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# Interview with Henry West, Professor of Philosophy

Henry West

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*Oral History Project*

**Interview with:**      **Henry West**  
                                 Professor of Philosophy, 1965-2008

**Date:**                    **Thursday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008, 1:00 p.m.**

Place:                      Macalester College, Old Main, Henry West's Office  
Interviewer:              Kayla Burchuk, Class of 2010

Interview                 1:40:11 minutes  
run time:

Accession:                2009-09-10-01

Agreement:               Signed, on file, no restrictions

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                 Teaching at Spelman, friendship with Howard Zinn  
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**Interview with Henry West**

**Kayla Burchuk, Interviewer**

**June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008  
Macalester College  
Old Main  
Henry West's Office**

[00:00]

KB: My name is Kayla Burchuk and I am a Macalester student from the Class of 2010, conducting interviews for the Macalester Oral History Project. Today is Thursday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008, and I am interviewing Henry West, Professor of Philosophy, in his office in Old Main. So first, if you could just state your name, and when you were born, and how old you were when you first came to Macalester.

HW: Well, I'm not sure I can remember that [laughter]. I'm Henry West, and I was born December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1933, and I came to Macalester in 1965, so that would make me...thirty-one? '33 to '63, then another year there, maybe I was thirty-two? No, I was thirty-one [laughter]. And so, what difference does that make?

[00:57]

KB: Right. So I'd like to start off by just talking a little bit about your background before you came to Macalester. What was your educational background and what were you engaged in directly prior to coming to Macalester?

HW: All right. Well, my educational background was I grew up in Athens, Georgia, went to public high school there. I went to Emory University in Atlanta for my undergraduate studies. I first went to Emory as a junior college, first two years in Oxford—it's where the original campus was before it got Coca-Cola money and built a new campus in Atlanta in 1919. And on the old campus, which dates to pre-Civil War days, they run a two-year program. And I went there, and then to the—what they call Big Emory, the main campus in Atlanta. And then when I was graduating I got a one-year scholarship, a Woodrow Wilson fellowship. And I was planning to go to theology school, but I couldn't use this fellowship to go to theology school. I had to use it in a field that had college teaching, because it was trying to recruit people to teach at the college level. And so I used it to study philosophy, and I was admitted to Duke University, and I spent a year there and then came back for a summer and wrote my master's thesis. So I have a MA from Duke University. Then I went to Union Theological Seminary in New York, which was my original plan, and I got a, what was then called a BD, a bachelor of divinity. It's now been upgraded to a master of divinity, so I have a M.Div. from there. And when I was finishing there I realized I was not going to go into the ministry. I was not orthodox enough. I might, could have been a Unitarian, or more likely someone in ethical culture or something that didn't have much belief in the supernatural. And so I thought what I'd like to do was either to teach religious studies—I had some interest in Hinduism and world religions—or teach philosophy. I already had an MA in philosophy. And so I thought I would find out whether I wanted to be a college teacher by teaching some before finishing a PhD, and being from the South I had Southern guilt over racism, and so I applied only to black colleges, and to all of them. Every black college in the whole country. And I was offered positions at Morehouse College and at Spelman College. They're sister and brother colleges in Atlanta, Morehouse a men's college, Spelman a women's

college. And Spelman was going to allow me to teach sociology, which I'd never taken a course in but I wanted to learn something about it, [laughs] so—and history. Whereas Morehouse was for me to teach humanities. I'd been a humanities undergraduate at Emory, so I could do either one; I didn't have credentials in sociology, but I could read the textbook. And so I took the position at Spelman. Another advantage there was they offered on-campus housing, and so I lived on campus. And so I was there. I planned to go there for just two years but I stayed three, and Howard Zinn was the department chairman of my history/sociology/political science/economics department. [Laughs] All of them were one department. So I got to know him there, and he's been a lifelong friend. And just to jump ahead a little bit, he and I share a summer beach house in Cape Cod, Massachusetts. He and his wife bought it in 1977, and it had what's called a bulkhead that kept it from eroding, and that washed away in the winter of '77-'78, and they had to have some money to rebuild the—what I call a seawall. And they were renting the place out in June and so they wanted to see if we would like to buy half-interest, and to use it June and first half of—I'm sorry, the last half of June and all of July. They'd been renting it out in July, I'm sorry. And so we bought half-interest from them, and so we've been seeing them for the last, what is it? '78? Thirty years, sharing this house. And so he's one of my very best friends.

[05:44]

KB: That's great.

HW: Spelman was a very exciting place because the civil rights movement was getting started.

Martin Luther King had moved his operations from Birmingham to Atlanta, and the student sit-in

hadn't begun until the third year I was there. But students were trying to see how they could get involved in the civil rights movement. The year before I got there Howard Zinn had taken some of his students to sit in the white section of the Georgia legislature, and so the first year I was there he invited me to go with him with his students to the—sit in the white section of the Georgia legislature. But it was with black students, so it was breaking the segregation laws. It was an interesting episode. We'd...Howard Zinn and his wife, me and my wife, and these fifteen or twenty students all sat in the white section of the gallery. And we were sitting there for a few minutes watching the proceedings, and all of a sudden, the Speaker of the House noticed that we were there, and he banged on the gavel and he said, "Sergeant-at-Arms! Get those colored people out of the white section! We have segregation in the state of Georgia!" So the Sergeant-at-Arms came up to where we were sitting and down from the back of where we were sitting and he told the students to move to the colored section. And so the students moved, and so Howard Zinn and his wife and me and my wife moved with them. And we started the proceedings again, and then the speaker noticed we were sitting in the colored section. And so he banged on the gavel again and he said, "Sergeant-at-Arms! Get those white people out of the colored section! We have segregation in the state of Georgia!" And so the Sergeant-at-Arms came down and he told me and my wife and Howard Zinn and his wife and one of the students who looked white [laughter] the five of us would have to move back to the white section. Well, we'd made our point so we left. But that was the kind of things that were going on. Another thing was that the concerts and plays and things were segregated. And so I became the ticket agent for black people who wanted to go to see a play, a Broadway play in Atlanta or go to a concert, a symphony concert or something. And so I would buy tickets for whoever wanted them, and then they would be in the white section, of course. And so then these people would go and they

would wait until just before the lights went down and then go take their seats. And so when the lights came up at intermission, there were black people in the white section. And so the ushers would come down and they would say, "You can't be sitting here." They'd say, "We have tickets to sit there." And the people all around there would, "We don't mind, just leave them alone" [laughs].

[08:49]

And another one was we would, I would go with some of my black colleagues to the public library, the Atlanta Public Library, which had a main office which didn't allow black people to be members. They had a branch office out in a black neighborhood. But the black office, the branch in the black neighborhood had no card catalog for the whole system, so there was no way of knowing what was elsewhere if you wanted something through library loan. And so I would take colleagues down and—and in particular a professor of music who wanted to take out recordings, and he would pick out the recordings that he wanted to check out, and I would check them out on my card. But we would always wait until he was told to leave, because this was embarrassing to the staff. They really, you know, wanted to serve everybody, but this was the law. So the students decided that one of the projects they should undertake would be to desegregate the Atlanta public library system. And so they went to the Urban League. The Urban League was a—or *is* a highly integrated organization. It was one of the few organizations in Atlanta that was pretty much half and half, black and white. The Unitarian church was another, but there were very few. And the Urban League tried to negotiate with the library to desegregate, and the library said no, they were not going to desegregate, they'd close before they would desegregate. This was the thing they were often said by public school officials. "We'll close up before we'll desegregate." And so the students went to the NAACP legal defense fund

and asked if they would bring a lawsuit, and they said they would, to get some respectable black person to apply for a card and be rejected, and that person would be the plaintiff. And so they asked this French professor at Macalest—at Spelman. She was Professor Jackson to me, but she was from a prominent Atlanta family, had studied at the Sorbonne, and had a PhD, and so she said yes, she would be the plaintiff. Well, they needed a witness, and so my wife offered to be the witness for her being rejected. And so the two of them went down to the Atlanta Public Library one day, and she applied for a card. And the young girl at the desk said, "I'm sorry. I can't offer you a card." And she said, "Well, in that case we'll have to bring a lawsuit against you." And so the girl at the desk went back, talked to the Atlanta supervisor, and she came back and she said, "Do you have some identification?" And so Professor Jackson showed a passport, and she became the first black member of the Atlanta Public Library system. So it had been desegregated. They were not going to fight it in court. They were sure to lose. And the library staff didn't want to fight it. I mean, the library director was a political person, so he was trying to not offend the sources that be and the city government, but the library staff wanted to serve everybody, and so that was a very peaceful, smooth transition. A lot of the others were not. The students began sitting in at lunch counters, and that was not amicable, and so I participated in some of the marches around the big department store where there were a lot of black customers, and they did not sit at the lunch counter. And that eventually got desegregated, I think, but not while I was there. And I left in 1960.

[13:03]

KB: Wow. That's so interesting. So you left in 1960.

HW: Um-hm.

KB: What did you do after that?

HW: Well, I went back to graduate school, this time not to Duke but to Harvard. I have an interesting story about that, too. It doesn't have anything to do with Macalester, but... I thought that I could get into any place I wanted to. I had a good record at Emory, and a good record at Duke, and had gotten a fellowship from that first year. So I only applied to Harvard, and I was turned down. So I wrote back to my thesis supervisor at Duke and said, "You'll have to write a letter of recommendation to Columbia, I was turned down by Harvard." He said, "You were turned down by Harvard?" I said, "Yes." Well, he wrote this letter to Harvard saying, "If you don't accept West, we might as well never send you another student." [laughter] And so the chair of the Harvard Philosophy Department wrote me and said, "We're reconsidering your application." And so I was admitted. When I got to Harvard, I went to interviews myself in the department, and the department secretary said, "Oh, you're West." She said, "When your application came in it had all these E's from Duke." Duke gave E's for excellence instead of E's for failure as Harvard did. She said, "I didn't even pass it on to the admissions committee."

[laughter] So I tell you, departmental coordinators can have a lot of power.

[14:45]

KB: Wow. So, moving on to your time at Macalester, how did you come to find out about the position at Macalester and what was the hiring process for you?

HW: Well, I finished my degree at Harvard, and I was very fortunate, after—I finished all the coursework and passed all the language exams and the prelims in one year, because I had a family and I had to get—I had a one-year fellowship. And so all I had to do was write a dissertation, and I had a friend at MIT who was—I'd gotten to know through Howard Zinn, and he said, "Why don't you apply to MIT to teach humanities there? We hire a lot of Harvard graduate students." And so I did apply, and he recommended me, and so I got a job full-time teaching at MIT while I was writing my doctoral dissertation. And that took three years and then I had a one more year appointment. I was never tenure track there. These were all temporary appointments, and so I was having to apply for jobs. And the way the system worked back then is not like the works now. It was the old boy network, as they called it. And the chair of a department who was hiring would write or call the major graduate schools and say, who—who's going to finish up this year, would you recommend. And so Thomas Hill, who was the chair of the department here, called or wrote Harvard department, and they recommended me. What happened was that the department didn't want its PhDs competing against one another, so they would sort of figure, "Well here's somebody who's really hot stuff, we'll recommend him to Berkeley, here's somebody who's really hot stuff, we'll recommend him to Princeton, here's somebody who's going to be a good teacher, we'll recommend him to Macalester" [laughs]. It really was that way, you know. They would say, "Here's somebody who's a scholar but he's not going to be worth a damn except teaching graduate students who—captive audience. We'll recommend him to one of those research universities." So I was recommended to Macalester, and to College of William & Mary, and the Southern Methodist University and to a number of places. And the other place that made me an offer that was anywhere comparable to Macalester was the State University of New York at Binghamton. Macalester was offering—when I came

out for an interview, Macalester offered me a salary which was about a thousand dollars more than Binghamton, and it was about three thousand dollars more than most of the schools. And so I actually got an offer while I was at the campus interview. Nowadays they interview three or four people, and so they don't make offers until they've seen people and had comparative judgments. But the department—who had a pecking order, now I was the first person they were interviewing, then there was another philosopher from Princeton they were going to interview next. I made a good impression, they liked me, and they said, "Let's make him an offer right now while he's on campus." And they did. And so I had a few days to think about it, so I called up Binghamton, and I said, "Will you invite me to the campus for an interview?" And they said, "No, but we'll match Macalester's offer with money." Well, that didn't appeal to me, and Binghamton wasn't a city that I wanted to live in compared to Minneapolis—St. Paul. So I took the job at Macalester.

[18:34]

KB: What about Macalester appealed to you so much that you chose the college as your place of employment?

HW: Well...first place, it was a small college in a big city with a research university nearby. And those are advantageous if you want to teach and not just do research. So I could go to the University of Minnesota and I could use its library and get to know its philosophers and go to its colloquia, and it was as if I were in a research university, without the pressure to be publishing the first year you're there. And Minneapolis—St. Paul is a wonderful city, it's a great city. And I had lived in New York and I've since lived in Chicago, and Minneapolis—St. Paul is an

accessible city, it's not terribly crowded, it doesn't have high crime rates, at least in this neighborhood. And another advantage is that this is a very nice neighborhood and the college offered me housing. So I lived in a college-owned house for less than the market rental value, while I could get settled before buying a house. And so they had all these things going. Not only that, but Macalester was—I won't say *nouveau riche*, it was newly rich, and the year before I came the Janet Wallace Fine Arts center had opened, Doty Hall had opened, Dupre Hall had opened, the stadium had opened. I mean, it was a college which was—it had lots of money. DeWitt Wallace was pouring money into it and it was able to offer salaries that were better than other salaries, and it was able to hire other people like me who had good credentials. And my entering class was I think the largest in the history of the college, and many of the people who came when I came are still here. They're not teaching, because they took MSFEO [laughs] and I didn't. But they're people like Chuck Green and Wayne Roberts and Wayne Wolsey and...oh, I could go on, there were about twenty-five people, of whom six or eight are still around. And so there were a lot of very interesting, exciting colleagues.

[20:52]

KB: Wow, that's wonderful. So, you obviously took the job, and you came to Macalester in 1965. So when you first arrived on campus, what was your impression of the situation you stepped into?

HW: Well, when I first came for an interview, I was impressed with the snow. It was supposed to be a heat wave, it was in the twenties, and the coeds were walking around in Bermuda shorts! And it was—I thought, my goodness. I had two young preschool children and I envisioned

having to put them into snowsuits in order to get them out the doors, but fifteen minutes before they came in you had to take the snowsuits off again, you know. But it was a very warm campus, it was...the chaplain, Max Adams, interviewed me. And he, instead of talking about the fact that I was maybe not as religious as I might seem to be from having gone to divinity school, he talked about the service that the students did, about how many Macalester students joined the Peace Corps and how many service projects there were in the Twin Cities. And there were a lot of—and still are a lot of Macalester students who do those things, and that impressed me. Also the students who are very bright and smart, you know. DeWitt Wallace was offering a Macalester free ride—I think it was a total scholarship, but at least it was a tuition-free scholarship—for any National Merit Scholar. And so Macalester was bringing in National Merit Scholars in comparison with the research universities and the big, and the Ivy League. And in one year, I think it was the fall of 1969, Macalester actually had the largest number of National Merit Scholars in the entering class of any college or university in the country. And so there were, you know, the range of students was not as—was wider than at MIT. At MIT, in order to get in, you had to really be brilliant in math, and those students could also write very well. But the best students at Macalester were as good as anywhere. And so it was quite a joy to teach them. And some of those students are still around. Martin Gunderson, my colleague, was a sophomore here when I came.

KB: Oh, really.

HW: And he went on to get a Ph.D. at Cornell and a law degree from the University of Minnesota, and has a publications record and has now just been promoted to full professor of

philosophy.

[23:38]

KB: That's great. What was your impression of the administration when you first stepped on campus?

HW: Well, the academic vice president was Lucius Garvin, and he was a philosopher and a very acute man, and very persuasive as a recruiter and, I think, a good judge of academic talent. The president, Harvey Rice, left something to be desired. He was actually pretty good at fundraising, and dealing with DeWitt Wallace and Wallace's agents, but he was something of an embarrassment to me. One time Barbara Ward, who was an internationally recognized scholar, came to give a convocation talk. And after she'd finished, instead of saying how wonderful it was to have Barbara Ward on campus, Harvey Rice got up and said, "She does not represent Macalester College, she represents herself and she does not—Macalester College does not officially share her values." She was talking about the wonderful things of international education and having students study abroad and having foreign students come here—the kind of values that we now recognize. But Harvey didn't share them [laughs].

[25:01]

KB: Wow. Sounds like quite the—different kind of guy from what's going on now. What was your impression of the faculty as a whole, when you first came?

HW: I was very impressed. I mean, there were some, there were some people who'd been here a

long time. In the Philosophy Department there were, there was—the first person who became a philosophy professor here, who *was* the department during the Second World War, was Hugo Thompson. At the—in 1946, Thomas Hill was hired. And in fact, the first time I ever noticed the name Macalester College was when I was in the Harvard library, and I was reading a book, and I thought, "This is a good book, who wrote it?" And then I saw the name Thomas Hill, Macalester College. And I thought "Macalester College? Never heard of it. Where is that?" [laughter]. And David White was the junior person in the department. He'd been here only seventeen years when I came. And they were all three great teachers and great scholars, and this was not just true in philosophy, it was true in other departments as well. And so there were people who had been hired recently who were still around, people like Emil Slowinski, but some of the people who had been here for years and years were of the caliber of these philosophers.

[26:30]

KB: Would you describe them as like an old guard, for example?

HW: I wouldn't call them an old guard, I would call them elder statesmen [laughter]. They were—they had a lot of wisdom of the institutional memory, and they were progressive, they were attracted to Macalester because of its internationalism. Yahya Armajani, who was a historian, has a funny story about how he was hired. He was invited to give a talk at chapel, and on the way to take him to the train, the president of the college, who was—who was the president back before Rice? [laughter]

KB: Charles Turck?

HW: Who?

KB: Turck? President Turck?

HW: No...the one who raised the United States flag on the flagpole?

KB: Yeah, that was Turck. Charles Turck?

HW: Okay. Charlie Turck. Turck, right. T-u-r-k-k or something like that, yeah. Charlie Turck was driving him back to the train station, and said, "How would you like to come teach at Macalester in the History Department?" And so, Armajani thought about it, and accepted the offer, and he came to campus and he went to the History Department to introduce himself. And the chairman of the History Department didn't know who he was! And so Armajani went back to his wife and said, "I don't think we're going to like it here, it was a very cold reception." Well it turns out that Charlie Turck sometimes ran the college like a high school principal, and he had hired Armajani without telling the History Department that he'd hired him. [laughter] But he was a great historian of the Middle East, and wrote a book on Persia. Which, we need people like that who understand that culture today.

[28:36]

KB: Um-hm. How would you describe the relationship between students, faculty, and the administration at that time?

HW: Well...the parietal rules were very much more protective of students. So there were housemothers in the dormitories. And there were, I'm not sure what all the rules were, but they broke down in the late '60s shortly after I got here. And I think females could have men in their rooms, but they had to keep the door open, it was something like that, and so they would close the door almost closed and put a towel over it. [laughter] That's a sign I've got a girl in here. But I think the faculty-student relations were very much the way they are now. They were cordial, students were willing to ask for advice, which has not been true in big universities where I've taught. And so you got to know your students. You call them by first name. Funny episode about that is that in my first year here they introduced this course called "Man and his World"—very sexist term. But this was required of all first year students. And they divided the students alphabetically. And so one of my colleagues, George Bowen, got the J's, and of the twenty-eight students, twenty-six had the last name of Johnson.

KB: Oh my.

HW: [laughs] And he had been accustomed to calling students very formally "Ms. So-and-so," "Mr. So-and-so." Well, he had to learn their first names [laughs]. And he couldn't refer to Mr. Johnson when there were twelve others.

[30:33]

KB: Wow, that's funny. How would you describe the overall campus culture when you stepped on campus?

HW: I think it was, it was—it was more radical than I expected. The Vietnam War was going on, and the assistant chaplain and I organized a committee called the Committee for Peace in Vietnam, and it had a lot of student interest. And so when there was an anti-war rally in Minneapolis, lots of Macalester students would go there. And the faculty were also involved in that. There was a vigil on Grand Avenue every Wednesday at noon in which probably twenty faculty would line the street. It was a silent vigil. It didn't even have signs, it was just, "Why are these people out there?" And word got around: "They're protesting the war."

[31:32]

KB: I understand you got involved in various anti-war activities at that time. Like, I think I read something in my archival work about you teaching a retreat for example? Can you tell me anything else about other anti-Vietnam activities you were involved in?

HW: Well the primary thing was just trying to get students to become aware of how awful the war was, but because of the draft they were aware of it anyway. It's not like the war in Iraq where students think, "Well, it doesn't involve me very much."

KB: Right.

HW: And so students were coming and asking your advice, you know, "Can I become a conscientious objector when I just object to this war, not to all wars?" And, "Should I shoot myself in the foot to keep from getting drafted?" Or, "Should I pretend that I'm gay and develop

gay speech?" And they were begging for advice on how to stay out of Vietnam.

KB: So many students were being drafted at that time?

HW: They were, yeah.

KB: Wow.

HW: And that contributed to grade inflation, because if a student was flunked out, and it was a male, you'd get drafted! And so instead of giving failures you gave C-minuses. And I think that was a big contributor to the grade inflation from the C being an average grade to C being a failing grade.

[33:09]

KB: So back to when you first came to the college. What was your impression of the Philosophy Department? We talked a little bit about this but, for example, how big was the department?

HW: Well, there were just the four of us. It had—Hugo Thompson had been a department of one, and Thomas Hill, a second person, and David White, a third person, and I was the fourth. No one had ever resigned. [laughter] And we were very congenial and all of us were scholars writing books. So it was really a great department, and it was very popular with the best students on the campus. There weren't very many majors, you know. The Martin Gunderson who

majored in philosophy was rare. There would maybe be three or four each year who majored in philosophy, and maybe two of those would be planning to go on to graduate school. Now we typically have fifteen or so, and two of them are planning to go on to graduate school. So it's become a much more popular major for non-professional philosophers. We had—I was hired to teach logic and philosophy of science, even though I'd written my doctoral dissertation in ethics. But Thomas Hill was an ethics specialist. He'd written a book on...I think it was called—well, he'd written two books. One was an ethics textbook and one was a survey of twentieth-century ethics. I think it was called *Contemporary Ethical Theories*, I think was the name of it. But he also was a specialist in theory of knowledge, and he'd written a book on contemporary theories of knowledge. So he taught the ethics and an advanced course in theory of knowledge. And nobody had as recent study of logic and philosophy of science as I had, so I taught those courses. And I also taught introductory courses and always have and enjoy them very much.

[35:21]

KB: So yeah, I was going to ask you about the curriculum in the Philosophy Department. Was it dramatically different back in those days?

HW: It's changed occasionally but it hasn't been dramatically different. We've always had a logic course, an ethics course, a history of philosophy sequence, and we've had introductory courses. Which, when I got here, one was called "Great Thinkers," and we changed it to "Problems of Philosophy," but it's existed now for forty years under that title. And we wanted to teach the political philosophy course, but Ted Mitau was a very popular teacher here and he taught political philosophy. After he retired I took the course, but then when Frank Adler—he

wanted it back, so it's... [laughter] So we've had a good time with that.

KB: So kind of a push and pull between the departments for that one?

HW: I think there was—I don't know how much interdisciplinary teaching there is right now but there was a great deal of it when I came. In the first place, there was a January term, and a lot of students were off-campus so the classes were smaller, so it was easy for two members of the faculty to offer a course together. And have enough students in it that the faculty-student ratio wasn't ridiculous. So if you had, you know, six students in a course, that was a one to three ratio. [laughter] But it wasn't as bad as if you had only three students in a course you were teaching by yourself, so. There was one January when four of us—a historian named Ernest Sandeen, who has since died, Truman Schwartz in chemistry, and Harley Henry, who was in the English Department and has retired, and I, taught a course which was on—concentrating on the eighteenth century. Looking at it from the perspectives of English, history, science, and philosophy. And we had eight students. [laughter] That was really what you would do as a tutorial today. And Peter Weisensel and I in the '70s began teaching a course, and since there were kind of rules by that time that you had to justify why two people teach a course instead of only one, we said, "Well, I'll teach a course in the history and philosophy of socialism, and you teach a course in the history and philosophy of socialism, and we'll make the students take both courses." And so we have, in alternate years, for these thirty-plus years, been offering that course, and the students—we have a combined syllabus, and we always teach it in the last two hours of Monday/Wednesday/Friday. And I think we would get much larger enrollments if the students could take it as just one course, but even with the two-course requirement, we get an

adequate size class, you know, fifteen to twenty.

[38:53]

KB: I was going to ask you about that course, because that is kind of one of your trademarks as a professor here, it's been going on for over three decades. How did you and Peter Weisensel get the idea for the course, and how did you create it?

HW: Well, I was interested in socialism as a philosophy. You know, I had mixed feelings about Marx and Marxism, but by that time I was kind of left of liberal in the political spectrum, and wanted to learn more about socialism. And Peter is a historian of Russia and so he knew a lot about Russian socialism, but he wanted to learn a lot about non-Bolshevik socialism. A lot of courses are courses where the instructor wants to learn, not just teach [laughs]. And so, we got together and said, "Let's offer something in January." And Peter said, "Well"—or maybe I said—"Well, why don't we not offer it in January? Why don't we do it as a regular course, get it into the catalog, and then we'll have more serious students who are not just taking it for pass/fail but taking it for a letter grade. And we'll—it'll be one of our regular offerings and so we can devote more time to preparing classes and learning about it." And so we did. When we first started teaching it the students were much more strongly pro or con. Had a couple of students who dropped out of Macalester to go work for the party, and that meant the Socialist Workers Party. And then there were other students who were taking it because they were ardent capitalists and wanted to defend capitalism. Now, the students are much more academic. They just want to learn about it because they figure it's something they ought to know about. But we still get these degrees of interest. The last time we taught it, last fall, we had a student whose

mother had known Eugene Debs, and we had a student who was related to socialists. And so, you know, we get three or four students who have a family background, and then you get the student who's in Russian studies, and you get the philosophy student who wants to take another course from me [laughter].

[41:35]

KB: Has the course changed or evolved much over the years?

HW: I don't think it has. I think it's—we go through different books because we're never quite satisfied. We've always taught the pre-Marxist utopian socialist texts. And we've always taught a big chunk of Marx and Engels in the middle. And we've always taught the post-Marxist European socialists who were not Bolsheviks, and then after the Russian Revolution who were Bolsheviks. Beyond that, though, we've never quite gotten satisfied with what to do about more recent work of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And so we will—and I think Peter's added more labor history to it. At the beginning it was mostly just history and theory of socialism, but Peter has decided that we really need to know more about workers' conditions. We always read the Engels history of the condition of the working class in England in 1844, which told about the awful conditions of the new factory systems in [unclear] in textiles, which was that out of which Engels' and Marx's radicalism grew. But Peter's introduced some autobiographies of workers. There's a collection called *The German Worker*, which is autobiographies of workers, some of whom were socialist and some of whom were not socialist, but it gives a good view of what working conditions were for a worker. These are not quite typical workers because these are workers who could read and write, and, you know, most workers couldn't read and write. But

these are workers who are real workers, they're not intellectuals, they're not Engels talking about the workers, they're workers talking about themselves. And you get the sense of how exploited they were, and how insecure they were, and how poor they were, and what a struggle it was. And is. I mean, you could write the same stories by most of the world and immigrants in this country.

[44:02]

KB: Um-hm. Definitely. No, that's great. And speaking of your academic interests, so for the bulk of your career here you've been an ethicist, correct? Or an ethics specialist.

HW: I think you could say that.

KB: Yeah, as your specialty in the department.

HW: I took on the history of philosophy fairly recently, and I've been teaching that and enjoying it very much. Jerry Reedy and I, for I guess ten or more years, jointly taught ancient and medieval philosophy. And we were able to justify that because we cross-listed it in classics and philosophy, and he knew Greek and Latin very well, and I knew—had contemporary perspectives on the ancient philosophers that he didn't have in the same way. Turns out that we disagreed about everything philosophical. He's still in the middle ages, you know, he would fit right in with St. Thomas Aquinas. And I have rejected all of that, and so we had a lot of good discussions in class in which there was not only dispute between students and students, but between Jerry and me. One story about that is that we were arguing about the arguments for the

existence of God. And Jerry was defending St. Thomas, who has five ways of proving that God exists, and I was debunking all five ways. Jerry was defending four of them. And one of the students in the class was involved in our student philosophy club, and he came to me and he said, "Would you debate Professor Reedy on the existence of God for the philosophy club?" And I said, "Sure!" And he went to Jerry Reedy and he said, "Would you debate Professor West on the existence of God for the philosophy club?" And Reedy said, "No, but I'll get somebody who will" [laughter].

[46:08]

And so he got the Aquinas Professor of Philosophy at St. Thomas to agree to come and debate me. And the philosophy club usually had about twenty people who would show up to meetings, but that night there were ninety; we had it on Carnegie 06 and filled it up. But in the audience was a Bethel Seminary student, who was the advisor to the Macalester Christian Fellowship. And he came up afterwards, and he said, "I don't think you had a worthy opponent." [laughs] Because Professor Sullivan from St. Thomas was talking about science, and you know, there was scientific evidence that there was an intelligent designer. But he wasn't really passionate about it. And so this man asked me if I would debate David Clark, which was one of his professors at Bethel Seminary. And I said yes. And so we scheduled it here at Macalester. And it was in what—the old Cochran Lounge, which used to be a big hall in what was the building before this new student center came. And there were three hundred chairs set up, and I thought, "That's silly." Well, it filled all three hundred chairs, and they had about a thirty people standing room as well. So we debated, and it was very well-organized debate, so that they didn't allow the audience to ask questions orally. They had to write down their questions and pass them in. And the advisor who'd organized it would pick out the ones that were appropriate, and one—you

know, alternate questions who were hostile to me or hostile to David Clark. Well David Clark thought I had home field advantage, because the students was kind of cheering me when I would say something. And they weren't booing him, but they weren't—the cheers were much more muffled. And so David Clark invited me to debate him again at the Community Church of Eden Prairie, which is a Baptist church, evangelical Baptist church out there. And so I agreed. And we met with the—I think he's called the extension minister, there were about six ministers. This is the minister to kind of organize external things. And so he arranged how it was going to work. And it was a February, and I was driving out there, and it was sleeting, and I was thinking, this is—there's not going to be good, much turnout for this. Church holds three thousand people. When I got there, thirty minutes ahead of time, about the first fourth of the church was filled up by people who wanted to get close enough to hear well. By the time we went onstage they had filled up the choir behind us. Every seat was taken, and there were people standing in the hallway outside. They figured they had about three thousand, three hundred people, the most that had ever been in that church. [laughs] But it was very interesting, you know, afterwards—*he* had a home field advantage. There were about a hundred people surrounding him in the social hall congratulating him. And there were about ten people surrounding me arguing with me [laughs]. But I enjoyed those. I don't think anyone's minds were altered by the debates, but they were high-level intellectual debates, and they were very good.

KB: That's wonderful, wow. Sounds very contentious and interesting.

HW: I think we got off of this on team teaching and teaching—

[50:09]

KB: Right, we were talking about your academic interests. And speaking of your academic interests, you undoubtedly have an academic interest in John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism. You've written two books on the subject, and edited a third volume.

HW: Within the last four years.

KB: Wow. And I also read your retirement notice, you're still writing on the topic.

HW: Yes.

KB: I was wondering, how did you first become interested in Mill's utilitarianism?

HW: Okay. My doctoral dissertation at Harvard was on utilitarianism. There's a dispute in utilitarianism that was very hot at the time, in the '60s, between whether you evaluate each individual act, which also was called situation ethics, by the consequences of that individual act, or whether you try to set up a moral code, which is kind of like a legal code. And you follow the moral code, but you criticize the moral code by whether these items have the best consequences. And utilitarians have done the same thing with the law; they ask is this law, does this law have good consequences? Is there an alternative law which would have better consequences? Or should there be no law? And Jeremy Bentham, who was the real founder of the utilitarian tradition, was primarily a legal scholar and trying to work out that for the British legal system. Now when—in his day there were lots of lots of penalties that were capital punishment. And so

he thought that's absurd. And there were lots of things that were criminalized that he thought shouldn't be criminalized, such as adultery. And he thought, you know, adultery's bad, but in order to enforce it you're going to have to violate people's privacy to the point that it's not worth it, and you're not going to catch many of the people anyway, and so in order to really prevent adultery you're going to have to make the crime something like being stoned to death. And [laughs] that's worse than adultery. So he had evaluated the legal system in that way, and so the rule utilitarians wanted to say, let's evaluate moral codes that way. There are mores in existence, and we should ask of these, do these have good consequences or bad consequences? And so there's the dispute between the rule utilitarians and the act utilitarians, and I wrote my doctoral dissertation on that. And what I was trying to do in it was try to reconcile them by saying, well, if an act is in violation of a useful rule, then it does that much towards undermining the rule. And then if you've got a particular collective act, there's a strike going on, and you then say, "Well, if I go out on strike I'm contributing that much towards it. If I don't go out on strike I'm contributing that much towards it not working." And so I was trying to develop a notion of contributory consequences. Voting is an example of that, you know, just in the calculation of the probability that your vote is going to change an election on any large scale is not infinitesimal, but it's very, very low. And so unless you have some sense that I'm contributing to something, my vote isn't going to be decisive. It's not going to be the—you can't say it's going to change something, as a necessary and sufficient condition.

[53:55]

Well I tried to develop such a theory, but I came to the conclusion after I'd passed my exams that it didn't work [laughs]. So I wasn't going to try to publish my dissertation, and I thought I would like to find an individual philosopher to make a study of. And I picked Mill because he

was a utilitarian, and also he was not an academic. He was someone who had a day job. He worked for the British East India Company. And he was writing for a general public, rather than writing for students or the professors. And he also wrote across the whole range of philosophy. He wrote in logic, in philosophy of science, in epistemology, metaphysics, theory of language, theory of mind, ethics, political philosophy, economics, aesthetics, everything. And so I thought, well, if I study him, I'll study everything. And so in 1967, which was two years after I came to Macalester, I began reading the works of John Stuart Mill. And I knew that publishing on Mill would take a long time. I had written the Encyclopaedia Britannica article on utilitarianism, the whole thing, so I had some publications behind me, but I embarked on this work on Mill's ethics, which only saw the light of publication as a book in 2004. So '67 to 2004—that's a long gestation period, like an elephant [laughs]. But I've been making some contributions to journal articles in the meantime, and become acquainted with just about all the utilitarians in the English-speaking world. There's a conference, there's an organization called the International Society for Utilitarian Studies that has a conference every three years. And so I go to those, and there are hundreds of utilitarians from all over the world. And some people don't know there's so many utilitarians, but there are [laughs].

[56:19]

KB: Wow, that's great. So moving away from your academic interests and more towards, kind of, campus culture, as your career progressed. Right now I'd like to talk a little bit about the '60s and '70s. I read while I was doing research on you that you were one of three, along with Patricia Kane and Carl Sandberg, faculty members to sit in on the 77 Mac closed negotiations? Is that true?

HW: You know I'd read that in your questions, and I remember Patricia Kane, and I remember Earl Bowman, who was the football coach, or maybe he was in the development office. I don't remember Carl Sandberg.

KB: Oh, really? Huh, well maybe that's inaccurate, yeah!

HW: No, maybe I just don't remember him [laughs]. I mean, it could very well be. I just remember two faculty members and a staff person. But he could have been there. Yes, what happened was that the EEO program did—which I can talk about—but I'll go back to that. It had exploded in its expense. And so in 1970, when Arthur Flemming was fired, the EEO program was a big chunk of the budget. And the college was having to tighten belts. And the administration was afraid to touch the EEO program. Because they figured they would have a protest on their hands. Well, finally they did touch it. And so I think it was almost entirely black students, though it may have been a Puerto Rican contingent as well, occupied the business building over there, back of what's now the administration building. In particular the admissions office and the financial aid office. And so, the president, James Robinson, was trying to negotiate with them to get them out of the building, so that operations could return to normal and the admissions office could do their recruiting and the business office could do their work. And so the students agreed that they would meet with them, but they wanted to have some faculty and staff representation as impartial observers. We were not participating in the negotiations. They hired a black negotiator, who's a professional negotiator, Earl somebody, Earl Craig, Earl, somebody like that, who was trying to meet with each group and figure out what are your

demands, meet with the other group, figure out what are your demands. And then he would try to get the demands in sync with each other. And the—Patricia Kane and I, and Carl Sandberg if he was there, and Earl Bowman if he was there, we just sat and observed, talked to each other during breaks [laughs]. But it was an honor to be one of the people who was asked to do that.

[1:00:00] [Note: tape change]

KB: And before we took a break we were talking about the EEO program, and the cuts, and I was wondering if you could give me a little background on your perspective on what was going on at the school, kind of culturally and financially, that led to tension over that issue.

HW: Okay. Well when I came, the admissions office was attempting to recruit black students. Primarily black students. But to diversify the campus with American minorities. And it was not being very successful. And Fred Kramer, who was then the dean of students, drew up a kind of proposal, and said let's have a program in which we try to raise some money, and devote some of our budget toward making the college more attractive to minority students. Hire a black recruiter in the admissions office, have a black remedial English teacher of writing, and try to bring in about, you know, twenty-five students who have a lot of financial aid, so that we can diversify the campus. And so Harley Henry and I, and some others, drew up this—took this proposal. And we wrote up the details of it for—as an academic and counseling program. And so we were going to have a writing, remedial writing person, and a remedial math person. And a psychological counselor, you know, additional advisor to the program. And so we took it to the faculty, and I came up with the name EEO, for Expanding Educational Opportunities, and wrote a preamble about how Macalester graduates were going to have to live in a diverse world, an

interracially diverse world, an economically diverse world. And it'd be part of their education, if they could be educated with students from diverse backgrounds. And so the faculty approved this. Now, what had happened between when we were working this up was that the president of Oregon University showed an interest in becoming president of Macalester. And so Harvey Rice, who was then president of Macalester, was bought out of his presidency by the idea that he'd been here for ten years, it was time for him to retire, and they would give him a very nice parachute to live on for a while [laughs]. And so he resigned, and they already had in place Arthur Flemming, who was going to move from the University of Oregon to Macalester. And this looked like a big deal, you know, big university professor who had been in the Eisenhower cabinet, Secretary of Health, Education, Welfare, had come to Macalester to put Macalester on the map. The board was all happy with that, and the—DeWitt Wallace's agent was the one who was negotiating this, to get Rice out and Flemming in. Well, Arthur Flemming turned out to be fiscally irresponsible. His heart was I guess in the right place; he certainly wanted to carry out radical social programs to benefit poor and racially minority people. And he told us on the faculty—I was on the advisory council then, and meeting with him at breakfast every morning—he told us we just get the program going, it's going to be the best program in the country, and money will pour in from the federal government and from the foundations.

[1:04:27]

Well, when it was announced what they were going to do, the students wanted more than the program—students already on campus who were black, Puerto Rican, Mexican, wanted more than the program offered. Each one wanted a fraternity, sorority house. They said, you know, we want a place where we can retreat to and just be with ourselves. And we each want an advisor who can run the social programs for these houses. And we each want an academic

advisor to work with our minority, not one who works with all minorities. Well you can see it's starting to get out of hand; what we had proposed as a simple program for twenty-five students is now a program for a hundred students, and it's quadrupled. And then Arthur Flemming brought in somebody from the University of Oregon to direct it, and he said I have to have an assistant, I have to have a financial person, a business person, and I have to have—each of us has to have a secretary. And made it just—was bureaucratic explosion. So to pay for this, Arthur Flemming borrowed a million dollars from the restricted endowment that DeWitt Wallace had given the college to pay for it. Without getting permission. And then the next year, he planned to borrow another million dollars from the restricted endowment. Well at that point, DeWitt Wallace said, "I gave this money to the restricted endowment so that the college that my father was president of in hard times would never have hard times again, and here you're taking this away without getting permission to do it." And furthermore, Flemming was not bringing in any money from the federal government, he was not bringing any foundation money to speak of, and so the college was going deeply in the red. And not only that, but Wallace said, "You're so irresponsible I'm not going to give you any more new money. I'll pay for the students who are here on National Merit scholarships, I'll pay for the other programs I've already funded, but you're not going to get this thirty percent of the budget that I've been giving you annually." Well, if you can imagine taking thirty percent of the budget away, at the same time that you've built this bureaucracy which you couldn't pay for beforehand, then the college was in bad shape. And so in the year 1970—I don't, I think it was 1970-71, but it may have been 1971-72—something like sixty non-teaching positions were eliminated from the college, and something like thirty teaching positions were eliminated from the college. And they didn't want to challenge tenure, so this means that everybody who didn't have tenure was told, start looking for

a job somewhere else. And something like fifteen of them got jobs elsewhere, and something like fifteen of them, or I think it was fourteen of them, were able to stay because people in their departments were bailing out, seeing the way the college was going. In English, Susan Toth and Bob Warde shared a position for a year, because only one person left the English Department, and then a couple of years later somebody else left the English Department so they were able to get full time positions again. But that gives you an idea of the kind of trauma of this. And so that was the background of—Robinson, during one summer, and his financial officer, McLarnan, closed down all but one of the fraternity/sorority houses. Said, “We’re just going to have a cultural house, not four.” Well that really hit the students’ social life. And he also fired some of the advisors, social advisors for the different programs, and said you’ve got to double up, and the one who does Puerto Rico’s also got to do Mexico. And so the program was being slashed to about one third of something like what it had been. And so the students saw this as a challenge to their program, why they’d come to Macalester.

[1:09:47]

KB: For about how many years would you say EEO was at its peak?

HW: Well I think it—it got off the ground with ’69, I think, with the first class of recruits. And then within two years, the college was in trouble.

KB: Wow.

HW: And so it was kind of under attack. In the ’70—in I think the ’71-72 year, at a faculty

meeting there was a black student demonstration in which they came and were threatening anybody who wanted to leave the meeting. And they said, “You’re going to stay here until you give an endorsement to the existing EEO program.” I was on leave then, fortunately. So I didn’t have to witness that. But I was back on campus at the time of the occupation of the business office.

[1:11:00]

KB: Wow. So obviously students of color were very outraged about the EEO program, or at least students of color involved in the program—

HW: Well, let me put it this way. Some of the students of color thought the EEO program was not what Harley Henry and I had envisioned it to be, which was to recruit qualified students. And so some of the students of color thought, you’re not getting qualified students, you’re getting people off the streets of Chicago who didn’t want to come to college, but offered them a free ride and so here they are. And they’re not really interested in what we’re interested in. And it’s a stigma on us that you have these people who are not well-qualified. I think that was really the worst characteristic of the program, was that it was an invitation to failure to those who weren’t qualified. And it set up a kind of criticism of all people of color, because some of them were not. And so if you were in a class, and there was a black student in the class, you know, “Well, this is an EEO student who shouldn’t be here.” And some of the EEO students *should* be here. Melvin Carter, what’s his name—we have a congressman in Saint Paul who was part of the EEO program, we had a mayor of Minneapolis who was part of the EEO program, so there have been some very good successes out of that. Some good musicians who’ve gone on to fame.

But it, because they didn't apply standards of academic—of the quality of Macalester, it was a very uneven program. And that was a problem with it. And it also was just too big. When you have that many students getting support by that many support staff on a college of this size, it doesn't work.

[1:13:13]

KB: How would you describe the larger kind of faculty and student opinion of the program at that time?

HW: It was polarized. And so there were conservatives on the faculty who were—thought it was the worst thing that ever happened to the college. And there were radicals on the faculty who thought, “Well, it's overblown but it was a good idea. And so let's support it.” And it tended to make the faculty divide into one side or the other. And a lot of faculty lost respect for each other for that reason.

[1:13:51]

KB: Wow. So speaking of negotiations, I understand for a long time that you were the chairman of the Faculty Advisory Council.

HW: Well not for a long time, but I served two terms.

KB: Two terms. Were you on the council for a while, not as president?

HW: Well, usually it was a two-year appointment, and I would be on it, and then the second year be president.

KB: Ah, interesting. What was the role of the FAC?

HW: We don't really have anything quite like it now. Because the curriculum committee then worked with the curriculum. And the personnel committee worked with the personnel decisions. Personnel decisions were—they would interview candidates for positions here, and they would look over the proposals of the provost, who was then called executive vice president, for promotions and for salary increases and for tenure. So they were localized in personnel decision. And the curriculum committee was localized in curriculum decisions. The faculty advisory council didn't have any particular thing. They met with the academic vice president, now provost, once a week, and the provost would just ask them for advice about what do you think about this, what do you think about that. And so it really was an advisory group, and it functioned in that way. And I think it worked pretty well. You know, our advice wasn't always taken, but at least it was listened to.

[1:15:41]

KB: What issues stand out to you the most, in terms of things that you gave advice on, on the committee?

HW: One that stands out most was whether we should have a nursing program. This was in the—just after James Robinson retired, and he had come up with a proposal his last year. He'd

come up with a proposal for a nursing program. And it was voodoo economics. He was claiming that this would be a profitable expansion of the college. A nursing program would bring in tuition, and it wouldn't cost the college any more than our current operations. And that's just fraudulent. And so, that was one of the most contentious issues.

[1:16:43]

KB: Interesting. And then another question I have, just to completely change subjects—you were known on campus as an avid tennis player. How did you come to be known as such a lover of tennis?

HW: Well I had played tennis in high school. I was on my high school tennis team, though we never won a match [laughs]. But I did play. And so when I came to Macalester and we had indoor courts, or an indoor court at least, when I first came. And then the field house was remodeled and we had five indoor courts, that was a winter sport. And there was a—there were, you know, three or four people that I played with regularly, we had a kind of regular foursome. And we played three times a week, and then sometimes I would play with somebody else the other two times a week. For a while I was playing five times a week. And I'm not a terribly good player, but I like to play, and I'm an enthusiastic player, and I have a serve that some people have trouble returning. I don't move around the court very well, that's my problem [laughs]. Are you a tennis player?

KB: No, I'm not.

HW: What's your sport?

KB: I guess yoga, if that's a sport! But no, I'm not a particularly athletic person.

HW: Yoga's a great sport. My wife does yoga and Joy Laine, my colleague, teaches yoga. And she's a wonderful teacher.

[1:18:16]

KB: She's great at it. When and how did you receive tenure, and how has the tenure process changed in your time here?

HW: Oh, it changed a lot. That's one big difference. When I came, I had seven years teaching experience, three at Spelman and four at MIT. And so the second year I was here, I asked the chairman about promotion to associate professor. And he said, well, he would take it up with Lou, who was the academic vice president. And he wrote me a letter and he said, "Well, you don't have enough publications for us to promote you to associate professor, but we're granting you tenure." [laughs] So from my third year on, I was a tenured professor. And now, hardly anyone gets tenure until their sixth year, and they go through a third-year review. And they're insecure for six years, until the decision is made. I was secure after just two years. And I think that was a good thing. You know, the alternative argument is when you continue somebody, to somebody that young, and they think they don't have to publish, then they may just wallow in their faculty-student relationships and their collegiality with their friends, and they won't really be scholarly. But I think if you recruit people who have scholarly ambitions, then they will.

And they will even produce better work because they don't have to get it out so quickly. I certainly think that's true of me. I mean, my book on John Stuart Mill is a far better book than it would have been ten years ago. And it's certainly a far better thesis, if I'd had to publish that when I first came. Anyway, that's changed remarkably. The recruitment process has also changed a lot. As I told you, I was recruited by the old boy network. And now, you have to advertise your position, and whatever your academic field has as a publication advertised positions. In philosophy, there's something called "Jobs for Philosophers." And it publishes all the job openings in the United States. You also have to go through procedures where, I mean—that allows everybody who knows about the job can apply to it. When I was on the job market, you know, there was a job at Northwestern and I inquired about that. And he said, "Well, your department didn't recommend you." And a job at Wisconsin, I said, "What about that?" And he said, "Well, your department didn't recommend you." I insisted with Northwestern people on—I talked them into giving me an interview. And they, a year after I came to Macalester, offered me a job at Northwestern, but I didn't want to leave Macalester after just one year. But now you know about all the jobs, and you can apply to fifty or a hundred or whatever you think goes anywhere near meeting your credentials. And so for my successor, I think the department got about three hundred applications. And so it's much different situation now.

[1:21:59]

KB: Wow. We already talked about the 1960s and 1970s and what was going on in that era, but I was wondering, as we head into the 1980s, and now we're almost done with the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what did you see evolve and change at Macalester during that period?

HW: Well, to go all the way back, Macalester in the '60s had a much smaller percentage of children of academics. Now, there are lots of children of professors. Professors know about Macalester, and they know it's a good college, and so they say to their children, "Well, why don't you consider Macalester?" Back then, most of the students who heard about Macalester heard about it from somebody who had come here. Or they got a scholarship here. And so there were a lot of first generation college students here in the late '60s. Now, there are very few. You know, most students have parents who went to college, at least some college. And it's kind of rare when you have a student who—parents dropped out of high school or only went to high school. So that's changed. I think another change that the college went through between the late '60s and the, say, '90s, was that—and I think this was probably a characteristic of the whole country after the Vietnam War subsided. College students became a little more vocationally oriented. And they began to think, "What is my degree going to get me? What can I do after I graduate?" Macalester was not that way as much as typical public universities, but I think in the '80s there was a kind of attitude under Reagan and so on that well, you better get a degree in economics, or you better study this new field called computer science or something like that, so you'll have a job when you get out. Now I think we've gotten back to the position, well, I just want an education. And I want to study what I want to study, if it's philosophy or anthropology, I don't have—I'm not going to think about that as pre-job. I'm going to think about that as self-development, and acquiring the ability to learn whatever I have to learn when I get out of college and into the job market.

[1:24:38]

KB: That's great. What activities and programs have you seen change in that time period?

HW: Well, let's see...

KB: Or even, for example, school policy, curriculum policy, things like that.

HW: Well one of the big changes was in the very late '60s, when the college had co-ed dormitories. And they weren't nearly as restrictive of the students' time and lifestyle. Now, I think most colleges are more like Macalester in that respect, so Macalester isn't the kind of pioneer it was then. The January term has made a big difference, I think. I liked the January term. It was innovative; you had to teach something that was not in the curriculum. And so you had to make up a course for that term. And so there was a lot of experimentation in teaching things that you wanted to find out something about, or interdisciplinary subjects and so on. The resistance to the January term was that people who had not been here a long time felt they needed some time to prepare spring classes. If you'd already taught your spring classes for ten years, you thought, I'll just review my notes and read the books again as I teach them. But young faculty have found that they really needed some time in there to think about what they were going to do in the spring term. And the college thought about the energy bills; if we didn't keep the college open for two, three weeks in January, we'd save a lot of money. There were these kinds of forces. There was also a lot of academic difference between the January term courses, one and another. And some were very rigorous, just as rigorous as regular term catalog courses. And others were kind of, let's go out in the community and have a good time. And so an example of one that I taught, I taught one called "Aesthetics and Arts in the Twin Cities." And my wife helped me teach it. And we took the kids on seventeen field trips; I mean, we

were off-campus more often than we were on-campus during those days. It wasn't academically rigorous. I mean, we had a textbook, and we read it, and students had to write a paper on that. But we weren't—we were more, it was more experiential than it was hitting the books. And there were some people that thought that's not respectable. And others thought that's great. So there's a lot of controversy about the January term. And I think, some rather unimaginative faculty people didn't want to have to cook up a course every January; they thought, I'd like to just teach math, or whatever [laughs]. Or if it was languages, they wanted to get credit for that core term, you know. You couldn't get credit for your major in January. And if you were doing intensive language, the faculty thought, we should be able to give our students credit for the sequence of courses. Well, that's one big change, is the—when I came there were only four colleges in the country who had a January term. And then it became very popular, and widely adopted by colleges that didn't like the quarter system, because they had to move two quarters into after Christmas. Or they didn't like the semester system, because they had to squeeze a semester before Christmas, or had leftover after Christmas. And so the four-one-four became a very popular calendar. But I think maybe it was more colleges going to the four-oh-four, like Macalester. We tend to be pioneers, and others follow us [laughs].

[1:28:45]

KB: How would you describe Macalester today?

HW: Well, it's wealthy again. It's got a beautiful campus, got great students, great faculty. A staff which is very supportive. I don't think it's...what do I want to say... I used to like interdisciplinary courses. But I don't like interdisciplinary majors. I think a student ought to get

a major in philosophy or history or English or anthropology or something which has a real discipline. And now there are a lot of interdisciplinary majors. And I had an interdisciplinary major as an undergraduate, and I wish I had majored in history or philosophy. Because you take three or four philosophy courses, three or four history courses, and you don't really acquire the courses that give you the methodological skills if you major in the subject. And so anyway, that's one of my idiosyncrasies [laughs].

[1:30:08]

KB: How has the political and cultural climate, in your opinion, on campus changed the most over the years?

HW: Well, I think it—this is a reflection of the general political and economic climate of the country. So during the Vietnam War, it was everybody was pro or con, Macalester mostly against the war. And the few people who were in favor of the war were looked down upon, and they were considered far right conservatives because they were in favor of the war. I think it's not so polarized today. I mean, there is a big Students for Democratic Society movement in the student body, but then there's a lot of just, "Oh well, we don't have to get drafted," attitude. Of course, I'm a little bit out of it, because I don't, you know, the young faculty that I know are people on my hall. And Erik Davis is trying to get together a faculty support group for students who are protesting the national, the Republican convention. And he wants there to be a body of faculty who, if students get arrested or get in trouble, will come to their assistance. Well that's a good—they know, that's a good thing, that's sort of like what we had in the Vietnam War protests. But I get the sort of general impression from students that they are involved in

environmental and social activism, but they're not nearly as disturbed about this war as they ought to be.

[1:32:12]

KB: Interesting. Another kind of reflective question—how has being at Macalester influenced you as a scholar and intellectual?

HW: Well, primarily by giving me the freedom to do what I wanted to do. To teach courses I wanted to teach, to postpone my publications until I was ready to publish them. They've supported me with attendance at professional meetings. And I've had some opportunities to take leaves of absence, with support from the college. And I've had opportunities to take leaves of absence to go and teach elsewhere, without any difficulty. And I've taught at the University of Minnesota one term, I taught at the University of Chicago for a year, I taught at University of North Carolina for a half year, and the college saw those as opportunities, not as drawbacks. And that was very nice. The library has pretty much allowed me to order whatever books I want to order for my discipline. And I was dragged into the computer age by being given a computer even if I didn't want one. So I had to learn to use it. And then I was given a new one, I had to learn to use that, and now I have still a new one, and I have to learn to use it. I didn't ask for those things, but they were good.

[1:33:42]

KB: That's great. How has being at Macalester influenced you as a teacher?

HW: Well, I've had to be a better teacher than I would have had to be elsewhere. And when I think back about my teaching at Spelman and at MIT, I could use those as opportunities to just—well, at Spelman, it wasn't so much...I had great classes, but the students couldn't read and they couldn't write. And so there was those great limitations. And I think I wasn't a very good teacher for those people. I led good class discussions, but I expected them to do work they couldn't do out of class, and I didn't adjust to that. And at MIT the students were brilliant students, but you never saw them again after you taught a class, and so you didn't have any kind of long term relations with students the way you do at Macalester. There were no philosophy majors, I was teaching a first year class for first year students who were going on to become engineers and mathematicians and physicists. And they liked philosophy but this was their one dose of it. So being in a small college environment, where you take your teaching seriously and your students take your teaching seriously is the best environment. At University of Minnesota when I taught there, I had a lecture hall of a hundred and ten students in one class, forty-five in another. And I kept advertising my office hours. And no one ever came. Evaluation at the end of the term, was the professor accessible, everyone gave me an A [laughs]. I was accessible! It's just they didn't take advantage of it. And here my door is open and students drop by. And sometimes I don't want them to drop by, but I like to have the door open. So if they drop by I take time out to talk to them, and then say I got to get back to work, you know, it's like that.

[1:35:57]

KB: What is your proudest teaching achievement here at Macalester?

HW: I don't know. Maybe Martin Gunderson [laughter]. He's the longest achievement.

KB: You taught Gunderson when he was...?

HW: I taught Gunderson.

KB: Wow, and now he's your colleague.

HW: And I don't think I was the one who persuaded him to become a philosopher. But there's a philosopher at Rice University named Mark Kulstad, who says he took his first philosophy course with me and he had no idea of majoring in philosophy until he took that course. And so he blames me, or congratulates me, on getting him into the profession. And so you know, things like that. It's hard to say there's some one achievement. It's spread over time.

[1:36:55]

KB: If you could give any advice to future students, faculty, and administration of the college, what would it be?

HW: Enjoy yourself. You got a great place to work and study. And appreciate it.

[1:37:15]

KB: And if you could change some things about Macalester, what would they be?

HW: Well, it'd be nice if you had enough office space, I could have stayed here in this office

[laughs]. But I'm happy to be over in Lampert building, I've got a little cubicle over there. No, I'm not—that's not serious. Well, I earlier talked about, I thought that students should have a disciplinary major instead of an interdisciplinary major, and I—that's one thing, I would try to get the curriculum back into, more for majors, not for courses, and not for programs where you can, you know, take two majors. But for majors I think it would be better if you had more disciplinary control over those. Students like these interdisciplinary majors. I did, when I was you know, when I was undergraduate, I thought, I don't have to major in history or philosophy or English, I can major in all three! Well actually I was just minoring in all three.

[1:38:34]

KB: Interesting. And then a final question to close: what memories stand out to you the most in all your time at Macalester?

HW: I can't answer that question, there are too many memories. If you've got forty-three years of memories, they don't stand out, except when you just think about them. But you know, I think when I was—the early year, the group of us who were relatively new faculty, and now we had young children, and we got together socially with our wives and families. And we had good times together. As the years have gone on, well, playing tennis, in the men's locker room, that's one of the good features that Brian [person off-camera] and I are missing right now... Well, it all becomes a blur [laughs].

KB: Great. Well thank you so much Dr. West. This was a great honor.

HW: Well thank you for being a good interviewer.

KB: Thank you—oh, my pleasure.

HW: And for having this project of oral history.

KB: Oh, thank you for participating in this project! We really value your contribution, thank you.

[End of Interview, 1:40:11]