

CLIFTON WHARTON, Jr.

June 1, 2000

Jeffrey Charnley,
interviewer

Charnley: Today is Thursday, June 1st, the year 2000. We're in New York City. I'm Jeff Charnley, interviewing Dr. Clifton Wharton, Jr., for the MSU [Michigan State University] Oral History Project for the sesquicentennial of the institution to be commemorated in the year 2005.

As you can see, Dr. Wharton, we're tape-recording this interview. Would you give us permission to tape?

Wharton: Indeed.

Charnley: I'd like to start first with a little bit about your general educational and professional background before you came to Michigan State. Where did you go to school and what were some of your important influences in your early life?

Wharton: Okay. Well, my earliest education was provided by my mother, through a correspondence course, because my father was a career diplomat and we were living abroad. At that time my father was stationed as a U.S. consul in the Canary Islands of Spain. In those days there were no American schools, no international schools, and so it was a correspondence course. The correspondence school, which is the Calvert School, still exists today in Baltimore. So that was my education primarily until I came back to the United States to live with my grandparents when I was ten.

When we were on home leave once in a while, I would go to a public school in Boston, but never for a full academic year. But when I returned to Boston in 1936, my parents, of course, and my siblings stayed in

Spain, but I attended the Boston Latin School, and that was a six-year program, and graduated from Boston Latin in 1943, and then entered Harvard [University] at the age of sixteen, where I studied for the next four years, except for a brief stint in the Air Force as a cadet pilot in training in 1945.

I graduated in 1947, and then I entered the School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C., where I studied in anticipation that I was going to follow in my father's footsteps as a diplomat. I decided not to, as a matter of fact, and, instead, joined a program of Nelson Rockefeller's, working on Latin America. I worked for Nelson for some five years, and then during that period of time, Dolores [Wharton] and I were married in 1950, on April 15th, which means that we just celebrated our fiftieth wedding anniversary.

At the end of the five-year period, we moved with our newly born son, Clifton, to Chicago, where I began to study for my doctorate in economics at the University of Chicago. My major mentor was Theodore Schultz, who subsequently became the Nobel laureate in economics, and at that time he was chairman of the Department of Economics.

We were there in Chicago from 1953 to 1957. It was at that point that I then joined John D. Rockefeller III in his Agricultural Development Council, which was a nonprofit organization working on expanding the rural social sciences in Asia, dedicated to providing grants, research grants, fellowships for graduate studies in the United States for Asians to get their advanced degrees, and also we provided visiting professors.

During that period of time, we lived in Southeast Asia for six years, the first two years in Singapore, four years in Kuala Lumpur. Our second son, Bruce, was born in Singapore.

We came back to the States at the end of that period in 1964. We spent a sabbatical year at Stanford [University] in '64, '65, and I was still with the Agricultural Development Council.

We then came back to New York. I eventually became vice president of ADC, and it was at that point that I was elected president of Michigan State in 1969.

Charnley: How was it that you first heard about the opening? Did you know President [John A.] Hannah?

Wharton: I knew him. I should explain that I had not expected to change careers. Not change it, but shift careers, really. It was evident that I was slated to become the next head of the foundation that I was working for. This was signaled by the fact that I was made vice president. While the president took a leave of absence, I became acting president, so it was quite clear that I was going to be the new president.

During that period of time, however, because I was director of a program that dealt with American universities engaging in research activities on the lesser developed countries, I spent a great deal of time touring and visiting major U.S. universities, supporting seminars and workshops, providing grants for American professors to acquire experience and to engage in research on developing problems.

Michigan State was one of the campuses I had visited. I had visited Michigan State several times. As a matter of fact, I think my first visit to Michigan State professionally occurred before we went to Asia. I was doing a study on U.S. graduate training of Asian agricultural economists, and I visited the campus and became quite friendly with many of the people there, as I did at all of the campuses there that I visited.

So when we returned to the United States toward the end of the sixties, my name cropped up in a number of presidential searches, much to our surprise. At the time with most of those, I did not express any particular interest. When they asked me about my possible interest in being a candidate at Michigan State, however, Dolores and I talked about this, as we do about everything, and it was very clear to us that Michigan State had a set of characteristics which were a very good fit for me in terms of my background and interest. It was a land-grant university with a strong commitment, broad commitment to a set of values in terms of education which I empathized with. It had at that time probably the strongest international program of any major university, public or private, in the United States. Hannah himself personally had demonstrated a very strong commitment to the issues of affirmative action, civil rights and diversity as chairman of the Civil Rights Commission.

The people who were there, particularly my professional colleagues, all were very interested in my candidacy, so that it was a case where when you put together all of the different elements that were involved, this sounded to us as something which we might properly explore.

Charnley: So you a core of people within the university who were putting your name forward.

Wharton: Yes.

Charnley: Do you remember any of those?

Wharton: The nomination was made by Nicholas Lietzke [phonetic], who is deceased now. I knew Nick when he was a graduate student getting his doctorate at Cornell. He had received a grant. His major professor received a grant from the Agricultural Development Council. I had known Nick when he was doing research in the Philippines, and then he did additional research in Vietnam, which was one of the countries in my region. He'd become ill in Vietnam, and I had been of help to him in that regard. He was the person who submitted my name officially in the candidacy.

I knew Larry [Lawrence L.] Boger. I first knew Larry when he was chairman of the Department of Agricultural Economics, later dean in the College of Agriculture. In that department I knew Glen Johnson, who was a professor who had done research in Thailand. I knew Jim [James T.] Bonnen quite well, who was a professor there. Dale [E.] Hathaway, who was chairman of the Department of Agricultural Economics was chairman of the search committee, and I knew him. I knew the dean of international programs, Ralph Smuckler, who had headed up the MSU program in Vietnam. Who else? There were so many.

It was a situation where having been to the campus many times, participated professionally in seminars and workshops and all. Also Carl Eicher, who was a professor there. I mean, I could go on. There were just a large number of people whom I knew professionally on the campus.

Charnley: The time when you became president, tell me a little bit about your experiences of either getting approved or the interview process. Do you remember anything dramatic about that, or anything that comes to mind?

Wharton: Well, I don't know how much you want to get into. The important background is that before the search committee began their work, they had secured from the Michigan State Board of Trustees a commitment that no person would be considered for the presidency who had not received a majority vote of the search committee. And this was done, I suspect--although I wasn't there at the time, I suspect in large part because of the politicization battle or the political battles that occurred in that board of trustees at that time.

There was a faction of trustees on the board, three individuals, in point of fact, who were interested in the appointment of the former governor, G. Mennon Williams, "Soapy" Williams, as president. And this was Warren [M.] Huff, Claire White, and Frank Hartman. In fact, they had met with Soapy either in the Philippines or soon after he returned from the Philippines as ambassador, to tell him that there five Democrats on the board and obviously that he would become president.

The search committee would not approve Williams as a candidate. The short list, as I recall, were five of us. In an attempt to scuttle this, the dissidents released the names to the press. One of the candidates withdrew his name, because that was a very major negative effect upon him and it affected his situation where he was. The rest all stayed in, but there was a major battle.

Now, in addition, at the time, the acting president was Walter Adams, and as acting president, he regularly indicated he was not interested in the presidency. However, he actively campaigned for the presidency, and it reached a fevered pitch, where I guess it was a week or two before the final action by the board, there were campaign signatures by students all over the campus and so on. I won't go through all the details, but the net result was that finally he once again came out and said he was not a candidate.

In the meantime there was also a boomlet for Woody Varner, who was then the president of Oakland University, which was part of Michigan State University at the time. These Varner students were in an uproar and said, "Don't do that to us." So Woody said he was not a candidate, but if nothing else came along, you know, this kind of thing.

It was quite a bruising battle, apparently. Now, much of this was happening while I was in Asia on a trip, so I was not privy to what was going on. When the vote was finally taken, the faction, the three, tried to block it by putting forward the name of Jack Breslin as a candidate for president, even though they knew that Jack had not been approved by the committee and that it would have been a disastrous reaction from the faculty because Jack didn't have any academic credentials whatsoever. But that was their way of trying to block it. That did not succeed, and so I was elected on a five-to-three vote. And that was the way, as one my friends said, history was made.

Charnley: So there were two Democrats that supported you.

Wharton: Two Democrats supported me.

Charnley: Two that did support you.

Wharton: And three Republicans.

Charnley: And who were they?

Wharton: Don Stevens and Blanche Martin. When they called me about this that night, they said that they had the votes, and I said the only question I had is, is it a bipartisan vote? And they said yes. I said okay. They wanted to be sure that I would accept it, even though they didn't have a majority.

Now, there are a lot of other ins and outs. The dissidents tried to reach me the night before, to try to get me to postpone any acceptance so that I would negotiate with them, and I refused to do that. I said, "I don't negotiate with individual trustees. I deal with the whole board."

Charnley: With some of these dealings, did you at least question your initial decision about it, or did that give you pause when you first came, "What have I gotten myself into?" or anything like that?

Wharton: No, not really. I don't think so. I think it was really a matter where in terms of what was involved, I felt that the reactions were, in part, based upon their political machinations. I must confess, I did not believe at the time, perhaps naively, that the political--the only word I can use is "viciousness," involved was as deep as it was. That I think we discovered after we got there more than we did beforehand.

I didn't mention the fact that we had an interview, Dolores and I--and I insisted on Dolores being part of the interview--with the full board.

Dolores Wharton: In New York.

Wharton: Here in New York. It was very interesting, because the five who eventually voted for me, it was very interesting, Frank Merriman, who was really an agriculturalist and who represented sort of the ag group, at first I could tell was sort of, you know, very dubious about this until he began to realize that I had a tremendous base of experience in agriculture in foreign field, and that was very surprising to him.

The dissidents were very surprised to find that my role at ADC involved having professors under me, doing research and engaging in teaching, and I taught an average of sixteen hours a week just like any other faculty member, and I had published journal articles and the whole thing, just like any other faculty member.

They also began to challenge me on budgetary matters. But the search committee had sent me all the budget materials, so I knew all about the university. So that was a discussion where it was what I would have

expected from a search process, and while I heard about the battles, I didn't think it was quite as deep-seated as it turned out to be.

Having said that, during the period while the three were there on the board, each board meeting action, an action at those board meetings was a test of having enough votes. I always had to have a minimum of five votes or else I was out of there, and that was quite an interesting situation.

Charnley: The milieu of the campus in 1969, 1970, when you first came, how would you best describe, not the physical, but the campus in general when you arrived?

Wharton: Well, it was in a high state of change and flux. The most obvious one relates to the continuing pattern of student unrest, which had begun a year or two before over the Vietnam War. But beyond that, there were also tremendous forces at work that related to such things as parietal rules, student participation in governance, faculty participation in governance. There was a whole series of things that were taking place which were quite new on the scene, in addition. But the public sort of concentrated on the Vietnam War demonstrations more than these others, but these other things were very often quite, quite critical to be dealt with. And in that setting there was also the problem of changing roles of a university president as well as the changing role of the university president's spouse.

For a university president, the era that I succeeded with Hanna was an era where the presidents were strong, dominant, almost autocratic figures. And we were moving into a period that I refer to as a participatory democracy. So here was a campus where what John Hanna said was law, to one where you had to persuade and deal with faculty and students in a participatory mode to arrive at any solution. Now, all of that at the same time as you're dealing with all of the disruption from student unrest.

And the same thing was true for Dolores. Where previously the president's spouse was a traditional university president, now you had a situation where the spouse--and she can talk on her own--but the spouse had to be a partner and a contributor while maintaining also an independent role and position. So that when

we reached out to the students and we visited the dorms and had dinner with them in the dorms two and three nights a week, Dolores would go with me. This was reaching out to the students. It was not just hosting them for some of the special occasional events. That's a whole new environment.

If truth were known, there also had been, in my judgment, an erosion in the respect and dignity of the office, due to the fact that during the period while Adams was acting president, he operated as a populist in an attempt to curry support in the student groups. That was his style of operation. The contrast is that when they had a march, they had one big march on the state capitol, he was marching in the front lines with the students. Well, that's all well and good in the short run, but when you're trying to run the university, you have to have, I believe, a level of what I would consider to be scholarly academic image of leadership and vision, as well as some genuine respect on the part of the campus and the community as a whole.

So it's a very different environment that one faced in those periods, and it's one thing to sort of be a cheerleader in a march, it's a very different thing when you've got three and four thousand students breaking up a campus. That's what Dolores and I had to deal with. Now, that was really rough, and we did it. In 1970, those demonstrations and riots in May lasted five weeks. That was not just an occasionally little blip. We had a major, major firestorm on our hands, and then we had another one in 1972. Well, our first one was in February of 1970, six weeks after we got there.

Charnley: Six weeks. That didn't give you much time.

Wharton: No, no.

Charnley: What set off the February one, do you remember?

Wharton: The Chicago Seven Trial.

Charnley: And then the May was the Kent State [University].

Wharton: The May was the Kent State. Well, Vietnam and Kent State.

Charnley: Did you find that your experience in Vietnam, how did the students respond to that? You can see a comparison there between Walter Adams' experience, who may or may not have been there before. How did you feel that experience helped to deal with it?

Wharton: I think to a certain extent for the more extreme students it was probably a bit disconcerting, because here we both had lived and worked in this country. We knew the country, we knew the people, we knew the situation.

Dolores Wharton: I probably ran into it quite a bit at that time. The students were demonstrating and they would be over at the Student Union and they would come over to Cowles House. They were looking for Clif. This was all in the evening. And I would go out and talk to them. They were telling *me* about Vietnam, and I was saying, "Look, I've been there. I've been in that country. I know the people. I've lived in Asia." And they were not pleased with this. They wanted to inform *me* about what the situation was. It was an interesting dialogue, and it engaged the students in a lot of conversations. On a number of occasions I invited them into Cowles House and they would come into the living room and we would talk.

There was one point, one event particularly I remember, when they were being [unclear]. The press was there. The press came and caught me on camera talking to the students, and I got some good coverage over that. But it was heavily on the Vietnam situation. They wanted to engage Clif, of course.

Wharton: Yes. And also, this I understood, they wanted me to articulate their position. I tried to regularly explain to them that if a university, a true university, is a true university, it must be a forum in which different

views may contend in the pursuit of truth, and that if I, as a leader of that institution, adopted a position on this, I, in effect, have made the decision as to what the truth is. I would allow this to occur, but for me to express my view for you, or take your view, I'm in a sense replacing that pursuit.

This is a side issue, but there was a fascinating experience many years later. We had a group of Iranian students on campus and they regularly wanted to protest the Shah. We had a professor of cinematography who was an Iranian, who had received a grant from the Iranian government to do a film series on ancient Persia. He had a nationally renowned committee of scholars on the Middle East to serve as his editorial advisory board. The films had nothing to do with the Shah; they were all about ancient Persia. This was a wonderful project. The students then objected. They even took over the International Building.

Dolores Wharton: Yes, they did. Three days.

Wharton: So then the board of trustees became a little uncertain about whether they should approve this grant or not. I said, "We should have an opportunity for this matter to be debated." I created a special project system where the Thursday night before the meetings, the board of trustees would have an opportunity for anybody to come and make presentations. Well, we had this done with a much larger audience for there to be a discussion and a debate on the issue.

We set up a number of opportunities for key faculty particularly, as well as the students, to debate this issue in the presence of the trustees. It was absolutely fascinating, because almost every single one of the more liberal faculty members who normally would have been expected to have been against the Shah, realized that, first of all, this was a perfectly good work of scholarship, that to attack this would indeed affect their own academic freedom and the pursuit of their truth, and therefore they had to argue that this grant should be accepted.

Now, for the students sitting there, the Iranians, I mean, they were absolutely mesmerized by this discussion and debate. The result was that while I would say clearly a majority of the Iranian students were

unhappy, the other non-Iranian students very often who were anti the Shah and so on, came away from that, I personally think, with a much better understanding of why a university is the way it is, you see, without my having said this. This happened in that context, and that, to me, is a wonderful example of what makes a university great. Although it happened much after this other, but it was one of those instances where--

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Charnley: We're talking about the conditions at Michigan State University and some of the issues in your early years there, some of the programmatic things that happened during your presidency. Would you like to talk about some of those changes that you saw?

Wharton: There are a lot. Well, first of all, I restructured a good deal of the way in which things operated. I converted the breakfast group to an executive group. I added a new position of Executive Vice President for External Affairs and Affirmative Action. I created another one, which was for university development. I set up a Commission on Admissions to come forward with a set of recommendations on how to deal with all of the issues of admissions, including greater diversity. This meant that our approach was totally very different from that which was taken by many of the other universities in Michigan and elsewhere.

I created a Task Force on Lifelong Education, which was one of the first in the country, on the importance of lifelong education. I converted the Center for Urban Affairs into a College of Urban Development. I mean, it's a long, long list. The most important thing, I think, in all of this, whether it was creating a student advisory group or a new college, it was all designed to enhance the special characteristics and strengths of Michigan State, but also bring it into the modern era. I mean, it's hard to believe now, but I can remember when I first worked on trying to get student membership in the Academic Council. I mean, that was a terrible thing to think about. And all of that was done.

I had a program of presidential fellows, which was extremely successful. This was a program which I created, of selecting one undergraduate student, one graduate student, and one assistant professor, who would spend--initially it was one semester, eventually it was two semesters, in my office, and they would follow me around and see what I was doing, how I did it. They would go to anything I went to except for personnel matters. They would get special projects and so on. I would meet with them every other week, and they could ask me any question they wanted on what was happening in the university, why I did what I did or what I said what I did in the various meetings. So they could learn and see what it's like to run a university.

I had a reunion of this group a few years ago, and of the group, I think of the thirteen, I think twelve came, were able to come. It was the most incredible thing, because here were two college presidents, an assistant provost, two university vice presidents--no, three university vice presidents, director of a major program and foundation, business officer at Andover, I mean this group. And they all talked about what they had learned as a result of that process.

But again, my emphasis on Rhodes scholarships. While we had the largest number of National Merit Scholars of any university in the country, I discovered we hadn't worked to get anybody as a Rhodes scholar, so I pushed to get the Rhodes scholars. Again, it's a matter of moving it into [unclear].

Fundraising, which was a big thing. When Dolores and I arrived at Michigan State, we discovered that there were fifty-four President's Club members. Fifty-four. John Hannah did not believe in private fundraising. He believed that if you raise the money, the state would take it away, offset it. That was in those days. In my experience, you had to have an opportunity to go and get the money. So what happened was, when I brought in Les Scott as vice president for development--and Les was an absolutely incredible man--we worked. I increased the number of President's Clubs tenfold in less than six years.

But what did we do? Well, Dolores and I decided that we should do something for these people, don't just take their money. So Dolores worked on developing a program where we would host them at Cowles House, we would give them special tours of the campus, of special areas of the campus, and we would do things with them. Well, the result was, people just thrived.

We had programs of reaching out in the community where we would bring members of the community into the university. All of this was part of what I would call the conversion of the university into a kind of vibrant place, but all of that was part of this process. I mean, you just can't look at it in isolation.

Charnley: Were you surprised to find that Michigan State's endowment when you came was so slow or almost nonexistent?

Wharton: "Surprised" was not the right word. I would say I understood why it was where it was, because I understood why Hanna felt the way he did. It was not that I felt, "Oh, this is terrible." It was that I can understand why he did it, but isn't the way we were going to operate. We had our own approach to this, which we felt related more to the current mode of that period. For some people it's very hard to think back and realize all these things, because now it's so much part of the procession it's routinized, but in those days, no.

Let's take another one which really had a tremendous impact, the Advanced Management Program in Detroit. Now, most people don't realize it, but the key person who pushed that the strongest, with my help, was Les Scott. Les went and had gotten several of the corporations to give the land and so on. He wanted to develop this program. He was a corporate person himself after having left Michigan State. He'd been director of continuing education, director of the hotel school and so on. He said there are many corporate executives in that Detroit area who don't have advanced degrees in business and they don't have the time to go away from their work and go and get enrolled. He said they need a part-time program where they can work toward their MBA degree.

And so then he worked, he got the building erected, he persuaded the dean of the College of Business to use his regular faculty, not adjunct faculty, to travel down there and give the courses. That place hummed. We had people enrolled in those courses like you wouldn't believe, from all the major corporations of Detroit,

and it upset, if truth were known, it upset Michigan and Wayne State. They got very upset about the fact here was Michigan State in there siphoning off all these people.

Just to give you one other example, we were with him last night. You know who got his MBA there and got his degree from me? Alex Trotman, former chairman and CEO of Ford Motor Company. I was on the board, of course, but I gave him his degree, and he was an MBA graduate. And there are hundreds of them down there like that.

Charnley: And they remembered.

Wharton: And they remembered. They certainly do. But there again that was at a time when--now they have these advanced management programs all over the United States. In those days, it was very new.

Charnley: Would you talk a little bit about some of the diversity issues, minority rights and women's issues, that you faced? Thirty years ago it's quite a contrast.

Wharton: First of all, my appointment, for that reason, attracted a tremendous amount of national attention. Since I was the first black to be made a head of a predominantly white university, major university, on a personal level for us, it meant that we had an even higher level of inspection visibility than we would have normally had.

In Michigan, as you know, there are four positions that are instant celebrities: the governor, the mayor of Detroit, the president of the University of Michigan, and president of Michigan State. Those are the four. Now, because we were black, that was even hyper. Everything we did was inspected. Everything. I don't think we've ever before or since had that level of inspection under a microscope.

I know this doesn't answer your question. Just to give you one little example. Our youngest son, Bruce, was enrolled at Central, and one day the principal of the school called up Dolores and said, "Did you

give permission to a reporter?" She said, "What reporter?" "Well, he's here and he wants to follow Bruce around and interview his classmates to see how they accepted him." And how old was Bruce at the time? Eight?

Dolores Wharton: No, he was about eleven.

Wharton: About eleven. So she said, "No." So they got the guy out of there. But I mean, to go after a little kid, that's the kind of thing we had to go through regularly.

Now, on the campus itself, there were the predictable contending forces of, on the one hand, the minority students and the minority faculty expected or wanted me to in a sense be certain that I was going to do the right thing. The non-minority faculty, the public and so on, were watching to make certain that I was not bending over backwards and doing the wrong thing. So it was an important tightrope. But as far as I was concerned, I was going to do that which I was supposed to do as president, black or white. I think that eventually it had some resonance on the part of everybody in the community.

With some great help from Professor Carl Taylor, I modified and changed the Minority Aid Program in the dorms. We worked on that. We also, as I said, did the Commission on Admissions, which helped that. But it was a situation where I would say we had a number of cases of problems which we had to deal with. I remember when the students took over the basketball court, and they had their own reasons, which were quite appropriate. What happened there was that the students, with some encouragement from some of the black faculty, objected to the fact the Big Ten had virtually no minority presence in the coaching staffs and the referee groups, so they took over the basketball court and blocked the game one night for a period of time. That was a game we had not attended. They called me up. By the time I got there, it had all stopped.

In the meantime, I issued a statement to the press that this was an official event, and that anything to disrupt it would be a violation of certain codes of the state law. And the leader of the group came to see me.

He was very upset, and he said, "You have drawn a line in the sand." And I said, "No, I just don't want you to get in trouble, because I know you want to go to law school." [Laughter]

So we went to the next game. The campus police were ringing the court, and Dolores and I were sitting up there watching this. This young man, whose name is Sam Riddle [phonetic], who's still around, he came marching in with two of his cohorts. Everybody was watching to see what we were going to do and what he was going to do. So he sits down, and at halftime his two cohorts get up and they go over to one of the balconies and they put up a great big banner, which says, "The Big Ten: Open It Up Or Close it Down." And then the other one puts up a banner, which says, "MSU: Uncle Clif's Cabin."

The campus police start rushing to tear these down, and Dolores and I leaped out of our seats, we stopped the police. We said, "No, no, no. That's free speech." And, of course, all the kids clapped. That was all right, you know, they didn't disrupt the game.

But I would say that the issue of our blackness was pretty much a focal point the first year or two, but after that, it was I was the president and my wife was the first lady. It was just, that was it. They understood it, they recognized it, but it was not a critical issue.

Also keep in mind we did a better job on increases in minority enrollment than most of the other universities did, but I didn't set quotas or anything like that.

Charnley: Affirmative action was that.

Wharton: Yes. That's another thing. I created the anti-discrimination procedures. I created the Anti-discrimination Judicial Board. All of those things were done because they didn't have it as a way of dealing with these issues. So I went ahead and did that.

Charnley: How about for women's issues at that time?

Wharton: Yes, we had a lot of that. But you see again, we were very strong on Title IX. I put in the first woman faculty representative, athletic faculty representative, in the whole Big Ten. I did that. The deputy athletic director that I appointed was a woman, and at that time, she was the only one. But in those days it was very unusual.

Charnley: The medical school?

Wharton: Which one? [Laughter]

Charnley: Vet med, M.D., and osteopath. Do you remember some of those controversies at all?

Wharton: Well, they weren't controversial. The osteopathic proved to be a very successful--I guess one could almost call it a merger. They needed state funding in their previous location, and they had a number of their funding leaders who negotiated with us and the university to bring them to Michigan State. Their first dean, Mike Magen, worked very hard with the other medical schools, and they eventually developed a fairly unified first-year program set of courses so that it was a much higher level of interaction between the two. They proved to be quite, quite successful.

In fact, I don't know if it ever evolved quite that way, but Mike had the notion that given the tremendously high quality of what they were producing or were going to produce at Michigan State, that they would be able to produce many of the future academic leaders of osteopathic medicine around the country. But that did not work to be a major controversy.

The problem where I had the greatest pressure was to try to persuade me to get a hospital. Talking with all of my colleagues who had hospitals in other universities, they all said the same thing. Every one of them said, "If you can avoid it, don't do it." And they were right. They were right. When I was head of SUNY, I had, what was it, four hospitals, five hospitals. And they can really drain your energies and finances. So we

didn't, and that's why we developed a whole new system, and it worked quite well. Andrew Hunt, the dean of allopathic medicine, was just great in that. But it wasn't a major controversy.

No, the major battle--it wasn't a big battle, but the fight that we had, which I lost, was on the law school, and we lost that by one vote. That was the only one that I felt that was too bad that we didn't get that one through. Everything else was fine.

Fred Honhart: Could you explain a little bit more about the law school as far as about what the issue was?

Wharton: We were proposing a law school which would reflect a greater orientation toward what I would call the wider social wheel of society, not just being a kind of a typical law school. We wanted to include in it a lot of the orientation towards the need for special training in environmental law, etc., as part of the regular training. We developed, I thought, a very strong proposal, which people really liked, and it would be sort of like a counterpart to the way we infused into allopathic medicine the strong orientation towards family practice.

Most people don't realize it, but at the time in the allopathic hunt and Andy Hunt, that emphasis on family practice orientation was quite strong and very unique. It was not the only one, but it was a very strong one. We wanted to have that counterpart on the law side.

The major problem we had was not internal. It was the fact that the University of Michigan, I believe, can't prove it, fought tooth and nail against our getting the law school. They had fought us against getting the medical school, but we had won that one. But this one, as I say, we lost by one vote.

At the time, too, we were also being fought by the Cooley Law School, which was getting under way. So Cooley was fighting against us, and U. of M. was fighting against us, and we believed that there was more than enough out there to not affect anybody adversely.

Charnley: The one vote, was that in the state legislature?

Wharton: Yes.

Charnley: In talking about some of the legislative issues, how would you characterize the economic times that you had to deal with there? How did it affect your presidency?

Wharton: We had several years when the budgets would be difficult or would even be cut mid-year or during the year. But I would have to say that I was extremely fortunate in that Roger Wilkinson--I should back up and explain. When I arrived at Michigan State, Roger was acting vice president of business and finance, and he was thirty-five years old. I am told--I don't know how accurate it is, but I am told that at the time when Warren Huff was leading the charge against my appointment, that when they wanted to sit down and talk to me, that Warren Huff wanted to negotiate with me to become vice president of business and finance. I don't know how true that is, but anyway, it adds a little spice.

But I felt that Roger had done this great job as acting vice president and he deserved a chance to show his wares, and so I nominated him to be full vice president. At the same meeting, I nominated Bob Perrin to be vice president for university affairs, external affairs, and affirmative action. And I nominated Ira Polley to be director of admissions.

A little bit of background. Ira Polley had been superintendent of education. Bob Perrin had been the top aide to Senator McNamara in Washington, and formerly the director of OEO. Before I had ever entered the picture, Warren Huff had talked to Bob Perrin about whether or not he should become vice president of business and finance. When I put their three names forward, the three dissidents voted against it, and Warren Huff said he didn't like seeing politics intruding into the political-type things.

Charnley: You still maintained that five-to-three ratio.

Wharton: Well, it broke down a little bit. I'll get into that in a minute as to what happened, but just to finish off. But in any event, we had a situation where we were talking about the--I went off on the other.

Charnley: About Roger Wilkinson.

Wharton: When he took over, Roger did a superb job. Now, he had learned a great deal, because he always had worked at Michigan State, he had learned a great deal from John Hannah.

I'll tell you one little story, anecdote, which is quite true. One of my rules of thumb at Michigan State was if I saw something that did not look right or why it was strange, I would always say, "John Hannah had a reason for doing it this way. What was it?" Now, one of the things that I discovered was that John Hannah seemed to be able to ride out budgetary dips, budgetary cutbacks. How did he do it? Well, what I discovered was the coal pile.

In my day, there was a very limited number of dollars that you could transfer from one budget year to the next. I've forgotten what it was, maybe about 100,000. And you had no contingency in the budget. No contingency. What Hannah did was, he had a great guy who knew when to buy coal, and he would buy it when the price was low. He'd buy a huge pile of coal, way more than needed. Then, if, in fact, there were budget cuts in the middle of the year, they would just lower the coal pile right down. They skillfully used the capital asset portion of the budget, particularly the coal pile, as a way of softening all of the budget cuts. There's a sequel to this, which I won't go into. One of my successors, who didn't pay attention to this, really suffered.

Charnley: Got to have the coal pile.

Wharton: But that was an example. Roger was always very, very good at handling this, and so we were able to live with it.

The other thing is that I would have to say Jack Breslin was extremely good in his work with the legislature. Dolores and I had very good relationship with Governor Milliken and Helen Milliken. Particularly during the riots, Milliken was absolutely superb. He said to me regularly, he said, "You're in charge. I trust you. Keep me informed." We would talk two or three times a day, and he would follow my lead right straight down the line, and it made a tremendous difference.

But also on the budget side, I could call Milliken and say, "I need to see you for five minutes or ten minutes." He would always call back. I could go and see him just like that. That was wonderful, whether he agreed with what I was asking or recommending.

I also had, on the whole, good relationships with many of the leaders of the legislature, even though Jack was the primary person to deal with them, but I still did. So even in the difficult years, financially. During the student riots, they tried to pass a resolution asking the three presidents to resign and all that sort of stuff, but that was a different thing.

Charnley: Some of the issues relating to the Urban Affairs Program, would you be able to talk a little bit about that?

Wharton: When I arrived, there had been created a special pool of money as a result of the Detroit riots in the Martin Luther King [Jr.] case. What had happened was that all of these funds were used for the provost office, in Center for Urban Affairs, and also in affirmative action. They were all kind of clustered together. I felt that that was not helping, because you had sort of one person dealing with all of these different issues. So I decided that I should separate those out. So I put the provost piece into the provost office, and I appointed a great, great man, James Hamilton, who is deceased now, and his wife is still a faculty member at Michigan State, Ruth, who had done a phenomenal job in chemistry, as professor of chemistry, with minority youth. He developed a major program, academic program for minorities, in the academic side, and then moved the affirmative action piece over to be under Bob Perrin with a separate person.

Then that left the Center for Urban Affairs as an academic piece. Then subsequently, I felt that the Center for Urban Affairs needed to have a permanent academic slot, because what was happening was, they would use their funds to support slots in different departments, but the moment you pulled the money away, the department didn't have any commitment to it. The special money is gone. It's like a grant. So I said, no, you've got to have a regular academic department.

So we developed a proposal to create a College of Urban Development out of the Center for Urban Affairs, which would have two academic departments in it, one for metropolitan and urban studies and the other one for sociology. Those two entities then became the base for the College of Urban Development, and then that gave it a regular line in the budget. It was not some special little add-on. But after I left, they eliminated it, moved it back in the Center for Urban Affairs. I think personally it needed to have--because I was nurturing it and encouraging it because I felt it couldn't--but again, what I was trying to do was--

[Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

Charnley: This is tape two. When the tape ended, we were talking about the Center for Urban Affairs. Dr. Wharton, if you could, go back to your last summary statement about impact.

Wharton: I was trying to develop it in a way where we would have a true disciplinary core and it would have its own budgetary line. I don't know when it was eliminated. It was eliminated a few years after I left, and it was moved back to being the Center for Urban Affairs.

Charnley: The issue of athletics and academics, the push and pull between the two, especially at a large university, would you talk a little bit about that, about how it affected your presidency?

Wharton: You should ask my wife that question. [Laughter] First of all, there's no question but what athletics is, and was, an important part of Michigan State University. What gave me concern or caused me concern was not that factor, but the fact that there was a lesser attention being given to certain other aspects of the university in the extracurricular sense as well as the curricular sense.

That is to say, you had a strong art faculty, but they were not getting anything like the attention that the athletic department was getting. You had some outstanding humanists on the faculty, and they were not getting any attention. I will not go any further than this to say because this is where Dolores will come in, but when you look at what we had as an auditorium and you say, "This is a major university," and we went to University of Michigan to--what was it? Krenner [phonetic], was that the one at Michigan, University of Michigan Performing Arts Center? I forgot the name of the one at Michigan.

Dolores Wharton: At the University of Michigan?

Wharton: Yes.

Dolores Wharton: It was the new one that was built before Powers.

Wharton: Yes, I know.

Dolores Wharton: The Powers Center.

Wharton: Powers Center, that's right. Bill Powers. But anyway, that auditorium, if that was a reflection of the cultural values of Michigan State, forget about it, as the kids would say. Well, now having said that, and I'll leave that part to Dolores, as she can talk about this better than I can, in terms of her work with the artists and the rotating art as well as the performing arts center, but on the athletic front, one of the things which I

quickly came to realize was that the role that a president has in trying to exercise real oversight over the athletic program is a very critical part of a president's responsibility.

The experience of going through our NCAA investigation taught me a tremendous amount about what really goes on. I learned so much, that the Big Ten athletic director used me as a resource with all the new presidents in the Big Ten. He'd say, "Go talk to Clif and he'll tell you what's going on."

I would not have known any of this. I don't think that many presidents would know this unless these things happened and they suddenly begin to dig and found out what goes on. But it was quite an experience, quite an experience.

One little vignette. When I announced the fact that we were under investigation and the press came, I think the press practically filled the whole board room, you know. Bob Perrin and I said to each other, "Why can't we get this kind of coverage when we have these Rhodes scholars?" But that was it.

I conducted the investigation very deliberately. I created a special committee, which included a trustee, to assist me in the investigation. I insisted that none of the information about the allegations should be made public until we had verified them. The reason was very simple, and most people at first did not understand this. The list that we received were unsubstantiated allegations, with no indication of whom the persons were who made the statements. So if they said, "We have reason to believe that Professor John Lee took an athlete and gave him his credit card and he bought six suits," I don't know whether it was H___ who said it or anybody, but it's on there. I don't know whether it's true or not.

Now, if we'd made that public, there's a whole series of possible consequences. If it's untrue, then you sue me for having made this public, and all your reputation is damaged for having had this come out. So I insisted, no, we cannot make these public. The press wanted to know what the charges were. I said, "Can't do that, because you don't know who said it and you don't know whether it's true or not." And then we proceeded to do the investigation.

The other thing which was also very difficult for people to understand is that given the nature of the procedures which existed then, I refused to go along and condemn out of hand those cases where it was

impossible to make a determination of accuracy, in cases where we didn't know who had made the statement. Because secretly people could make these statements and ruin you and we have no way of finding out who said it. Sometimes it's out of spite or hatred or what have you. The cases where we found it, boy, we nailed them. But it was quite an experience, quite an experience.

Charnley: Was there anything in your background that prepared you for that?

Wharton: I would say good old common sense and a commitment to justice and fairness. That's much more important than--the investigation itself, no, that you just know what you're doing. Plus I had my very good relationships. For example, it was clear that some of the allegations seemed to have been coming out of Ohio State. I called up the then president of Ohio State, [unclear], who is a good friend, and said, "I would like to come down and interview some of your student athletes, football, whom we attempted to recruit, who came to Ohio State instead." And he set it up for me. And unbeknownst to us, until we were pretty much through, Woody Hayes had rented a room above our room in the hotel and he was channeling these student athletes through his room down to us and then back up to his room. But I was about to find that out.

You just go at it from the standpoint of what you think is right and fair. And it was very interesting that the outcome was really quite an event on the campus and it had some other consequences, too.

Honhart: One of the consequences was the change in athletic directors.

Wharton: That was the coach. The athletic director, Jack [John A.] Fuzak, stayed on for a while. But the coach--

Honhart: Burt Smith.

Wharton: Well, Burt did, yes. I was thinking of the faculty rep. Burt left. To a certain extent, it was more a matter that it happened on Burt's watch really to a certain extent, but the real malefactors, we nailed them. We knew who they were.

One of the more interesting aspects of this, which I was writing up the other day, is that Denny Stoltz [phonetic], quite a few times publicly years afterwards, was very critical of me, because he kept saying that he was released without proper due process and all that sort of thing. And he didn't know any of these things at all. I've never revealed until I put it in this book that what he doesn't realize is that the first job he got after he left Michigan State, I helped him get.

Honhart: At the University of Toledo.

Wharton: Yes, Bowling Green. What happened was, the president there called me and he said, "Well, what do you think?"

And I said, "Well, I personally think that Denny Stoltz inherited a very messy situation, and I think he may have known what was going on, but if he did, he didn't do as much about it as he should have." I said, "But I think he really was trapped." And I said, "I think that basically he wants to be an honest coach." I did. That's what I told him, and that's when he hired him. But Denny didn't know that and I never told Denny this, you know. But I always was amused by the fact that he says, "Oh, you know what you did to me."

Honhart: [Unclear because of microphone static] There was a lot of rumor, if you will, to the effect that you went into the NCAA hearing and learned that you hadn't been told the whole truth by your own subordinates on certain aspects of the investigation.

Wharton: No. I don't remember anything like that at all.

Honhart: That's very interesting to hear, because things develop over time.

Wharton: No, I don't remember anything of that nature. No. I'll check and see.

Those hearings are not to be believed. The staff of the NCAA who conducted the investigation to begin with and who put together all of the allegations, then become the staff of the hearing committee and they act as the prosecutor in the case in front of the committee. You're sitting there and they're giving you these accusations having given you the list to begin with and without telling you who gave you these. I mean, it's almost otherworldly when you are sitting there, and you're trying to answer these questions, but they don't show you what they've got. It's really a very, very odd kind of pattern.

One of the committee members, it was very interesting, after this sent me a cable in which he, in effect, as I remember it, said that he felt that one of the people, one of our assistant coaches, probably should not be treated this harshly. I thought this was true, too, but he agreed, although he didn't do that at the committee.

In terms of really bad stuff, we had it. I won't go into all of it, but the really bad actors we nailed. We really had them.

Charnley: Toward the end of your time at Michigan State, were there any thoughts or did you actively seek a new job? What were the circumstances? People had been approaching you prior, probably as soon as you got here, in government and business. Could you talk a little bit about those, just in general terms?

Wharton: I guess my wife and I used to say regularly that no sooner had we gotten there, everybody had us leaving. Well, it's hard to tell in certain cases how serious these things are. For example, I supposedly was on the short list for Harvard, and that caused us turmoil on the campus.

Then when [James] Carter was elected President, that's a very funny one. Right after he was elected, one of his aides called me and wanted me to go down to Plains, Georgia, because he was convening a group.

The group was Mike Blumenthal, Juanita Krebs, Cy Vance, Harold Brown, and there was one other person, and then he wanted me. I said I was very flattered, but I couldn't do it. I said, "I operate as a nonpartisan, and the moment that I show up, that's it. I'm a dead duck in Michigan." And I wouldn't go.

Years later, Dolores was on the board of Gannett Newspaper along with Roslyn Carter, and at one luncheon in Atlanta, Dolores is sitting next to the President and she said to him--well, you can tell them the story. You introduced yourself.

Dolores Wharton: I introduced myself to him so that he would know who I was. He said, "Oh, I know who you are. I invited Clif Wharton to come to be a member of my Cabinet and he refused." [Laughter] "Oh, thank you, Mr. President." But we've had lovely relationships with the Carters, both the Carters.

Wharton: No, I wasn't searching. Things were going fine. By that time the dissidents were all gone, and so it was working very well. But when the state university offer came along, that was one that really had some [unclear]. Now, interestingly, although most people don't know this, I was right at the penultimate stages on the SUNY one when Yale came after me.

I think what had been accomplished at Michigan State, I think attracted a lot of attention for both of us, so that despite some of our detractors on the campus, it was--but it was hard. It was hard for us to leave there, it really was.

Dolores Wharton: Oh, yes. I was really very unhappy about leaving Michigan State. I truly loved it. I still do.

Wharton: Yes. That was probably the hardest change we've ever made.

Dolores Wharton: I'd say so.

Charnley: In looking back at your career, and obviously because of time we maybe can't go into some of the subsequent things, you're writing a book probably about your post-MSU career for sure, how would you assess your overall experience in terms of your own life, it coming at the time that it did and then now and looking back? How important was your experience as president of Michigan State University?

Wharton: Well, it obviously was a very important stage in our lives. I would have to say that with probably one exception, every stage of our lives has been absolutely marvelous, it really has, with all of the ups and downs. And they all were quite distinctive, the years we spent out in Latin America, the years in Asia or Michigan State or SUNY or TIA, they were all quite personally rewarding.

I would say that at Michigan State, to a certain extent it was the first time in our married life when we truly were able to operate as a team across the board, I mean right across the board. I mean, it was not just segmented. Because it's a total job. It's a twenty-four-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week job. So that, you know, people call the house. If I'm not there, Dolores takes the phone call. I mean, issues arise. It's an all-embracing, if you really want to do it right, kind of experience.

We became known as a team. That's why the center [Wharton Center for Performing Arts] is named for the two of us. It was not my presidency; it was our presidency in a very real sense, without Dolores being sort of Madam President in the way she operated.

I would have to say that I learned a lot. I learned a lot. I learned a lot about running a university, which proved quite valuable when I then had to run sixty-four campuses, you know. But I would say the bottom line on it is, it is really hard for me to be a fair and impartial judge on it for a variety of reasons. Not only is it personal, but also I think the perspective has to be there with a certain amount of time and distance to allow this to be done, and also I find that there's great deal of what I call revisionism that occurs in the way people describe things and what happened. You say, "I did so and so," and people say, "Oh, you did that?" And it's like, "Oh, I didn't know that" sort of thing.

Not too long ago, I was talking to one of the big fundraisers, retired now, and he had forgotten that Dolores and I were the ones who started the capital drive and the first one they ever had at Michigan State. He should have known, this is his field. And he didn't know it. He thought that, you know, somebody else had started it. "No, we started it." And then when he thought, "Oh, I guess that's right," you know. That kind of thing goes on all the time and in time it gets lost.

Charnley: Fred?

Honhart: I just want to go back to one of the other special points here. You made a major change in the administration when you relocated administration [microphone static]. Would you care to comment about what led to that decision?

Wharton: Well, first of all, Breslin was not changed by me. Jack's title was added to it--period--by the board when I was appointed. That's all that happened. There was no other change in his responsibilities, no addition, no subtraction.

John Cantlon was a different case. When I arrived, John was provost, and he was a good provost, very good provost. Then Milt Molidor was due to retire, and I felt, as I looked at it, that John would be as good or better as a-- [Doorbell ring. Tape recorder turned off.]

John Cantlon was, I thought, as good or better as vice president of research and graduate studies. So I asked John if he would be willing to move over, and he said, "Sure." So he did, and that's when I moved Larry Boger in as provost. But it was no dissatisfaction with John at all. Quite the reverse. John had always been a great team player, and he was just great as vice president. He was great as provost. But that way I got two strong people.

Honhart: The other question I had, you had mentioned Walter Adams as the interim. How would you describe your relationship with him during your presidency?

Wharton: I'd be interested in Dolores' reaction to that. I would say that my relationship with Adams was at times distant or prickly, mainly because--well, I'll give you one example. When I was working hard on creating the College of Urban Development, one day in the halls he stopped me and he said, "You're trying to destroy this wonderful program."

And I said, "No, I'm trying to save it." And I said, "You just let me try to get this done." But he was convinced that I was trying to destroy the program. I said, "No, not at all."

When it finally went through and I got it through the state legislature, you know, he never said a word.

There were a number of occasions when--and I never said anything to him about it publicly, but there were a number of occasions when he would sort of adopt positions which were sometimes detrimental. He and Lash Larrowe.

I guess it was also part and parcel of a very important difference in style of management. A former trustee, who is dead now, of Michigan State, he said, "Walter Adams likes to play to the gallery." He said, "And you want to provide leadership." He said, "That's the difference." I don't know how accurate it is.

Then when I left, as I was leaving, Walter Adams said I neglected the university. Some of the members of the board of trustees blasted the daylights out of him for having said that. They started listing all the different things that I'd done. It was, I think, to a certain extent, his continuing unhappiness that he didn't get it and he really wanted it. This is a guess. I just don't know.

Now with Pauline, his wife, we got along fine. But he never got over it. Yet I didn't have a thing to do with it. I didn't go out to prevent him from being president. That wasn't my role.

Charnley: I want to thank you on behalf of the project, certainly, and we appreciate your contribution.

[End of interview]

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