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Interview with Jim Stewart, James Wallace Professor of History and Provost

Jim Stewart

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Oral History Project

Interview with:	**Jim Stewart** James Wallace Professor of History, 1969-2007; Provost, 1987-1989
Date:	**Tuesday, January 16th, 2007, 8:30a.m.**
Place:	Macalester College DeWitt Wallace Library, Harmon Room
Interviewer:	Sara Nelson, Class of 2007
Edited interview run time:	1:04:51 minutes
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Interview with Jim Stewart

Sara Nelson, Interviewer

January 16, 2007
Macalester College
DeWitt Wallace Library
Harmon Room

SN: My name is Sara Nelson and I'm interviewing Jim Stewart for the Macalester Oral History Project on Tuesday January 16th, in the Harmon Room in the Library. I guess I would just like to start with the beginning of your experience at Macalester. So if you could, state your name, and when you came to Macalester.

[00:18]

JS: Ok, my name is Jim Stewart and I came to Macalester in 1969, after having graduated from Dartmouth College in 1962. And then having spent a considerable amount of time—first going to graduate school, then immediately leaving graduate school because of the impact of the Cuban Missile Crisis on me back in 1963. Went back to my home town of Cleveland, Ohio where I became a street basketball player. I played a great deal in college. Got involved in the Civil Rights movement in Cleveland, and shifted from my original interest in being a medieval historian—which was why I originally went to graduate school—to becoming very interested in problems of slavery and race and social justice in the United States. So I finished my graduate work at Case Western Reserve University in 1968…found a job at a very teeny postage stamp liberal arts college in Waukesha, Wisconsin for a year. And then in 1968, in the spring, was offered a job here at Macalester to teach American history.

[1:22]

SN: What did you know about Macalester?

JS: Nothing! [Laughter] Nothing. I knew that I wanted to get out of Waukesha, Wisconsin, which was not the best place for me and my young family at the time. And what I knew about Macalester—finally after having come up here and had an interview—was A) that it had, or seemed to have, a tremendous amount of money—actually it turned out that it didn't. And that it was embarked on an extraordinary program that really excited me a great deal, which was called the Expanded Educational Opportunity Program, called EEO, which was bringing the next following Fall to campus seventy-five low income black students, per year, to create a huge initiative in melding the opportunity of a liberal arts college together with trying to address directly problems of racial injustice. And that fit very well with the kind of civil rights work that I'd been doing before, and I was very excited about coming to the college when I did in 1969.

[2:22]

SN: Can you talk a little bit about what the hiring process was like?

JS: The hiring process was…the… I flew up in an airplane, talked to some guys, [laughter], guys, and without any sense of there being any kind of competitive process at all—I think I was the only candidate—they were desperate to have somebody teach African-American history and I could do that. They were a lot more desperate to have somebody who was dark-skinned teach African-American history, but they couldn't find anybody who represented that quality. So I

was hired at the very last minute in the late spring of 1968, and the hiring process, as far as I could tell, was just a very rapidly concluded mystery.

SN: So it's much different now?

JS: Yes, it's considerably different now.

[3:09]

SN: So was your first impression of the campus?

JS: Macalester was a place that was very small and had millions of students in it. The college was about a third bigger than it is today. Without the benefit of new dormitories or anything else like that. The vast percentage of Mac students back in the sixties lived off campus. Rents were extremely low. Students really grouped together by ideology and interest groups. And I had the impression that it was a campus that had large classes—unlike the small classes that we have today. It had a faculty that was growing extremely rapidly, trying to keep up with the very large size of the student body. And it was also a campus that was very heavily engaged in a way that my little postage stamp college back in Waukesha, Wisconsin wasn't—in really being involved in issues of social justice, and particularly opposition to the war in Vietnam. All of which was stuff that I was heavily involved in myself. So those are my first impressions. Oh, the other thing was that the student body was very, very young and the faculty for the most part was extremely old. It was a really sort of a binary spread in the faculty—very young people hired very recently because of all the money that DeWitt Wallace had put into the place, and a lot of

much older men, and a few women, who had been at the college for a very long time and there were very, very deep kinds of…stresses between the old and young in the faculty. Not just tenured and untenured, but old people who had been around for a long time and knew the old college before it went through this transformation, and those of us who were coming on board because there was such a transformation.

[4:52]

SN: So was there visible tension?

JS: Oh yeah. There was a lot of debate about whether the faculty should take positions on things like Vietnam. There was considerable stress and debate about the whole EEO program—how much it was costing, what sort of budgetary controls were over it. Many people were very preoccupied with whether what we were doing on campus was what our great benefactor DeWitt Wallace wanted us to do or not. And a considerable amount of concern that we were **not** doing what DeWitt Wallace wanted us do to, and that therefore we would be in financial trouble soon, which we were.[Laughter]

SN: I've heard.

JS: Yes, Ok?

[5:29]

SN: Um, so what was a typical day like during your first few years teaching?

JS: About the same as it was in my last few years teaching. Except I was a lot younger, a lot more energetic…spent a lot of time doing political stuff. I'm somebody who is always—I'm a very compulsive person and there are two things that I have to do everyday. One, I have to go running. And second of all I have to write things. I publish constantly, write lots of books. I spend a lot of time with the historical problems that have engaged me all my adult life, which have to do largely with slavery and how it was abolished in the United States, and what the experience of slavery meant, and what the moral implications are of having the first modern democracy based on slave labor at the same time. So my days were taken up with teaching, advising students, being involved with political things, and writing. And so I was doing all those things all the time. For the most part I worked eighteen to twenty hours a day, and was with my family some of that time. I have two daughters who are now in their late thirties, early forties, but at the time were quite young. And it was just a big, rich, full, all out kind of life. And actually I think that's what I've done here at Macalester all my life. It's always sort of been that way.

[6:50]

SN: What classes have you taught?

JS: Oh, God. You want this to be a short interview or you want this to be a long interview? I've taught so much different stuff, that when I talk to my university colleagues—people who teach in departments of forty and fifty, and have a little, narrow specialty like that and you teach American history from 1815 to 1850—and we compare curriculums, it's really a yuck because

the span of my curriculum finally ended up beginning long before there were any European people on the North American or South American or Latin American land mass, and ended up finally chronologically going way into the twentieth century because I was teaching environmental history, comparative colonization conquest, all of this stuff about the American Revolution and the American Civil War, stuff like family history from one time to another, things in African-American history. What Macalester allowed me to do was to become a mile wide and an inch deep [laughter] and at the same time be able to follow all kinds of different interests, so that I was reading in many, many different fields at once, and then trying all the time—I never used a syllabus more than once—to take what I thought were the freshest and best ways to approach asking questions of the past right into my courses without two or three years of preparation time, I'd just do it right away.

[8:14]

SN: Can we go back a little bit to your discussion of political activism during the Vietnam War?

JS: Sure.

SN: Do you want to talk a little bit about your involvement in that?

JS: Oh there were a lot of things. I mean we were all involved in marches and demonstrations and going here and going there. Students groups were very, very engaged in doing neighborhood work and neighborhood education and leafleting and things like that. At the time of the bombing in Cambodia in 1972, we…several of us from the History Department and other

places—there were a younger group of faculty who did a lot of this kind of stuff together, all of whom have dispersed and I'm about the only one left that have really finished a career at Macalester. We decided with the bombing of Cambodia it was important to make a really huge demonstration of one kind or another, that would be very eye-catching and really big, so we built a graveyard.

SN: Oh, wow.

JS: We went out to the lumberyard, came back with big pieces of lathe, which is wood about this wide like that. And we constructed thousands of crosses, and we put them right out in front of what now is Kagin…and the dorms over there. And took that whole area and then across the street towards the chapel, and turned it into something that looked like…one of the big military graveyards like out at Fort Snelling. So when cars would go by they'd see all that stuff. So…but for the most part it was involved with signs and demonstrations and leafleting…petitioning, getting involved. I got very heavily involved in the campaign in 1972. There was a tremendous amount of consensus on the Macalester campus about the importance of doing that kind of work. There was very little debate, very little dialogue. You'll probably get from other people that you interview so I won't spend a lot of time on it…the campus' reaction to having Vice President Humphrey here, which you probably have heard about, correct? Oh you haven't, ok.

[10:12]

SN: No one's mentioned that.

JS: Ok. He was appointed after his failed bid for the presidency to a professorship in political science here, and had an office right over at Old Main—a floor up from mine. And became—because of his support for the Vietnam War and his support for Lyndon Johnson—a subject of tremendous controversy. Had his office barricaded, a lot of controversy and campus stress over him. He stayed for a year. And looking back on it was very unfortunate that all that happened. I had him in class a couple times to talk, not about his experience as Vice President or as Senator, but what it was like to be Mayor of Minneapolis in the 1940s—to get a sense of what urban reform felt like right in post-war America. He was a wonderful guy and a terrific teacher. But all of those kinds of things were going on constantly during my first years here.

[11:02]

SN: So was there a lot of collaboration with faculty and students in terms of activism?

JS: Oh yeah. Um-hm. Yep.

SN: Have you seen that sort of collaboration in anything else?

JS: No. No, the college has gone in a direction where our faculty has become much more self-consciously professional. And our student body has become self-consciously much more self-absorbed. Those two things together I think have created a barrier between faculty and students where that kind of collaboration is really hard. The kind of collaboration that's easy, and the kind of collaboration that a lot of people do, has to do with individual research, internships, stuff like that. There, there can be a lot of collaboration. But if you're talking about collaboration

having to do with the kind of stuff I'm talking about… And a lot of day-to-day contact between faculty and students—that's gone. One of the things that made it go away was the campus center. The campus center…replaces something that used to stand by itself—where faculty and students could just hang out…have hamburgers together, talk to each other. There was a big thing called the Grille, and it was about as big as, about twice as big as this room. It was filled with tables, and the dining area for students was someplace else. And when the dining area for students was some place else, this was free social space, where people could really get together and talk about anything. And did. And there was a tremendous amount of informal contact that way. Once Kagin, which used to contain the dining hall, became Kagin ballroom, and the administration—which I think made a very bad mistake—stuffed the dining hall in the campus center, then it became impossible for people to have that kind of interaction. That was sort of the last thing that happened back…five or six years ago, that really concluded an ability for there to be kind of a shared campus space and culture for faculty and students.

[13:03]

SN: Can you talk a little bit about your collaboration with student researchers, during your time here, what sorts of projects you've done?

JS: It's really hard to get started because I've been involved in so many different honors theses, and so much work with individual students who have gone on to do incredible things of their own, that I'm really tempted—and have just now suddenly decided to say—I'm not going to try and talk about all that in any sort of individual way…it was just constant. It's something that I found very, very satisfying…extremely challenging. And it's something that I've continued to

work with a great deal, not here at Macalester. I now run a seminar in Philadelphia for undergraduate American historians—sponsored by the Mellon Foundation—which is all designed to create this kind of faculty-student collaboration for people going on for work on higher levels of American history, its just part of what I do. Fortunately I've always been able to attract people who…taught me things. One of the main ways that I've been able to say that I've become a more educated person as a consequence of getting a PhD is by really going through just dozens and dozens of projects, where students are framing their own questions. I'm having to learn what those questions are, learn to become very rapidly—not better than them in answering them—but astute and adept at developing approaches that I can suggest to people so that they can go off and do their own work. To really answer your question, I'd have to go out and get into the CLICnet catalog and look up the honors theses to see all the stuff that's there. But it's just a vital part of what I've always done.

[14:41]

SN: You stopped teaching in 2002?

JS: I stopped teaching in 2002 and I've been for the past four and a half years on this MSFEO program, which is what's granted me this interview I guess. Many of the MSFEO faculty have elected to continue teaching. I haven't taught a student for four and half years. I've completely…except in the summertime with the program that I mentioned in Philadelphia—I've completely cut off my connections with students between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. Just because I have so many other things that I'm doing, and my life has become such an adventure in the past four years. I've also found that just teaching is extremely wearing. I'm not

as energetic as I used to be, and I was just thinking this morning—I said geez I gotta go for an interview today. What was that like back then? I can't believe that I used to teach an eight-thirty class, a nine-thirty class and then roll off for a seven o'clock, three hour seminar at night on Wednesdays—every Wednesday for a long, long time. We had a much higher teaching load most of the time that I was teaching here, until that was changed in the late 1980s. So I'm really perplexed as I look back on it on how I was able to do it all, because I certainly couldn't do it now.

[15:58]

SN: How many classes were you teaching per semester?

JS: Ah…usually three classes a semester. And then we also had this thing called intersession, or interim term. Notice this January nobody's here—this is most under-utilized facility in the world. There are classrooms, laboratories, libraries, everything else going absolutely vacant and what that is is the space that used to contain a great deal of activity that went on when students were here for January for short-term courses. I think it's personally…it's a terrible shame that we can't figure out creative uses for this stuff. I mean we're like a church in a sense, a big church building everyone comes in on Sunday morning and stays for Sunday noon and then you don't use the building for the rest of the week. Well we have this whole month of January which used to be part of my teaching load, and now it's part of nobody's teaching load. So the teaching load was heavier then—today we teach a three two and that's about it.

[16:52]

SN: Ok. I guess now I want to talk a little bit about your time as provost.

JS: Oh yeah!

SN: So how did you end up becoming provost?

JS: I didn't mean to become Provost [laughter]. It was an honor thrust on me against both my better judgment and lots of other things. How did I become provost? The president of the college decided that when he got here he had to have a new chief academic officer. And so we went through an elaborate national search process that brought us a new chief academic officer from a major research university with a lot of high credentials back out East. This guy was a really smart guy and he came to the college. And to make a very long story short—well he appointed me to help him. I was somebody who knows a great deal about the interior of the college. I've sat on every faculty committee, I've been chairman of the History department for…ever, and [cough] excuse me. When this individual came here, his first thought was he needed somebody from inside the college to help him understand what this place is. He had come from a big major university, and didn't have a whole lot of real, immediate instincts about how to understand this place. So he asked me to become his associate—so I did. He had his nervous breakdown in November after having come in September, and suddenly I was asked by the President to take his place. There was a very, rapid, hasty, internal search for my candidacy [laughter], if that's what it can be called—was compared to the potential candidacies of other faculty members. And then suddenly, there I was, with an inbox about like this…of stuff that the

guy hadn't done. And very little—actually no preparation—for doing the job. So that's how I become provost.

[18:47]

SN: So you were teaching while you were Provost?

JS: Yes. I had two classes. I was running this job twenty-eight hours a day. And I had twenty-four students in one class, and twenty-nine students in the other. And it was the hardest, most stressful period in my life.

[19:03]

SN: So what were some of the best and worst aspects of being Provost?

JS: Well the best aspect of being Provost continues to this day. I've learned so much about administration in small liberal arts colleges that I think I can probably run anything small. It's a mistake for me to feel that way, but I honest to god do feel that way. And I know so much more about higher education, and how these little places work, that it's opened doors for me to foundations, to consultancies all over the country in various other settings where that knowledge is valuable. Its…it's just taught me a lot [laughter]. I've been able to use that knowledge and leverage that knowledge to do a lot of really, what I think is important and good work outside the college. The challenge that I faced as provost has something to do with what we opened this interview with. This is a college that was rapidly, rapidly changing when I first came. And it continued to rapidly change up and down through the seventies and on into the eighties. You

probably know that we went through a huge financial implosion—we just cratered in the seventies. And when Bob Gavin became president at Macalester, the injunction of the Board of Trustee was to bring us back to national preeminence. We knew that we had a very good chance of being able to develop a whole new relationship with the Wallace family financially that has to do with all this stock that other people have talked about… Suddenly—about the time that I became provost—was on the road to giving us what was one of the largest small college endowments in the United States. My job as provost was to raise the academic aspirations and standards of the college to meet those resources. So that's what I did. And I made myself extremely unpopular in some places and very popular in other places by suddenly rewarding people very, very heavily who hadn't been rewarded before for scholarship—for having written books, for having been able to manage the whole business of excellent teaching together with extraordinary scholarship. I began to devalue things like just hanging around on certain committees [laughter]. And faculty responded to me by saying, in a lot of ways, you're changing the college too rapidly, I was hired here with certain expectations, you're changing them on me now. There was a lot of heartache about that, and a lot of other people who felt that their contributions had been undervalued, who suddenly felt that they were finally being paid attention to. So it was very controversial that way. I also changed the standards for promotion and tenure. I got myself involved in a very, very large legal case as a consequence of that when I denied tenure to someone over the unanimous recommendation of faculty committees, because I didn't figure this person met the criteria in the handbook that we had at the time. And that if we had let this tenure case go we would have no standing or claim at all for raising our standards. And so I denied this person—I had the support of the President when I did that. We ended up having a big litigation; it was all over the newspapers. I was all over the *Mac Weekly* week after week

after week after week. And I had people going after me for everything they could possibly get their hands on. Students were very, very angry with me. I didn't like that. I think you probably sense from earlier things that I've said in this interview that my relationship with students has for the most part been really, really close and very enjoyable. And the whole notion of suddenly being in a situation where I'm butting heads with people that I usually like the most…wasn't all that much fun. So that was the downside. The upside was that I think we accomplished a tremendous amount in creating a…stronger and more professionally engaged and professionally committed faculty than we've ever had before. And that's what you have to have if you're going to be able to look students in the eye and say this is a really outstanding place where you're going to get a terrific education. So, for the most part—and in fact entirely—I would do that job again in a shot, knowing what I know now about what I've learned from it, and looking back on it—what I think the gains for the college were that I was fortunate enough to be part of.

[23:17]

SN: So have those gains that you made as Provost have they been maintained?

JS: Ah, I think…well you know, now here comes a paradox. Because the paradox is I think they've been maintained too well. In some ways, and I guess this is a sign of somebody who has evolved from being a young turk to being an old turkey [laughter]. I think that the emphasis that I particularly was very, very much in favor of, and got a lot of support particularly from younger faculty for, which was scholarship and publication has gone too far at the college. I think we've now developed standards and expectations for our junior faculty which are close to, if not, yeah close to identical to what you'd find at the University of Minnesota, or at any other major

research university. And I don't think that's what our scholarship is for—to build another brick in the wall. It's to be able to have a very strong and vital understanding and grasp and engagement with the field, so that you can do good things with students. And I think there's been a…a loss of that connection. The people who publish the most books around here are not necessarily the best teachers. Some of the very best teachers around here are people who are—in fact I would argue that the very best teachers around here are people who are deeply engaged in their field and do very creative work in it. But the idea that scholarship is performance and that you have to be able to do this much of this, and that much of that, in order to be able to—just on its own—be valued and recognized as a faculty member, just in writing things or getting stuff published, has become too much of a project in its own right for me. So the answer is yes and no.

[25:02]

SN: Can you talk about what it was like to return to teaching after being Provost?

JS: Yeah, yeah it was great! I got a year's leave. I got a chance to write a book. It's a book that I'd had in my head for a long time—a nice biography of a very complicated person who was very instrumental in getting slavery abolished. My faculty friends welcomed me back, and my faculty enemies were nice to me [laughter]. And I never had any real sense that there was a transition involved at all, it was just nice.

SN: So that tension that you felt between you and students?

JS: That went away immediately.

SN: Once you weren't making controversial decisions…[laughter]

[25:38]

JS: Once I wasn't making controversial decisions, I was the same guy as I always was. We have two kinds of memory at Macalester it seems to me. The first kind of memory that we have has to do with people who are employees here—many of them have been here for so long—that they can remember what someone else said in a faculty meeting thirty years ago, or can recall that so and so parked in the handicapped parking spot without a sticker ten years ago, and so and so knows that you know that. This kind of small community gossip and memory network that goes on all the time. At the same time on the other end of the continuum, people forget things real quickly. And in response to the question you asked, nobody cared that I had been chief academic officer for three odd years, and then made this big commotion and all this fuss and went back to the faculty. Everybody was just nice to me, so…

[26:32]

SN: That's good. Now I'd like to go back in time a little bit, if you could just talk a little bit about the experience during the seventies, during the financial crisis and what it was like to be faculty here then?

JS: Oh! It was very, very important back then. And I guess this is—I can connect the period of time that you're talking to me about now to the things we just talked about. The thing that kept

me sane was my professional life outside of the college. Was being able, in spite of all the crazy stuff that was going on around here, to be able to write books, give papers at conferences, sit on Ph.D. committees at major universities—do all kinds of different things that made me feel validated as a historian and made me feel like I was making major contributions to the common, collective endeavor called American history between the time of the revolution and the time of the coming of the Civil War. On campus, it was just really, really harsh…[sigh]. Old Main, where I did all my teaching, had a roof on it that was so bad that you could stand in the attic—which is now the fourth floor, you know that nice conference meeting room, it was just a bare attic before—and look out and see the sky. In the wintertime ice dams would form on all of the gutters, and water would seep in through the ceilings while you were teaching. The physical plant at this college was just ghastly. And the reason that I'm talking about it is because it created an impression of declination and decay and decline, and that nobody was in charge. Our President at the time was a wonderful man who did absolutely incredible things given the fact that he had nothing to work with. Now that's John Davis about whom you'll hear a lot in these interviews. The fact he had nothing to work with explains what I've just described. And because we had no money we did not hire good faculty, in my opinion, because we did not have a sense of professional aspiration. We did a lot of things with adjunct faculty, people without Ph.D's who were trying to teach here while going to graduate school someplace in Missouri. The faculty-student ratio went way, way up, but at the same time we were…you can't be polite about this. We were taking anybody who could pay, and we were taking anybody who could come in the door. And the problem with teaching back then was you were still attracting a fair number of really, really amazing people who sat in this part of your class [laughter] and over here, the rest of it was this huge tail that went down to almost nothing. And it was very, very

difficult to figure out how to teach all that. I'd been accustomed to that when I was in graduate school because I was teaching at a community college where you'd get that. But everybody understood the expectations then and everybody could figure out how to work their way around it. At a small, liberal arts college where you're supposed to be doing one kind of teaching, to try and figure out how you deal with an array of people with such differing backgrounds, from superb to non-existent, was very difficult. So the seventies and early eighties was a time where you just sat here and slugged it out. I had a wonderful friend, I still have a friend and you better interview this friend of mine—his name is Calvin Roetzel. During this period of time, Calvin and I were running partners. We competed in marathons together. And for this whole period of time, every morning or sometime everyday, we would go out together and run a minimum of six miles or a maximum, at one time, thirty. We were preparing for marathons. And together we would just talk about this stuff. And we would get it out of our systems. And we would figure out things that we could do to try to improve things. We did all kinds of stuff. Keeping a general log of how many miles we actually traversed [laughter] we figured out that we circumnavigated the globe doing this. And a lot of it was just important physical maintenance, but some of it was mental health, you know with what was going on here. And it isn't as if anybody had bad intentions. It isn't as if anybody…in any sort of perverse way managed the college poorly. Its just we had no resources, we had no assets. We had a President who was as great a community leader, and as great an expositor of hope as you could possibly find in John. I thought he did a magnificent job during his tenure here. But...what made his job so magnificently done is the fact that he was working with almost nothing and we were almost nothing at that time. And it was during that time that I had to take all kinds of leadership positions and try and keep the History Department together, and sitting on committees of one

kind or another trying to figure out what you do with this year's budget shortfall. So, long answer.

[31:27]

SN: So how have you seen the composition of the student body change during your time here?

JS: It's gotten a lot more cosmopolitan. I mean everybody would answer it that way, I think. But Macalester is very, very good at paralleling national trends. And so the fact that we are now an international, multi-ethnic campus, is only to say that Minnesota and the rest of the United States has become an international, multi-ethnic society. That's the biggest change. I think the biggest transition ideologically for the college has been to move from what began in your interview with me and my introduction to the college is this binary between black and white, to this notion of multi-ethnicity and multi-raciality. And the kinds of complications about discourses on race that you find all over the place are really, really, really strong here. And have represented a major, major shift as the college has tried, with varying degrees of success, to keep its commitment, its traditional commitment to social justice and involvement in the community.

[32:42]

SN: And how has the faculty changed?

JS: Much, much more devoted to…its fields, than to the college. That's a usual old man's complaint about things.

SN: That's interesting.

JS: Um-hm. That's certainly not true of many younger faculty here. But what I talked about before—the standards for publication and scholarship—really do keep people…wedded to production in their field in a way that, to a point, is really important, and past a certain point I think has a lot of negative consequences. The amount of faculty turnover here among younger faculty is very large. There are a number of reasons for that. Some of it has to do with going to find a better place to get a better job. A lot of it has to do with the complications of what's happened to family life since the time that I was hired. I have been the only income in my family ever since 1968. My wife supported me through graduate school and then she told me—much to the consternation of her first-wave feminist friends—I'm going to stay home and we're going to have kids and you're going to support all of us, and I'm going to do what I want. And so she did that and continues to do that. And so in a lot of different ways…I'm the only person that I know on the faculty who hasn't had to deal with the question of two incomes. And the problem of being able to situate younger faculty, at a college like Macalester—it's even worse at a place like Oberlin or Grinnell where you're out in the country and jobs for spouses are very rare and difficult to get. But still, people move all the time in order to try and improve the margin of security of one of the two family members. So there's a lot more complication in being a faculty member now than there was when I was first hired. And that together with I think, with a loyalty more to field than before—than to the college—makes the faculty different today then it was when I came. In a lot of ways I'm very, very much like the oldest faculty who taught here before all the changes took place….Ok?

[35:08]

SN: Ok. How have you seen teaching styles and pedagogy change?

JS: Oh wow, that's very difficult. I don't really know. I've team-taught with a lot of people. I love being able to teach a class with somebody else. And I was one of the people who invented something called the double course. Nobody much does this anymore. Where you take two classes, smash them together, and then make people meet three day a week, not for one hour but for two. Clay Steinman and I taught a course on theory and history of race in the United States the year—the semester before I quit teaching. And it was just an incredible learning experience for me to have Clay doing all of this communications theory and media stuff and me juxtaposing all this historical information together. And Clay's teaching style—I learned a great deal from him and he learned a great deal from me. And I've always found there's a lot of team teaching that goes on in the history department as well. And I've taught a lot with people in the English Department, and also with people in Religious Studies. And in a sense, I think that there's…I'd like to think—I haven't the vaguest idea about how to answer this question—I'd like to think that the dominant style in my end of the college—not over there in computer sciences and stuff like that—but in my end of the college, is very much still involved in the Socratic business of give and take. I mean I wouldn't let people take notes in my class. Nobody was allowed to bring a pen or pencil to class. They had to come with notes to themselves that they'd prepared for discussion about the reading assignments. And the idea was that you talked in class not to just say what's on your mind, but to be part of a discussion where you're always addressing someone else's point, and where what we said last week has something to do with what we're saying this week. And it's the idea of trying to create intellectual communities. And the people that I've

taught with are people who generally operate—not as extremely as I do, by not even letting people write things down because they have to be paying attention to what they're thinking, to what they're going to say if they're going to say something. But I think the Socratic method of teaching, I hope, is still a dominant style at least in the humanities and social sciences. The thing that I really worry about is when I see somebody trucking down the hall with their Powerpoint presentation. I think that stuff is noxious. And I think it's horrible and I think it's lobotomizing, and I think that the idea that technology takes over classrooms is something that we should have really, really, really serious doubts about. There's a wonderful spoof on Powerpoint—which of course I downloaded off the internet [laughter]—which shows what will happen to Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address if you turn it into a Powerpoint presentation. Because once you do that you know [snore sound] everybody goes to sleep, and nobody notices that this was in other formats, a great piece of American rhetoric. So I'm hoping that too much technology, and slide shows, and Powerpoints and downloading…I won't let people download things. I wasn't able…I don't know if I was successful with this but I was…I really insisted that people not download stuff off the internet unless it was primary source material for anything that they would write for me. So I'm very hostile to technology.

[38:34]

SN: Have you always been that way, well I guess…

JS: Oh I'm not in other parts of my life. I mean now I can get all of the big, big newspapers that I've worked on, which have been scanned into the Library of Congress. And I can take Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* from 1854 and do a word search and find out anything I want. I

love it! It's terrific! I'm not hostile to technology if I'm using it. And if I'm using it for very, very traditional purposes. What I don't want is the human interface between faculty and student to be disrupted.

[39:10]

SN: How have you seen student life change over the time here, like in terms of social activities, athletics, dorm life?

JS: Huh. There's a lot of…thoughts in my head right now that make me wonder which direction I'm going to go to answer your question. Ah…[pause]…students when I first came here were extremely political about the way that they carried themselves, always. Students today are extremely political about the way they carry themselves, that is to say how they dress, what sorts of messages they carry by decorating their bodies certain ways [laughter]. There's something about this age group, and going to college that makes that a constant. Now the content of that changes, the content of that changes very much. But the more important thing is there's this tremendous continuity of being between eighteen and twenty-one, and spending a good bit of your time saying, how do I explain myself by how I look, who I associate with…what kinds of activities I get involved in. And that's what college is for. And I think that's a predictable but yet at the same time really important thing. Slowly into the nineties—oh gosh this is so hard, because there's that huge gap in the seventies and eighties when the college was in such tough shape that it's very hard to talk about. Students today are far less political, in my opinion, than they used to be. And this is a comment that's said lovingly and not critically—much, much more self-absorbed. And that's not because they're bad people and people before them were good

people. It's that the world has become so much more uncertain…so much scarier, so much more difficult to be able to conceive of if you were to close your eyes and cast your mind twenty years ahead. I'm so glad I'm not nineteen, sorry. And I have children that are thirty-eight and thirty-six right now, and I think of my grandchildren. And the sense that the world is so fragile and so far out of control of any of us to be able to say with certainty…where I'd like to be five years from now, ten years from now. The idea of becoming more tentative, hesitant, and pragmatic about things is probably the biggest change that I've seen. If you wanted to…give it another twist, I think there was a kind of innocence in the sixties, that carried on into the seventies, that allowed people to feel that one way or another, their lives were much more in their own hands than people feel today. And so consequently I think students today are far more conservative. Not in the sense of politics, but in the sense of not wanting to make extended commitments. Or on the other hand by saying, this is the only…I've known since I was nine years old that I want to be an accountant [laughter], or go to medical school, or so forth and so on. Now the value of the college—and it continues to do this probably more to the benefit of people now than back when I first started—is to challenge that. And to expose people to experiences that don't fit their expectations, and cause everybody to think again. So, in that sense I think probably the college is more valuable now to the people that it's trying to serve than maybe it was when I started.

[43:17]

SN: So aside from the Vietnam War, what were some other issues that students and I guess faculty have seen as significant?

JS: Well…ah apart from the Vietnam War? Hee! Um, the Vietnam War was a large carrying basket for feminism. A large carrying basket for urban social issues having to do with race. It was a—what would you call it—it was a large occasion where people began to explore inequality in a variety of different ways. And since this is the day after Martin Luther King's holiday, when you saw someone like Dr. King incorporating global, social injustice into his civil rights message—which he did towards the end of his life—you began to understand that there were all kinds of different issues that began with Civil Rights that moved into the Vietnam War, that got into questions of globalization, imperialism, and so forth and so on. So that I think the whole medley of what you see today as the issues we like to talk about are all back there. They were not nearly as highly elaborated as they are now, but that's what people were involved with. Feminism came to Macalester College [clap] just like that. And it was amazing to see the difference between Macalester students who were my first couple years' juniors and seniors under the old regime, and people who had come in as first and second year students. Because their whole approach to questions of gender, sexuality, race—everything else—was completely different in the younger cohort than it was in the older cohort.

[45:10]

SN: Why do you think there was that difference?

JS: Because the college was admitting different kinds of people and because this college had developed this **huge** national reputation for being deeply engaged in problems of racial injustice. That's what EEO was all about. It was millions of dollars worth of commitment, that came from the president at the time—Arthur Flemming—who believed that he had endless resources

available from Dewitt Wallace to do this. And suddenly what had been a completely lily-white small college campus drawn largely from the Midwest, was doing two things simultaneously. One, it was buying National Merit Scholars. We had more National Merit Scholars—not by comparison—but in raw numbers than Harvard did in 1969. I mean that's an extraordinary thing to do while at the same time you're recruiting dark skinned people from the ghetto to go to the same campus. I mean there's never been a social experiment like that ever done in a small college to my knowledge, ever in the world, and it was an enormous risk that created an instantaneous change on this campus. When you come back for your senior year as a Macalester student, and all of this that I've just described has just taken place—you don't recognize the campus that you're on. You have no idea what the heck is going on. And you either like it a great deal or it drives you nuts.

[46:35]

SN: Was there a lot of racial tension during…?

JS: Oh yeah, um-hm. Lots of it, lots and lots and lots of it. And…there was a separatist ideology that was very, very strong among certain of the African American students. A lot of tension between the African American students who adopted the separatist ideology and those that didn't. A lot of white guilt. A lot of the things that you'd expect to have happen—those were all there. There was a lot of division in the faculty between whether—among many different groups—about the extent to which this was a good idea to do this at all—how much it was costing, and would it drive our college into bankruptcy? And when the college did go into bankruptcy—and this is I think one of the tremendous burdens that the college has carried ever

since—basically the EEO program was blamed for it. And if you wanted to get harsh and negative about it you'd say you were blaming black people for a white college's collapse. And that was a terrible problem to have to work through in the seventies and on into the eighties. It's not a problem I don't think any longer, since we've moved well beyond those memories among those that were really active in the college, and there's only certain folks like me that remember them, so.

[47:50]

SN: Can you talk a little bit about the relationship between various presidents and the faculty during your years?

JS: [laughter] Everybody loved John Davis, ok? Ah…I can start with Arthur Flemming, who I only met once. Who was mandated by the Wallace family to come and make Macalester nationally ranked…preeminent Harvard of the Midwest, liberal arts college. And the college had prepared for this by going through a whole big self-study. There was a big Stillwater meeting that maybe you can hear about, but you've probably heard about before. That happened before I got here. And then Arthur came and then Arthur went. And all the things that attended to Arthur's short presidency I've already talked about. Then we had a president from Ohio State University named James Robinson who did the best he could…left as soon as he could because it was a disaster. And then we had John Davis about whom you're going to hear volumes and volumes of praise—including mine—that I've already told you why, so that's that. John Davis was followed by the guy that I worked for, Bob Gavin, who's the same age I am. He was a chemist from Haverford who had been provost there. He was very hard driving—what would

you call it—single minded, stubborn…difficult guy to work for. And he chewed up a whole series of provosts like me before he finally retired. And his relationships with the faculty were not very good, because he was seen—as I was—of being high-handed, changing the standards, not listening to faculty who wanted to run the college in the way that they were accustomed to. And Bob was at the same time responsible for getting the renegotiated deal with the Wallace's that got us our stock, that got us our endowment, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah so. But relationships between Bob Gavin and the faculty were notably bad, and I contributed to that [laughter]. And Mike McPherson, who followed him, was really I think Bob's mirror image. We were looking for somebody who could be—we, the general tenor of the campus—was looking for somebody who wouldn't be hard driving, dogmatic, not listen to people. So what we got was a president who was very laid-back. Who very much avoided conflict, and who went out of his way to really ingratiate himself, not just with the faculty but just about with everybody. And I think the majority of the faculty felt very relieved not to have Bob around anymore. And for the most part felt that Mike was a very nice, balance weight to this sense of tension that we'd had before. And so faculty relations there I think were a lot better. I'm not going to comment on the current president [laughter] ok? This is a retrospection; this is not current events, ok? [laughter]

[50:59]

SN: So what were some of the most controversial events that you witnessed during your time here?

JS: Oh lord! Ah…the most controversial? The EEO program was I think by far in a way the most profound and deeply divisive issue that our college has ever seen. But the EEO program in itself led to, finally, in the early and mid-seventies, such a tremendous sense of…crisis about the future of the college. Which was much more than the EEO program. I'm not going to make the mistake of blaming the decline of the college on black people. What has to say instead is that, instead of controversy there was just tremendous anxiety and a sense of…struggling against great odds to keep the thing going. So if there's a particular crisis or particular issue that inflamed faculty opinion, it would be that program. If there's something profound that divided faculty and made us all concerned and confused and caused us to go in a variety of conflicting directions, it was the financial crisis of the seventies and early eighties that did that. Everything else since then has been just what colleges are. It all feels very important at the time. I mean when I denied the tenure case, and then was slapped with a suit for practice of discrimination based on gender that felt big. But I learned pretty quickly as I was going through it, and I certainly believe since, it wasn't. It was a necessary thing that colleges go through. People get sued all the time. I learned after that, that when somebody threatened to sue me I'd say, there's a line right over there you get at the end of it and we'll deal with you next [laughter]. And so I think in a lot of ways colleges are roiled with…with very big controversies that feel really, really, really massive at the time and that really, in the long institutional history of the college aren't. Just for one contemporary—need-blind is one of those. It's very important from a standpoint of values. It's extremely important from the standpoint of political commitments, from the standpoint of what kind of student body you've got and what the college looks like. There are so many bigger things that drive that in the long run, that the college isn't going to look much different under the policy that it's got, from the policy that it had. And the bottom

category for judging what the college is, is who does it serve, and how well does it serve it? But it felt like just a huge thing when it was going on. I don't know if you were here then.

SN: Yeah I was.

JS: Ok, so that's my answer.

SN: I was a sophomore.

JS: Ok.

[53:46]

SN: So what have you seen as some of the most significant kind of administrative policy changes since you've been here?

JS: Hm…I think I've talked about them already. I think that they have to do profoundly with the way we…the expectations we put on our faculty, and the way we evaluate them. I think that's probably more…more dramatically different now, than when I got here…then anything else that I can think of. The other thing that goes with that is—and they do track together very strongly—the admissions policy that says we'll take anybody who can show up and can pay, to an admissions policy now that's very highly elaborated and extremely mysterious. I guess the third thing is the merchandising of the college—I hadn't talked about this. But this goes with it too—the idea that we have to have a national logo. We have to have a way to be able to sell

ourselves, as the maple leaf, and the idea that we're better than Ivy because we're not quite Ivy. And this whole sense that one way or another we're involved in this big, big race either to the top or the bottom depending on what the U.S News and World Report survey says about us. The idea that we're a nationally marketed college. That we are a college that has moved from being a college that just wanted to explain itself as a college. That's the way it was when I got here. But…our reference group is Wesleyan, Oberlin, Carleton, Pomona. I'm really responsible for a lot of that, I set that peer group when I was provost. And so the merchandising of the college, the ratcheting up of the admissions standards, the change in the expectations of our faculty are all part of becoming what—and this is again another word that I contributed—a preeminent liberal arts college. Those are all things that I'm very divided by. Part of me says that that's what you have to do, another part of me says that I'm not so sure that….there aren't downsides and costs involved in that, that in the long run are not really good for education.

SN: So when you were provost and you set that goal to become a preeminent liberal arts college…?

JS: I just threw out the word to the trustees. No I didn't set that, I said, you know we were all talking about it in a trustees meeting. And we were trying to talk about being excellent or being superior and all of that, and I said what about preeminent and they said yeah that's a good word. [laughter]

[56:26]

SN: Did you think that things would change as much as they have?

JS: You never know…there's a lot—the doctrine of unintended consequences is one of things that historians study. It's one of the things that our President's learning about in Iraq. I thought at the time, and I still think that there's a really healthy and very important tension that goes on in this college between elitism and democracy, a lot more so than in most places. Carleton, Williams, they have no trouble with elitism. They have little trouble with democracy either because they're not that concerned with it. We have this lovely heritage that comes out of the post-World War II period, which is where the college was really—in some profound and much deeper way than we've talked about—defined, that constantly is nagging at us to remember that we're supposed to be serving people in some larger way than just on our campus. And that takes you back to Charles Turck, who really is the person who is most important in the whole history of the college—much more so than any other president. I only met him once and he was in wheelchair—ninety-two years old and had a fifty-two year old wife, which tells you something about Charlie Turck. So…the long term consequences of all this are things that I certainly couldn't foresee but I always assumed that this bigger commitment to engagement with the world was going to be part of Macalester, and I think it still is. I think a lot of it has become much, much, much too highly professionalized and centered in a couple different places on campus. But that doesn't mean that it's not still there.

[58:08]

SN: So I read somewhere that you learned Spanish, pretty late in your career?

JS: Yeah, my wife and I [laughter] yes I did. See, I roll out of bed in the morning and I think to myself, I have a fifty percent change of living to be eighty-five years old. And I have a fifty percent chance of not being able to live to eighty-five years old. That's sort of where the gerontology of my age right now at sixty-seven puts me. And I say to myself, if all this ends in two weeks, how do I feel about it. And what the college has done is given me this incredible….I don't even have a word for it, and usually that's not my problem…. Just an incredible environment I guess for learning stuff, and being out of the box and doing things that I think are important, that in other settings people would say, you can't do that, or what are you doing that for? What happened to me was that I began to understand a bunch of different things all at the same time. A) that I didn't understand what people were talking about when they got on the bus. B) that my interest in slavery and conquest and the creation of…transformed European continents in the Western hemispheres really had to be something that was transnational and global, and I had to understand slavery in Cuba. And I had to understand why the indigenous people were able to survive and finally become dominant forces in Latino societies, whereas they certainly have not here. And all of that together, with just a real desire for adventure and fun, got my wife and me back into Spanish classes when we were about fifty-five years old. So I'd be sitting in my desk and Dottie would be sitting in her desk, and these people that are eighteen years old are looking at us saying, what the hell are those old people doing here? And my wife is an absolutely fabulous language student. She's a perfectionist at many different things and small points of grammar and stuff like that, she's really good at. So I was in this really unhealthy competition with her to see if I could do as well as she did [laughter]. Spanish just became a great deal of fun and so we went through Spanish fifty-two, which back then—the numbers are all different now—was advanced grammar conversation. Then the college was kind enough to

send me—I paid for her, we paid for her—to several different language schools in Mexico. And then I began doing consulting at Mexican universities, doing comparative history projects, getting involved in a lot of different things. And the language has kind of has become part of who I am. When I go out running now it's…my favorite disc to listen to is a woman named Susana Baca who is a Peruvian, an Afro-Peruvian singer who's just fabulous. She speaks so clearly but so rapidly that I try to catch the lyrics all the time. It's just a wonderful Spanish lesson for me, plus the music is just drop dead gorgeous. But what that's led me to is I'm now an ESL teacher. I lied to you before when I told you that I don't teach people. I do teach people but they're much older. And I've now established a class for myself, an ESL class here at the college that meets on Tuesdays and Thursday nights and what I will do is work with very high-need, very ambitious, high end immigrants from Mexico and Peru and Guatemala, teaching them English very rapidly so that they can get out of the very…difficult conditions that they're currently in—find better jobs, take the citizenship test, and have a future for themselves and for their families. So Spanish has become a big deal for me. And usually once a year I'm off to someplace or another. Last time it was Costa Rica, simply to talk it, see a new place and learn some things. So yes, Spanish has become an increasingly important part of my life. I've also in the last few years I was here—actually when I was on MSFEO—I continued to be the director of the Latin American Studies program, which is now in the hands of Paul Dosh and Raymond Robertson, and they're doing a wonderful job, so.

[1:02:24]

SN: So you took Spanish classes at Macalester, while you were a faculty member?

JS: Yea, four semesters.

SN: So what was it like to be in a class?

JS: It was fun. It was fun. There are a couple people in that class who still are Dottie's dear friends. They email all the time, they talk all the time. We were accepted very graciously by younger people, after they once got over the fact that here these old people were. We took all the tests. That's the point. I mean you didn't come in there and just fill up chairs that more productive undergraduates could be in. We were only allowed in the classes if the classes didn't fill. So once we were there though, we had to show that we were, and we really truly were, people who meant business. So that's how that worked.

SN: That's interesting. Did you have any students of yours in the class with you?

JS: I don't remember that I did [laughter]. Although that would have been cool if we did. No I'm sure I didn't, I would have remembered that, yeah.

SN: Interesting, and I guess you've already talked a little bit about basketball, and how you became a historian.

JS: Yes, I've talked about that.

[1:03:29]

SN: Ok, so do you have a favorite memory of Macalester?

JS: No. I don't have a favorite memory of Macalester. What I do have…we only live about a half a mile from here, and for decades either walked up here or ridden my bike. We've been a one car family. The only thing that's made us a two car family is suddenly we have three grandchildren, and we need this Honda Odyssey to get them around. And I have this old 1991 Volvo that's got, oh god, a hundred and ninety-eight thousand miles on it that we couldn't sell to anybody anyway, so now we've have two cars. But that's a long, roundabout way of saying what I really like to do is just come up here by myself and be here. I like it particularly when I don't have anything to do. You know, I feel like this is just a huge—but very, very small and intimate—place that I filled up my life with. So I don't have a specific memory of the place. I sort of wear it like an old shirt [laughter].

SN: Interesting. Ok, well that's the end of my questions, if there's anything else you want to say?

JS: Nope. You've been a great interviewer. I've appreciated the opportunity to pull all this together.

[End of Disc 1 1:04:51]