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## Charles Wells

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**Interviewee: Charles Wells**

**Interviewer: Brendan Plann-Curley**

**Interview date: February 12, 2021**

BPC: This is Brendan Plann-Curley, Reference Librarian at Pace University. Today is February 12, 2021. I'm in my apartment in Brooklyn and joining me today on Zoom from Duncanville, TX is Pace alumnus Charles Wells. Thank you for being here, Charles.

CW: Thank you.

BPC: Let's just dive right into it. Why don't you start by telling me a little bit about yourself: your background, where you grew up, and so forth.

CW: Well, I'm 84 years old. I graduated from Pace in 1972. I grew up in a little town called Ambler PA. It's 35 miles north of Philadelphia. Ambler in the history books is called the "asbestos capital of the world." There was a plant called Keasbey and Mattison. They relocated from Philadelphia to Ambler in 1882. My father worked there. All of my friends' fathers and uncles worked there. Unfortunately, Keasbey and Mattison was owned by a guy named Doctor Joseph Mattison [correction: Richard V. Mattison], a chemist. And they knew from the first time their product causes cancer in the workers, and my father worked there for 35 years. He died of asbestosis. Two of my uncles died, and I would say that 99% of all my friends' fathers died of the same thing. Ambler has been studied by EPA, Oxford University, University of Pennsylvania, and 48% of the people never have lung problems. That was an interest as I got older and learned more about it. Like I said, my father was one of the first black union leaders. He caught a lot of flak for fighting for workers' rights. It got me interested in some things. My father also started a team called the Ambler Giants. They were similar to a Negro League team, and I played in the Negro League; my father came out of retirement. But I grew up in an environment in which I never felt racism growing up in Ambler. Ambler was a town consisting of immigrants from Sicily and the Black community. We got along great. The first time I ever saw racism was when I went to Morgan State in 1954.

BPC: I was going to ask about that. So, you went to Morgan State?

CW: I started at Morgan State, yes. I went there because a lot of my friends growing up went there, and there was a young lady who was like my big sister, and her family kind of adopted me. I went there because all my friends were there, and I did not stay the year because I got sick and I had to come home and go to a school closer. I came home and spent two years in the oldest tuberculosis hospital in the country called Rush Hospital [Rush Hospital for Consumption and Allied Diseases]. I spent two years in hospital.

BPC: You had tuberculosis?

CW: I had tuberculosis, and it was during a period of time where most people didn't survive tuberculosis. I was very young, and I remember even to this day, I lost 30 roommates in 30 days, and I was beginning to lose it, and the Irish nurse gave me Irish coffee to settle my nerves, and my mother thanked her. But that experience made me realize that I needed to get an education,

and my father always said that he didn't want me to have to work as hard as he worked. So, from an early age I wanted to go to college, and all my friends were going to school. When I got out of the hospital, as I said, I had to transfer, and I graduated from an HBCU, Cheyney State [now Cheyney University of Pennsylvania]. It's the oldest HBCU in the country. And while there I majored in Special Education, Elementary Education, and I taught for three years. When my wife became pregnant with my first son, I decided I needed to leave teaching and go into something else that would pay more money. And I went to work for the Urban League, and that got me involved in civil rights. Then I went to work for Temple University's Mental Health program. And I entered the doctoral program. I was working on a doctorate in clinical psychology. I finished a year.

BPC: Were you living in Philadelphia?

CW: I was living in Ambler, and then when I got married, we lived in West Philly.

BPC: And this was in the early 1960s or late 1950s?

CW: I got married on April 18, 1964, and I moved to Philadelphia with my wife, who was a Westchester State grad. And then when I was working on my doctorate, I worked at the Temple University Mental Health Clinic, which is down Broad Street. As part of my studies, I ran a unit out of Byberry State Hospital [Philadelphia State Hospital at Byberry]. Byberry is no longer there, by the way. They tore it down and built houses that start at three or four-hundred thousand dollars. There, I was working with patients, and the one thing that I remember to this day is that the United States government has never had a comprehensive mental health program to address the needs of people with mental illness. To this day, they still don't, especially for minority communities. Temple was located right in the heart of the black community. So, it opened my eyes to how policy in the mental health field, or a lack of policy, affected people who were underserved or not as strong economically. It played a role. strong, but it was clear role.

BPC: Do you feel like there's been any change in the way that mental health is viewed? Less stigma?

CW: No, it seems the same, because we still, in 2021, do not have a comprehensive mental health program. For example, when I was working at the state hospital, patients weren't brought to the hospital in the ambulance. They were brought in a police paddy wagon. They were put in straight jackets, and police are not equipped to handle mentally ill people. Instead of having social workers and people who know how to deal with people with mental health issues, most police departments around the country don't do that. Now there's a push to try to do that. We made some progress, but, in my mind, very little progress. When I left there, I went to work for the Philadelphia Urban League. That was my foray into the Civil Rights movement. I worked in in the Urban League in Philadelphia, but its national president was a guy named Whitney Young, who became somewhat of a mentor to me. In the Urban League, I was on a committee working with Frank Rizzo, who was police chief and later became the mayor. Now, if you ask the average American citizen if Frank Rizzo is racist, nine out of ten would say "no." But under Frank Rizzo, Philadelphia was one of the most racist places in the North. In fact, there's a documentary coming out on HBO about Africa's MOVE [documentary is called "40 Years a Prisoner"]. There

was a man named John Africa who started MOVE. They lived in a house in West Philly. They barricaded the house. Rizzo took bulldozers and leveled the house, and when John Africa came out to give himself up, his wife came with him and their three-week old baby. So, that got me interested. In the healthcare field, there still were bad policies. As I got older, I realized that the power structure of that company Keasbey and Mattison, the owners knew for years that the product was killing people, but they didn't care. They really didn't care, and I think that because of where I grew up, it also affected me. I didn't have asbestosis, but I had tuberculosis. So, it opened my eyes. When I worked at the Urban League, I was involved with a group out of New York called the Council of Concerned Black Executives, which helped me as I moved to corporate America.

BPC: Was this the mid to late 60s when you were working for the Urban League?

CW: When I worked for the Urban League it was '67 or '68, and then I went to work at Temple. When I left Temple, I was on the train doing some work and a guy said, "What are you doing?" And I said I was working in the mental health field, and he offered me a job with a consulting firm.

BPC: Was that in New York?

CW: The first consulting job I had was with Hay and Associates. That was in Philadelphia. Hay and Associates was the leading compensation consulting firm. They worked in employee wage and salary complaints for corporations. But working with the Urban League gave me entrée, because my title was Director of Economic Development and Employment at the Philadelphia Urban League. That was the number three position. I interacted with the business community and banking community. So, I got a firsthand experience meeting with business leaders to see how corporations worked, how they operated. I sat in on meetings with their planning, and it was very obvious back then. You have to understand that this was the initial period when corporations started to hire Blacks. They made a concerted effort, or they tried to. And in my capacity working with the Urban League, I worked with a Kappa brother of mine [Kappa Alpha Psi], a friend who graduated from Cheyney. We did this study of a company in South Philadelphia. They had government contracts, and they had no minorities: no brown people, no Black people, no women, hardly. We worked on his study to help them recruit and train minority people. I remember we were at their headquarters. We were sitting in a room with the chairman, and we were presenting our proposal that they had accepted. We were getting ready to start, and in walks a guy who it turns out was the Executive Vice President of the company, and he had been flying around the country on the company plane campaigning for George Wallace, and he wanted to know who were these N words sitting there. So, that was an eye opener. And back then I had a bad temper. I came out of my seat, and my partner pushed me down. And I have to say: the CEO of that company was one of the nicest people. He was very smart, he respected us, he listened to what we had to say. So, that was my first foray into working with corporate people and seeing both good and bad people. It was an education.

BPC: So, I see where this is heading in terms of your thesis at Pace. Help me get from this point to your enrolling at Pace. How did that all happen? Were you starting to think about grad school? And how did you find out about Pace?

CW: I was in grad school at Temple working on a doctorate in psychology. When I left Hay and Associates, I was hired by Arthur D. Little. And Arthur D. Little had a relationship with Harvard, and they wanted me to go to Harvard. There were like 12 black consultants at that time at Arthur D. Little. That was around 1972. I went over there for the interview, and I felt so uncomfortable. It was like they looked at me like I was an alien, and had no business being on a campus. They made me feel like I wouldn't be welcomed there. So, I told the company president that I didn't want to go to Harvard. That's not me. I have a bad temper, and I wouldn't do well there. When I was working for Arthur D. Little, I left, and I went to work with Ciba-Geigy. The guy who offered me the job said, "If you drop out of your doctoral program, we want you to get an MBA. We will pay for it." And that's how I got the Pace. When I look back on it, the two years at Pace was one of the best times I had, because you have to understand that America was very racist. Corporate America was racist. They were just beginning to hire Blacks. There were a lot of racist people who really don't want us, and when we walked into a job, they didn't want you there. But I went to Pace, and they made me feel like they welcomed me with open arms. Dr. Philipp Lohman was like a mentor to me, and there was another professor. He was a big guy, he had beautiful gray hair and a white beard, and he reminded us of Santa Claus. And he said to us that we were one of the best classes he had, and he was going to throw a Christmas party for us in a bar that was like two blocks from Pace. But some emergency came up, and he had to fly back to Martha's Vineyard, where he was from. In the time that we were supposed to be there, the bar blew up [Ryan's Café at 11 Park Row burst into flames on December 11, 1970]. It was a hole in the ground. He said, "Aren't you guys lucky I had to go? I had an emergency." So, it was fun. My remembrance of Pace is just positive all the way.

BPC: Were you living in New York at that time, or did you commute in when you had class?

CW: I was living in Burlington NJ, commuting 70 miles one way a day to Summit, NJ and going to Pace, I was traveling probably 60% of my time.

BPC: Were you still doing consulting work?

CW: No. When I went to Pace, I was working for Ciba-Geigy, a pharmaceutical firm. When I got hired, my boss took me to the executive dining room. When we walked into the dining room, just about everybody got up and walked out. And my boss said to me, "Did that bother you?" And I said, "No. They don't know me." He said, "You're not upset?" And I said, "No. They don't know me. They saw the color of my skin. That's their problem. I'm hungry." So, we sit down. And that boss became a mentor to me. He guided me, he let me make mistakes, and he always told me, "Everybody makes mistakes. Don't make the same one twice." It was a good place for me to start.

BPC: This was Ciba-Geigy.

CW: Ciba-Geigy. Their headquarters was in Summit NJ, but then I got relocated to their headquarters up in Ardsley, New York.

BPC: And you were taking classes at the New York City campus, right?

CW: I was at the downtown campus, yes. I enjoyed it. There weren't that many Blacks in the class. They had one Black professor. I think he was the Dean, Dr Tony Bonaparte. We could talk to him. Because I was traveling all the time, my wife typed my papers and everything, but it was a good experience, and it opened a lot of doors for me.

BPC: What was your MBA concentration? Was it in executive management?

CW: I was in the Executive MBA Program, but it was in marketing and finance. I worked in commercial credit. I was assistant treasurer, regional vice president, and I covered from Minnesota to Mississippi, and I called on 105 banks. And I got involved in banking, and that's where I experienced how racism in banking worked and how depending on your zip code and the color of your skin, it was difficult if you were business to get a loan. And that was when I began working on my thesis on the fallacies of Black capitalism. I will tell you that while some may have had good intentions, from the outset they're programmed to fail because a lot of the people signed to develop those programs within the government and corporations really in their heart never believed that minorities could learn. So, you had to fight an uphill battle constantly.

BPC: Were you using the library at Pace to do your research?

CW: I used the library at Pace, and I used other libraries when I was on the road. I was involved with the Corporate Council of Black Executives. These were guys like Joe Black, the former Dodger pitcher, who headed it. A guy who was like a big brother named Chuck Sterling, who made the cover of *Time*. There were some very good people, and we were the first or second group to go into corporate America, so we formed this group because we were under a lot of pressure in our jobs. With these guys we stuck together, and they were mentors, like if I had a problem, I could pick up the phone and call Joe Black. I said, "I've got a boss who's doing this." And with my temper, they would say, "Just remain calm. Keep pushing forward." So, one time we wrote an article. We wanted to get the attention of New York companies, so we wrote this article, and we entitled it "Darkies at the Bottom of the Stairs." And I was at Ciba-Geigy when that article came out. And my boss called me. He says, "The chairman of the company, Mr Tom Boucher, wants to see you at the 6th floor." I said OK. He says, "You know he read that article." I said, "Am I in trouble." He said, "I don't know." So, I went up there, and what I always remember is: his office took up the whole floor, so you had this long walk across the office to get to his desk. I think he did it psychologically to instill a little allegiance to the person. So I walked in and sat down, and he said, "Charles, I read the article of this group. I understand that you're a remember." I said, "Yes, sir." He says, "Do you actually believe what's in the article?" I said, "Yes, sir." I said, "We wouldn't have written the article. We did our homework. We lived through it." I said, "We want American corporations to know that the game plan for minorities, since we're the first ones in, is: they have to learn to work with us, and we have to learn how to walk this maze. It's different." He says, "OK, but you firmly believe what's in that article?" What we said was: by the time job applications appear in New York Times and newspapers, those jobs are filled. And the way they get filled is: their fathers, white guys that know people, they tell their sons and they have their own network at the golf course, the country club. So, by the time you see it, they've already recommended someone. You see what I'm saying? It was a difference. The jobs would be gone. And they weren't putting ads into Black newspapers on Black radio, so we were at a disadvantage. And he said, "OK. If you honestly believe that, we have a problem. I

said, "What do you mean?" Well, the Black Panthers were putting corporations on a list, saying they were racist and wouldn't hire you. I don't know how old you are; you may not remember those days. And I said, "OK." The Black Panthers had put Ciba-Geigy on that list. And I was in personnel. He said, "Can you get a meeting with the Black Panthers?" I said, "I came out of the Urban League." You have to understand: if you worked in the Urban League, Whitney Young's motto was: once a Urban Leaguer, always an Urban Leaguer. A lot of guys in corporations got their start with Urban League, like I did. So I picked up the phone, and I called the head of the Urban League in Oakland, CA. I told him who I was, and he remembered me from when I was at the Philadelphia Urban League. And I said, "I'm flying to Oakland. I need to have a meeting with the Panthers. Can you arrange it?" He said, "Where will you be staying?" I told him the name of the hotel, and within three days I had a meeting with the Black Panthers. And I said, "Since you put us on the list, I have in my pocket 100 jobs. If they can read or write, we can train and hire them. You can pick the people. And that's how I got to meet with the Panthers.

BPC: Were you there as an official representative of Ciba-Geigy then?

CW: Yes. I was personnel for them.

BPC: That's impressive that they would want you to engage like that.

CW: Well, you know, they knew that having played in the Negro Leagues, I experienced racism. My father, as I said, formed the baseball team and played in it. And coming up, when I played in the Negro Leagues, I was a kid, so I had 25 fathers on the team. But because of the position I played, once we hit the field, I told them what to do, because I was the catcher. You know, the catcher is the manager, basically, on the field. So, that experience helped me. And having worked in the Urban League, I knew people all across the country at various Urban Leagues like in California, Oakland, LA, New Orleans. Because at the National Urban League, we'd get together. So, I had the chance to meet with them. And I remember when I walked into the room, I could hear them talking about me, because I was dressed conservatively, I never had an Afro, and they were saying things like, "Look at him. He doesn't even look like a brother." And they insulted me for like 45 minutes. And I was blindfolded.

BPC: Who did you meet with? Do you know? Were they high up in the organization?

CW: I really don't tell people, but in that room was Huey Newton. Eldridge Cleaver was in the room, Elaine Brown, and Angela Davis.

BPC: So, were they receptive to what you had to say?

CW: Not at first. The brothers were saying things like, "You looked like a white boy." They started insulting me, and I took all the insults, and finally I took out the note and said, "I came here with jobs. You said we won't hire, and I'm saying we have 100 jobs. You select people. If they can read and write, we'll hire them." I said, "But I'm not taking any more insults." I said, "You might beat me, you might do something, but you're not going to kill me. And if you beat me, I'm going to go back to the hotel and call some friends of mine and then we're going to have

a problem.” Because I was young and hotheaded. And Angela Davis, one of the women, said, “Cut out the testimony. The brother is here to help, he’s got jobs, so listen to what he has to say.” From then on, it went OK. It was a good period. I’m glad I got to meet them. There were some smart people in that room. You know, most people don’t know that Huey Newton came out of high school, and he didn’t know how to read or write, but he ended up with a doctorate from San Jose State. He taught himself to read and write. There were some smart people. They had good motives, they were trying to help the community, and they were villainized by the head of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover; just like he terrorized and made a villain out of Dr. King.

BPC: Do you see parallels with the Black Lives Matter movement today?

CW: With Black Lives Matter, I see the parallels and differences. The Panthers armed themselves because brothers were being killed left and right in the streets, and the cops weren’t protecting us, so they protected us. And they didn’t look for trouble, but they didn’t walk away from it either. What I see now under Trump, and I’m not saying Trump was the creator, but what he did was he lifted the cover. He took the scab off, and we are in a worse place racially now. We’re almost back to the ‘40s and ‘50s. I feel threatened for my life when I go to some places. For example, I haven’t been in certain department stores in Dallas in six years. I love clothes; I used to model when I was young. And the last time I went into the store to buy something, the person followed me all through the store. And I asked the person: was there a problem? Because I don’t take that. So, what Trump has done is divide this country. And I tell people. I did a project in Nigeria. I had to stand at the door of the conference room as the Nigerians from the North – you know Nigeria it’s 50% Muslim and 50% Christian, the North being Islamic – I had to stand at the door and say, “You are Nigerians first. Leave Allah outside the door. We’ve got to resolve this problem. This is your country.” They wouldn’t even talk to each other. And what Trump has done is divide the races in this country to the point where it’s scary. It really is. But the Panthers started out feeding the community, helping kids. In Black Lives Matter, the three women who formed it get death threats every day. We have made progress, but we have gone backwards under Trump. I don’t know how you feel about that, but that’s looking at it through the eyes of a Black person.

BPC: I can’t disagree with anything that you said. Let’s talk about your time at Pace a little bit more. Tell me about just the class that you were a part of. It sounds like you were busy with family and work and everything, but did you have a sense of community and camaraderie with your classmates, too?

CW: Yes. There were only about twelve of us. We all traveled, OK? We would get hotel rooms and stay over and write papers. Like, when I went on the road, I would send the papers back to my wife or my secretary, and she would type it. So, when I returned and had to go to class, they were done. And Pace took care of all of that. And we became very close. And if I had a problem, I could go to Dr. Philipp Lohman. I’ll give you an example. You’ve heard of *Essence* magazine?

BPC: Yes, I have.

CW: Chuck Sterling and I wrote the business plan for *Essence* magazine. We got them funded. And we were supposed to get paid for that, but we put that together, and one week on a

Wednesday they called and said, "We have a problem. We're short \$350,000. Where can we get it?" I said, "Well, when do you need it by?" And they said, "9 o'clock on Friday morning." And I said, "Wow." So, I went to Dr. Lohman, and I told him that we're working with this magazine, and he says, "Are they going to pay you." And I said, "They're supposed to." He picked up the phone and called an investment firm and set up a meeting and I got the money for it. He was like a mentor to me. He was someone I looked up to. He had advised five different presidents. He understood me. I could talk to him about anything. And the night I graduated, they told me if I stayed another year, I could have a doctorate. But my wife was tired of typing my papers while I traveled, and she said we need a break. So, that's why I didn't finish my doctorate. Now, while I was there, there were two guys who came in the year after me as freshman. We had gone to Morgan State together in 1954. And they were sent to Pace by two companies in New York, and they were going to quit. So, I asked them to lunch. And we went to lunch somewhere close to Pace, and I sit there, and I said, "You're here at Pace. Your tuition is paid. Have you lost your damn mind!" My father had an expression: if it's free, it's for me. I said, "Everything is being paid for you: books, clothes, mileage. People at Pace are greeting you with open arms, showing you respect. And I talked them out of quitting. One of the guys who was my fraternity brother, I called him at the hospital last year, and he said to his wife, "Hey, this is the brother that cussed me out, and I told me that I needed to stay at Pace and get my degree." And he did. He died two months later, but he remembered me telling him that when we were at Pace. I've recommended people to go to Pace. When I do business in Africa, I tell universities that they should send students to Pace. I wanted to teach there. I tried to start a program between Pace and universities in Namibia, like the University of Science and Technology and UNAM, because UNAM had a relationship with Morehouse. So, yeah, I still promote Pace. I think the best thing that ever happened to me was going to Pace. You have to understand that I came out of a high school that was predominantly white. I never felt racism, but I went to historically black colleges. So, when I first went to Harvard, they made me feel so unwelcome, like I was infringing on their territory. So, I didn't want to go there, but when I got to Pace, it was like they opened their arms and they made it conducive for me to learn. And I'm always grateful for that. That's why I reached out to Dr. Lawrence Singleton. I still want to try to do some things with Pace, because I think kids in America don't understand the opportunities for them over in Africa. It's the last great marketplace, and I've got 37 years of experience working on the continent.

BPC: Let's talk about that. What did you do after you finished at Pace? What kind of career did you have?

CW: When I finished at Pace, I went to work in banking. I called on the banks, and I got to see how racist banks could be. I'll give you an example. When Richard Hatcher won election in 1967, he was the first Black mayor of Gary. When Hatcher ran for reelection, I was calling all banks in Gary, and all the bank presidents said, "Charles, before you come back, if he wins, call us." So, he won the election, and I called them. And they said, "We're not in Gary." I said, "What do you mean?" When he won that election, they moved every bank in Gary out overnight. Overnight. The hotels moved out. Businesses closed. And they went to Maryville, an unincorporated community that is now incorporated, and they never came back to Gary. Think about that. How do you move every bank out overnight? They had to plan months in advance, to move all the vaults and the money and all that. And Gary is like a ghost town. And that was because of Richard Hatch, who won the second term. I worked on a project with Tom Bradley

when he was the mayor and I was at Ciba-Geigy and Hay and Associates. I worked on projects with Maynard Jackson. I worked on projects with the mayor of Detroit. And Pace helped me to do that.

BPC: Did you keep in touch with Dr. Lohman or any of your fellow students?

CW: I did. When I first got out, I got busy. But like I said, I came up there and I met with them. I wanted to put an African Institute [at Pace]. I've had two presidential appointments through the State Department to work as a diplomat in Africa. So, I went to Pace, met with the alumni person, and I said, "I would like to put in an African Institute where we would bring in Heads of State, African business leaders, and invite corporate America to have an open and frank dialogue on economic policy and how you improve the quality of life of people." And I still would like to put that at Pace because it's right in the heart of Wall Street and not far from the UN. And I have letters from Africans asking me to try to do that, so I've always tried it because I think Pace would be the place for them to come because they make you feel welcome. That's basically how I feel about it.

BPC: Did you live in Africa or did you work with companies over there? What was the nature of your involvement?

CW: I took American Airlines Sabre Group to Africa, and we did the Safe Sky Study under Bill Clinton. I've been to 23 or 24 African countries. In 1990, my small company, which has only three people, was given a contract to study the financial system for the Government of Ghana, and we recommended changes they had to make to the Central Bank of Ghana because their inflation rate was like 13 percent at that time. And I spent eight weeks in the country, I interviewed every bank and politician, and I wrote this 70-page document and gave to the manager at the Central Bank, and they incorporated all of my suggestions. And then in Nigeria, I worked with President Obasanjo. We did the Safe Sky Study. I'm doing a project now in Namibia to put a car manufacturing plant there. When I dedicated my life to working in Africa, at first people thought I was crazy. Fortunately for me, my wife understood why and supported me, so it's been good.

BPC: And now you're in Texas?

CW: But I was on the phone talking to people in the Namibia. I'm working on a project to put an energy plant in Mozambique. I still work in Africa, but I do it over the phone now, because you can't travel [due to COVID-19 restrictions].

BPC: You're also revisiting your thesis, right? Did you say that you're trying to expand it into a book?

CW: The publishers called me two weeks ago and said their committee reviewed it and they think it's timely and they want to publish it. I'm writing a second book. It's called "A Black Man's Perspective of the Social Ills of America," and it talks about how policy affects the poor and people of color, how racism started. When Ronald Reagan took office, he put 4,000 mentally ill people on the streets. If you look at Newt Gingrich, he started this whole thing of if a

Republican speaks to a Democrat, you're a traitor to your party. And he is one of the most despicable human beings on earth. Do you know he divorced his first wife when she was coming out of surgery for cancer? He divorced his second wife when he found out she was ill. And his third wife is a serial adulterer. Trump made her the Ambassador to the Vatican, out of spite. So, I'm really happy with those things. I really want to put an institute at Pace. I think kids need to be exposed to students from other cultures.

BPC: Is there anything else you want to talk about?

CW: I know the pandemic has affected students. I met with a young lady from the alumni office and she gave me a pen from Pace and two sweatshirts, because I really wanted to do something, and I still want to teach, to be an adjunct professor. I think kids need to be exposed to what's happening in this world. Unfortunately, when Trump said "shithole" countries in Africa, I was averaging 50 calls a day from former presidents that I knew, ministers and ambassadors from the diplomatic core. And they said, "What the hell is going on with America?" And I said, "I told you the man was racist and you can't depend on him." And have to rebuild that. Young people are more open. What impressed when George Floyd got killed... and remember I was in the civil rights demonstrations. What really gave me hope was seeing people of all walks of life, all colors out there together. Black Lives Matter protests by all accounts were peaceful. Now you got people like [Senator Ted] Cruz saying things about Black Lives Matter. You got people like here in Texas the other day, Evangelical pastors referring to the Vice President [Kamala Harris] as Jezebel. I put on Facebook: if you can't respect Black women, sisters, you're going to pay a price, because if you say that to the wrong person, someone is going to punch you right in the mouth. I would never let someone disrespect my wife. But we have to get past this hatred. [President Joe] Biden has got his hands full. But corporate America has to take the lead. There has to be a way. Most black kids come to corporate America at a disadvantage. That's why we formed a Council of Concerned Black Executives.

BPC: How do you feel the situation is today for Black graduates in corporate America compared to your time?

CW: There are opportunities, but those doors started closing when Trump took over. I'll give you an example. At the State Department there were 128 Black diplomats and Foreign Service employees. Some have been there 10 or 15 years. I had diplomatic status. They were there when I was there in the '90s. Under Trump and Pompeo, they stripped them of all their duties, didn't let them travel anywhere, forced them to resign. And it was done deliberately. Biden has to undo that. There are some companies that will hire you [as a Black person], but they pay you less money. And what I say to students is: my degree from Pace will match against Harvard, Yale, Penn, and I should command the same pay as graduates from those schools, because I think my degree is just as good. And I have the experience to prove it. So, I'm always grateful to Pace. I really want to meet with Dean Singleton, because he worked in China and understands the importance of having relationships with foreign universities. I don't know how we do that, but that's what I want to do while I still have the strength to do it.

BPC: Did you get through to anyone in Lubin [School of Business]. Have you started conversations with people there?

CW: I sent a letter, but I haven't heard anything. I talked to some lady in this office, and that was it. I know he's busy.

BPC: Tell me about your thesis on Black-owned businesses.

CW: I worked with people inside of the Nixon administration. Black businesses weren't getting opportunities from the government. Look at XM Bank. I was nominated to the board of XM Bank. Look at USAID. In the history of USAID, only one Black consulting company ever got a contract. All the contracts go to what is known as the K Street Bandits. Under Trump, no Black firm got any contract with the government. They all went to his cronies. Ivanka is dumb as dirt, and she gets more contracts than some of the brightest people I know. So, we have gone backwards. When I was in banking, at one time there were over 100 Black banks in this country. We're down to 19. Fifty years ago, when I became president of a Black bank, I went to some of the biggest black churches. Every Monday morning, throughout the United States, Black churches across this country deposit over \$11 billion into white banks. Did you hear what I just said?

BPC: Yes.

CW: When I became president of the Bank, I went to the largest Black church in Dallas. They had 11 accounts at MBank, which was downtown, and I said to the bastard, "Just give me one or two of you your accounts. Let us show you how we can serve your church." He told me no. Six weeks later, he comes back to me. He says, "Mr. Wells, we have a construction program." I said, "Excuse me. You don't have any money in the bank, your accounts [are] downtown with white banks?" He told me no. I said, "You want me to give you a loan for construction, an add-on to the church? I would be in trouble with the comptroller because you're not a customer." And he looked at me and said, "Well, I'm coming to you now." And I said, "You're coming to me because your bank refused to lend you the money. You don't want to move any accounts, and that's against federal law. And I'm not going to violate the law for you." I got in my car, went to his church, and I told him, "You know, I tried to be very professional with you. You knew why you got turned down. And now you're badmouthing me. So, I'm going to tell you this one time: if I ever hear my name come out of your mouth again, I'm going to come back over here and punch you right in your mouth." And he called my wife, told her what I did, and my wife said, "Yeah, that's him." Because he was playing games with me. But look at the Black universe. I went to Cheyney State. Did you know Cheyney State had to take the state of Pennsylvania to court? They underfunded us for over 50 years, to the tune of over \$50 million dollars. Morgan State, in the state of Maryland, they were underfunded for over 50 years. Morgan State won in court. But all of that started reversing itself under Trump. Did you see where Jeff Bezos ex-wife gave money to 30 Black colleges?

BPC: I heard about that.

CW: Morgan got \$40 million. Lincoln University in Pennsylvania got \$30 million. Cheyney didn't get any because it doesn't have an endowment, and it's been poorly managed. But Pace opened my eyes. What I'm saying is: Pace, the warmth, the help, the professors, like the one

from Martha's Vineyard who was going to throw a party for us, he said, "You are the best class." We asked him questions, he was a consultant, and he knew I was in the consulting business. And if I had a client, I could go talk to him. That's why I have fond memories of Pace. That's why I want to be able to give something back. I'm hoping when my book is published, they'll at least put it in the Pace bookstore. I'm a graduate. I learned a lot from Pace.

BPC: Unfortunately, the bookstore doesn't carry books anymore. They do a lot of online business, and the store is mostly for apparel.

CW: You know, I have a Pace sweatshirt. I'm going to put my hood on because it's cold in here. But like I said, I have fond memories. I want to work with Pace, do anything I can to help them.

BPC: That's great. It sounds like you're a great resource, and they should take you up on that. Is the Alumni office in touch with you?

CW: I get a letter from the Alumni office every month. I've been trying to get them to work with me. I wanted to do a thing with African leaders at Pace, where they can talk about economic policy. CNN would cover it and all of that. I think it would be helpful. Get students involved. And I think there should be an exchange program between Pace University and the University of Science and Technology and UNAM in Namibia. Namibia is more First World, by the way.

BPC: I was just looking to see if Pace had any study abroad programs in Africa. I saw something about South Africa, but not much else.

CW: South Africa is not a good place for them to be. Namibia is safe. People come to Namibia to ski the sand dunes. It's amazing to see that. And I've known the president 37 years. College kids today need to go to school and understand the corporate environment. I tell Black kids, "I would never hire you the way you look." And they get offended. "What do you mean?" I say, "Look in the mirror. I know it's the in thing to have a wild hairdo. But you can't go into a job looking like that. You've got to put on a suit and tie. When you walk through the door, the first thing they see is the color of your skin. So, they're going to assume that you don't know what you're doing." I'll give you an example. When I was at Commercial Credit, one of the jobs I had was Director of Marketing, and I was hired in personnel. Then they made me Director of Marketing. And they had a national sales meeting at a country club about 15 minutes north of Baltimore. And when they introduced me, I walked out and I heard people go, "Ooh." Eight-hundred salesmen, all of them white and from the Deep South; and they never said [to the salesmen] that I was African American. So, I started talking and I said, "I sense that you're shocked to see this Black man standing before you." But we have to work together, and I'm going to tell you that as long as you do your job, if there's a problem, if I have a problem with you, I will go take you to an office behind a closed door, and whatever I say to you stays in that office. I will never publicly try to embarrass you, I will never undermine you, and I will never play games with you. I'll give you respect as long as you give it to me." And one of these guys came to me, he had his hair down to his shoulders, good ole boy, he said, "Do you know who I am?" I said, "Yeah, I know who you are." He was the number one salesman. He said, "If you have any trouble with any of these guys, here's my cell number, my home phone number. Call me, and I'll take care of it." And I had a problem with a guy, and he said, "Mr. Wells kept his

word on everything. He treats us with dignity and fairness, he fights for us, so you better cut the crap out.” So, my attitude is if you meet people halfway and treat them fairly, treat them with respect, they’ll walk through a wall for you. Because the one thing I learned from playing ball is: they want to know can you play your position. And as a musician, I play drums, they don’t look at the color of my skin. It’s: can you play your instrument? You see what I’m saying? And that’s what corporate America has got to start doing. Don’t look at my skin. Look to see what I bring to the table for you. The world is changing.

BPC: I meant to ask you about playing ball. So, you played in the Negro Leagues?

CW: I was a catcher. I played with the Philadelphia Stars.

BPC: That was when you were growing up?

CW: I was 12 years old. My father came out of retirement to play with me. I played against eight Hall of Famers. I played against the Oscar Charleston, Larry Doby, Monte Irvin, Junior Gilliam, Joe Black.

BPC: That’s amazing.

CW: But I don’t put that in any of my books. That was something that I enjoyed. It was fun.

BPC: And your father was a ballplayer too?

CW: He played second and short. He could outrun me when he’s 50 years old. I wasn’t fast. I was a catcher.

BPC: That’s an important position.

CW: Oh, yeah. Safest place on the field, in my opinion. One time they moved me to third base because I made a bunch of errors in one game, and the manager said, “Oh, no. Put back on the tools of ignorance and get back behind the plate. Thank you.” See, playing third base, you have to have quick reflexes. A line drive coming at you from 60 feet, you better be able to get your hands up quick or you’ll lose your teeth. Same with first base if a lefthanded hitter can pull it down there. So, catching was like sitting in the cradle. I caught this guy named Jimmy Dean. He was throwing 90. They didn’t have guns, but he was throwing 90, 95 mile an hour fastballs. It is what it is. But I’ll tell you, Pace has been a bright spot. It helped me in my jobs in Africa. It helped me to grow as a person, but more importantly it helped me at time when I was angry because of the way companies in America treated Black people. And Pace showed me that there were people who truly would accept you for who you are and treat you with dignity. That’s what Pace did. It helped mellow me out. I just wish Pace would be more proactive. I don’t know how many Black students they have now. I want them to get more involved in the international arena. I really do.

BPC: When you were at Pace, were there not many Black students? I know the Black Student Union started around that time.

CW: In the graduate program, I think there were 12 of us. But we were all traveling.

BPC: And you probably weren't connected to undergraduate student life.

CW: No. We had a professor of accounting who taught four graduate classes and four undergrad. And in five years he passed five students. We had CPAs who would audit the class, and they said to us, "I don't know how you guys will pass because this man is crazy." He would come in, give you the test booklet, and say, "The only thing you're going to get right is the date and your name." He took pride in seeing how tough he could make it and not help you. That's crazy. So, we went to Dr. Bonaparte, and they got rid of it. He's not teaching. He's only seeing how many people he can fail. You know what I mean? Dr. Bonaparte was a good guy. There were some good people there. They really were honest. As long as you came prepared and showed that you would work and you wanted to learn, they would treat you well. And that's what I liked about Pace. And they didn't say, "Oh, you got here on affirmative action." They didn't make you feel like you were second class. They made you feel like you were part of this school. And that's what I liked.

BPC: That's good to hear. Is there anything else you want to mention and include?

CW: Thank you. Like I said, I want to stay in contact. I want to try to talk to the president. I think there's some things that can be done.

BPC: I wish you luck with that. Let me know if I can make any introductions or anything.

CW: I will.

BPC: Thanks for taking the time today to do this.

CW: I've got a warm spot on my heart for Pace. I'm hoping things will go OK.

BPC: I hope so.

Duration: 01:07:14