Interview with Dr. David Jones

February 2009

AV: What was the date and place of birth?

DJ: I was born on October 20, 1963 in Omaha, Nebraska.

AV: What is your race?

DJ: African American.

AV: What is your ethnicity?

DJ: We all say African American pretty much as far back as we go.

AV: How many male and/or female siblings do you have?

DJ: I have an older sister who is 10 years older than me and one other older sister who is 8 years older, and then my brother is exactly 7 years older. We actually have the same birthday; we are 7 years apart.

AV: How many children do you have? A boy or a girl?

DJ: I have one girl.

AV: How old is she?

DJ: She is 8.

AV: Where did you attend school and what degrees do you have?

DJ: I went to the University of Iowa in Iowa City for my undergraduate degree in English education. Then I went to Nevada-Las Vegas, for my masters in English Composition.

AV: Is there anything else about your general background you think is important?

DJ: I am not sure. I do not think there is anything particularly.

AV: Describe your relationship with your parents and siblings when you were growing up.

DJ: My dad and mom got divorced when I was about maybe 2 or 3, and so I have primary relationship with my mom, very warm relationship. Part of my experience with her, and fortunately having older siblings, came in handy for just to have more people to take care of things. Very full household. We really enjoyed the time. My dad lived in New Orleans eventually for an extended time but we did see each other for most of the time in between and sent letters in between and stuff. The siblings, it was a lot of fun just having a big family I think.

AV: Tell me about the community and the neighborhood where you grew up.

DJ: I grew up in Omaha, Nebraska, North Omaha, which was a predominantly black community. I enjoyed it a lot actually. It was very much a community where you knew everybody and you could go pretty much anywhere at that time. It was a bit of poor. It seemed like urban unrest was really an issue at the time. I think things have changed somewhat since then, but it just felt like folks were again willing help each other and kids, you know, plenty of kids everywhere. It took me a while to even realize that this was considered inner city. I stayed at North Omaha the whole time I was growing up in Omaha. So, I really enjoyed living in Omaha. Just, at the time, it was not a very dense population. It is just like space of its own. You know, just a little population is almost like its own country and city at the same time. It seemed like that way with everything but I think it is a little more crowded now as things grow.

AV: Where you very connected to your community?

DJ: Yeah, I felt like it was very connected to the neighborhood, and all my siblings. I mean just because I think it is a tight community and just the fact that you have more of high achiever for my sister, who was a very high achiever in high school, got a reputation from just again. Very often we would walk to school. We all went to the same school. I taught high school in Las Vegas and then when I was going back for the summer, I used to teach in Omaha over the summer and I actually taught at least one school where I used to attend, which was very strange in a way, but it was much better run than when we went there. When I was there, it was kind of just a wild and wooly year. One teacher in particular was a study hall teacher. He was the gym teacher also, and you know, we used to get locked out of the cafeteria at least once a week, someone would lock the door. We would knock on the wall until somebody would get up and let us in. Anyway, I was reminded of this when I was working with him. Another place I taught was North High School, where I decided to go to school. It kind of had a Rep. as being a ghetto school, but you know, there were people that worked there that I knew from before. This is a complicated question. I think at the same time there was certainly stratification and in terms of just income, we were low income and very poor. My mom, you know, usually was working, for a while just doing _____ work, and then she got retrained. She entered this program that (They recently pulled this program in Milwaukee), I forget what it stands for, but they were retraining people to get better professions. She worked in that until the last part of her work career. She worked at Mutual of Omaha with a good salary, retirement, and all that. We decided that it did not really feel like a lack of things just because it seemed like there was a still enough resources, from my point of view as a kid, it did not seem like we were lacking. But this was largely due to her. But then again, being with both systems in place that were at least helpful back then. If you do have struggles with getting just enough to food your family, there are some programs that help with _____distribution and then even for education. I think that those pieces were really key for just kind of making it. So I think one of the things that I am interested in is just how does that change over time, are there still enough of those programs that have enough funding that they reach people who have _____ and even live in section housing. I do not know if you have heard of sectioning, but it is a housing program that helps to subsidize if you are subsidized ____ and make

_____. So all of those things I think were very helpful when growing up and I think without them, it would have been more of a challenge certainly. Definitely there were differences. I mean, I can remember just getting a car, around 9 or 10, and getting a car. I think may it was a '63 Pontiac _____, something like that, back then a great car. Like going to the boys' club; t hey used to have this activity called the pin scramble. Basically they took us out to the soccer field and just threw change in the grass. So we would be out there looking for change you know. Like, just spread some change and hope you find it.

AV: What values did you learn from your family, other people, as well as the institutions in the community?

JD: Well apparently I really like the set of values I got from my family. I feel like pretty much multigenerational and across different things from my family, just kind of appreciate things for one. Just to appreciate what you have and to be a kind person and also just to put some effort into things, keep your expectation moderate. I think that is really the combination of values that I think has been really good as we confront all situations. And I can see that when I meet other parts of my family too. We have family reunions. I really have a lot of respect for just the wisdom and that point of view that has been handed down to me. It is somewhat kind of old fashion but, you know just again, have respect for yourself, have respect for other people and expect to put some effort and do not expect necessarily to get more than what is fair to get. I mean, just appreciate what you have no matter what that is. I think that is far as the institutions, I do think that education in Omaha was very good. I feel like my public school education was very good, especially the elementary school where I think we had some teachers in elementary, that seemed like the teachers were part of the community, they understood the importance of just using education to get a little higher up the ladder, at least getting some literacy, because even the people that I know that are not necessarily upper class from my high school days, are still very literate, they have literacy skills even if they did not go beyond high school. So, there is still a sense of intelligence about them, even though it is not from higher education. I have a lot of respect for the fact that that was created in the school district through those years and I do not for sure if I would say the same now just because my only indication of this is my nephew and niece went to Northwest, which is a subsidiary of the same high school that I went to. My sisters and brother went to Central, which is a kind of an old high school in Omaha. Ahman Greene went there, I do not

know if you know anything about football. It is kind of the old, established high school and the Northwest is kind of, somewhat, _____ four in the white neighborhoods, but became more _____ at this time. But, the graduation rate, I think it was like 40% students did not graduate from Northwest, and that is pretty typical in an urban school right now but it is very shocking, I mean just that number as such a high number for any school, and then it just seemed like it was so not that way. I remember the stigma that was attached to those people who were maybe junior taking a sophomore level class. It was, "Oh yeah, that person flunked and that is why they are here". So again, I don't know what the history of that is to answer the question or just is my conception in about 1980, the graduation rate of 1995 with a poor graduation rate and what happened in those 15 years to make it so _____. I do feel like one positive thing about my growing up was just women in leadership positions, because I did feel my mom and my older sister were very much the heads of the household and did all the functions that heads of the household do, and actually took that for granted as being kind of the state of the house. It was kind of surprising for me once I was kind out of the house to meeting women who were grew up differently that there is more expectation that men are suppose to be leaders or have more deference. It was surprisingly to me because I never would have thought that way growing up. You know, it seemed pretty obvious that women would be leaders as much as men, so it took me a while just to get used to just that. That was very internalized by a lot of people, they were expected to take the lead, so it was kind of surprising again because people do not always feel like equal partners and it has been interesting to point to regions in Las Vegas, and then to Wisconsin. You know Wisconsin is even more so that way where, I think it is more conservative in terms of gender in leadership. So, that has been pretty interesting, where does that social change come from, does every body feel like that social change is necessary, but I have always felt like it was. You know, kind of maximizing everyone's potential if you have the expectation in leadership, so I have more decided. Besides, that is important for people to not just sort of defer, it is important for people to just use their full capacities. So, that is one thing just about gender when growing up and having that model of very strong women in the household. As far as race goes, I mean again, it is something that I do not feel like I had that impression of, a recognition of the regional differences until may be 6 or 7, when I went to an all black community school. Elementary, I do not remember too many white students. I would have to look back, you know. I remember, 4th grade one student was Native American, and that was somewhat exotic. And then we moved neighborhoods in 6th grade and that is when I first went to a school where it was more divided, kind of more evenly divided. For white teachers, I think I actually

remember the first four. I am just trying to remember if I had white teachers in elementary. There were a couple but I think 4th grade we had four different teachers because one teacher was ill. But the other grades, it may have been all Afro-American teachers and I felt comfortable. I did not feel like I had visible differences, so I do not feel like it was a big trauma with that change, but it was just a shift in how my life was populated. It was also the same time that there was integration attempts in Omaha to kind of integrate the schools and so there was quite a bit of tension up from junior high up until early high school. There were not a lot of fights, just listened, just how you were received, which side you were on, it was very important, at least those years of junior high. That is kind of my perspective on that and then just the higher you go in the social system, you start to see that there is stratification happening as far as Afro-Americans are not as high up on the ladder at most of those social institutions so it is kind of like, the more education you get and the more higher economic skills, the wider the difference. So, that is something that is challenging, it may be just as far as maintaining their contact with the community and getting involved. Family is one thing, but just having contact with the white community, I think you really have to make that point. This is like when I had debate teacher at Northwest. Northwest was fairly open to having integrated schools. We were kind of the first round of people. At that time, you could either go to any of the predominantly white schools or you could go to North. I did not have the choice to go to either Central or Vincent, which I probably would have picked but they were more _____ in dominance, so unless you were in that neighborhood, you had the choice of those 2 schools. I ended up not going to North, you know, the "ghetto school", but this had like had connotation "ghetto school". It was not too bad a thing to do, it was like, what ever happens is not going to come from the teachers. So, I ended up going to Northwest, mainly because all of my friends were going there, or most of them. My debate teacher in class, who I had a very rocky relationship with the whole time, who just had the perception that I was some kind of rebellious student. I do not feel that I am super rebellious, but I am not too much of a butt kisser. I am just doing what I do, I am not causing a problem so I do not expect for them to cause problems for me. And so, he asked me in class if he could call me Negro because he felt like he felt more comfortable calling a person Negro. What am I suppose to do, you know. It was kind of a chain of events along that line. That was kind of the typical type way to be treated. It was kind of like no stigma allowed. I actually wrote to my counselor about it and the counselor said, "Well this complaint is really poorly written". I was just trying to say what happened. But it was that kind of thing that was pretty common at that school. It is just so hard sometimes to put your finger on just what discrimination. We just

wanted to be treated like everybody else. I do not want people sweating over what to call me, call me by name. You know, if it is the last name, that is up to you. So, it is just that kind of thing that is trying to work through. I had a great experience in the debate class, despite the teacher, but again there are all kinds of things that I could point to where it is being still allowed. Part of it again, the perception that if you hear it now, it is not necessarily the common person or is it someone who just follows the line. That is what I think was sometimes added to that perception of racially illiterate at that time, especially when you are nervous about integration. I worked on a newspaper in high school. Part of the reason I participated was because just all this stuff and in journalism I felt like I was being treated well as far as getting opportunities to do more editorship, I felt like I was as strong writer as everyone else, but not getting those opportunities. So being a part of the newspaper, there was a big to do over that, and I felt, let people do what they do. I mean, if they think I am going to spend like more than 10 seconds worrying about this. And so, those are the things that I think of as far as high school goes. Fortunately, I had support at home and so it did not really matter what happened. I mean, you know your kids, you know what they do, when they are around and when they are not around. Nothing bad, so there was nothing to worry as much about it from that standpoint. But accumulatively, in most institutions there is some of that with different guises. You know when you think about it, I am trying to remember other situations of discrimination but I cannot. I think that maybe one example that maybe is a little unconventional in a way, just being a musician and going to professional conferences when we at are hotels, I think hotels are one of the most concrete places where you can see stratification. There very often are where there are white male clerks, or very often white females. This is not systematic everywhere like this. You think of population. I remember going to the Twin Cities, it was like this. There would be a white male doorman, white female person who signed you up; ride in the service elevator, it is people who do not speak English. Get out of the service elevator into the ballroom, it is white women mostly. It is just very systematic. It is like that in so many places. It has been so systematic. I feel sometimes going to conferences, and I do not want to think of the south or anywhere else, but it just seems, again, this is going to be so visible. I could point to New Orleans where one conference where every single patron is white in the hotel and every single server is black, and then being served by someone that is kind of bowing and scraping in service. This, I do not like this, this does not feel very comfortable and you really do not have to do this and it kind of freaks me out you know. But at the same time, they are the one doing their job and it is like I am the one who does not fit so why aren't I standing along with every other black person there. That just seems like it is, I see

that a lot. It is very easy to observe. Sometimes it is just hard to relax under that environment. It has kind of been by personal right. A lot of the people I am with are professionals that are not aware as to the hired staff, and so it does not bother them. They can just sit there and relax. It is me, all I can see is the accumulative effects of discrimination. Though in action, it is like this. It just reminds me of how systematic it is because I feel like even growing up, even though we grew up in a situation that was more of a segregated neighborhood, it seemed that it was fine, I liked my neighborhood, I was totally happy with my family and comfortable financially as well. But then just seeing it from a bigger perspective, which means that certain stratification. I just recently went to Washington DC. We went to the senate office building, went to Georgetown, went to this placed called Teaism and had every kind of tea and a beautiful place to go, beautiful buildings. Then we went to the Fredrick-Douglas Historic Home and we went across the Potomac River, which is kind of sidelined with the capital, but quite a bit of that neighborhood where again, just a corner south, 20 people standing around, looking around, and just by urban, you know since I lived in the cities, it is easy me for me to go through and see who has been recently incarcerated, who is selling what. It is just so easy to see that, that is kind of to an easy degree, to see with minimal sense of what is going on. We walked into the grocery store, in the gas stations, they have bulletproof glass and everything, but usually small grocery stores do not have bulletproof glass. The meat counter is below. The hot dogs, well they look like they were bought 2 years ago and this is the store. I mean, it is just so…and the next thing you know you are hanging around tea and stuff you know, having conversation. This is Washington, the capital, so if you cannot do anything about it there, or no effort is being made. I do not know what we can say about the rest of the country in situations like that but..so, I guess it is just a reminder when I see it, all the accumulative effects of all that. With the other question, let's see, the first thing I can think of is just being on a search committee at the university. There was this one kid, ____ color. There were very different perceptions I think among the crowd because we had gotten to this point. We were narrowing down the candidates and this particular person was very, I do not know what the word is…just forward, kind of a _____, and not quite as focused. He still had a strong presentation as the others, but kind of a little bit harder for other people to categorize. He had done something with the military, he had done something with several different universities, he happened to be from a university that was public but was from the east coast and most people did not know it was a public university. People thought, "Well is this some kind of small religious college". Well no, it is really a public university that just happens to be in a state that we are not from. I had raised the point there, just not so

much for discrimination, but it is a plus that people are from Midwest universities, it is sort like of if that a person is from Ohio State, it is like "Oh, Ohio State" you know. It is just as strong of an university, it is just that it is not in the Midwest, and so there are all kinds of, I think, ways that a person's kind of manner and style, if it is not of the Midwestern kind,

can _____ before we react _____ to that. So that was something at that point I did raise just about, is there something that is unstated here about this candidate that we are not putting our finger on. I didn't accuse anyone of saying, "Well because this candidate is not white, is that the reason" because I do not think it is strictly that. I think also that it is not as comfortable because of what people have been used to in the Midwest. So a lot of times, I feel there are interesting words like racism or _____ now, just not only kind of literally race, but also on institutional climate that is affected by, ultimately by racial and classic I guess. You know, I will give you another example. This candidate actually had a typo in his application and then someone had said, "Well, he has this typo", and I reached this point "Well, are we hiring a typist". I mean that is not to say that it is not okay, but it just can we have a reason why a typo is for whatever that reason, whether right or wrong. I think that the institutional pressure is just getting perfectionism in the sense that that typo means that you are a sloppy person and that you are not going to do good, and how can you have a professional job if you cannot type or read an application with no error whatsoever. I think you have to look at it, as is this a good person for the job because you do not want to lose a good person because of a typo. You can turn it around a little bit more, but that is I think, kind of out of box perspective sometimes you have.

VP: What memories of your childhood continue to make a difference in your life?

DJ: When I think back, some of it was just having a lot time and having a lot of _____. Because I do still feel that I like to be kind of left alone. There is this one book I was reading that was called _____ for Youngest Children, where you have a tendency to be uneasy about the need of well-defined personal space. But then again, it is very much true. I mean, just where it is like very personal things, or even growing up, you know just physical space in the family. People do kind of hover over you because you are the youngest child, but then again they know about stuff going on and you really don't know at the same place, so by the time you get there, they're already somewhere else. By the time you get to junior high or high school, they are pretty much out the

door. So it is sort of like having left over stuff but the house is a little bigger; once that bedroom set belonged to all the kids but now I get to be in every bedroom because I am the last kid. I remember the Nixon resignation, some of the Watergate trial. I remember totally just the end of the Vietnam era, where on TV they had the U.S. dumping their helicopters into the ocean so the Vietnamese would not capture them. It was just such big TV images of helicopters going in to the ocean, it was what a waste. I remember the funerals for President Eisenhower and President Johnson. I was pretty interested in presidential politics. You know, I remember I was very interested in politics. Reagan was elected in my freshman year in college and I remember Reagan's election and the death of John Lennon were really close together. The John Lennon thing, it seemed like of all people, he didn't do anything to anybody and that was really jarring. So, I think early on those were some of the things that were pretty shaping for me. We took my sister to Boston in 1975, when she was getting ready to take her bar exam at New York State. I do not know if you are familiar with Angela Davis, but she is an Afro-American activist and she was running for president on the communist ticket. I remember seeing this poster of Angela Davis, like I did not think that was good, you know. My older sister talked to me about this, the political system. I think just because my family background and how I grew up in the middle of those social movements that were still going on very much, it was almost like I was just at the age to kind of feel that influence of it without fully thinking that they were strange or different. It seemed like that was just the way things were. I remember that my family just seemed so normal. At the same time, the feminist movement was still, just like now, a very active organization and there was just a lot of that kind of thing going on so it just seemed like that is just how things are. So, it was kind of a time in trying to understand the country as a whole more. I think the black community has always had prominent political leaders, so it is not anything new in the black community and I think also just not having a male perspective in that sense. Maybe if I had my dad in the house, he would be more conservative on those issues and it might be a different story. I decided to go to the University of Iowa because I knew that they were good in the writing area and I thought that was one area I was interested in, and also was trying to decide if I wanted to get away from home, not just to Nebraska University. My older sister went to the University of Nebraska, and it was like I think an hour away. I mean it and good programs, a lot of fun things you know. But then, I think like 100 out of 500 of my classmates were going to Nebraska, it was a large numbers of the class were going to Nebraska. So, I also got a job offer from Mutual of Omaha to work part time. I was looking for work all summer and then I got a pretty good job offer from them towards the end of the summer to come work

for them. I briefly thought about just going to Nebraska Omaha and work part time. But I went to Iowa just for a little bit of adventure. Actually, the trip where I went to Boston, we took the bus and we went through Iowa City, Iowa, where the University of Iowa is. I remember it looked like such a cool town, it looked like a beautiful town and so I was still interested in that. So that is where I went and it was a great town and it still a great town. I think I was somewhat interested in English education. I think that is why I started in journalism and then I was in communication studies. My 10th grade English teacher really influenced me to be interested in English, just reading Julius Cesar, Oliver Twist, it was just really a great test. She was giving me a hard time about my grades and we would argue about these grades. My grades were okay, they were not that bad, were not that good. If I could find her, I would just say "thanks". She just made a great impression. That was more a built in profession, as far as English. Iowa has a pretty good reputation for a school for education so we had a lot of people around the nation coming in looking for graduates. It was fairly early that year I interviewed for Las Vegas. I almost did not go to the interview because it was like.....Las Vegas..do I want to go Las Vegas. They were pretty impressive about recruiting me. They were kind of the first offer on the table. I pretty close with Bellview. Bellview is just south of Omaha. They actually had a job that was both English and Communication Studies. What hardly even gets taught in high school is communication studies and I had gone to their second interview, they were interested, and the weekend of the Las Vegas offer, I was scheduled to go to Bellview. There probably would have been a job offer from them and would have been the second job offer. Again, the salary, close to home, good job, but mom almost talked me in to Las Vegas. There were a few factors. The offer was already on the table, and my mom was saying, "Well, why not, have some fun, do something different" and it was like, okay. So, I ended up choosing Las Vegas, which was quite an experience. Mostly the job itself was the good part. I was not too crazy about going to Las Vegas, living there, although it is in such a beautiful area. I just loved it down there, close to California and it was really great. It was just beautiful. It is easy to hide there, it is no so _____. I ended up going out there and going to my Master's program after my second or third year in Vegas. We had to do a few continuing credits. I just felt like I would not mind getting a Ph.D. I was there for four years. By the third year, I was pretty much ready to think about moving on. About that time, a few of my friends from Iowa were driving around. They were driving around the country. They went to the Mardi Gras, they went to Austin and drove a Ford Granada. When they come to visit, they did not tell me before they came to visit, they just kind of showed up. Fortunately, we did have enough room. We just moved into this 3-bedroom

apartment with a couple of buddies of mine at the time. We had a fairly big apartment. We had been living in a 1-bedroom. After things conspired, I was thinking I did not really know if I quite want to go this path. I did move to Minneapolis the next year and I wanted to start a band. I had never really been in a band fulltime or really tried to do as well as I could. At the University of St. Thomas, I temped for a while. I was program assistant for a while at St. Thomas and then I started doing activity adviser. After I finished my degree, I was able to teach some classes part time, and so I was getting experience in the area of education. I think one of the interesting things was sexual orientation. The first person one summer after my freshman year of college. I had two jobs but the one was kind of a dumb job but it paid pretty well, it was like $4.73/hour, which at the time was pretty good. It was a government job and we had to put these personnel files in chronological order, take the staples out of them, and sort them into like 3 different kinds. They were supposed to microfiche them eventually, which they never did. You would get a pile of files, a staple remover and that was pretty much all you needed. In downtown Omaha, I met my friend Mary there, which was really good. I had a crush on her for a while. She had been going through some issues with a relationship, and she _____. So, I just listened to her when she told me about all those things. We were good friends. She actually took me around to some of the places in downtown Omaha that were more _____, bars, and so that was really interesting to see because a lot of it was just places that I walked by all the time. It was just like a different geography, but just right in downtown Omaha. It was like 1981. One place I remember was really quite striking. It was still in the disco area and it was really wild. That was really an eye opening experience and a very good one, kind of my first introduction to a lot of those issues that I already had a lot of empathy with and could totally understand what she was going through in terms of personal struggles.

VP: What memories do you have of your first encounters with the feminist or culture of feminism?

DJ: When I was in junior high and needing to know a little bit more about human sexuality, my sister had me read *Our Bodies, Our Selves*. So that was one of the first times; and at the time, I don't know if I would have identified it as feminist. So that was an early encounter. I don't know if I had anything on feminism in college. I'm pretty sure I didn't. I mean, I think that everything that I heard about it (feminism) was just from reading the newspaper when I was in high school and before. And then I think it came up more when I was in graduate

school, when I started studying African American feminism. Because, I think I just read this or that, just to kind of get a general history of stuff. And then in grad school- I'm teaching this same course in the Black Arts movement here in the fall- I took a course once on the Black Arts movements and it was the very first time I really read black feminist writing. This was maybe about 1989. And what struck me about it was that there was more polarization than I remembered growing up between men and women in the way that they talked about it. And that was the thing that made me curious about it- I mean did I just miss this completely, just because we didn't a male/ female household? Or, is this just a different take on what I experienced? So that's what really led to my dissertation topic, it ended up being the black arts movement– feminism and gender in that context. I mean, I was just really curious about, what was that? Did I just miss that; because I do miss things from time to time. But it just seemed like it was a real critique of what males did in the sixties. So I went deeper into that, and that was a project for probably about three years - looking at that topic of generation differences and gender differences during the 1960s amidst all of these social change movements.

VP: What experiences, social movements, events or people were important in shaping you as a feminist?

DJ: I think certainly black feminist writers quite a bit. I feel like June Jordan especially. I read this book by June Jordan, called *Technical Difficulties*. I used to do book reviews for the Minnesota Daily and one of the books I ended up getting was *Technical Difficulties*, and I believe that book is a blending of a more of an everyday black woman's voice with this academic style of writing. It just sounded like home, what I heard around the house except it was on academic topics- just the marriage between that speaking style and the depth of content was really remarkable to me. And I was like "Wow, you could actually write like this and publish it in an academic way." And I mean it was great. It was an amazing book and she is an amazing figure, but I just had no idea. And I didn't realize that of course, she was a pioneer in that and that was a reason why it seemed so powerful. Her more than anyone else. I did get to meet her really briefly. I taught a course during my PHD program. For a while I taught courses part time at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and I taught a course. It was a Life in Art: June Jordan, so the whole course was focused on June Jordan writings and was talking about the 1960s' social movements. It was so cool because there was one student that really got into June Jordan, just loved June Jordan, and then June Jordan actually came to Minnesota to talk. I invited the student to

come with me, so we both got to hear June Jordan. We went to this place that was a really nice place in Dinky town that had nice hummus, pitas, and shakes. It had a really nice shake/pita combination. June Jordan came in there to eat. I mean, just of all places, she walks in. I got to shake her hand and I mentioned that I had just taught a course about her work and that I really admired her work. She was a little shy.

AV: What resistance, if any, did you get from people you cared about when you became a feminist?

DJ: I don't think I got a lot just from people I care about. I mean I think I get eyebrow raising for being connected to Women's Studies, and so that is something I address in class all the time, routinely. Just because it is something that's like "okay, you're not a woman". So I try to use examples like "Well, I am going to have a hard time teaching Shakespeare because nobody was there, so I guess we just can't teach it." You do not necessarily have to be what you teach, although I think if you do not the subjective experience, you can't pretend that you have it. Subjective experience often completes the conversation, or even leads the conversation, and that is an important part. That part, I used to overcome some of that resistance. I think it is positive that on the one hand that people feel like they do not have to be the image of Women's Studies, therefore any interested person and has ways of enriching interested persons can get into it. Sometimes there is resistance. Depending on the circle and the composition of people going to Women's Studies conferences, just being male, can feel inconvenient some times. There is a little bit of suspicion, but you know, I don't know if it's really suspicion – well suspicion probably is the word I would use- of just why. It's like "Well it's an interesting field to study, so sorry." It is just something that I have to be aware of and at the same time, be like "well okay, I can understand the suspicion about it." But on the other hand, is the purpose of it to confine itself to a given group of people or is it something that is open to a wider group of people? It's kind of like with teaching African American studies; it's kind of like the same thing. It has to be addressed directly.

VP: Describe the process you went through as you decided to identify as a feminist.

DJ: I will have to think about that one a little bit. I think I felt like it was something I always supported from childhood because I felt like it was such a natural fit between the women in my family and what feminism was

saying about the essential quality of people and the need to appreciate what women do in society. It seemed to me like that was very natural. Again, I would assume up until probably in the 80s, I just assumed everyone agreed with that. I remember actually at one point when our teacher in high school said, "I am going to read the ERA". And we were like, "Read the ERA? That is going to take all day. Okay, so it's like its only a hundred and fifty words. Wow, that is all it is." Who in the world would be against it? Why, for what possible reason? So, that was kind of mind set and therefore, I just felt like it was very much a starting position. Then it got reinforced later through reading in more detail about the struggles, for instance, of Afro-American women in the 1960s and just the idea that my freedom or a male person's freedom came at the expense of someone else. So, those kinds of things helped to reinforce it. I think also again, just as far as personal life, dating, and just different people that sometimes feel like you are suppose to step up as a male to be a leader and my feeling like, "well no, we're even." And learning that that is actually the personal result of male privilege, and so that was another thing that kind of reinforced. I have a different view of it now just because I feel at times that we are at a point where we need to broaden our movement, partially because I am not much of a nationalist. I mean that's just not quite my thing. Even with the Afro-American culture, I am not a nationalist. I do not feel it; I never have. It's just that sense that you can sort people out by their type. And even though I know that is over simplifying it, I am just somewhat skeptical of that. I feel like the coalition building is the thing that made the civil rights movement work- well it worked in part with organizing African American communities- but the fact that is that it started to appeal to a broader base and that is what made it ultimately succeed, to change laws. I feel like the feminist movement needs to be strategized in that sense, of how to get great buy in, especially in the wake of the 80s and 90s, when there was a backlash that is starting to die off. I mean the backlash has started to crack, and that's partially due to continuing feminist activism. I think it needs to be more overt about its strategies for organizing.

AV: What meaning does the feminist statement "the personal is political" hold for you?

I think that in the sense- I have said this a couple of times- but just like growing up in a household where feminism was in practice. And that is also something that is part of what raises the status of everyone, is the fact that you are trying to strive, and you are trying to a voice for someone, a broader kind of voice in largely white dominated public institutions. "The personal is political" is the ultimate statement of what

our lives mean, what they mean to us as individuals, and what they mean to us as we enter institutions. It is literally true that we are a microcosm of larger social trends. People do not tend to think of themselves as being kind of lodged in a historical moment. We do not normally think of ourselves as being lodged in a historical moment, but that is what I think is part of "the personal is political," is that our individual identity is part of a collective, so we can use that to be a witness to make social change. And, even if we do not use that, wherever we look in our life, there is evidence of how things are on the larger scale.

AV: How have you negotiated your identity as a feminist with constraining societal expectations of masculinity?

That's a good question. Let me think a little bit about that one. That's a complicated question. I think on the one hand, male identity is like any other identity in the sense that it is partially biological. So I do feel as though one thing that maybe is the counter side, again the suspicion sometimes, is just that I cannot help being male entirely. It is part of my biological identity and it's part of my social identity. I do not think anyone has to apologize for what they are. I think you do have to answer for what your behavior is. If you are a person who believes in justice, it is good to be self-critical and examine your behavior. So, I think those are the key things. Who you are is a function again of your birth, of your rearing, and everything else. I do not think anyone should have to hold their head low because of who you are and I do not think anyone should be held accountable for the overall- your individual role in what other people do, just this idea that you have to answer for the full range of things I think is a good starting point, but not an ending point. Where it goes from there is realizing that your own actions can make a difference, so how are you using your point of origin to make a difference, and your identity to try to look at what maybe could be changed about it, what might contribute negatively against justice for people based on your identity. It is almost like the first stage of organizing is that recognition that peoples' identity matter in terms of privilege, and then the next stage is recognizing individual possibilities and individual differences. So I think it is kind of balancing between those two things and having enough self criticism to recognize that some things that you can do are negative, as far as their social affects, and to challenge those. This summer, I'm on this statewide commission domestic violence African American families and we are going to do a workshop and I am going to focus my part on men in the context of child rearing and the family law system, and just talk about what

my experience has been in that. I am going to offer whatever insights I can, and discuss those. I feel like it is just a way to deal with those issues. I can address it better than some people can just because I have been through it and I am not going to sit here and say it is a bunch of roses. It is not easy and that there are reasons for that, that are structurally difficult to negotiate. But because of who I am as a male, it gives me a little bit more insight in it, having been through it on the male side. So just trying to understand some of the aims of feminism, and being a part of that, I can give a balance between those things.

Av: What have been the greatest challenges you have faced as a feminist?

I think one of them is the male role in feminism has been a challenge, I think. So, I think that goes to some of these issues of male privilege as far as income or position within the institution. I think that personally, just the issues of being heterosexual and how does heterosexuality fit in. heterosexuality is a part of that too. I think that sometimes it is an interpersonal thing with strong, intelligent, institutionally thoughtful women and my own sensibilities where I am also strong, intelligent, and institutionally savvy, but not female. I think you do have to have some panache to hold your own, to be a voice, especially when there is not going to be many people that have your particular voice. Just to be confident, as a male, in those contexts, I think is a challenge. Then again, it's not anything against how I am treated per say, but it is a more like if you are a person who does not fit the profile of people who are most likely to be interested. And again, just various experiences that way, ranging from the slightly uncomfortable to the comfortable.

AV: Which of your contributions have made the most difference in shaping feminist theories and practices and your own understandings of yourself as a feminist?

DJ: It definitely has been the African American angle on feminism and thinking about double jeopardy or, I cannot quite think of the term now that is the most common one, to talk about ways that identity is divided. I think you can think "a female is a female" but of course there are many division based on class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and race. So I think that is something that is being worked on quite a bit. Again, I think my skepticism sometimes about identity based movements as well as my recognition of their necessity are both

important in thinking of the third way or the fourth way that maybe we are going to have to go forward. Just that effort to address exclusion, we do not want that to produce exclusion. So, that is something I like to emphasize a lot and I feel like just having a foot in various kinds of camps is a good place to be in that way, just being able to move a little bit between these points of identity- ethnicity and race, gender, class- I mean, I think there are ways I can move among those, except sexual identity is a little bit more of a challenge. But, you know, we have enough to history that helps me, some, to negotiate that. Again, that is just a story that needs to unfold as we expand the notion identity and work it into our cultural thinking more.

AV: What do you consider the greatest achievements of feminism over the last 25 years?

DJ: I think surviving the new right, and continuing to organize in the midst of that. I also think just gaining a greater foothold in academic settings. I think now Women's Studies is more established then it was 25 years ago, of course, and also appealing to a broader core of students. Even in my time at UWEC, I can see a difference between 10 years ago and now. Of course, because of all the efforts that have been made by the program to develop the major and the positive results that have been gained by just offering the courses. I think the experience in the courses, for many people, has been an excellent experience. That's a tribute to the people involved in it; the more people take the courses, the number of people interested in it grows. So I think first or second, is just the growth of Women's Studies.

AV: What do you think are the most important challenges feminism must overcome in this century?

I think still, just the challenge of perception. It's still perceived as marginal by many people. If there is a way to package, or to gain a public profile, that is regular, rather than exotic. One of example of that, this goes back to the years of O.J. Simpson trial, they would ask bell hooks about her opinion all the time, and she would say, "Well, the main thing is that this is male violence against women." It's not so much about race, but no one suggested that a female carved up Nicole Simpson. It is like, "Okay, well let's go on to the next comment." The refusal to examine domestic violence side of that situation is really what was brought out by her participation. So somehow for maybe 25 years from then, for that to maybe not seem so exotic. It is just like I am allowed as a

feminist, you got me here as a feminist, but you want me to somehow pit the feminist against the black man. I mean this is supposed to be some ritualized kind of conflict. So, why couldn't she have the opportunity to say whatever she wants and just to be valued for her opinion? I would hope that in a few more years, that is how it is. You can have a person coming on who is from Women's Studies, who gives the angle on how a social issue affects issues of gender or just specifically for women, that would be a valued opinion, one that would be sought of by journalists.

VP: How long and in what way have you been engaged with the UWEC Women's Studies Program?

DJ: I think the first course I taught was in 2001. I have been teaching courses, usually once every 2 years, sometimes once a year. I think I have taught a total of 8 courses, so that's probably an average of about once a year. They had a topics course. I cannot quite remember the name of the label that it was at when I came. But once you teach it 3 times, then you need to create a course that is specifically for the subject area. So, I wrote a course – it's called African American Feminism in the Humanities- and that is the course where I continue to teach different umbrella designs under. Each one has been different so far. The first one was Black Women's Feminism, there was one Black Macho and Black Superwomen in Recent American Film, one was American Childhood and the Culture Wars. And the one that I teach for the first repeat version, which I thought went the best, is the course Sexist in the Sixties. So, we are going to do that one again in the spring of 2010. That one was focused both on the feminist movement in the 1960s and the other social movements that reacted, for and against it. It will just be talking about the issue of sexism and helping to define it. So, it is more kind of introductory and maybe sophomore level of Women's Studies but it has some of the core terms and things of that sort.

AV: What is your first memory of the program?

DJ: My colleague, Jenny Shaddock, was the program director at that time and since she was a part of the interview team, she got my information. I think my paper that I submitted was about being a black male feminist. I think that may have been the reading sample I used for my presentation. The one was published in *Feminist Teacher*, and I think Jenny helped to kind of usher me into the Women's Studies Program as a person who was

interested in those issues, from a teaching and program perspective. It was wonderful just to have her support and help to get connected with the program.

VP: How has the program changed during the time that you have been involved in it?

DJ: It has definitely grown. This was before Susan Turell came to UWEC and now it has an identified place, office space and staff, as well as course offerings that are well established as far as the major and the minor, and the certificate programs. Just having a physical presence, having permanent personnel, having great student interest- those things have really been significantly improved.

AV: What are the major contributions of UWEC's Women's Studies program to the campus and larger community beyond?

I think it is a necessary piece of a humanities or social science standpoint that has not been available before and so I think those courses, they do serve both personal growth and education perspective, so I think that from my experiences with many those classes you can see what happens to students. They didn't really know what Women's Studies was about. They think, "I'm taking these course and they really opened my eyes to fundamental things. And, I'm also interested in bringing this in as a component of my professional training or my educational perspective. So, I think that is a place for those people that do advocacy for women, and whether that's in a kind of social service context or a medical context, I think it is also a point that can be created and enhanced. So I think many of us who are in Women's Studies are also involved in various kinds of social and political work and we feel like that's encouraged and valued by the university. The university has made opportunities for me to teach there, lessen my teaching load because they value the program and they realize that it really depends on faculty across the curriculum to keep it vital and also that we make contributions outside of our university that we bring into the classroom and also serve the community that way.

AV: Share any stories of people of events that you think are vital in shaping the 25 year history of Women's Studies at UWEC.

I think it has been great to get to know her and she has got amazing skills in so many areas. There are other people. Teresa Sandslow, I think has been great, especially with Women's History, and there are lots of supporters beyond that, just where there is clearly in the community interest in talking about these issues. Those are those some of the people who have done great things. I think a little bit of the popular culture angle and contemporary culture, because I do a lot of things with teaching music and mass media imagery, are things that are kind of a distinct way that I have been doing my courses. To try and bridge that gap between humanities and social science, I feel like I have a foot in both camps where I like social science perspectives, critical race studies and junior studies. Also, I like to read texts, which is what we do here in English, so I feel like just bridging some of those gaps. Again, just being male, being Afro-American, just perspectives that I think make a contribution to the program from those points of view as well.

VP: What role do you think Women's Studies will play on the UWEC campus, community and beyond?

DJ: We will continue to grow as a program and I think just more emphasis on the advising as people prepare for careers beyond UWEC will help us. I think just the fact that this celebration is giving us more contact with those alumni and I feel that is one area that will continue to grow because there is a lot of interest there is a lot interest in those. There is a lot of interest in the field as it goes on. We just need to continue to understand how it can contribute to society. So, I think that is something that will continue to grow and be useful.