnoticed, he consistently demonstrated both a dedication to fairness and a willingness to fight for those ideals that we claim as our founding principles. I saw this, I witnessed this, many times over the years - years too small in number - that I spent with my good friend.

Tom's roles in the fight for equality took him from the law firm he called home for decades to the Departments of Energy and Labor and to the National Football League. He fought to insure adequate funding for the Legal Services Corporation and made real the possibility of same sex marriage. He made the treatment of thousands of deaf employees of the Postal Service more fair and their lives immeasurably better. Tom was the President of the D.C. Bar and also played an official, vital role in the selection of this city's judges for many years while at the same time attempting to insure access to justice for those traditionally and unfairly denied adequate representation in our courts. Tom Williamson shaped the life of this community - and this nation - for decades. We are all the better for his good works.

In the final fight that so cruelly took him from us, he conducted himself in these last months in the way that was characteristic of the man we all came to admire - and to love. With determination, with dignity and with, even then, a continuing focus on others, Tom Williamson showed us what real courage is and what the measure of a man must be. When I visited with Tom we spoke of many things - his youth, his efforts to diversify Covington and Harvard and his pride in, and love for Shelley, and their three wonderful children. I was struck on one occasion by his selection of two individuals who he said he most respected in his youth: Ralph Bunche and Jesse Owens. Like him they were two men of great consequence who impacted the larger world while not losing their identities as proud black men. Like Tom they were "race men". They were also "quiet warriors for justice" who, despite the recognition they received, were not nearly as appreciated as they should have been. We must ensure that this quiet warrior who I am proud to call my friend, my partner, my brother, is indeed recognized for all that he did and appreciated for the way in which he did it. Many people make significant contributions. Those who do so in a selfless way, who

focus more on the outcome rather than the recognition, are rare. This is who Tom Williamson was. It is our responsibility to make certain that as history is written he is found in his rightful, significant place.

If they are given the chance to get to know the work, the impact, of this great man I am certain that young men and women, young boys and girls, will someday say that they want to be like Tom. His was truly a life worth emulating. Though I am utterly heartbroken by his passing, I find some solace in the knowledge that I am surrounded by the results of his good works and that, by his actions, he bent that moral arc towards justice making more certain that our nation will live up to its founding documents and the lives of our people made immeasurably better.

Rest in peace my brother.

JEFFREY HUVELLE

Tom Williamson and I went back a long way, more than 50 years, when we were both college freshmen. We had in common numerous friends and experiences and similar values. We spent forty years together at Covington, often working on the same matters; for most of that time our offices were near each other, which allowed us to collaborate on our work, discuss our families and mutual friends and reminisce about our pasts. It was a special relationship that I greatly cherished.

A lawyer who once worked at Covington recalls a meeting of associates on his first day at the firm in 1976 at which Tom described his assignment at Neighborhood Legal Services and urged his young colleagues to engage in work that contributed to society. The lawyer still remembers that Tom's presence - his combination of intelligence and humanity - greatly impressed him.

That memory touches on two aspects of Tom's legal career: his commitment to law as tool for social justice and his humanity. I will focus on his humanity, and its impact on so many people.

Simply put, Tom was a kind person. Kindness is not a trivial trait. The *Iliad* tells the story of Achilles' slow progress from self-centered rage to a single act of kindness towards his foe's father. Tom's kindness was not a single act, and it was not passive. It permeated everything he did. He attacked the world with kindness.

Tom treated everyone with respect, without regard for Washington hierarchies. Upon joining the Labor Department, he met first with the administrative staff, not the many lawyers who reported to him, knowing that this departure from the usual order would signal his respect for the staff. At Covington Tom addressed all the staff by name. One partner was so struck by Tom's refusal to recognize hierarchies within the firm that he modeled his own behavior on Tom's example. Tom treated opposing counsel, witnesses and co-counsel with respect, which made him a better lawyer.

Tom's kindness was reflected in his eagerness to counsel and teach. A partner whose occasionally rough edges contrasted with Tom's diplomacy appreciated Tom's gentle coaching, including Tom's explaining the subtle protocol that determines where to sit at a conference table for a meeting with important government officials.

Tom excelled at mentoring young lawyers, a talent Covington helped him develop. When Tom was asked to assist Charlie Buffon with the summer associate program, Charlie, with an inspired mixture of wisdom and self-interest, suggested that Charlie take care of social events and Tom handle the evaluations and counseling. For his remaining years at the firm, Tom was a relentless mentor beloved by numerous young lawyers who appreciated his keen interest in their development. Tom's willingness to spend time with young lawyers was especially appreciated because Tom's time was precious - he was a highly accomplished and busy lawyer - and because, by Covington standards, Tom was very hip.

The one area in which Tom fell short was gossip. Good gossip requires an eye for people's weaknesses. Tom could never see beyond people's best qualities.

Tom has a teammate from the Harvard football team who suffers from dementia. After Tom visited him, Tom wrote to his former teammates to alert them to his condition. This occurred last fall, after the hospital suspended Tom's therapy. A lesser person would understandably be focused on his own situation. Tom was no lesser person.

Tom cared for others first, and he approached life with optimism. We are fortunate to have seen the world through his eyes.

DANIEL MCINTOSH

My Friend Tom

Tom and I cherished an extraordinary friendship for 48 years after meeting in the summer of 1969 when we shared a D.C. apartment. We reconnected at Boalt Hall for law school and later for a summer when I recruited him to my Beverly Hills firm. Alas for me, he chose Covington.

Nevertheless, our friendship thrived, primarily through conversations – in Washington or LA, but most often through spontaneous midnight telephone chats. When Tom and Shelley found each other and began the family he always wanted, we grew closer. What a bonus that our wives made a similar connection. New Year's Eves often found us together, our children bonding and the four of us toasting our futures.

What did I learn from this friendship?

1. At his core, Tom was old fashioned, in the best sense. He believed in honor and integrity and the obligation to give back what had been given to him. He was proud of his ancestry and the accomplishments of blacks in America; at the same time, he believed all people who lacked his own advantages (a nurturing family and community) should be provided with the opportunities and assistance needed to enrich their resources and lives. Tom was loyal to the schools and communities that educated him and gave him the opportunity to excel. He was devoted to the law firm and mentors that molded him into a fully formed lawyer. His commitment to legal services for the poor and his other community contributions were crucial to who he was. (As were the suspenders he wore with his elegant suits).

2. Tom loved being a lawyer. He never tired of doing the work necessary to meet the intellectual and practical challenges that a complex law practice provided. He also loved being a teacher and mentor to young lawyers, offering them the opportunities they needed to shine, even if it meant stepping back from the spotlight himself.

3. Tom was a family man. He strived to provide well for Shelley and his children and to encourage them to pursue their own talents and dreams. During the toughest days of his illness, he

was writing to his friends with excitement about Chris's new sports casting opportunities, rooting for Tommy to be accepted into a prestigious acting program and letting me know how proud he was of Taylor's academic accomplishments.

4. Tom was great company. He loved a good story and knew how to tell one. His hoots of laughter when something really amused him left me laughing too. (He could also order in French at French restaurants). As he battled his disease with strength and courage, he still found time to seek out old friends for lunch and to travel with Shelley to new places they wanted to see together. A trip with us to Cambria in January was a gift I will value forever.

I miss you already, Tom. Thank you for your friendship and the gift of your company. You'll always be with me and I will do my best to look out for your family - as I know you wanted me to do.

CHARLES MILLER

When Tom Williamson graduated from U.C. Berkeley law school he could have joined any firm in America, for all firms were searching for associates of his talents and qualities. He decided to go to Washington because he thought that venue offered the best chance to make a contribution to society, and from the among the top firms in the city he selected Covington because of its demonstrated commitment to public service and pro bono work. I believe he was never disappointed with his choice.

I first met Tom while recruiting at U.C. Berkeley, and that was the beginning of a friendship of over forty years, that included his parents as well. We shared the same growing up locale. We were professional colleagues. We played sports together. Our families, his kids and our grandkids, enjoyed times together. Over all those years and all those times I never heard Tom utter a harsh word, or demean another person. He was serious in demeanor, but with a fine sense of the absurd, and he enjoyed a good laugh. He was always a class act.

Tom worked with me when he first joined Covington. We represented states, assisting their health and welfare programs navigate federal laws and respond to their many challenges. Oklahoma was a leading client. Its health agency was led by one of those larger-than-life figures that filled the landscape in the Southwest--Lloyd Rader. Shortly after Tom arrived at the firm, a case arose concerning the operation of Oklahoma's mental institutions, and I asked Tom to go to Oklahoma to investigate the problem and figure out how it could be resolved. With a little trepidation he went off to deal with the legendary Rader, and handled the issue with what became his trademark thoroughness, sensitivity and sound judgment. Thereafter, as additional Oklahoma problems arose, Rader, whose one failing was an inability to remember names, would ask that we send "Wilson" or "Williams" or "Wilton" to deal with them. We knew who he meant, and over time Tom handled many delicate and difficult assignments for Oklahoma and other state clients. The work was particularly satisfying to Tom, for it appealed to his passion to devote his energies to improving the lot of those in need.

Tom's devotion to public service is seen not only in his two stints in the federal government--at the Department of Energy and the Department of Labor--but also in his extensive pro bono work at Covington. He was particularly focused on the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, and took on several cases of importance that resulted in eliminating workplace practices that discriminated against minorities or persons with disabilities. At the same time, he developed a

thriving employment law practice for paying clients, and his well- deserved reputation for fairness and sound judgment led to his engagement by some of the country's largest companies to oversee their compliance with court decrees intended to eradicate cultures of discrimination.

Among the large number of Covington partners committed to the advancement of the firm and the preservation of its ideals, Tom stood out. His partners recognized his special qualities, and elected him to the Management Committee, where he was a strong and consistent voice for adherence those ideals and for fair and compassionate treatment of its employees. Those same qualities animated his extensive work for many community organizations, and led to his election to the presidency of the D.C. Bar.

Covington & Burling is a better place for having had Tom Williamson in its midst. He will always be remembered with reverence by all who knew him.

RICHARD W. ROBERTS

Tom was a senior Covington associate when I met him well over three decades ago. I was a junior civil rights prosecutor, but he took the time to reach out and cultivate our friendship. He was elevated to partnership and recruited me to come practice civil litigation at the firm. When word spread that Tom had made partner, many rejoiced at his good luck getting in. Plainly, though, it was Covington that was lucky to get *him*. We young black lawyers trembled a bit wondering if we had to match the Tom Williamson gold standard to make it in a firm -- Harvard, magna cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa, Rhodes Scholar, law review editor. Actually, his example set a high bar for *all* young lawyers -- black white yellow and brown. Some would think of the song "The Impossible Dream" since Tom's professional pedigree made him sound like "the unreachable star." But Tom reached out not just to me but to so many. I heard this about Tom from Justice Martin Jenkins of the California Court of Appeals: "He was very good to me when I came to D.C. to work." And this from one of my law clerks from my early days as a federal judge, Janet Fisher: "I remember that you introduced us at an event many years ago -- Tom was a great, generous person; I also remember thinking, why is this important man taking his time talking with me, when there are so many more important people in the room?" Tom mentored dozens and dozens of others as well and offered them his warm guidance and friendship.

He and Shelley honored my wife Vonya and me by having us be the godparents to his first-born son. Our kids and their kids grew up enjoying Halloween outings and Thanksgiving and Christmas gatherings and summer vacation trips together. That gave me the good fortune of getting to know both the fun and the humble sides of Tom. His laugh was infectious. He could cut a mean rug when Motown sounds came on. We'd go out with our kids on our trick-or-treat outings where Tom wore these elaborately festooned Dracula costumes. But as my sister Toni observed, his eloquent table blessings at our holiday meals always contained reminders to honor our elders' teachings to serve the least among us.

Tom and I bonded the most perhaps on our family vacation trips. We both jumped at the opportunity in the lush clear waters off of Maui to snorkel among the spectacular array of marine life he never saw in his native San Francisco Bay and I never saw in my native New York harbor. The train ride to Canada and our sojourn in Italy were flights of fantasy from law practice in Washington.

But nothing topped our summers in North Carolina. While our spouses and kids were inside our beach-side rental house tending to the rest of the dinner preparations, Tom and I were outside, grilling the meat entrees for the evening and, as they say, “talking smack.” You would expect him as a cultured Francophile never to veer from his highly developed taste in fine wines. On those hot summer days on the Outer Banks though, while I could not lure him down to my passion for Wild Irish Rose or Mad Dog 20-20 or Manischewitz Grape Concord, he did, to my delight, join me in relishing Boone’s Farm or Bartles & Jaymes wine coolers. We chugged down quite a few.

In the past year, he showed me how you face uninvited adversity and soldier forward through it with your head held high. On earth, he soared with the eagles. Today, he flies on the wings of the angels. Bless you, my Brother.