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Kieran Connell: If I can ask you first of all if you can think back to was it the late seventies when you joined the centre.

Errol Lawrence: When did I join? Yeah, '79, I think.

Kieran Connell: How did you end up there?

Errol Lawrence: I was working in a Community Relations Council in Hammersmith, Race Equality Council they called themselves, and it was a project working with unemployed Black youth. I'd come to the end of that and I had just seen Stuart on TV talking about something, I can't even remember what it was now that he was talking about, probably something to do with race but I can't quite remember the programme, and I knew – a friend of mine at the time, she was much better acquainted with the work of CCCS and said, 'You should apply, you should go there.' I thought, well, why not? So I applied to go there to do some work, some more work around Black youth and unemployment I think.

Kieran Connell: So were you full time there or funded or...?

Errol Lawrence: Did I start off...? I was part time, I was part time, because I was signing on in those days. In those days, you could sign on.

Kieran Connell: Wow!

Errol Lawrence: I was there part time. Yes, my MA was two years.

Kieran Connell: So were you staying in London then and commuting to Birmingham?

Errol Lawrence: Well, that was quite difficult because our daughter was quite young, my partner was living in – she was in Reading still finishing her degree, and so I was living in Reading. Then I moved for a while to Handsworth and stayed there. I also had a friend who lived in Birmingham at the time who was teaching at... where was he teaching? I can't even remember. But they lived out in Erdington I think it was. So I was staying there, I stayed with them for a while, and then I got somewhere in Handsworth and then in the end I moved back to Reading. When we were writing the book, I was commuting from Reading. But I had finished the MA by then, and I was meant to be doing a PhD which never saw the light of day.

Kieran Connell: What was the atmosphere like when you arrived in – did it match up to what you were expecting?

Errol Lawrence: I didn't really know, I didn't have any expectations because I wasn't really aware of it as a, kind of – I wasn't aware of the politics of it, really, and I wasn't... I didn't really understand its cultural significance at the time. I didn't understand that, kind of, place in cultural studies or any of that. I felt it was all quite intimidating for me. I did a Politics degree and I had studied Marxism just as another theorist, so I wasn't at a university – I wasn't in a department that saw itself in any way as having any debt to Marx.

Kieran Connell: Was that in Reading?

Errol Lawrence: It was in Reading, yeah. It was just a Politics department, quite a traditional Politics department. And so, yeah, Marx was just Marx, Hegel and Marx were just... yeah, just philosophers, just another set of philosophers. So although I had read Marx, I wasn't really prepared for that. It was really quite intense, and it was one of those situations where everyone knows what they are talking about except you. As I say, quite intimidating I thought. There was also some tension between our group and feminists as well because that's the thing, we were trying to think about how those two movements and how those sets of theories, how they related to each other. And in a real situation, they didn't much really. I think some of the feminists were quite antagonistic, I think.

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Kieran Connell: Was there like hostility to it?

Errol Lawrence: I wouldn't say hostility but I think there still is that question about which is primary, which is the primary oppression. So, yeah, there was some tension there.

Kieran Connell: Was the commitment to Marx at the Centre, did it match your own intellectual interests?

Errol Lawrence: No.

Kieran Connell: Were you a Marxist before...?

Errol Lawrence: No.

Kieran Connell: Did you lead a Marxist...?

Errol Lawrence: No, I don't think I did. Well, yes and no. In a way I did, but I was very – I think I left really quite aware of the areas that Marxism was silent about, really, and didn't deal with very well. And I think those other forms of oppression, Marx didn't really have that much to say about it, and that was another tension and that was a tension within the group too, within the Race and Politics Group. Robin, did you hear of him?

Kieran Connell: On my list of people to get in touch with, yeah.

Errol Lawrence: I think he took some stick for – I think he was probably more from that kind of working class, the primacy of class. And I suppose when I joined, I was obviously very aware of racism so I went an anti-racist certainly but even then my ideas about that were not that well informed and I was probably - or not well-formed, and I was probably a Nationalist, really, probably a Black Nationalist of some description. So that certainly changed that. And it was working with the group that changed that, really.

Kieran Connell: Were you involved in the establishment of the group then? Were you...

Errol Lawrence: Race and Politics? Yeah.

Kieran Connell: What were the reasons behind it coming about in the first place?

Errol Lawrence: Do you know, I don't... there were other books being written or other work being done in other groups. Now, if I remember rightly and you will probably be able to find out the mechanics of it, but it was one of the – it was a form of study. We were really a study group, that's what it was, and so it was – and my PhD extensively was about unemployment and Black youth and obviously race had something to do with that, race/racism had something to do with that. So we really came together as a discussion group. I don't know where the idea of doing the book came from, I think it was Paul's [Gilroy].

Kieran Connell: And how did that discussion group work then to begin with? Were you sharing your thoughts and ideas and work?

Errol Lawrence: Yeah, really. And I think we started by reading particular things, can't remember what. I remember we read John Rex quite a lot, C.L.R. James... Paul and Hazel [Carby], in particular, were I would say quite well read in terms of they had already done quite a lot of associated reading around the way race works, racism works. They had talked about it quite a lot. They had thought about how it intersects with gender and class. And I think that the two of them were quite pivotal.

Kieran Connell: In the direction of...?

[0:11:14]

Errol Lawrence: In the direction, yeah.

Kieran Connell: Right.

Errol Lawrence: Obviously Paul and John, when he joined, he joined later. Bob was also very influential in the group. Pratibha [Parmar] and Valerie [Amos], well, Paul and Valerie were quite close friends and I was just there.

Kieran Connell: How long did... you know, that feeling of everyone else knows what they are talking about and you don't, did that subside as you went on or did you always feel slightly on the outside looking into these big Marxist and whatever...?

Errol Lawrence: No, to some extent I did, but I think what happened was that as we started writing the book, obviously some of it just by being around people and talking, and obviously the more I read as well, I think in particular – I read some of – I really got into some of Stuart's work so that was one – yeah, *Policing the Crisis*, reading that, reading *On Ideology* which he had edited. But also Stephen Andan in the Institute of Race down here, race and class. So what I did feel very comfortable with by the time we left, or much more comfortable with, was I felt more certain about how I understood race to work and about how I understood racism to work, really, and how it related to sex and gender and class. I felt a lot more confident about that, but there was still... I still wouldn't – I'm not – I didn't continue that reading, really, so... Yeah.

Kieran Connell: You mentioned that *Policing the Crisis* which came out, what, '78 maybe, late seventies?

Errol Lawrence: Late seventies, yeah.

Kieran Connell: Which obviously deals quite a lot with race and the moral panic around places like Handsworth anyway. The fact that you guys in the Race Group wanted to form your own group that also dealt with race in a slightly different way, were you pushing against *Policing the Crisis* or was that more of a springboard into the work you were doing?

Errol Lawrence: Yeah, I think that working from it, working off it, I don't... I certainly felt, still feel, that it was such an important book, not so much – for the way it dealt with race, that's why I would say it was important, much more than how it dealt with policing and moral panics and so on. The way it dealt with race, for me anyway, it was really quite seminal, that was the key word.

Kieran Connell: And what was the actual process of group work like, the actual process of working together?

Errol Lawrence: That was interesting. We divided it up; I was going to do housing, which was interesting because that's where I ended up. But I didn't want to do it. I started doing some reading and I thought, 'This is boring, I'm not really interested in this,' and I started getting interested in – I read a lot of John Rex and I started getting interested in... the way in which – and because I had worked for Community Relations Council as well and I had already read a lot of that kind of stuff, and I had met people who – one guy in particular who was in Hammersmith and I can't remember his name quite, but he had already written a book on race relations which wasn't a big seller but which I'd read when I was in London. And so I started getting interested in how those writers from a Left-ish oppositional but not Marxist theoretical base, how they had characterised, how they'd talked about race. And that is really where one of my chapters comes from is that critique of that. But I was also interested in the idea of common sense as well. And there was a guy from Germany whose name I can't remember, Michael maybe, who was in our group for a while; I think he was a philosopher, Philosophy student, who was doing a year... something like that. And he had some interesting – he talked in an interesting way about common sense and about its place in thinking, really, in our intellectual life, and I just got interested in that and that's where... I think that what happened was we decided somehow, not entirely sure how that we wanted to critique that race relation industry work and that became my task. But the other chapter, that common sense, it kind of came naturally out of it because-

Kieran Connell: Organically?

[0:18:08]

Errol Lawrence: Yeah, organically. I felt I couldn't really critique that body of race relations work without doing that, I think. And I think once I'd got into the writing and then we'd be meeting, we'd be coming back and meeting quite regularly, but I did a lot of the writing then down in Reading.

Kieran Connell: Were there any tensions in the intellectual process?

Errol Lawrence: Mm. Not as many as you might imagine. With Robin, that was the big tension.

Kieran Connell: Cause there was more of a class based approach from Robin, whereas others wanted to focus more on racism?

Errol Lawrence: It wasn't – we didn't want to ditch class. I don't know if Paul has ditched it now but we didn't want to ditch it, but we wanted to reposition it. We didn't think it was primary. And, of course, the classic line is from *Policing the Crisis*, racism modality through which passes lived. And we didn't see how you could really sensibly talk about racism without dealing with the way race works. There was always a danger, I think, in Robin's approach that you airbrush over it, you airbrush over the specific effects of race, of racialization and racism. So there was that tension. There was much less tension – there were arguments. The arguments weren't even that fierce, to be honest. I've had fiercer arguments since with colleagues and people. And there was a certain amount of... yeah, there was... you see, it wasn't arguing. The chapters on women, I think sometimes Pratibha and Hazel might have felt a bit marginalised, not entirely sure, I think so. I was reasonably close to Pratibha in particular, and I think we both felt a bit outside, not central to it but differently. We had arguments with other people rather than with each other. I think Paul was quite a – his very sharp intellect and also quite brusque. I was, kind, of a bit wary of him. But I think really it went quite well. We did a... who was it? Me, Paul, was it Valerie, I don't know if Pratibha came as well... went to America to do a talk, a series of talks, about-

Kieran Connell: Was this once the book had been published?

Errol Lawrence: Yeah, I think it was when the book was published. I think it was out then. So we did something... where were we? In St Paul's, I don't know, some Marxist, some American Marxist. Yeah, I think it was Pratibha, Valerie – Valerie joined us, I think, and Hazel who set it up, because the guy Michael, her husband, and Paul. We got on.

Kieran Connell: How did the work that you were doing in the Race and Politics Group fit in with the rest of the work that was going on in the Centre? Not just intellectually but also, I mean, the Centre general meeting was on a Monday and the theory seminars... what was the average working week in terms of that for you when you were living in Birmingham?

Errol Lawrence: I think by the time we were writing – when I was doing the MA, I attended those, didn't understand a lot of them, but quite a few people didn't understand them either. It was interesting. For me, it was very much learning, I was a student. Very, very challenging intellectually. As I say, certainly the first – probably the first term I just thought I don't know what they are talking about but then other people didn't either. I didn't form any particular friendships with other students. I don't even remember any of them apart from the people in our group. Centre meetings, I don't really have a memory of them, so they obviously didn't touch me greatly.

Kieran Connell: Obviously the Centre had this commitment to not having this traditional relationship between the students and staff members, there were only three staff members anyway, but what was the – how would you describe the influence of Stuart, Richard and Michael?

Errol Lawrence: Okay. Stuart, he was leaving when I joined, very influential as far as our group was concerned. Paul knew him quite well, still does I think. The others had – Paul, Hazel and Valerie, I think, were already there when I joined; they had already been there a year, I think, and so they had had time to have some sort of relationship which I didn't really... I can remember, actually, having some sort of discussion with Stuart and I was still in my unformed Nationalist thoughts and trying to engage with

him. He was a good teacher, Stuart was a good teacher. Richard, I really liked, I got on really well with Richard. When I was doing quite a lot of reading of history of Atlantic slave trade and so on, and also trying to understand – then trying to understand where Eric Hobsbawm and who is the other person?

[0:27:19]

Kieran Connell: Thompson?

Errol Lawrence: Yeah, E.P. Thompson, trying to understand that kind of history. And Richard was quite important in that for me, and I liked him and he was head of the Centre when Stuart left. Michael Green, I didn't warm to him greatly; he was okay. And then there was a woman whose name-

Kieran Connell: Maureen.

Errol Lawrence: Maureen.

Kieran Connell: Who replaced Stuart when he left.

Errol Lawrence: Yes, okay. Maureen was – they were – they didn't really – they weren't influential for me. Richard was but more as a teacher rather than in terms of any of the ideas. I think we were... you see, I think we were clearly part of what was going on at the Centre but we weren't central, I think, and I think that – at least, that's how I would see it.

Kieran Connell: Why do you think that was then?

Errol Lawrence: I just think – I do think that we were talking about those issues in a different way. And some of that actually meant disagreeing with some of the things that were being thought at the Centre you see, I think. So I don't think – we certainly weren't – we were a little sub-group, we were a little sub-group, and I was certainly surprised by the success of the book, actually. I thought it was just be a monograph that sat somewhere and it was extraordinarily successful.

Kieran Connell: What about the politics of – various forms of politics operating in the Centre. You mentioned you arrived as a Nationalist, Black Nationalist, then alongside there were people who were active in Big Flame or International Marxist Group and various other forms of Marxist or Socialist politics. Do you have any recollections of how that or how all these things interacted within the Centre?

Errol Lawrence: No, no. I didn't – I wasn't very social in the Centre, partly because my family lived in Reading and so certainly towards the end of my time there I was not there more often than I was there. I was – there wasn't that much going on socially, and I wasn't part of those – I've never been in Big Flame or IMG or any of that. Paul was in Big Flame, wasn't he? So I knew about it. I felt quite suspicious of it, a lot of it, personally, that's just a personal thing. But I don't really – I would say, for me, I didn't really see much of that. The way... yeah, I don't know.

Kieran Connell: You mentioned you were living in Handsworth, and obviously within Handsworth there's also a lot of politics going on there like African Caribbean Self Help Organisation, Harambee, all those various forms of Nationalism as well and other kinds of politics. Were there ever – did you feel, anyway, a relationship between that kind of politics or even against racism in the late seventies or anti-Nazi league, was there ever a relationship, whether it's one way or the other, between that outside political world and then the intellectual work of the Centre?

Errol Lawrence: Do you mean...?

Kieran Connell: For you or organically or...

Errol Lawrence: A relationship.

Kieran Connell: In the Race and Politics Group or just...

Errol Lawrence: Yes, there was some, there was some. I think we had different histories. Paul was involved in Big Flame; he knew quite a lot of people in Handsworth in the Birmingham area. He knew the people in – and culturally as well, particularly music. He knew some of those musicians, Steel Pulse and so on, and he really did live there so... Pratibha had come from a different – it was a different kind of politics within the Asian communities. I think she – I can't remember whether she was involved in Big Flame or not... But, yeah, those things were kind of important parts of the history. I think when we were writing though, I think certainly we were distancing ourselves from the Nationalist politics, that was quite clear. And we were also distancing ourselves from a purely class based politics and from a Felonist politics, actually, and we were trying to marry all of those things together with – I think we became convinced, I don't know, was it a new thing, I don't know, that it all worked – that it kind of worked together and you couldn't – for real people you couldn't separate it and it was actually difficult to separate it even intellectually. So we were trying to write in a way that wasn't just an incremental addition of oppressions but organically these things were fused so I think that's what we were trying to do. We were drawing on – we certainly for inspiration we did draw on *Rock Against Racism* and we drew on the work of Big Flame and the words of Samaj in 'a Babylon. All sorts of other things were an important part of our – it gives you that inner strength.

[0:36:18]

Kieran Connell: A formation of the work. That was all sort of feeding into it-

Errol Lawrence: Yes, it was all feeding into it. Sometimes it was feeding into it because you didn't agree with that. Some of it was just purely – because if you really thought about it, there was a lot about the music, about reggae, that actually we wouldn't have agreed with a lot of those ideas, but that was actually quite central to us as a group just in terms of a... I don't know, it wasn't an intellectual thing, it was something else. It was to do with your soul, I guess.

Kieran Connell: One of the things Paul touched upon yesterday was about there's a protest at the Race and Politics Group you were involved in, to some extent, against the University of Birmingham were going to raise tuition fees for overseas students. And the Race and Politics Group were apparently a bit involved in that. Do you have any recollections of that?

Errol Lawrence: I can imagine that we would have not been involved with that. I don't remember... no, I don't have any particular...

Kieran Connell: What about the relationship between the Centre in general and the University? Were you aware of any tensions or were you very much just part of – did you see yourselves as just being part of the Centre and not really involved in the rest of the academic life in the University as a whole?

Errol Lawrence: Yeah, I didn't... But I wouldn't... Yeah, I was very – I didn't see myself as part of the University particularly. I mean I did, I did, but only because I didn't think not to be. I went to the Centre. As I came to understand what it was about, I was quite proud to be there. And, of course, as I talked to other people about what I was doing, the more I came to realise its standing already. And so, for me, that was my primary allegiance, if you like, that's probably too strong a word but it was to the Centre rather than to the University. I didn't have anything against the University particularly. I remember much more our involvement, not our involvement, our participation after the deaths in New Cross.

Kieran Connell: OK, in what ways?

Errol Lawrence: I'm trying to think whether we were still writing the book then or whether we had... I think we were still writing the book because I'm pretty sure that one of the photographs, the photograph on the front cover, I think came from the policing of that march, pretty sure it did. That's the other important influence, Searchlight, because Ron was a... worked on that. That was important as well, although I didn't know Ron at the time but that was an important influence. But, anyway, yes, I think that things like that and the experience of marching through Fleet Street and so on, that cemented for me anyway that view that you couldn't talk about the situation of Black people in the UK without dealing with race and racism, it wasn't possible to do it. If you did try to do that you would be missing something important. That was... and I think that though we were much more emotionally invested

in that than anyone else at the Centre, and I think that there were some emerging tensions. Paul started growing locks and so did I round about that time and although we were not Nationalist, I think we were inspired by some of Rastafari, some of that cultural opposition to Babylon.

[0:42:56]

Kieran Connell: Obviously Paul has become and Hazel as well, both professors in various departments, but after you left the Centre you went on a different route. But would you say that your experience and time at the Centre, has it influenced your subsequent-?

Errol Lawrence: Career?

Kieran Connell: Career and trajectory, however you want to call it.

Errol Lawrence: Mm... yeah, it's been interesting. I think that... it's difficult to know why my trajectory was different.

Kieran Connell: Was there ever an unwritten rule or was there ever an atmosphere that people were doing the book, *The Empire Strikes Back*, to become academics?

Errol Lawrence: Oh no.

Kieran Connell: Was Paul clear that you wanted to become an academic at that point?

Errol Lawrence: He may have been, I don't know.

Kieran Connell: Was it an obvious thing within the Race and Politics Group?

Errol Lawrence: I think it was obvious that Paul was highly intellectual. I remember one of the women, one of the feminists, saying something about Paul being the one who was intellectual and the rest of us were nothing really. No, it wasn't that obvious. When he left, he worked for the GLC in the police unit, and he was always interested in policing. He was quite important to me getting the job in Camden Community Relations which is where I worked because he was on their General Council. I was doing my PhD and then my son, our second child, was born and I just felt I couldn't continue and I never went back to it. So I think probably if I'd have taken a different – if I'd stuck with it and completed the PhD, I probably would have been more of an academic but I didn't, and I went to work for the Community Relations Council and that was a different kind of – I think what was interesting about that, that experience, it was like trying to see how our ideas panned out in practise. It was an interesting time from that point of view.

Kieran Connell: And so how did they, what was your experience of that?

Errol Lawrence: Well, you see, one of the things that quickly became obvious to me when I started working on the ground in Camden was we were convinced, well we weren't convinced, that's probably a mistake on our part, but we tended to talk about the different darker skinned minority communities as all being Black. So in our group, Pratibha was the only Indian person but we were all Black apart from those in the group who were not Black. But when you were on the ground, that wasn't how people understood it and so one of the first things was a disconnect between that kind of intellectual thinking that was shared, by Stuart, by Steven Andan at the Institute, even though they didn't necessarily agree with each other, the people in *Race Today* perhaps less so, Darcus Howe. So there was that view that had been formed somehow up here amongst a group of intellectuals. But on the ground it just wasn't like that. And so one of my first meetings was with Afro Caribbean community who tried to recruit me to their side, their team. But I think that the Community Relations Council I worked for was quite radical for what it was and we had – there were a group of people there who were aware of the book, they were aware of *Empire Strikes Back*, and certainly aware of Paul, and Salman Rushdie's sister worked there. And there was another guy who worked there, Abdul, who was quite influential in the Bangladeshi community but also in terms of the work that he did with them was really influential. And we did work as a... and so you had in this Community Relations Council you had this group of staff from all different parts of the world who did see themselves as Black, as a Black staff, but working with communities who didn't see things in that way at all. And actually we

lost that struggle in Camden. When I left, just after I left, it just all fractured into lots of different ethnic groups fighting each other, and that has really become – that is much more pronounced now than it was back then. But it's an interesting experience nevertheless. And we occupied the Town Hall in Camden and that was important from a different point of view because, for me anyway, it was about not allowing - not making it about race but not allowing that to disappear because it was all about homelessness and it was about who is homeless, and I think still today Shelter don't recognise that... I mean, there's a sense in which homelessness can affect anybody but actually when you look at who, the actual people who become homeless, they are gendered and they are racialised, if you like. It's not anybody who becomes homeless, so there's that kind of... The Bangladeshi family... do you know about this?

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Kieran Connell: The...?

Errol Lawrence: You don't know? '83, 1983 I think it was. They were homeless and there's a long history to that which I won't go into-

Kieran Connell: In Camden?

Errol Lawrence: Yeah, a long history which I won't go into, but a family, a mother and her children, died in a fire in a hotel. Camden had not been able to house them, had put them in a bed and breakfast hotel and that was quite common practise in London. And a lot of these hotels were just unsafe, insanitary as well quite often. And we had marched to the Town Hall really to have a dialogue and we had been refused a dialogue and ended up saying, okay, we're going to stay here then. We occupied the Council Chamber and occupied that part of the Town Hall, and that lasted for three or four weeks. And it became quite a big thing. It was a time of the miners' strike, we had the Black miners from Nottingham who came down, showed solidarity, and then there were all sorts; SWP, IMG, you name it, they were there like flies around sh*t. So it was quite important because we had to work in that community. It was quite important not to lose sight of what we were doing there, and not to map it immediately into some... do you know what I mean?

Kieran Connell: Yeah, yeah.

Errol Lawrence: Bigger struggle. Which is what people wanted to do. I'm still not sure that - we won a kind of victory but I'm not sure that we didn't get it right. Again, the thinking in – it was like trying in practise to work out a politics that didn't ignore who the people at the centre of it were.

Kieran Connell: Was that an unsettling experience given the disconnect between the theory that you had worked extremely hard on, the race and politics group, and the practise that you were going out on the ground with your role in Camden, was that an unsettling experience?

Errol Lawrence: Yeah, it was at first. You start off you try to in a sense beat it into their kids, all wrong.

Kieran Connell: Going back to the false consciousness thing.

Errol Lawrence: Yeah, kind of, yes.

Kieran Connell: In a way.

Errol Lawrence: Clearly it's not. Then I started to – I suppose we probably always knew that although we might be on the – that actually that's part of the way in which racism works is by it does identify you as racist but it identifies you as different racist. We might call them ethnicities but they are different races, and that has consequences, that has very real consequences in the real world. But also I think something Paul always understood was that people draw a strength from those kind of associations, and so you can't just dismiss those associations as some sort of false consciousness. I think that as a politics no one has worked out how you pull it together, I think. And I think for our communities it is quite fragmented now. But, on the other hand, Thatcher was just so good at doing a different – constructing a different kind of... what would you call it? I think she has constructed a way of being.

Kieran Connell: Almost like a hegemonic practice, in a way.

[0:55:46]

Errol Lawrence: Yeah, so that now – and I saw this, and I taught in further education, and I think one of the reasons I probably didn't finish the PhD and didn't write more was because I ended up in a further education college and the whole thing there was that you taught; nobody does research, and it was thought of as a waste of time which is quite interesting, actually, for-

Kieran Connell: Research was thought of as a waste of time.

Errol Lawrence: Yeah. It wasn't real work. You were only doing real work if you were teaching. And I was quite heavily involved in the teaching and then became head of – I was head of school of housing so less and less time to do academic work.

Kieran Connell: That brings me on to my final question really which was given the trajectory that you've taken since leaving the Centre, that lip service and talk about the importance of being an organic intellectual, do you think in a sense that root – did you see yourself as being an organic intellectual and going out and being into the real world, if you like, and away from the ivory tower?

Errol Lawrence: Yeah. I didn't... I wanted to teach, I really enjoyed teaching, and I did want to write but I never... I would say it's not that I didn't find the time. Partly it's just simply to do, I think – it is partly that I didn't have time, I was just too busy, and you're a bit exhausted and drained by teaching all the time, and I taught everything. I didn't know that much about housing before, about housing at all before I started teaching. I went in there to teach the sociology of housing, and I'd done some reading around that and I ended up teaching that and economics of housing and housing policy and housing finance, because in a further education college that's what you are expected to do. The degree specialism is – the extent to which people are able to specialise is quite small, really. And, of course, in order to be able to teach all those things that just meant a huge amount of reading and thinking which got in the way of writing. But also I had just take a long time to get down physically to the act of writing. I just need to have lots and lots of time which I increasingly didn't have, and I think that's why I didn't do it. I was always – I didn't want to teach race, I knew that, and we did talk about that, about whether we wanted to be pigeon holed in that way, and that was certainly something that I didn't – and I don't think we have. Although Paul might be known for that, perhaps more than – and John, I suppose, has done a lot of that. I didn't want to. And I think, for me, as well it was because I'd had that experience of working in the race industry, for Community Relations Council, I was – that just made me all the more determined not to be doing that kind of work. So I was quite happy to be in the field that was much broader, about housing, and that was quite an interesting time. I still talked about race and racism and... but increasingly to groups of students who were just bemused by it, even though they were mostly Black students. The idea for many of them that race doesn't exist as a biological entity that was news. So every year I would find that that, 'This is news to me, I didn't...' So there was also that sense I started to get that talking about an organic intellectual, but actually what we were doing somehow doesn't – partly it's not connecting with peoples' lives but also there's this idea that those battles continually have to be fought and won, and I think increasingly, I was talking to my wife about that and other friends who are not part of that, but there is this sense you get now as an older person that, hey, people are having these discussions still. They are still acting in these ways, they are still doing these things, I thought we might...

Kieran Connell: Thought that battle was won.

Errol Lawrence: Yeah, thought that battle was won and, of course, it wasn't. I think that... so you look back with a certain amount of disappointment really. A lot of it is because those battles haven't been won and indeed-

Kieran Connell: Need to win them again and again.

Errol Lawrence: Need to win them again and again and we've gone backwards in many respects, and more than – I don't know if Stuart maybe understood at the time but that work that Thatcher did, intellectual work

really, that's just been so powerful. Because that was the other thing that I noticed more and more. I started teaching in the college in '91 and by the thousands, by the noughties, I was teaching students who that was their life. And the idea that tenants were not consumers... yeah, that was just... it didn't make any sense. Of course they were our customers. So these are housing officers, of course they are our customers. And so it's like there's a way in which the whole way in which we talk about ourselves now has been infiltrated by all of that, and nobody seems to be able to move beyond it or there's no credible opposition to it anywhere, from anywhere. The other thing that's happened is that a lot of those far Left groups seem to have... I don't know what has happened to them.

[1:03:51]

Kieran Connell: Splintered again.

Errol Lawrence: Yeah. I don't know where they are.

Kieran Connell: Fragmentation again, isn't it?

Errol Lawrence: Yeah. So we have this strange new world. The book is still-

Kieran Connell: Being read.

Errol Lawrence: Still being read, which is quite extraordinary really.

Kieran Connell: Well, thank you very much.

Errol Lawrence: Okay, thank you.

[End of Transcript]