BL: This is Bill Leslie. And it's December 16th, and I'm with Professor David Cohen, formerly of Johns Hopkins, now at the University of Michigan. And one of the chief participants—I won't say architect, but maybe—of the joint Atlantic Program in History and Culture.

When did you first get to Hopkins?

DC: I arrived there in the summer of 1968.

BL: I want to get your impressions of the History Department, coming from the outside. Where were you coming from?

DC: School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. And I hadn't completed my Ph.D. I was almost finished. I knew of a few people at Hopkins. The department was easy to get to know people, because it was quite small. And History of Science people were also interested in my coming. And so, you know, you could wrap those two departments up and you had about 12 people at the time.

BL: That's true.

DC: And it was remarkable that those sets of people could constitute one of the top history programs in America with such small numbers. So it was a very interesting thing to try to understand that.

BL: Now who were the—was Jack Greene chair at that time? Or who was chair?

DC: Al Chandler was chair.

BL: Chandler was chair?

DC: Yep.
BL: And were you the first Africanist that they hired?

DC: I was the first non-Western person who had taught there—person who was teaching a non-Western subject. Not U.S., not Europe, who had taught there since the ‘40's when that guy, during the—

BL: Oh, Owen Lattimore.

DC: Owen Lattimore. Chandler was the chair, and I was brought in by a combo of David Donald and Jack Greene as part of the Ford Foundation's grant to establish an institute for southern history. And they had the idea that people doing southern history should know something about Africa. The African backgrounds of African Americans in the south.

BL: That’s quite interesting.

DC: So I was brought in and it was another person who worked in civil rights in the south. Hugh Davis Graham, Hugh Graham was there on a shorter term. We shared an office in Gilman, which is very interesting, because he was the research director for the Kerner Commission on the uprisings. That was going on at the other side of the room—you know, my little office in Gilman.

BL: Nowadays they almost always try to hire two people in any particular field. But in those days were expected to be kind of an army of one?

DC: Well, yeah, I was. My professor in London, who was one among like seven or eight African historians in his program in London, had said, there are two kinds of African history positions out in the world. There's one where you have a little--you're a piece of a group that works on Africa or the tropical region, or something like that. And then there's one where you're a one man—he called it a one man band.

And so it helped me orient myself to that “one man band” and challenge, where my teaching would have to include talking about empire, the emergence of empire globally, or African history would have sort of an Atlantic slave trade and triangle trade kind of aspect to it as well, to connect it to North America. Even though I worked on East Africa. Still, the Atlantic was something I had been interested in.

BL: Now had you received training in anthropology at SOAS, or were at least sympathetic to it?

[0:05:00]
DC: Well, it was more than sympathetic. I went to the University of Wisconsin as an undergraduate. And by the second year I was very interested in the possibilities of bridging anthropology and history, because I would go in classrooms with anthropology and history and have a feeling that people were talking about roughly the same things without talking to each other.

I was very interested in how to bring them together. So I went to London to study social anthropology more intensively. And my interest was learning anthropology, but thinking about how anthropologists worked and whether they could do more history. And I found myself in a department very indisposed to doing history, the one in London. The London School of Economics.

And I did something –

BL: Oh, you were at LSE?

DC: Yeah, LSE. At first I was at LSE for what would be called a junior year abroad. And I fell in among some people who were doing a master's in social anthropology. So I did that program, the master's and took the exams at the end of one year rather than at the end of two years. And when I went back to Wisconsin they gave me credit for that. I don't have a master's degree from LSE. But they gave me credit. And then again when I started a Ph.D. at SOAS the following year, '65, they said, "Well, you know, with that work at LSE we'll just set you on the course to do a Ph.D. straight away."

And so I started, you know, '65 I was registered for a Ph.D. rather than a master's at SOAS.

BL: Now from Hopkins’ perspective when they hired you, were they expecting that you would bring an anthropological as well as historical dimension?

DC: I don't think it occurred to them at all. And I don't think it was something that was being advertised, being used by SOAS history faculty as a kind of way of promoting people, because the positions that they could post people in—I mean they had students who were in history. They could only get posts in history. The history posts were not advertising for people who did any anthropology. And I would say that it was in my mind all the time, you know, that I wanted to do anthropology and history.

When I got to Hopkins there was an anthropologist there who himself was a sort of British-trained anthropologist, trained in way that history didn't—that doing history the way it was done in the history department did not matter at all, Neville Dyson-Hudson.
BL: He went to Binghamton, I think?

DC: Yeah, yeah. And I think the next person who came in was William Irons. Or he was maybe arrived around the time I [did], similarly. There wasn't a history inclination there. But there was at Hopkins, around Jack Greene, really, and myself, an interest in making connections across areas of the world. You may have caught a taste of the other side of it. There was a strong group of Europeanists in the History Department and a strong group of Americanists.

And Jack Greene was one of the people who had a dalliance with Anglo-American, Caribbean. I thought that in an American seminar it was about the United States, and Jack Greene's idea of North America included Atlantic Canada, it included Jamaica, Barbados, the English colonies of the Caribbean. Which were really part of America, the north, until the American Revolution or beyond. So the 18th century, mid-18th century you had to think of 13 colonies and include Jamaica and Barbados as well. And other places.

And because of slavery, he was interested in comparative stuff. And I was also. I had come from University of Wisconsin where my undergraduate adviser was Philip Curtain. You know, an adviser. He had to sign my papers. Not giving me a whole lot of advice. Though he did tell me, "You know, you shouldn't stay here for graduate school. You should go to London." And he let me take graduate level courses during my senior year at Wisconsin. So I was already doing graduate courses in African history. But it was Phil Curtain who founded the tropical history group.

BL: At Wisconsin?

DC: At Wisconsin, which was in my mind as a very smart way of connecting up different parts of the world that otherwise—we didn't have the word—they were segregated, but the word is "silod," now. And so he had people who worked on Indonesia talking to people who worked on Brazil, the Caribbean, Africa, Europe. Almost all historians—although some of them like Curtain and (inaudible) had read—they knew anthropologists and they read some anthropology and they met with them at conferences and things.

So I had that rubric. And well, I'll let you ask your question. I could go on a bit. But I do remember exactly where I was standing when Jack Greene and I in one of our very long telephone conversations started talking about doing an Atlantic program.
BL: I would love to know that.

DC: Okay.

BL: Have a drink and go from there.

DC: It was between 1970 to early 1971 that we had a very long telephone conversation. And I was actually tapping into, you know, a little bit of plagiarism of this Wisconsin thing. Whether it could be done on a smaller scale, connecting Africa, the Caribbean, you know, Jack Greene’s thing. Especially workable for the 18th century, the U.K., Europe, and comparative stuff. And so there were two things we started working on. One was this idea of an Atlantic program. I think we called it the Atlantic program. It did not include anthropology in those conversations.

And this project on freedmen and the new world was a very good place for testing the possibilities of comparative work across different imperial cultural metropolitan domains like French, Portuguese, English, among different slave settlements. So we came up with this project *Neither Slave Nor Free*. And I think we had the conference almost immediately, like in ’71, possibly.

Because the book came out. We edited the book in ’72, and I was on my way to Uganda in ’71. And I was in England working on the introduction while also preparing for a second year of research in East Africa. I remember being under a lot of pressure and there were things that colleagues in London, you know, I had a lot of colleagues from graduate school, and my former professors who wanted me to work on, but I remember saying no to them because I had that *Neither Slave Nor Free* introduction to do. And I thought it was a remarkable book. We had fantastic people and [a] fantastic project. And *Neither Slave Nor Free* I think set the possibilities of goals of being able to bring people into the same room who worked on Francophone, Hispanic, Portuguese, British, et cetera in different areas of the world into common discussions, which I think convinced us it was possible to have regular seminars where one day you had someone working on Brazil. The next week someone working on South Africa, you know, Europe. I don't know how Jack Greene remembers it, but I remember the telephone where I could have a long conversation [and] not bother my wife was standing in the study on 835 Park Avenue in the front, which used to be a dentist’s office. And leaning against the bookcase, talking to Jack Greene for a long period of time, we’d range over film and teaching and things like that.
We had lots of these long telephone conversations. I've never had a colleague with whom I've had such extended conversations ever in my career. Later when there were resources, you know, like lots of money that I was responsible for, I could not do telephone conversations because people would say, "Oh, well you promised you'd fund our conference." I don't remember. I said I was interested, yes.

BL: How sympathetic were the other members? I'm trying to think of who would have been there in the history department Ranna [phonetic] may not have been there yet.

DC: Well, David Donald was interested until he left for Harvard. And Bob Forster was interested in the comparison thing. I'm not sure when Frank Knight came. He had been in seminars that I was in Wisconsin, so I knew him.

BL: Oh, was he also a Wisconsin graduate?

DC: He did his Ph.D. at Wisconsin. And he was in the tropical history program working on Cuba. John Russell-Wood and Frank Knight participated in the free slave thing and then were hired afterwards in Neither Slave Nor Free.

BL: Yes, because they came after the grant from Rockefeller to—

DC: So it was probably '74, something like that.

BL: Yeah, I would say. The reason I ask is that Jack Greene told me a perhaps apocryphal story, but maybe it's true, that when he got to Hopkins and went into the seminar room there was a map, he said. And it was Western Europe and he said that said everything you needed to know about that department. It was kind of a portrait of Sidney Painter—

DC: That map was still there, I think, when I came.

BL: So it's not apocryphal?

DC: No, but I don't know that it was iconic. It was just, you know, who is going to change the seminar room? Still the same table, the same chairs. What's there? But there was a lot of important work by American historians being presented in that seminar. And I found it great. As a one man band I learned so much in doing this. But I can say that I could contribute something on the comparative side, because [of] the Wisconsin experience. My last paper—I think it was the last paper I wrote at Wisconsin—was on intellectuals circulating between France and the Caribbean.

So you know I was looking at Guadeloupe and Martinique and
Paris, Senegal.

BL: I was very interested to hear that at the beginning you and Jack were not really thinking so much about anthropology, although I suppose one of the—we had anthropologists, it's true, but they were in the Department of Social Relations. And my guess is that James Coleman cast such a shadow in that department that it was sociology with some anthropologists.

DC: Yeah, I don't think that they could have appointed a third person, you know, after Irons and Dyson-Hudson. And there started to be almost a commuter train of Hopkins people going to the Institute for Advanced Study and Geertz was there.

[0:20:00]

And people started reading or paying attention to Geertz, the historians, did including Greene and others. You know they could—

BL: I think Jack was at the Institute for a year.

DC: Yeah, yeah. And it started—I didn't go there, but lots of other people did. And we brought visitors to the Institute, [they] came down to Hopkins to give a paper. So there was kind of a relationship. You know, kind of a little bit of a joke was that the Hopkins History Department was compared to other historians' workplaces like the Institute for Advanced Study. You could bring in who you wanted to and there wasn't a lot of work. The people's idea of work was their own scholarship.

BL: Right. Well, I remember asking Jack Greene once to do something for undergraduates on a committee or something. And he said, "No, I have a contract that says I don't have to do anything with undergraduates."

DC: Yeah.

BL: I found out later in his files that wasn't true. He actually did teach undergraduate classes even back in your day. So how did the anthropologists and Rich Price and Sid Mintz become a part of this plan for the Atlantic Program?

DC: Well, it had to have been before '73 or '74, because we set up a visiting committee of people. It was one of these visiting committees where you hope you can hire all the people. It was Mintz, Bernie Cohn and Philip Curtain. So already you had the idea of anthropologists, two of the three were anthropologists.

So somewhere between '71 and '73 there was this anthropology
interest that I developed. And I think it was probably—I mean I was talking about it, but it wasn't—I have dreams about anthropology and history. Anthropologists and historians and they include things about Bob Forster and Jack Greene, Horace Ranna [phonetic] who were tiptoeing towards that, because they're spending time at the Institute for Advanced Study or similar places and then they're with anthropologists and they're starting to think about--it's hard to work on France without thinking about Levi-Strauss. You know how could we relate to that?

Or it's hard to be thinking about Brazil without anthropologists were quite important in that. Even Russell Wood, who studied at Oxford, didn't really engage much with anthropologists, just his presence or just thinking about Brazil introduced the question of anthropology even before he came.

And I think partly it was—I have to say I was in Africa in '71, '72. So there were things that were happening in that year of discussions perhaps with the foundations that I'm not totally aware of. Jack wrote letters. I saw in '71, my wife and I took our son to have a bris in Europe from East Africa, because we couldn't get anybody to do that kind of work there. So we were in Geneva and I ran into Ted Carter, who was a visitor from Penn, who worked in the History of Science and Technology.

He said, "Well, there's a lot of talk going on about doing something with the Atlantic program, really get it going." But I can't remember whether he said anthropology, but I would be sure that by '72, my guess is that anthropologists were considered in the mix and it could have been both that we were talking about it and maybe the foundations were suggesting.

BL: Yeah, from what I can see Peter Wood was the point person at the Rockefeller Foundation, a very young Peter Wood.

[0:25:02]

He was right out of grad school. I don't know if he'd finished his dissertation or not. But you can see some of those conversations. I have seen some of the consultants reports, but I was curious what you all thought you were learning from people like Mintz, Cohn, and—

DC: Well, I think we had already established that to conceptualize the Atlantic region the Caribbean was absolutely essential. And interestingly it was in the Caribbean that one was most likely to find anthropologists with historical interest. And that anthropology and history had to—if they could be married, they could be married around the study of slave communities, colonies in the Caribbean.
So Mintz was doing that kind of work. Who did I mention? The three.

BL: Cohn in Chicago.

DC: Cohn was already talking about history and anthropology together. Mintz was doing that at Yale.

BL: And Curtain being—

DC: And Curtain was, I would say, disposed to that, working—I think he would have liked a different set of anthropologists at Wisconsin than he had. But the idea of being—I think interdisciplinary was in the air. And so the conception of the Atlantic Program probably moved both from sort of an intellectual challenge of seeing how far anthropologists could be integrated, to an opportunistic one, that it was unlikely that you could claim resources from a major foundation without using words like interdisciplinary.

BL: Sure. When did you first get to know Rich Price? Because I didn't realize he was actually the founding department head in anthropology, rather than Mintz?

DC: Yeah, probably '73 or '74. I did not know him until he was interviewed.

BL: I see. And what were your impressions?

DC: Well, he and his wife became best friends of my wife and myself. What were my impressions? Kind of wild and interesting and—but my wife and I were—before they showed up we were considered the wild young—we were very young. We were 24 and 25 when we came to Baltimore. And we came from London. We were hip for a while.

BL: That is young.

DC: We moved to Bolton Hill and when we moved in there were tanks, National Guard Tanks at the end of—

BL: Oh, from the riots.

DC: On our street, Lafayette, and Eutaw Place. Yeah, from the riots. It was like a boundary.

BL: You may see them in the news again tomorrow, depending on what happens in the Freddie Gray case. My gosh.

DC: Yeah.
BL: Now I wanted to ask you because—

DC: You know, I should say that sometimes my role in founding the Atlantic Program is present in the way people speak about it, the way Jack has spoken about it, written about it. But sometimes it's not there. So I was the only one who was familiar with doing anthropology and history and I was, from my undergraduate days at Wisconsin, I was interested most of all rather than an area of engaging anthropologists and historians in something. Whether there would be some tension, friction, learning, and so forth.

So I was very aware of where there were anthropologists or historians who were willing to talk to each other, really engage. And I knew that those two from—they were interesting social anthropologists.

[0:30:07]

But were not likely to be engaging to historians. Now someone else made a decision of how to recast the Anthropology Department. I mean I think I influenced it. But how Irons and—he was doing sociobiology, I think, and Neville Dyson-Hudson was doing social anthropology in the British fashion. How they left, I don't know.

BL: I think Rich Price pretty much acknowledged that he had a particular vision for what this anthropology department was going to look like.

DC: Historically oriented.

BL: Yes and so brought three people from Yale down. Emily Martin—not yet Martin—but she came down, too. I was interested in how joint the Atlantic Program actually was in practice? How it actually played out on the ground as a program for training graduate students for organizing conferences, for bringing together these two disciplines in ways that you thought would be most fruitful intellectually?

DC: Boy, is that a good question. And it's got to be one that varies with time. I think there was an early period where people were very intrigued by the experiment. The program or this new anthropology program that was being given birth to by the program was basically being funded by the program was bringing in Stanley Tambiah, Edmund Leach, William Sturtevant. This was to do some visiting teaching.

And it had to be one of the most interesting experiments that has ever been done with the discipline of anthropology. I would say it
undoubtedly was, in the 1970s, the most interesting experiment ever done. Testing of how you create an anthropology department, how far it should be historically, how it did areas, and the Atlantic Program was a good initial rubric for it, because they could appoint at least two people who were geographically oriented, whose work was geographically oriented. And in fact as I said the Caribbean offered this kind of space that was central to the idea of an Atlantic region that could be studied historically. The Caribbean also was sort of a forgotten piece, an important but forgotten piece of the field of anthropology where some of the great so-called breakthroughs in anthropology were not done by Caribbeanists.

When people worked on castes they worked in India. They worked on religion, they might work in Indonesia. Geertz never worked on the Caribbean. Latin America, Levi-Strauss, and you know the Caribbean was like the stepchild that was involved in all the discussions, perhaps connected, potentially connecting them up. And the people worked on the Caribbean who were like myself, we had to be informed of all this stuff. We couldn't hide out in Indian social history or, you know, English history as such, but reach out. And I think that people like Bob Forster were intrigued. I say “people like–” I should be naming some more people. But I'm not.

But in doing something like Jack Greene was doing was like imagining a geographical sphere that preceded and was different than the nation. So to think about 18th century France or early 19th century France you had to think about slavery [in] France, French trade overseas, territories, people with experience or knowledge of experience in those areas influencing metropolitan France.

And the same with English history, British history, and North American history. And so you know we had three or four people. That was pretty good in a department that was only ten or twelve.

BL: For Hopkins’ size. What I was thinking about is, did recruiting different kinds of graduate students or training them, somewhat giving them different kinds of fields to do, how did it affect the kind of people you wanted to bring into Hopkins who weren't previously going to be sensitive to anthropology?

DC: Well, I think the students were fairly self selecting. Hopkins was different. I would say self selecting is one point. Second is we had quite a number of students from the Caribbean. And from Africa.

BL: Did you have to go look for them?
DC: We discovered the place from Africa. So they were attracted by the program's interest in their societies, and their questions that they were interested in. So we were attracting really fantastic students—graduate students—who were in this orbit of the Caribbean and Atlantic. And students in the Caribbean, you know, they didn't have to be forced into studying the history of Latin America or North America or Europe or Africa, because they recognized the relationships. So it was kind of an important nexus, a positive nexus for those students.

BL: I'm thinking if you brought somebody into the History Department, say, or say you brought somebody into Anthropology, Rolph Trouillot or somebody like that, do they have to do fields in the other departments in order to really participate in the Atlantic Program? Was the idea that you—?

DC: There was no way that they had to—they had to do fields. They had to do one field in another department. Not to participate, because the general seminar was open to anybody who wanted to come—and you know people like Edmund Leach came and spoke at the seminar. He wouldn't be considered an Atlanticist. There were like 40 or 45 people coming to the Atlantic seminars every week.

BL: That's—I don't know where they fit them all. I remember the history seminar room on the third floor of—

DC: They filled the seminar room and then it moved to Anthropology quarters, not where they were when I left. But another one next to Shriver Hall.

BL: Oh, in Maryland, probably?

DC: Possibly, yeah. So for a number of years we did have this very broad participation of students who weren't necessarily doing fields that crossed disciplines. But I believe to be an actual Atlantic student you had to be engaged in doing at least one field in the other department. And I believe that only one student ever did the full joint degree.

BL: Really? Oh, so you would get Ph.D. in Anthropology and one in History. Would that be the full degree?

[0:40:00]

DC: I have to say I don't remember what it is. But we had students who did—one student who worked on Spain. I'm trying to think of her name, and it was really remarkable what she did. But the other students, you know, it was remarkable what they did as well. I mean to do a field in anthropology usually means you're doing a
course or two with anthropologists, as well as the general seminar, as well as the methodology seminar. So over the first two years you had usually about four courses that were with someone in the room, a professor in the room, who was an anthropologist.

BL: And when you say a methodology seminar, was that something that you worked out with Anthropology? Was there a special method seminar between Anthropology?

DC: Anthropology, for probably the first ten years students were all required to do a methodology seminar in Anthropology and History and to be in the general seminar. While students—

BL: General seminar being History's general seminar?

DC: No, the general seminar in Atlantic History, Culture, and Society.

BL: I see.

DC: So the Anthropology Department was more embedded in the program, but because it's a small department they probably didn't have that many more Ph.D. students than historians participating.

BL: I was counting up, right. I let Jack Greene and Phil Morgan count up the total number of Ph.D.'s that were produced in the Atlantic Program over its entire run. Their number was 121 History Ph.D.'s and 21 Anthropology Ph.D.'s.

Now I suspect that their count probably wouldn't be my count if I was looking at the same people, but it certainly was an astonishing number.

DC: Yeah, those would be people who took a field in, I imagine, historians to be in that group would have to have taken a field with an anthropologist and to take that methodology seminar, which I taught for a number of years. So, yeah.

BL: Did you teach it on your own?

DC: Always we taught it jointly.

BL: And you taught sometimes with Price, with Mintz?

DC: I taught it with Price a lot and with Kathryn Groterie [phonetic] probably in my last year there. It was once taught with Chase-Dunn and myself. Chase-Dunn from sociology, because we had a connection there. I loved that seminar, the methodology seminar.

BL: I'm glad you mentioned Chase-Dunn, because one of the things in
their history of the program that Morgan and Greene wrote, an introduction to this volume on Atlantic History, one of the things they wanted to stress was that it wasn't just anthropology and history. That there were other social scientists involved. And I was trying to figure out who that would be, with Chase-Dunn being one. David Harvey?

DC:  David Harvey had students who sat in the seminar. But we had, probably in '73, there was an effort to bring psychology into it, social psychology, anthropology, and history. This was in the foundational part. And that didn't work. That didn't work out.

BL:  Just because we didn't have the right psychology people?

DC:  Probably.

BL:  I mean those guys were moving toward neuroscience and Mind/Brain. It's sort of hard to see—

DC:  Yeah, and here I was Director of the International Institute and psychologists were very interested in being involved with it. But the people did such different work than everyone else. It was hard for them to relate to it. And here they're so big, it's a multidisciplinary department. I think even at Hopkins as you mentioned, it was a multidisciplinary psychology department in a way.

BL:  That is the advantage of being at a bigger school though, because at Hopkins, four or five people in a psychology department determine its direction.

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Then there may not be room to maneuver for other people. That's true. Greene once characterized the Atlantic Program as a perspective. He said it's a perspective. It wasn't a new field. Would you agree with that?

DC:  Yeah, I think it was a way of testing the possibilities of a reconceptualization. It was a variant on an area studies program. You know like the Title 6 area studies funded by the federal government. They live on federal grants and when the federal grants stop they wither. And something like the tropical history program at Wisconsin which tried to pull all the people working on tropical regions together in a common field, which was from Indoneanists to West Africanists, Latin Americanists, that Phil Curtain was involved in before he came to Hopkins.

And I saw that at Wisconsin. I went to their thing. So I was aware of the value of doing that. I was always a critic of area studies
programs as such, because I think they withered into kind of a nullness. You know, minimalist, you did just enough to get to keep your federal grant alive. And I recognize that even in the first years of talking to Jack about the Atlantic Program. He said we didn't want that kind of thing. I think it was more of an experiment. And the Anthropology Department itself had to be experimental. I mean a historically oriented Anthropology Department in a time with very few anthropologists were committed to historical analysis.

BL: How unique was the larger Atlantic Program in terms of the relationship between history and anthropology in the larger world? Were there other universities doing things, maybe not with an Atlantic focus, but you mentioned Wisconsin, of course, being one model.

DC: Well, Wisconsin founded, I think, people there never produced conversations between historians and anthropology, intellectual ones. They certainly did about division of resources in the university, but not this other—or they would come together around something like the African Studies Center. But Hopkins having a seminar model where you really read papers. You have visitors and your faculty and your students presenting in the same venue, weekly intensive discussions, is very different from an area studies program per se, which is characterized by something called a brown bag lunch where people come and listen to a talk by someone who has just come back from a salt mine in Mongolia. And you know is talking about the salt mine. Everybody eats their lunch, asks a couple questions. And they go back to what they were doing.

This was, you know, constantly intensive work.

BL: I agree it was an experiment. And I think we can agree it was a success, but it was also one that had a limited duration. So by 1990 it was Global Studies and Culture, Power and whatever.

DC: Yeah.

BL: Jack, I know, said that he felt by the late '80s that, at least from his point of view, it had run its course and he was going to go do something else. So he went to Irvine for a year. And he did come back, but did you share that sense that it had done what it needed to do by that point or could it have gone for a long time?

DC: Well, I think the seminar could have continued, and some interdisciplinary programs. I arrived here in '93.

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That was the beginning, we were only in about the fourth year. So
people aren't even sure of the history of the Doctoral Program in Anthropology and History. Which is the only free standing joint anthropology history program. And it still exists.

BL: I noticed that. And they call it Anthro-History, I guess.

DC: Yeah. Yeah.

BL: But was that founded before you got here or you got it going?

DC: No, it was founded before I got here. I was at Northwestern from '89 to '93. But Anthro-History was founded here before I got here. It was a very tiny, insecure piece that has gotten stronger, but always with a sense of insecurity that if the stars fall off—too many stars don’t align, if too many people leave, because so many of the people engaged in the program have left. You know, how will it continue, but there have been faculty that have picked up and continued the program and students still—it attracts the most outstanding students in the two departments, really.

BL: So, as you recall, what happened in the late '80s when you were still there and '90 that meant the Atlantic Program wasn't continuing?

DC: Well, I think the Anthropology Department, probably about '85 it found its legs on its own. And I would have recommended or probably did recommend that it not require all the students to do the Atlantic seminar. That it have its own anthropology seminar. And it did. It started its own anthropology seminar. And I think that it had the strength, enough people in it. And they were doing work around the world. They were interdisciplinary, but oriented to conversations across disciplinary boundaries. But they needed to consolidate in Anthropology.

I think also the History Department had gotten much bigger and could have very diverse conversations in it without anthropologists being present.

BL: And did maybe an anthropological perspective start to be more common in history? Because I remember even in grad school in the '80s that you had to read some anthropology.

DC: Yes, a sort of kind of anthropology perspective. But it did not include Marxist anthropology. It was more focused on Geertz and Turner, symbolic anthropology. Can the study of symbols be integrated into history, or Geertzian, seemed to be accessible. But it wasn't very much of anthropology. I mean anthropology as a discipline, the social-cultural parts had in the 1960s become oriented to studies of underdevelopment, Marxist approaches, revolution, things like this. And there was a little bit of that in
Chicago in some of the Indian work, South Asian work, but largely, I think, what historians were looking for in anthropology was culture. In a way that anthropologists had said, “That's our old story. We’ve been through there.”

BL: I think that seems fair enough.

DC: And I think it's very interesting that as a historian of science you're commissioned to do this, because you can recognize these going in and going out of motifs and frames of reference. But I would say that historians studying Geertzian anthropology was a very minor introduction to anthropology.

BL: That's fair enough. As a kind of final question—I've taken your hour. What would you say is the legacy for—you're looking at Hopkins from the outside, but for the Hopkins History Department and for the field as a whole of the Atlantic program, what were the things that it left as a legacy, you think?

[0:55:10]

DC: Well, I consider historical anthropology and anthro-history as a really important site of work in the academy that might never be departmentalized other than a place like Michigan, but which has been absolutely important to the training of people all over the world. And I think the Hopkins program led that initiative. People came to study the work of historical anthropologists at Erfurt, which became the leading site for historical anthropology of the kind you and I would recognize as historical anthropology. It's not ethnography historicized, Erfurt was organized by Alf Lüdtke and Hans Medick. Very much influenced by the Hopkins kind of engagement, Hopkins model. Absolutely I think. Because the Central European model for doing historical anthropology had been Cambridge, where you had historians who did their work, who did quantitative social work, social history, quantitative history and had anthropologists like Jack Goody telling them what the anthropology part of it should be. There wasn't that co-training. The departments still stood apart.

And I think that people who were in Germany started with a model, inevitably started with a model of Cambridge's: “We need to have anthropologists around who can help us historians put things together.”

They ended up producing historical anthropology done by people who, you know, if you put them in a room like this, you wouldn't have been able to pick out who were the historians and who were the anthropologists. They were talking and thinking in the same way. And I think the Hopkins program had a great influence on those people, that kind of model.
So that is one thing. The second is this Atlantic rubric, you know, it was opportunistic in a way for Jack and myself to think of the Atlantic, because we could incorporate maybe a couple other faculty, Latin Americanists or Caribbeanists, hire maybe, to fit into that. And we could have a conversation around the Atlantic that hadn't been possible before.

But I think there was also some substance to it. There was Atlantic trade. There was a lot of important stuff. And theorizing the Atlantic became maybe people from Hopkins did it intuitively, but some of the best work that's been done in Anglo-American and global history has been theorizing the Atlantic. You know, as the black Atlantic. As a black Atlantic, thinking about the 18th century Atlantic. And you know people have won major prizes for work of this kind. Some come out of Michigan, but also influenced by that model from Hopkins. Just thinking about the Atlantic as a whole. Pete Linebaugh's paper in the early '80s called “In These Atlantic Mountains” about revolution around the Atlantic world. I think [these examples] said how important the Atlantic was to understand the 18th century.

BL: I think it's ironic in some ways that there aren't other programs in Atlantic history until the Hopkins one basically closed.

[1:00:00]

DC: Brown University—oh, until, yeah.

BL: Yeah. So Brown, but Harvard—

DC: Came along later.

BL: Yeah, it's interesting. They picked up kind of where it left off, I suppose.

DC: I look at it as the very early edge. I don't want to—well, I do want to make sure I'm not forgotten, okay? I might say that, because you know, you haven't left a university, but when you leave a university they say, “David, you leave Hopkins you're intellectually and socially dead. You might as well be a dead person.” I was told that when I left after 21 years.

BL: That's crazy.

DC: But I think that it was formative to me. It was something that I carried forward. When I went to Northwestern for four years, their tradition, intellectual tradition was brown bagging. That's the only place that people got together from different disciplines. And graduate students who were engaged in the Atlantic program at
Hopkins moved to Northwestern, and with me started a seminar tradition that became really important at Northwestern. It was reinforced here. You know, I don't want to hear about brown bags here. I was responsible for all the area study centers. I want to hear about the intellectual work, deep intellectual works of conferencing, deeper seminars, topic driven seminars, rather than area driven seminars. My goal here was that every area study center of which they had very prominent ones, be able to justify itself intellectually.

Not just that it was doing enough to keep the federal dollars coming.

BL: That's a good ending, because it's the Hopkins model being transplanted.

DC: Yeah.

BL: Carrying the flag.

DC: Something that has to be said is that I think graduate students did learn a lot in the process and have done very well out in the world from Hopkins, leading departments and things like that. But I think they found it frustrating, particularly the '80s, there was a lot of positioning of people in the Atlantic seminar—faculty, and the silencing. And I think if you interviewed people you would find that it wasn't such a great intellectual environment.

BL: From a faculty point of view?

DC: Student.

BL: From the student?

DC: Graduate students. You know as I was leaving I heard—maybe I became a surface area for students to complain about it, but there were complaints. You could also see that students were sitting around the edges of the seminar room. You know speaking after other faculty had done their work. And that was an old Hopkins way of working. You know the faculty—

BL: Who sat at the table and who sat on the periphery. Very good. Well, thank you very much.

[End of Audio]