

## WARD CONNERLY

### Part III: The Battle Over Proposition 209

*Ward Connerly, closely identified with the successful ballot measure, is thrust into the national spotlight. Seven other states have similar measures; six are successful. Finally, a negative memory of the late Diane Watson*

**Interview conducted by Dan Morain in Sacramento, California, on August 15, 2023.**

**DM:** Well, this is headed for the ballot in 1996. The Republicans have a 41-39 seat majority in the Assembly. So it's teetering. It's a presidential election. California at the time still conceivably was in play. Certainly, the Dole campaign claimed it would be in play. So this is coming at a difficult time politically, consequential time politically. Does this help or hurt the Republican cause?

**WC:** Well, if the demographics of the state that are in play is changing, who can say whether it helps or hurts? The national party really wanted the money to be used from the state that came in for purposes other than a Proposition. And so they're thinking, ahh, look at all this money coming in, \$750,000. We can do a lot with that. And they tried to do so apart from the money, what they wanted to do with it. Give 209 a little bit. Keep them quiet.

**DM:** Keep you quiet.

**DM:** That works out well. I think.

**WC:** I went to, they ran an ad, they were really inept.

**DM:** The Republican Party ran a Prop. 209 ad?

**WC:** They ran a Prop. 209 ad, and one of them, one of the ads that they ran, invoked the memory of Martin Luther King. How dumb do you have to be to realize that you are going with an ad at that point about race? And you're going to imply that Martin Luther King was on the side as he should have been, but on the side of those who wanted to eliminate preferences to Black people. I was in San Francisco when I saw this ad, and I thought, if we don't come out against the ad, we're gonna lose. And so I came back to Sacramento and I went over to the governor's house and I told Pete, Pete, this is bad. Are you aware of what they're doing? And Pete's an ex-marine and has some salty language at times, and...

**DM:** I've never heard that. I've never heard that.

**WC:** And he and I agreed that this was bad news. And so I called a press event of you folks, and I made it clear that if we lost this initiative, this campaign, the National Republican Party, Haley Barbour, and all of them, they're the ones responsible for it. And we decided at that point that we would go our own way and not rely on the party.

**DM:** And, but you don't have the money to put on television ads. Your campaign raised about three and a half million dollars. The no campaign raised \$21 million. So \$3 million even in 1996 is not enough to do much of a television campaign.

**WC:** No, but I think that when it comes to initiatives, and our opponents haven't quite grasped this. When it comes to initiatives, people are not swayed as much by the money as they are the personalities. I became identified with the issue. To this day, I have people that remember, "You're the guy." I look differently, obviously, after a few years, but people remember. People remember, that's the equality guy. That's the guy that is against affirmative action and doesn't matter about the \$30 million or \$20 million versus \$3 million. Doesn't matter, if your cause is right and you have a strong personality on this issue or that issue that can influence, that can rule the day when it comes to an initiative.

**DM:** Do you think the Dole campaign, which again initially at least was trying to compete in California, do you feel as if they were particularly engaged in this issue?

**WC:** No, they weren't. They didn't know even about the million dollars and all they knew is that the California party has got some big bucks. They don't know who raised it or whatever. We just know that they've got some big bucks.

**DM:** I wasn't clear. Do you believe that the Dole campaign was tuned in, dialed into the Prop. 209 issue? The nuances of it, the import, the significance of it? Dole did take a position in support. Clinton took a position in opposition.

**WC:** Yeah. But it's a very surface level kind of interest. It wasn't something that they really felt strongly about or whatever. No. They knew that there was this issue in California. If you went to people connected with the campaign right now and said, what did you think about 209? They can't remember.

**DM:** Okay. Well, and anyway it passed 54.5 percent in favor. You have a meeting sometime thereafter, soon thereafter, with Newt Gingrich, then Speaker of the House. And there was some discussion, some promise that this was going to become a national issue with Gingrich as speaker. What happened to that?

**WC:** Well, I saw a picture last night of Newt and yours truly, and Janice Camarena, who was Janice Ingram then, which reminded me of Newt's interest in it. Newt was very, he understood the issue. He is a policy wonk. He understood it. And...

**WC:** I think for a while there he tried to do everything that he could to catapult the issue into public policy platforms, but it simmered and died.

**DM:** Well. Why do you think that is the case? The speaker supported it. If he wanted to make it an issue, could, if he wanted to bring it to the floor, he could have gotten it to the floor. You would think.

**WC:** I can't answer. I don't know.

**DM:** Well, do you think that there was ambivalence within the Republican Party to take on this issue?

**WC:** Yes.

**DM:** And why is that?

**WC:** I think that the Republican Party has a difficult time, and I say that as a fellow Republican, it has a difficult time navigating the waters of race, really a difficult time. I think that, and to this day, it's difficult. I have always believed that the Republican Party should stake out a position on a race and defend it wholeheartedly. Many Republican leaders, however, believed, no, no. We don't want to touch that. We don't want to do that. We don't want to touch that because we're going to lose the Black vote. And my position is if it's the right position, why do you care about losing the Black vote? Black people can embrace equality just like anybody else can. Why are you worried about losing a vote if your position is the right position?

**DM:** Okay, well, so, nonetheless, they, this did not get to the floor. It did not become a nationalized a national issue, at least at that time. But you know, one of the things that I was struck by in re-jogging my memory about Prop. 209 doing some additional research, was the number of people who, were involved maybe in a somewhat small way who went on to become fairly prominent. Certainly, Larry Arnn is one, very prominent in conservative Republican politics. Members of the Federalist Society became involved initially. Fellow named Edward Blum may not be much of a household name, but he went on to found Students for Fair Admissions, which was the plaintiff in the lawsuit that resulted in the affirmative action decision by the U.S. Supreme Court of June striking down affirmative action in...

**WC:** June 29th.

**DM:** In higher...

**DM:** In higher education. So, in your view, what is the significance of Prop. 209 to this day?

**WC:** I shudder to think what decisions would be made by the California Legislature were it not for Prop. 209. There is no end of one's imagination of the horrors, public policy horrors, that could be visited upon a state when it comes to racial preferences absent something like Prop. 209, reparations be done, reparations for black people...

**DM:** Well, reparations for great grandsons of slaves.

**WC:** Yeah.

**DM:** So you are a great-grandson of a slave, right?

**WC:** Right. I'm also the great grandson of a slave owner, [laughter] and Prop. 209 would prevent

that.

**DM:** Okay. So you don't think reparations are a good idea?

**WC:** I don't think reparations are a good idea. I think it's a bad idea.

**DM:** Don't you think we, as a society, owe some debt to people who were once enslaved?

**WC:** No.

**DM:** Why not?

**WC:** In this country, we are all, we should be aware of the fact that we had slavery. It was an institution of economic necessity during its time, but the country is imperfect. It's always trying to correct things to make it a more perfect union. I didn't choose to be the descendant of a slave. True I didn't, but I am. And I'm an American and I believe that if I don't like this, I could leave. But there are a lot of other people who also have problems and I take the bad with the good.

**DM:** Okay. So do you know anything about your slave ancestor?

**WC:** No, I do not.

**DM:** Do you know anything about your slave-owner ancestor?

**WC:** No, I do not. Other than the slave owner married his Property, one of his slaves, and they had a daughter and the daughter ended up producing Wardell Connerly along the line. That's where my life begins, not with her. My life begins on June 15th, 1939. And my uncle James said to me, "Boy, it doesn't matter of where you begin, it's what you do that counts."

**DM:** So do you believe that there's institutional racism?

**WC:** I need to answer that in a very nuanced sort of way. And this is one of my weaknesses probably. And it infuriates guys in your profession that generally -- but you, maybe not so much -- there was a time when the institutions were structured, it seems, to benefit certain people on the basis of their skin color and thereby harm others because of their skin color. Do I think that the institutions, the educational institutions, the employment institutions, all of the different arts and entertainment institutions, the economy as an institution, do I think that all of those are rigged against people like me? No, I don't. And even if they did, are those barriers insurmountable? No. There are instances where certain people, based on their presumed identities, have more obstacles than others. Yeah. But I think that for the most part what we call the playing field is pretty well leveled out now so that there is not the institutional discrimination that prohibits a person like me, skin color-wise, from succeeding.

**DM:** Police shootings disproportionately involve people of color driving while black, I think probably is a thing. I don't know if you've ever experienced it. I never have obviously.

**WC:** One time I did driving down the alley on 22nd street, driving to my Victorian office building parking lot in my new Jaguar at the time, a police officer followed me down the alley as I went to my parking spot my new Jaguar who followed me, the owner of the building. And to this day, I am annoyed by it. Why would he presume that I am a threat to anybody? I own the building. I own this new Jag.

**DM:** Did he stop you?

**WC:** Yeah.

**DM:** And what'd he say to you?

**WC:** "I was just wondering who you were?" "Well, officer, I own that building and I appreciate your interest. Everything's okay." Who can say? But I do know this. The overarching problem is one in which people who share my skin color have a role to play in creating the atmosphere that causes him to perceive me as a possible problem. It's very nuanced. I can enter this transaction at the point where I say, "He's a bigot for singling me out." Or I can enter the process at the point where I say, "Guys who have the same amount of melanin that I do, or more or less have a role to play in creating the incidents of crime that causes him to have the attitude that he has."

**DM:** Okay. So after the '96 campaign, you're truly a public figure. And there was a very interesting, I thought, story in the New York Times, which delved into your background. I won't get into all the details of it, but one of the things really struck me was, you had lost contact with Roy Connerly, your father, and the reporter, a terrific reporter, went to Leesville and found, lo-and-behold, your old man's still alive or was still alive at the time. [chuckle] And so this was a surprise to you?

**WC:** Oh, yeah.

**DM:** And tell me what you thought. And then it led to a reunion, right?

**WC:** Well, I wouldn't call it a reunion.

**DM:** A visit, a visit. [chuckle]

**WC:** A visit. I was in my office as I recall, and Barry Bearak, a reporter for the [New York Times, did his research](#). Found out that my father, my biological father Roy Connerly, was on his deathbed and asked if I was going to visit him. And I said, "I don't think so." But then I was giving a speech at Tulane University, New Orleans, and I thought, "I think I'll pay him a visit." So I rented a car and drove four hours from New Orleans to Leesville. And my father was lying in bed, didn't have much longer for this earth. I called, I had previously called my stepmother, introduced myself to her. I was at a Walmart parking lot, I believe, I think it was Walmart. And I called on the phone. The number had been given to me by Bearak. Told her who I was.

**WC:** She instantly recognized, invited me over. Someone, I believe it was my stepbrother, came to the parking lot, picked me up, had me follow him to the house where my father was. I went in

and introduced myself and he said, "Billy," my nickname, "Nice to see you." Or something like that. And I said, I think I said, "Why didn't you ever try to get in touch with me?" And he didn't say anything. And I asked a couple of other questions, and he was out of it. He just had no idea who I was, really. My stepmother stood there, and she said, "He doesn't know what you're asking him." And after about 15 or 20 minutes having driven four hours across swamps or whatever they were, I turned and walked out. About a month later, she called and said, "Your father died. You wanna come to the funeral?" I said, "No, thanks." Close that chapter.

**DM:** But you have kin from Roy Connerly's two sons.

**WC:** Yes.

**DM:** Well, your half-brothers who you don't particularly know, but they have kids, right?

**WC:** They have daughters. I don't know if there are any sons or not, but I have met two of my nieces. I don't know if there are more than two, but I had two stepbrothers, I have two stepbrothers...

**DM:** When you say stepbrothers or half-brothers?

**WC:** Half-brothers.

**DM:** Half-brothers. Yeah.

**WC:** These two daughters, I love them dearly. My nieces, I've gotten to know them in the last year almost. And they are both wonderful people. And I've struck up a great relationship with Jennifer and Joanie. Just nothing but positive things to say about both of them. Great, great, great ladies.

**DM:** Do you talk politics with them?

**WC:** No. I don't know whether they think I'm an angel or an enemy. I don't know.

**DM:** Alright, well, so after 209 and after nothing came in Congress, you promoted a few other initiatives that mimicked 209. So it passed in Washington and Michigan and Nebraska and...

**WC:** Oklahoma.

**DM:** Oklahoma. What am I leaving out? What happened in Colorado?

**WC:** Well, Colorado, the Service Employees International Union. In 2016, I believe Barack Obama was on the ballot. I think that was the year.

**DM:** No, it wasn't 2016.

**DM:** 2008, I think.

**WC:** 2008. 2008. Yeah. And he publicly said he was opposed to those Ward Connerly initiatives. We lost.

**DM:** You lost Colorado.

**WC:** We lost Colorado.

**DM:** So what's your...

**WC:** Narrowly.

**DM:** What's your won-loss record on your ballot measures?

**WC:** Our won-loss record is on the ballot initiative is about seven wins and one loss.

**DM:** One loss in Colorado.

**WC:** Narrow loss. That was the only loss.

**DM:** And you blame President Obama?

**WC:** Without a doubt. Without a doubt. He is like so many Democrats that talk a good language about equality, but when the rubber hits the road, nowhere to be found, they oppose equality. To this day, I don't understand Democrats who sound so good about equality and diversity, but they opposed our initiative. The state shall not discriminate against or grant preferential treatment too. I don't know what is so difficult for those folks to embrace that. I just don't get it.

**DM:** Okay. So in 2003, you sought to take Prop. 209, a step further in California with Proposition 54, which would've limited...

**WC:** Racial privacy initiative.

**DM:** Which would've limited, restricted the ability of government to collect data on race with exceptions. But that was generally it, right? It lost. Tell me what your thinking was on that one.

**WC:** I don't think that the government... I am so glad you asked this. I don't think the government should be classifying people. It's almost as if by calling me a colored person, there are certain characteristics about me that you're gonna learn. Dan, you're not. You're not, all you're doing is singling me out, separating me. I'm waiting for the day when the Supreme Court prevents the classification system. That's the point at which we reach the promised land. The government should not be classifying its citizens into these separate racial groups. If we're all created equal, as our founders say, if the reality is that the people you see on those pictures there are evidence...

**DM:** These are photos of your family here.

**WC:** Are evidence of that melting pot. Why do you wanna classify them? Why do you wanna say this one is colored, person of color, which are really the same thing. Right? Isn't it, colored person of color. It's idiocy. The racial privacy initiative was the right thing to do.

**DM:** Okay. So it didn't win. The largest single donor to it was your foundation, the non-profit that you had set up, the American Civil Rights Institute. Right?

**WC:** Right.

**DM:** Initially, you did not disclose donors to that entity. There was the FPPC, Fair Political Practices Commission, filed a lawsuit to get at the donors, and lo-and-behold, it showed that Rupert Murdoch had given \$300,000 and John Moore as a Regent had given \$400,000. And, Harlan Crow had given \$140,000 and others. Paul Singer, hedge fund guy from New York. Why did you not wanna disclose the donors to that particular entity?

**WC:** Because people get penalized. The NAACP had previously years before or gone the route of not disclosing its donors to protect them. That's what I was trying to do. The...

**DM:** Well, the NAACP worried about its donors getting lynched. I don't think anybody is gonna lynch Rupert Murdoch. Right?

**WC:** True, true. But they sure might try to harm Fox News or something else that Rupert Murdoch is doing. And it was just to try to protect them.

**DM:** Okay. So Harlan Crow became big news this past year with his financial support of Justice Clarence Thomas. You have a relationship with Justice Thomas, as I understand.

**WC:** As I do with Harlan Crow.

**DM:** And with Harlan Crow. Well, so tell me what your feeling is about Justice Thomas.

**WC:** He's a great American.

**DM:** Fellow traveler? Fellow traveler?

**WC:** We believe, I think our beliefs, are pretty much parallel. I have the greatest respect for him. He has done great things. Conservative, yes, he is. Am I on most things? Yes. Do I think that he is being maligned? Yeah. Do I think that many of those who went after him were anticipating the decision that he led the way on June 29th? Yeah. They were anticipating this and wanted to put a little dirt on his robe in anticipation of the decision.

**DM:** On affirmative action.

**WC:** Yeah. Race preferences. You will notice as you read the decision.



**DM:** I did notice. Please, go ahead.

**WC:** That affirmative action's an amorphous term, it means many things. There's some forms of affirmative action that I would support. I don't know about his position, but this was about race preferences, about treating everybody the same. Affirmative action. For example, if you wanted to have a program in which you benefited unwed mothers who want help on childcare, that could be affirmative action. I would have no problem with that. I don't know about Justice Thomas, but I would have no problem with it. So to say that it's unconstitutional to have affirmative action means nothing. To say that you can have... he will not prefer one person over another because of "race", different thing, different altogether.

**DM:** Did you ever have a conversation with Justice Thomas about affirmative action? Not about the case, but about the concept or racial preferences?

**WC:** Not a conversation. I mean, he knows my position. I would visit Harlan Crow's home when I was out raising money for my campaigns and Justice Thomas's name would come up. Harlan Crow and Justice Thomas are very close friends. Harlan Crow doesn't need any decision that the Supreme Court might visit. He doesn't need that, but I'm aware of his relationship with Justice Thomas.

**DM:** Have the three of you been together?

**WC:** Yeah.

**DM:** Yeah.

**WC:** The last time we were, it was at a property of Harlan's in Dallas, a conference facility. And I walked into the room and Justice Thomas said, "You're creating trouble again." I said, "You're telling me?" And we laughed and that was the extent of it.

**DM:** So this was... When was this roughly? Last year?

**WC:** Last year.

**DM:** Last year.

**WC:** Yeah. Last year. But I think I have nothing but respect for him. He is no stranger to criticism. I remember when he, there was a period when everybody was calling him silent Clarence because he rarely asked ask questions. Now, he is the senior justice.

**DM:** Yeah.

**WC:** And he is able to set the agenda to a large extent.

**DM:** So in 2018 you got an invitation from President Trump to go to the White House in celebration of Black History Month. How'd that go?

**WC:** How did it go? [laughter]

**DM:** Yeah. How'd it go?

**WC:** I don't know what they did. I didn't go.

**DM:** Oh, you didn't go. You turned down an invitation to go to the White House. Why?

**WC:** Well, I think I... I don't remember whether I fitted on the agenda, but I'm not a fan of these race-based events standards. I just don't think that it brings us together. I just don't, and I believe that we need to emphasize what we have in common more, and Black History Month and all of that. I just don't favor it. I don't remember whether I went to that or not.

**DM:** Well, you would probably remember going to the White House. It's always a big deal, isn't it?

**WC:** I've been two or three times.

**DM:** Well, you were there with President Clinton. Right?

**WC:** Right.

**DM:** Yes. Right. What about with George W. Bush or...

**WC:** I went once with George W. Bush.

**DM:** And Obama?

[laughter]

**WC:** No.

**DM:** No?

**WC:** No.

**DM:** Trump. Did you, do you have a relationship with Trump? Did you...

**WC:** No, I did not.

**DM:** Yeah.

**WC:** And the obvious question is, why not? I love his policies. I wish he would abandon some of the personal characteristics in deference to being more of a statesman.

**DM:** So, Prop. 19 was a measure in 2020 that would've...

**WC:** Prop. 19.

**DM:** Did I say Prop. 19?

**WC:** Yeah. Prop...

**DM:** Yeah. That would've undone Prop. 209.

**WC:** Prop. 16.

**DM:** Prop. 16, excuse me, sorry. Prop. 16 would've undone Prop. 209 put on the ballot in part with the support of John A. Perez of and Shirley Weber, secretary of State Shirley Weber. And they raised a boatload of money in support of it. You raised a little bit of money in opposition to it, and you won. The largest single donor was the Students for Fair Admissions, which is the group that your friend Bloom oversaw that became the plaintiff in the Harvard case that the Supreme Court decided. So tell us why this mattered to you. I mean, it's kind of an obvious question, but tell us why defeating Prop. 16 mattered to you.

**WC:** California is a... Well, let me start from here. Why it matters to me? I think I've explained to you why the issue of equality matters to me. I never forget that C for colored. I never forget that my mission in life has been to erase the damn C. I should not be classified, period.

**WC:** It wouldn't matter to me whether they call me colored or negro or whatever, my opposition to it, it's the same. I shouldn't be classified. Now I know that that creates some complications for law enforcement. It's much easier to know that you're looking for a colored guy than it is that you're looking for a white guy, I'd say, or reverse the classification matters in that context. But other than that, I don't know why you need it. During the racial privacy initiative campaign, we lost that because of the medical issue. Cruz Bustamante wanted to use this as the vehicle to propel him into the governor's office. So he and the teacher's union ponied up a lot of money and got C. Everett Koop, former Surgeon General to say, this is a matter of life and death. You tell people that their life is on the line. I might have voted against it too, but it wasn't true. And we lost because of that.

**WC:** But other than if they hadn't brought up this phony medical scare, and I remember to this day C. Everett Koop saying, this is a matter of life and death. California would not be classifying people based on race. That's why that was so important to me. If you can't make any... If you can't treat people differently in this state, in the public sector, public employment, public education, public contracting, if you can't do anything with the data, why do you need the data?

**DM:** Well, it matters. It matters in congressional redistricting, right? Voting Rights Act.

**WC:** No.

**DM:** Should there, you don't believe that there should be lines drawn that assure African Americans or Latinos or Asians have representation?

**WC:** No. No. I do not. I think that you're a citizen, you get a vote, you vote, but why do we wanna carve districts that favor A over B based on color?

**DM:** Well, but that's I suppose that's an interesting position, however you understand of course, I'm sure better than I understand, that you can draw lines in ways that assure Republicans or Democrats will always win a seat. I mean, is that fair as opposed to competitive seats? As opposed to independent redistricting?

**WC:** Based on race?

**DM:** Based ... I suppose, I suppose race is a component, right?

**WC:** I suppose it is.

**DM:** Yeah.

**WC:** I just don't think in the overall context that the government should be involved in classifying its citizens based on race.

**DM:** Well, so an extension of Prop. 209 then would be to prohibit consideration of race and how we draw Congressional and legislative races seats, excuse me, reapportionment. Is that an issue that you're engaged in at all?

**WC:** No.

**DM:** Why not?

**WC:** I'm 84.

[laughter]

**DM:** Okay. Is it an issue that ought to come to the fore? I mean, is this something that, I mean, should this have, as your friend Ed Blum also was involved in the Shelby County case that undermined the Voting Rights Act. Is this something that you think is of a piece of Prop. 209.

**WC:** That I...

**DM:** Of the issue.

**WC:** I believe that at some point, probably not in my lifetime, but at some point, we're going to have to deal with this issue of race classifications. And the reality of how people are blending into this melting pot is going to force us to deal with the idiocy, the absolute idiocy of the racial classification system.

**DM:** Do you think race relations are better or are improving these days? Are we backsliding?

**WC:** I do think we're backsliding.

**DM:** And why is that?

**WC:** I think that the very nature of race causes you to backslide because we're not dealing with reality. We're dealing with our concept of what reality *ought* to be. Classifying people by race now is becoming like a crayon box. The blacks and browns, and many of the browns are in fact white, absent their last name. Blacks are not really black often it's the texture of hair. It's the width of a nose that we're using to classify people. White guy, but he looks like a black guy. And I'm astounded that comedians like David Chappelle and others don't have a field day with the contradictions.

**DM:** So I'm not sure my question was clear. When I asked whether we're backsliding. Do you think that racism is becoming more or less evident in our public discourse.

**WC:** Public discourse? Does that mean that we take into account public sentiment that is often not really expressed? 'Cause I think there is a lot of the element of people just not saying anything, but they're seething in anger about certain things. I see it with the discussion about reparations. I'm convinced that if we put that on the ballot, the public would vote it down 75-25. But you won't get that sentiment expressed by people as you talk to them.

**DM:** Well, what did you think when Charlottesville happened? What did you think when George Floyd was killed?

**WC:** I think that in George Floyd's case, my reaction was, geez, why do... You know you've gotta do something about these tactics that are allowed to be used? I didn't think there are a bunch of racist cops. Could have been some of them, but I thought, deal with the allowable police tactics.

**DM:** In Charlottesville?

**WC:** Didn't have much reaction there.

**DM:** Okay. Yeah. So UC recently announced its admitted class of freshman undergrads. So these are not people who, I guess, who have actually accepted, we don't know what that number is, but the admitted class, 37.6% Latino, 34.2% Asian American, 19.1% White, 5.5% Black and 0.0% American Indian. What do those numbers tell you in light of Prop. 209 and what you did on the UC Regents?

**WC:** Tells me that the university has been able to rig the system in order to achieve a student body that mirrors the graduating class in the aggregate of California high schools, which is their continuing ambition, a student body that reflects the diversity of California's graduating class. That's what they want. I don't think that they're saying, "Eeny, meeny, miny, moe -- take this one

in order to get that student body." I don't think that's it. I think they've been able to say, well, if we take, if we give preference to community college transfers, that is going to be more reflective of that graduating class and if we go with the SAT and all these other things that are indicia of merit. Now, is that desirable in this context? I would say no. We have what, 22? I don't know how many state colleges we have. Is it 22?

**DM:** I don't know. I could Google it, but I'm not sure.

**WC:** And we have community colleges throughout the land. Brophy was the only guy that had served on all institutions, all segments, community colleges, state colleges, UC. California taxpayers, spend a lot of money on education, not only in the state budget, but as consumers. We put a lot of money into education and the money is being paid disproportionately by middle class whites. It's a fact. I don't like talking about it in those terms, but that's the fact. If you are a white parent and you're paying, you're a taxpayer and you find out that only 19% of white kids are being admitted to UC, it may be, it may need to be explained in different terms than I've just said. But that's the way it's going to come across. I'll tell you, people are gonna be outraged by that. You're supporting a system largely, the system is not... UC is not being supported. And this triumvirate system that we have is now being supported by illegal immigrants.

**WC:** I saw something yesterday about illegals. Should they get Social Security? All this stuff has to be re-thought because it's just not making any sense anymore. And I don't wanna get us on some political soap box here, but people are paying for this triumvirate system. One, let's make sure that all of our kids have access to education without regard to affordability, that's community colleges. Two, let's make sure that once they go to a community college, there's a four-year institution available to them. Accessibility. Three, let's make sure that there are colleges that can credential people for the professions university system. There's a logic to that three-tiered system, and I would argue that we shouldn't be messing around with diversity when it comes to the credentials.

**WC:** When you go to visit your doctor. And you see that degree on the wall, that certificate on the wall, taxpayers shouldn't be worried about diversity. They want the credential to mean something. It shouldn't matter. That's why we have the three-tiered system. So I would argue that UC should abandon this pursuit of diversity. Don't worry about race. The court has said you can't give any preference based on the 14th amendment anyway. Just get off it and do what you're supposed to do, which is to provide access based on merit. Don't worry about 16% of this and 14% of that, do your job of providing a topflight institution to prepare people to be doctors and lawyers and architects and engineers. Don't worry about the diversity. Get off it.

**WC:** But they better start dealing with this 19% figure, because they've rigged the system so much that they're screwing the very people that are providing the bulk of the financing for the institution.

**DM:** Well, sounds like another initiative in the making. [laughter] So we've covered a lot of ground, and what haven't I asked that I ought to ask?

**WC:** Well, a lot you haven't asked me, but I'm not going to open the door to all those things.

**DM:** Oh no, you should.

**WC:** Well, you are in par excellence. I'm surprised at all the ground we've covered, frankly. It's been a good life. I've enjoyed what I've done, I've been frustrated a lot. I've been especially frustrated about the one thing that I've in my life that you didn't ask me about, a state senator.

**DM:** Oh, you mean Diane Watson.

**WC:** Who?

**DM:** Tell me about Diane Watson.

**WC:** Diane, I think that that was probably the most memorable, not in a good way, experience. A state senator in 1997, I believe it was, saying that I didn't want to be black and as evidence of that I married a white woman. Something to that effect.

**DM:** Yes, Amy Wallace of the [Los Angeles Times wrote that story](#), pretty much along those lines.

**WC:** And Amy...

**DM:** Accurately, she accurately quoted.

**WC:** She was very accurate, and she's a very good reporter.

**DM:** The best.

**WC:** The best. She maintains her impartiality, but when she came back to me and told me that, she had a smirk on her face. Not a smirk, but a "can you believe this?" And I just came unglued. At the turn of the century, a woman of color is attacking another person because of his choice of a marital partner. In California, a very pluralistic state, if this had been a white guy saying this, he's a nigger lover. Amy wouldn't have let him get away with it. My fellow Regents wouldn't ignore it. All of that was going through my mind about the hypocrisy and why we were giving a state senator a pass on something like that. Now I know that black women have a real problem, many of them do, not all, have a real problem when fellow blacks marry outside the race. I know that my own grandmother said, "Can't you find a nice colored girl?" But at the turn of the century, in California, a state senator no less, criticizing a man because of his choice of a marital partner. I just don't understand why people could be so oblivious to the implications of that.

**DM:** Well, you had some choice comments to make.

**WC:** I did, and they were mild in the context of how I really felt. I called her a lightweight, that was because she said that I would not be on the board of Regents were it not for her and other black peoples' push for diversity. Maybe she's right, I don't know. I won't quarrel with that because I said you're a lightweight, meaning, I don't think you had any influence on my getting

any place. I should not have said that because I try to be more selective in my words. I really do. I should not have done that. But in my defense, I think that it should be said, this was not California's finest hour, either. A state senator, not during Jim Crow by the way, a state senator of California... interracial marriage is not forbidden. The Loving decision has been handed down. What am I missing? You know? Well... Your profession too. Nobody criticized her.

**DM:** Well, I think many people wrote the story, I don't know what the editorial boards did at the time, but it was sort of emblematic. Well, it was very emblematic of the passions that arose over this issue of racial preferences affirmative action in admissions and government hiring and government contracting. Pretty passionate stuff.

**WC:** Indeed, it is passionate, but there are certain societal standards and there are many things that were violated there. I was angry that I didn't get any support from my colleagues. I would've expected some of them to say. But then again, it's a state senator. I expected them to come to my defense. I expected Chairman Hayden, who had been on that cruise, cruise, I call it with me. I would've expected him to say something. This was all public. This wasn't hidden stuff. He never came to my defense. There were just so many things that I think violated accepted standards of our society. Forget the Regents business, forget the chairman of the committee. Is there no regard for not saying that kind of thing? A state senator saying that, again, change the people, but say that it was a white guy saying that about another white guy. People would be saying, that's wrong. Hey, Dan, you sure you don't wanna take that back?

**DM:** Yeah. Well, if anything, discourse has gotten coarser.

**WC:** Yeah, indeed it has. You're right.

**DM:** Anyway, well, I so appreciate you taking all this time. And so on behalf of Open California, thanks to a grant from the California State Library, thank you very much for taking all this time, Ward.

**WC:** Thank you. You are the best.

[laughter]

**WC:** I don't know about that. John, you got anything?

**John Howard:** When you were talking about Wilson, I was thinking, of Prop. 187, 1984.

**DM:** '94.

**John:** 1994. Excuse me. And then 209 of '96, there was a close proximity there. 187 was construed be anti-Latino. It was anti-illegal immigration, but it had that Wilson was running for president then right around that time, '95, he launches his campaign. And then in a year of that, you have 209 passing. It seemed to me that there was this racial component in the mid '90s as Wilson launched his campaign unsuccessfully among Republicans. That was pretty strong, it seemed to me. Are they connected any way, or no?



**WC:** Well, I know that Pete still suffers from this anti-Latino image. Many still use his name whenever there is a campaign. They avoid Pete, because of that. It's unfair. But it's the reality of what happens. I don't see any connection between 209 and 187. We have been very sensitive to that and everything that we've done, we've tried to be sensitive to it. But I don't deliberately go around Pete because of that. I just don't.

**John:** Okay.

**DM:** All right. So Karlos, does this make an oral history?

**Karlos:** I believe so.

**DM:** Alright. [laughter]

[applause]

**DM:** Thanks man.

**WC:** Yeah well... Thank you.

**Karlos:** Thank you Ward.

**WC:** Thank you, Karlos.

**DM:** Alright, so what are you gonna do this afternoon?

**John:** Thank you.

**WC:** Huh?

**DM:** Where are you off to?

**WC:** I am writing my third book and I need to get on it.