If pretty much worked him over; he didn't last.
and Denius was a friend of mine; kind of a big brother to some extent.
Harrison, another product of the Lexington school system, had come,
and I'm in my heart for several reasons. One was that in 1966 Denius
had my mind up that Washington and Lee was going to be it for me. I
made my mind up that Washington and Lee was going to be it for me.
I walked down to Cornell College in Iowa. But by that time it was pretty
much hundreds schools, and those schools ranged all the way from Harvard
So in 1968, my senior year, I was recruited by something like two

with latent

Achievement Scholarship Program and was targeted as a minority
academically. And in 1972, became a semifinalist in the National
When I went through school locally, I did fairly well
it was kind of in the blood.
Cornman, a local attorney who was a Washington and Lee graduate, so
only the proximity, but the fact that my mother worked for William P.
really a neat place. I like it. I was indoctrinated very early from not
I remember looking up at the Hill and thinking, "God, that's
frisbee and do all of those kind of fun things that little kids like to do.
students, especially Phi Kappa Sigma brothers who taught me to play
then parents and immediate family; were Washington and Lee
the first seven years of my life. My first conscious memories, other
I am a native of Lexington, grew up at 9 North Jefferson Street.

WHY WE ALL

Abstract by June 20 November 1997
Interview by Mane 2 May 1997
DONE
WALTER BLAKE
The class that came in 1968 was probably one of the landmarks of the Vietnam

Kind of fascinated me about those columns and that red brick and that grass lawn that just
Colonnaded. Usually it was a fine spring day. There was just something
in front of the red front grocery store, and then (walk) down the
out of school on that last day and walkin' home up the little alley over
went to elementary school at Lyburn Downing—my tear was gettin'
It used to be a ritual of mine, every year when I finished up school—I
I could perceive, even then, that this place was somewhat special.

the one who was one of the first to do it.
It just happened to be the luck of the draw that I happened to be
what I would go anywhere else other than here.
options before, but consciously there was no consideration whatsoever
I didn't seriously consider any other institution. I clearly had
the contacts, the education, you couldn't beat it.
the contacts, the education, you couldn't beat it.
proficient and proficient institution for me to do that just because of
professionally in the South, Washington, and I was clearly the
at the age of sixteen that if I was serious about making a the
selfish motivation on my part was the fact that I understood even then
clearly a selfish motivation on my part at the time. I even more
whatever this institution threw at him and make it out. That was
I wanted to prove that a black student could come here and win and
I was probably brushed enough and confident enough in my ability,
members.

but clearly the foot soldiers in that whole campaign were class of '72

the demonstrations on campus. They may have been the leadershhip,

contribute at Washington and Lee. The class of 1970 took the credit for

The class was the first to have what I'd call a serious hippie

May 1970

"days. Never to come again, but those were the days.

many. I look back on them kindly and I think, 'Man, those were the

just one experience that I consider most memorable. There's just too

memorable experiences than can ever begin to recount. I cannot name

most memorable experience. My compartment was, I had more

had a questionnaire on our alumni form that asked, 'Please name your

It was an interesting internship time. It was phenomenal. We

simply because the world around it had changed so radically.

for so much of the fifties and early sixties, it was beginning to change

reflected very much those nice traditional values and style that I had

community in which the institution was located. While the institution

interesting time in not only the life of the institution, but the life of the

was mandatory for the first two years. So that time was really a very

cut rule in effect. We probably were the last full class in which ROC

were the last class with a dress code. We were the last class with the six-

We were the last class to have mandatory Saturday classes. We

out of the military or transferring because of the threat of being drafted.

attention because of Vietnam, and guys trying to figure out ways to get

1960s
relatively rational thinking and debate and came up with some

in the traditional Washington and Lee way, entrenched in what I'd call

imagined would have taken positions, made statements, listened, and

what it was, people who never in my wildest dreams would have

it is surprising. I call it a consciousness-raising, because that's really

in the country to have a consciousness-raising on campus. I won't call

Surprisingly, Washington and Lee was one of the earlier schools

Getting our people killed right and left

was a very sore topic because 1968, the Tet Offensive, and we were

been a sore topic forever. Since I came, even my Freshman year, the war

this sense of just pure outrage. The draft was going on. The war had

Chicago. It was happening on campuses all over the country. There was

and the Chicago Seven trials were going on up in New Haven and

bombings in Cambodia. Kent State happened. The Black Panther trials

There was an announcement that we'd been doing secret

be done.

I hasten, a damn good privilege who would go out and do what had to

was what he would define a trusted lieutenant, or if not trusted

left. General clearly was the titular leader of that whole effort. I

it was taking his course

like everyone else. But it was a bit easier taking my course at Stuy than

which he had to do. Well, I had to study, of course, just to stay here.

books and went over in a corner somewhere and started studying.

He was an engineering major, and Lihngwood, on his first day, got his

some activities that my very dear friend Lihngwood Smothers couldn't

to a planning degree, allowed me the freedom to indulge myself in

My major, concentrating in economics and engineering leading
that was pretty weird when you think about it.
road, just thinking to myself, "What just happened there?" You know,
left. It was like, "Well, I'll be damned." I remember driving back up the
recreational site. They listened and there were some questions and we
members of the Black Panther Party standing in front of the

unbelievable.

was absolute silence. And I'm thinking to myself, "Man, this is
we walked in, because everyone was talking. And we walked in, and it
was packed to the gills. There was this rumble among the crowd when
we get to Laxtition, walked into Lee Chapel and Lee Chapel

enthusiasm, but it didn't
hour later, "thinking well, you know, maybe that will dampen the
city. We stopped and called and said, "Look, we're going to be probably an
afternoon. Picked up our guests, and we got delayed coming out of the
experience I've ever gone through. We went to Washington one
Lee Chapel left packed house. One of the most amazing, surreal
party to come to campus and make a speech. The speech was made in
Washington, D.C., and recruit several members of the Black Panther
One of the things that I did alone with one of my classmates is go

We were having guys getting arrested and jailed.
People were taking off and going to Washington to the protests.

happen.

We have some significant potential here for some serious things to
think the administration thought to themselves, "What is going on?"

conclusions. It was so foreign as a concept to this institution that I
different frames of reference. While I may not be exactly like you, in
old world out there and all of us are different and we all come from
One of the things we need to get across was the fact that its a big

WEL TYP ES

perspective on the world, and it helped sensitize a lot of people.

institution, because they came and they brought a very different

It gave us, I also think that a number of that initial group experienced this

This institution, while it has blessed us with the education that

organization.

point for black students on campus. If became a fairly effective

was the first president (SABU’) for a number of years, became the local

and we did. We met over in the student union and created SABU’. I

We decided we needed to band together for self-preservation,

point out of shape.

out of shape about just because theyve got nothing better to do than get

related to what I call issues of insensitivity, things that people get bent

There had been a number of minor incidences on campus that

SABU, Student Association for Black Unity.

Matthew Towns, and Bobby Smith—that was the core of what became

Thomas Peen, Phillip Hutcherson, Bob Ford, Bill Hill, Johnny Morrison,

—with the five minutes we were brothers, that initial core of people—

struck up a bond. We had never met each other in our lives, but

September, much to my joy and my surprise, we had nineteen

the only two black students on campus. When we came back in

In May of 1970, when I left, Linwood Smothers and I still were
with this one, because if you do, you're going to have six or seven other
much known around campus that, "You really don't want to go mess
something to one of that group unless you did it to all, and it was pretty
didn't eat none of us are. That's just the way it was. You did not do
most fundamental sense. If one of us ate all of us ate. If one of us
I had to do to get those guys through. We were truly friends in the
I took it upon myself to hold hands, caffeine, project, do whatever
education and an incredible base of contacts.
the one thing we could all get from here was just an incredible
are, and we are going to fight to maintain it. All of us understood that
well, our saying was, "We'd rather fight than win."
I'd rather win than fight."
well before them. There is a saying, "If you go
not of a mindset to put up with the kind of challenge that was put
statistical measure, they washed out very quickly, because they were
of the ones that were very highly ranked according to the standard
If you looked at the minority people that came in 1970, a number
(First Blanks)

You didn't have that innate whatever it took, you didn't stay here.
and done well. You had to be a survivor to make it through here. If
and done well as it has been in the white students who have come here
that part has been so evident in the black students that have come here
immediately imbedded in people who have come here and done well, and
gone on in life and done incredible kinds of things. There is something
guys who come here who've been moderate performers have
person, and either you are built to come here and succeed or you're not
many respects, I'm exactly like you. This place attests a certain type of
many of the eighteen. I had very good experience.
maybe Sigma Nu, even. I think I even went to Beta. You can only do so
to ZBT and PPF and Lambda Chi and Sigma Chi and Phi Gamma and
getting into one being ZBT, the other was Phi Epsilon Pi. But I went
houses on campus that I'd really have any kind of a chance at all of
second visit. Well, I knew at the time that there were probably only two
percentage of the houses that I visited initially. I visited me back for a
I don't know how many houses I visited, but a very high
just this wide-eyed time, still is whirling around you.
leaving and your registration, getting your classes squared away, and it's
the Rush process. You're going through your advanced placement
Natural Bridge, which is quite nice. Then you come back and you begin
but you go to freshman camp and you spend a day or two at
appalling. I'm not sleeping with this guy. You've got to be crazy.'
order. We had two people to a bed, which most of us found pretty
At Natural Bridge you are assigned to cabins by alphabetical
wide-eyed kid in the big city.
just kind of a wide-eyed kid in a big city. These blocks from home, but a
let's just get out there and meet some guys and drink some beer.' I'm
I signed up for everybody. I didn't care. My attitude was, "Hey,
rush
SABU jackets everywhere.
campus was in SABU, whether they wanted to be or not. We were our
my extended family. They were my brothers. Every black student on
We felt comfortable together. We felt protected, and it was like
which way might go."
people to deal with. So you just keep 'em happy. We're not real sure
 Guns

My senior year, Thomas Pen was walking his eighth grade up back to maybe a sports coat and some chinos or whatever. Beginning to rotate back into something of more traditional style, going long-haired hippie breeks, and the guys who were coming behind us were senior, my class basically had a bunch of bell-bottom-wearing, he-dyed, shrit, long-haired hippie on the other extreme. By the time I was a lower with no socks. Then there'd be the bell-bottomed, he-dyed T-shirts, and some more classes. The older guys would loosen up to the extent

if change[es] took hold among the younger guys in the freshman dress.

enough to give me a C, and was happy as I could be.

I put everything I knew about calculus on a piece of paper, which was baseball. He liked me and I passed. I crammed, studied, and made a C.

and figured out, "The way I'm going to pass this course is talk about the thing he said. Just like any other freshman, had no clue. Loved him.

[I] had Professor Royson for calculus and didn't understand a

here.

with my fraternity brothers and just had a traditional freshman year.

first couple folk in it that were non-Jewish. [I] made very good friends exclusively Jewish. I think my class probably was the class that had the I choose to go with ZBT, ZBT, up until that time, had been almost

Continuation
bad.

had the potential to get hurt out of hand and have somebody get hurt
his heart. Murphy did a great job of diffusing almost every situation that
a couple of guys who'd get drunk and act stupid, but Murphy likes
Most of the locals were pretty cool. Every now and then we'd get

terrorized.

that meeting. We were very serious. We were not going to be
probably five people armed themselves within several days after

discussion.

you, just pure and simple. That's all there is to it. There's no
Guys, they're going to pull a gun on you and they're going to shoot
inform everybody that from now on, if you pull a gun on one of these
having guns pulled on us so the least thing you can do is go and
get a shooting war. Period. Just simple as that. We will not tolerate
need anybody to take care of us. If you want a shooting war, then you
whoever you have cannot protect us. We'll protect ourselves. We don't
police of Lexington and the university security and the state police or
they shoot you. Pure and simple. I made the statement that, "If the
don't shoot. When we come from, when people pull guns on you,
wait a minute. Excuse me, but when you come from, maybe they
Hutchinson and myself. We are just kind of looked at each other. I go,
pull a gun on you, they won't shoot you. And you know, HIII and
someone making the comment that none times out of ten it someone

We had a meeting up at Dean John's house. I remember
that is absolutely an outright up-front assault on us.
up just above the post office. Well, we take this pretty seriously. To us,
1

Dr. Leyburn is the epitome of the Renaissance man. He was at peace with himself. He was sure of himself, he was very good at what he did. I don't think he ever stopped learning. He had this incredible

perseverance, ability to suffer in silence when you know you're right.

Framework is the time that I spent here—commitment to duty, basically right? the only other frame of reference I have for that value, my life outside of the fact that my parents, as they say, brought me up, done all I know is that I took back, and if I have to point to a factor in everyday life, I don't know who did it, how it was done, when it was.

To this day, the Honor System, a value system, play fundamental roles in my

Murph is it, he served this time and he did good.

University, deserves to be an honorary alumni. This institution, we never had to do that if anyone in my experience with the couple of people around here who had both the means and the capacity but didn't around here then they were on the campus that could have made things a certain element from the campus that could have made things a
difficult situation, before they happened or buffeted us by keeping

someone like Murph, and we were pretty close to him. He either

He knew what was going on. We were quite fortunate to have

Murph was cool. Murph understood us. He watched us. 
Just so much slope going for you, that's what a lot of us would like to be...

Leyburn, sure of yourself, confident in your abilities, a man who has
rub off on him. If all of us had our chances, to be able to be like a

I think every student who ever had him had a little bit of him

"Man, where's Euy's Good."

there and you'd go. and make sense out of it. You'd sit...