

Edmund Gordon

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AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Today is November 12, 2010. My name is Audrey Amrein-Beardsley, and I am an Associate Professor at Arizona State University. I've created a show with David Berliner titled *Inside the Academy* that is sponsored by the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College and the Applied Learning Technologies Institute at Arizona State University. Today I'm speaking with and in admiration of Edmund Gordon, Professor of Psychology Emeritus at Yale University and Teachers College, Columbia, but also minister, clinical and counseling psychologist, research scientist, writer, citizen, father and husband, and chef. Welcome to *Inside the Academy*.

EDMUND GORDON

Thank you.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

It is a pleasure to honor you. You were born in 1921 in North Carolina.

EDMUND GORDON

Correct.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Tell us about your childhood.

EDMUND GORDON

Let's see now. North Carolina in 1921, my town was a small (1:00) tobacco market town. The farmers of that area grew a little bit of cotton, but mostly tobacco. The Bright Leaf Tobacco market was kind of settled in that region. It was a town of maybe 10,000 people, highly segregated. We lived on the border of the black community and the white community, about a block from down town. My father was a physician. He happened to have migrated to this country from Jamaica. And he never gave up his British passport because in those days, black people who were not continent born were treated differently from black people who were, and as long (2:00) as he carried his British passport, he was less subject to the segregation of the period, than were the African American folk. He had been in practice during the flu epidemic that hit the country in 18, probably 1919, right after the First World War. And he became, he didn't become very wealthy, but he became comfortable. So all through the Great Depression, of course, which marked my childhood in the 30s. We were really quite privileged. We never suffered from the economic deprivation that so many people suffered from in that time. My mother (3:00) had been an elementary school teacher before she married. She had become a housewife after she married and devoted her time to making sure that thwo of her children, I say two because her first child, my older brother, had been a mentally retarded person. He was injured at birth, and we never had much of a sibling relationship. But Mrs. Mable Gordon really invested just about all of her energy in the nurturance of her daughter, Rose, and her son, Ed. Sent us off to Howard University, which was then regarded as the capstone of Negro education. She made sure that we

would become (4:00) well-educated people. It was never much of a question, but that we would go to college and that we should do well there. I disappointed her because I went there, and after three semesters of playing around, they asked me to leave for poor scholarship. And my poor mother was devastated. She sent me up to Philadelphia to live for a semester with my uncle, her next oldest brother, who had raised three daughters, all of whom were Phi Beta Kappa; and he was supposed to turn me around, and I suppose he did because I went back to Howard and managed to keep going after that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
And you got your degree in zoology?

EDMUND GORDON
I got my first degree in biology.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
Okay.

EDMUND GORDON
And my first (5:00) postgraduate degree was in theology from Howard. Actually it was in social ethics from the School of Religion there at Howard. I make that distinction because I have really never aspired to be, even though I spent much time in the ministry, I was much more interested in both the theology and the way in which it informed social ethics and in human services. Within three years after I had finished, directed a school, I was back in school in psychology because I figured out that my theological preparation was not good preparation for what I really wanted to do, which at that time was to counsel people. So that's (6:00) how I went back to graduate school to do my work in counseling psychology.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
And that was at Teachers College, correct?

EDMUND GORDON
At Teachers College.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
And you got your doctorate?

EDMUND GORDON
At Teachers College.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
And what did you study for your dissertation?

EDMUND GORDON
I wrote my dissertation on the mental health problem of children in Harlem and a community based approach to their treatment. It was one of the early efforts at the either bypassing or doing

an end run around psychoanalytic approaches to therapy through the incorporation of community psychology and phenomenological (7:00) approach to intervention.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You have been married to Susan M. Gordon, M.D. pediatrician, since 1948, over 60 years of marriage. Tell us about Susan.

EDMUND GORDON

Last Friday I guess it was, last Saturday, it was 63 years, November 6, 1948.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Happy anniversary.

EDMUND GORDON

Thank you. Susan's a pediatrician, but a lot more than that. She's a social activist. She's a humanitarian. She's a humanist. She's a political radical. And with all of that, the mother of four children. (8:00) She practiced medicine for a few years, and after our third child was born she realized that the demands of private practice were more than a mother could handle; so she went into academic medicine. She taught pediatrics at New York Medical College initially, finished her career, I guess the last 20 years of it were at Columbia Presbyterian. She was recognized by her students for her excellence in teaching. So many times we had to create almost a special room for her awards. She's just a remarkable person.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What are your secrets to such a successful marriage?

EDMUND GORDON

I don't know. It certainly helps if you find solid people. (9:00) Marriage is not the place for weak characters because even though we have been happily married for 63 years, we've really been a pair, though, for two more years than that, almost 64, I think that the fact that she was both a decent and a very strong person, and I like to think of myself as having my act together, I think that helped considerably.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

It seems that both of you are very oriented towards service.

EDMUND GORDON

Yeah. I would have said it a little bit differently if you had asked me that. I think what is at the core is we've got a respect for ourselves and for other people, and that respect leads us to feel (10:00) responsible for nurturing and helping other people. One of the memories I have of the interactions with my father was he having said to me one day, I had done something to indicate how much I appreciated the fact that we were privileged. He said, "You know, privilege has responsibility." He said, "If you've got more than other people, then that makes you even more responsible for helping them." And that kind of has never gotten away from me. And of course was delighted when I discovered in Susan that she had much the same approach to life. She had also come out of her, even more strongly than my own, her father who was a newspaper

publisher (11:00) had taught her that the only she could really justify the privileges that she was enjoying was to share them with other people. So, yes, both of us are very much committed to...

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You have that in common.

EDMUND GORDON

I think that being good people, being strong people are all important and necessary, but loving each other is probably the core.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

The core ingredient?

EDMUND GORDON

Right.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You claim your children are your most important achievements in your history. Here's what they have to say about you. Your daughter, Jessica, she agrees that your most significant accomplishment was what you achieved with Susan, raising four accomplished and lovely human beings who do good in this world. What were your goals as their father?

EDMUND GORDON

You know, I don't think I ever articulated to myself or to Susan or even to them (12:00) goals for them. I think implicitly I probably was trying to do for them what my parents had done for me. I certainly wanted them to grow up to be decent people. When I retired the first time, I've tried three times now, but when I tried the first time, they threw a big party for me, actually it was a conference, and my oldest son was the last speaker, and he said a lot of nice things, but one of the things he said that impressed me most was that he and his siblings had learned from their parents that there were probably no problems that they would encounter in life that they couldn't solve if they willing to apply their minds (13:00) to it. And I remember that night, Susan and I were talking about it, and neither of us could remember ever having said that to them. But somehow one of the things that we were teaching them was to use their minds for the service of other people. And I would guess that implicitly that was the goal.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That was the goal.

EDMUND GORDON

These young people grow up as intellectually competent folk who knew how to use what they had to serve other people.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

On that note, she says that you were one of the most intellectual persons she has ever met and one of the most dedicated human beings she knows. But she did say that you were so dedicated that you actually brought work with you one time to a dinner party. Do you recall?

EDMUND GORDON

Not one time. I...

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Plenty of times?

EDMUND GORDON

I still do.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Oh, you do?

EDMUND GORDON

I don't like to waste time, and most social events after a while people, (14:00) particularly if they are drinking, start telling the same stories, so you have to be there, have something to do.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

She also said one of your biggest weaknesses is that you cannot bluff when you play cards. Do you grin?

EDMUND GORDON

I think it's true. I suspect I can't bluff in any situation. One of my mentors, Doxie Wilkerson, died a few years ago, and at his memorial service, his nephew was talking about Uncle Doxie, and he said, "Uncle Doxie was one of the most open people I have ever known." He said, "You got from him exactly what you see." And I hope people get from me exactly what they see.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Hence you can't bluff. We see it. Your son, Chris, also thanks you for instilling in him a love for learning and a passion for serving the greater good. He describes you as you (15:00) sometimes describe yourself, a humanist and such a firm believer in that is the responsibility of those who have been privileged to use the fruits of that privilege regardless of their manifestation to help those who are less well off. What inspired you to live your life in the service to others?

EDMUND GORDON

I probably answered that a couple of minutes ago in talking about my parents, in particularly my father. My mother enjoyed her status and privilege. I do not think of her as being isolated from the social fray, but she was not as likely to wade into it and try to do something about it as my father. (16:00) He certainly lived his life as a servant. He was with the people constantly and helping. He was the person that people admired and they turned to when they were in trouble, or needed help, or were sick, or whatever else.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Your daughter, Johanna, remembers a long time ago, one cold, fall day in New England, you were dedicating a memorial to W.E.B. Dubois, and out of nowhere, came the elderly man dressed, who called himself Mr. Lovejoy. Do you remember that? You offered him a sandwich

and a cup of hot soup. She says it's always amazing to her when she meets a stranger who tells her how you have touched their lives.

Tell us about the Harriet Tubman Clinic for Children you cofounded in Harlem in 1952. (17:00)

EDMUND GORDON

Susan and I have lived quite independent lives with her career in pediatrics and mine in education and psychology, but we have from the beginning tried to do things together. Back in the early 50s, it must have been '51 or '52 shortly after we moved to New York and she finished her internship, we opened this little office in Harlem, and we called it the Harriet Tubman Clinic in honor of Harriet Tubman who had led so many black people out of enslavement. I had a small, private practice there. Susan worked the hospital. (18:00) I was pretty much responsible for running our clinic, which was not for profit. In fact, I don't think we even charged people for it. If we did, not very much. Because after about nine years when our money ran out, we had to close it because it went bankrupt. But the Harriet Tubman Clinic was a child, and children's health and guidance clinic where we took care of the physical health and their mental health. My approach to mental health was a community development, parental strengthening, social interventionist approach to mental health, so it, which I think I told you about in my dissertation. So the Tubman Clinic was less a traditional (19:00) psychotherapeutic treatment center and probably more of a social service/social action center. I mentioned social action in juxtaposition to service because even then we had somehow come up with the notion that, which I probably got from some interactions I had with W.E.B. DuBois. Du Bois believed that the best help you could provide to people was to strengthen them in their capacity to help themselves. I remember in those days we were trying to give meaning to that notion through our clinic, trying to strengthen families and kids themselves in their capacity to assert themselves and to help themselves. Some, in a sense, cure themselves.

Video 2

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I also talked to some of your friends, the first one being Carl Kaestle. He says one of the main things you have common is your interest in W.E.B. Du Bois—one of the greatest American thinkers about educational opportunities, civil rights, and diversity. You knew W.E.B. Du Bois personally?

EDMUND GORDON

Yes, I had met Du Bois when I was in college, but wasn't smart then, really, to recognize who he was. He was really a great man. But when we moved to New York the first fulltime job I had was that of psychology in the department of pediatrics down at the Jewish hospital in Brooklyn. My chief of psychiatry was a chap named Joseph Werthers, who lived in Brooklyn, Brooklyn Heights, and next door to him (1:00) lived Shirley and W.E.B. Du Bois, and Dr. Werthers invited Susan and me over to have supper with them one night, and Du Bois and I struck off a strong relationship that lasted until '58 when he left for Ghana. I consider him at least one of my major mentors, if not the most important, and the debate has less to do with the intensity of the

relationship than what I took from it. I think that while there were very important influences on my intellectual development, Du Bois was probably the greatest.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What did you take from it? How did he inspire who you are today? (2:00)

EDMUND GORDON

I have a paper in which I titled it “Learning to Think Like Du Bois.” I don’t make this point in that paper, but in response to your question, I think I really learned to be a thinker in my interactions with him. I recall that up until that time, up until I met Du Bois I was preoccupied with two concerns. One was trying to learn as much information as I could, and the other one was trying to understand the mechanisms by which you explain things. On the Du Bois influence, I continued my respect for kind of encyclopedic (3:00) mastery of knowledge, which he tended to model, but I began attaching less importance to it, even though I still tried to know everything I could. But the thing that really began to consume my interest was trying to decipher the meanings of the other things I knew. The meanings of the things I experience because if you were talking to Du Bois, or reading him, or listening to him lecture, he always anchored his presentations in a solid knowledge base, but he went on to try to figure it, “Now what does this mean? And what would it mean if circumstances were different? What is it if you look at it from a perspective differently from the person who has presented it? (4:00) What is the knowledge interest of that person? And what if those knowledge interests had been different? Would that have changed the way in which the conclusions were formulated?” And that approach to thinking has stayed with me and served me quite well. I have to attribute that to W.E.B.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You also reference The Talented Tenth in some of your pieces. What do you take from that?

EDMUND GORDON

Du Bois was simply arguing there that in any population if the ablest people in that population are not nurtured, the population is limited. My work toward the end of the 20th century on the achievement gap and especially the work on the (5:00) under-productivity of middle class black people was greatly influenced by that set of notions. One that all populations tend to get their leadership from are the ablest members of the population. And if the population neglects that group, it weakens itself. The data I was working with beginning about 1963 or 4 increasingly indicated not only was there a gap in the achievement levels of black and white populations, but if you looked at the (6:00) black middle class, the gap was larger for middle class blacks than for lower class blacks if you compared them to their peers. That meant that the black middle class was under-producing despite its privileges, and Du Bois was talking and writing just about that. But in the, in his commitment to racial uplifting, the uplift of black people, he felt that special attention needed to be given to the best developed of those if the race of the group were to be uplifted. Then he argued, you know, the moral argument. He said there was a responsibility for those that we lift and enable to achieve even more, there’s a responsibility (7:00) for them to uplift the entire group.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I also talked to Ernest Washington. He sees in you a kind of sweet irony, which you see the contradictions but you do not hold it against us. What do you think he means by that?

EDMUND GORDON

I think Ernie's talking about the fact that I tend to be critical. I tend to recognize the paradoxes, the contradictions that exist in almost everything and, of course, in all people. But I'm not condemnatory to put you down for it. I try to better understand it and do something about it, rather than just be critical of it.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Your former student, Eleanor Armour-Thomas, says that your most significant accomplishment was your interactionist perspective to account for the relationship (8:00) between human diversity, learning, and behavior. It was from this conceptual lens that you provided a new direction for research, teaching, and assessment of populations from diverse backgrounds.

EDMUND GORDON

Yeah, she's really kind to give me credit for that. I'm not sure quite sure where I got that set of notions. I think I was first introduced to it in my relationship with two friends, Alexander Thomas and Stella Chess. They were psychiatrists, friends I got to meet in my Harriet Clinic days. I think it was Alex and our mutual friend, Herbert Birch, when we were struggling with problems of the genetic bases for intelligence (9:00) and racial differences. Alex and Herb introduced me to the literature of interactionism, where the explanation for almost and phenomenon has to come out of the ways in which the features that are given in the person or in the organism interact with the features that are given in the environment. Eleanor was one of my students, and she was sensitive enough, I guess she couldn't have missed it, to recognize that is a centerpiece in my thinking, and she attributed it to me; but it is not original with me. But it does capture an approach to knowledge and knowledge production that is (10:00) ubiquitous in my thinking. Almost anything I am trying I am trying to explain, I look not for either/or answers, but for the answer that is provided by an examination of the interaction.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. Are you familiar with Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle?

EDMUND GORDON

Oh, yeah. Sure.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I use that a lot in my research methods as well.

Ana Marie Cauce, another former student of yours from when you were at Yale. She says you have most inspired her with your work on defiers of negative prediction. What are the defiers of negative prediction?

EDMUND GORDON

That is a line of research in which I was looking at people who were predicted to fail, who, I guess, odds were stacked. What I was trying (11:00) to do was to account for their success

against the odds. I pursued that work for I guess almost 10 years, and it still influences some of my thinking. But I backed away from it because I progressively became aware of the fact that there were not good answers to the problem of uplift for masses of people because in those defiers, you had those exceptions. I finally realized one day that for each of the persons I had found who succeeded, you know there were tens of thousands who had not. And that led me to ask the question, now what's going on here? And I came to the conclusion that this society (12:00) is really organized to produce winners, not to produce losers. If one really wants to do something to uplift large numbers of people, you have to do something about the society that's organized to defeat them, rather than what a few of us are able to do to overcome it.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What are the implications for that for schools?

EDMUND GORDON

Well it's almost as if I planted that question because it takes us to my current preoccupation. I'm a very strong critic of Mr. Obama and Arne Duncan's interests on school reform because I don't think school reform is going to solve the problem we're trying to work on. There are several problems that are contributing to the under-productivity of our society (13:00) on educating people. One of them we have not be able or willing to seriously engaging the finding that indicates the very high correlation between adequacy of resources and school achievement. The best predictor we've got—if you're rich in this country, you're likely to be educated, and if you're poor, then you're likely to be uneducated.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And you don't need the test score to tell you that.

EDMUND GORDON

That's right. So the very first thing we ought to do is do something about more equally distributing access to reforms of education relevant capital that intellectual development seems to rest on. This society is not willing to do that. We do need good schools, and I don't object to heavy investment in schooling and heavy investment in the improvement of it; but I think (14:00) that even if we had the very best schools, if we didn't do something about the underlying problem that's contributing so heavily to the lack of success of schools, the schools aren't going to fix it. Number three, I think that we know the relationship between out of school learning experiences and school achievement. Howard Everson down at the College Board some years ago was looking at SAT scores, and sure enough, those kids who had the richest out of school learning experiences had the highest SAT scores. Now their good school experience helped, but it seems these things that were happening in the rest of their lives were terribly important, and of course Dewey had made this point back in 1920. Larry Cremin (15:00) reinforced it in the 70s. It's behind what I call supplementary or comprehensive education. That's looking at the complementarities between the learning and teaching that occur outside of school and of course the teaching and learning that occur inside the school. You need both, but if you're only going to attend to one, you're likely to be in trouble. And I'm persuaded that if I had to choose between the two, I think I would throw my weight behind what happens outside the school because it is in the out of school learning experiences which are certainly more ubiquitous to the lives of kids. It's in those that kids tend to develop, or fail to develop, a sense of power, a sense of agency. I've

(16:00) long been convinced, and Coleman's data seemed to indicate it, that where there's a sense of power, where there's a sense of agency, the capacity to act on my own behalf, one finds ways to deal with the odds against learning or to extract from opportunities to learn the best. So all of those have led me to try to work on the conditions of life, the diverse opportunities for learning, as opposed to the narrow opportunities for learning that they have in school.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And you continue to work, which leads me right into the next question: I talked to Wade Boykin, and he says he most respects in you that you continue to be on the cutting edge of educational research, even (17:00) after an approximately 60 year career. What do you see is the number cutting issue currently facing education?

EDMUND GORDON

I suppose, if Mr. Obama had consulted me on his education program, I would have given him the same speech I gave. That we've got to do something, we've got to do more to strengthen the capacities of families and communities to support the education of kids, to support what I call the intellectual development of kids; if we're going to seriously engage the problems of education. But, there are a lot of things that can be done within the field of education, since one implication in my argument (18:00) is that the problem is not primarily pedagogical, it's political/economic. Within education itself, I think I would begin with assessment. I think I would want to change assessment, so that it is less concerned with the measurement of status and less used in accountability, and much more actively used to inform intervention. Many, many years ago I had the fortune of working with a woman who was a special educator. She worked with cerebrally damaged kids, Elsa Horserman was her name. Elsa went to her death trying to standardized her tests that she had developed (19:00) that was much more concerned with documenting the processes by which kids achieved or failed, learned or failed to learn, and using that to inform her treatment of these kids, her interventions with these kids. Elsa, having been influenced by traditional approaches to assessment wanted to standardize this. I remember arguing evening after evening with her that standardization would defeat what she is trying to do because she is not trying to see what kids can do under standard circumstances, standard conditions. She's trying to figure out what kids need in order to learn the stuff. And I think that's the problem in assessments still. We need to be able to help teachers (20:00) and other persons who intervene with kids, even the kids themselves because we need to help them to better understand what it is that has to happen in their interaction with the learning opportunity to enable them to learn it because we don't all learn the same way at the same rate or style. It's got to be fine tuned for people. Our assessment ought to inform that process. And if it did, I think the pedagogy would improve. And I'd like to see that assessment procedure embedded in the teaching and learning itself, rather than separating kids to subject them to on-demand performance as a way of testing. I would like our interaction as you (21:00) teach me, or I learn from you. If there's a rich record of that, we psychometricians ought to be able to go to those records and deconstruct those records to take out our status data or our accountability data, management stuff. The primary function of assessment ought to be to help us learn how to teach better and to learn better.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

On a similar note, William Trent says you repeat work from your past, you refuse to repeat work from your past. You go further and integrate, synthesize, and evolve your work. What's next in terms of your scholarship?

EDMUND GORDON

I don't know, and I'm not optimistic that there'll be much. Next June I'm going to be 90; however, I've been expecting to die since I was about 60. My father died at 58 (22:00), and I was sure since I'm so much like him that I would be gone by then. So I never expected to get this far. I started to say doubt that I would be around that much longer, but I have to question that now because there's probably no reason that I shouldn't make it to 90. So we've got to think about what I will do next. Although, I suppose it's okay for me to announce this, I was in a meeting down in the Education Testing Service last week, and the president announced that they are about to create a commission on the future of assessment, and I'm being, or likely to be asked to chair it (23:00). So I suppose the problem I was just talking about is the thing, the next I'll work on.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Congratulations. You also were honored by ETS by the Edmund W. Gordon Chair for Policy and Evaluation Research.

EDMUND GORDON

Yeah, I have.

Video 3

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Tell us about your work on Head Start.

EDMUND GORDON

That's an interesting, and in some ways amusing, and certainly a very successful one. I think it was shortly after new year of 1965 that Joe Califano, who was Lyndon Johnson's either Chief of Staff or Chief Domestic Advisor, called, and he said that, "The President wants to do a little experiment in early childhood education, and we understand that you know something about it. Would you come down and help us organize such a program?" So Ed Zigler, Urie Bronfenbrenner, and Julius Richmond, and Robert Crook I think it was, he was a pediatrician (1:00) down at Hopkins, were in the group of us who were invited to the Oval Office, and Lyndon said that he wanted to do something about poverty, and he was convinced that we had to start early. He had been reading about the intervening early with the preschool. Could we run an experiment to see if there's anything to this idea? And he said, "I think we can find money to support maybe as many as 25,000 kids." Which of course we were very excited about doing one of the biggest experiments any of us had ever heard of.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Sure.

EDMUND GORDON

And we left to plan it. And about a week later, Joe called, and he said, “You know, the President has rethought this, and he wonders if you can make that 50,000 kids?” And about a month later, he wanted (2:00) it to be 100,000. By July, he had asked that we try to do half a million. We managed to mount by July with a rare crash program, a program that served about 450,000 kids. Now that first year was varied in its quality, and all kinds of things were passing for a head start for early schooling; but if did nothing else, it succeeded in getting the country committed to earlier education, beginning education earlier for kids because at that time, I suspect less than a third of the states in the country required states, that local districts provide education for kids (3:00) before six years of age. And within four years after we started, all 50 states were requiring that education be provided early. And of course the data on its effectiveness were quite mixed. I was speaking about the humor in it. I think it was in July, no, it must of by August, August or September of '65, Lyndon had a press conference in the Rose Garden on announcing the success of Head Start. I, being the research director for Head Start, was not at the party because I was back in my office, simply trying to organize the data. We were overwhelmed with all of it. We hadn't even begun doing any analysis (4:00) to justify his conclusion. But he was making the political statement: “This is working, so we are going to double it.” I also missed that party out of protest. By the fall of '65 I had realized how serious a mistake the President had made in expanding the war in Vietnam, and Susan and I felt that there was no way I could be his guest at the Rose Garden.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That's quite an impact.

EDMUND GORDON

Interesting experience, and I guess one of the things I'm proudest of because it clearly is one of the nation's most important experiments in education.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What do you think about where it is today?

EDMUND GORDON

Disappointed that it's not further along. Disappointed (5:00) that it's not of greater quality. And most disappointed that they still have not found the way to reach the kids that are most in need. The hard to reach kids were a problem in '65, and they continue to be.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

A problem today.

EDMUND GORDON

And I don't know what a democracy can do about that. I gave a rather radical talk one day when I said that if we could, at that time conscripting people to military service, I took the position that if we could conscript adolescents and young adults for military service, maybe we should conscript younger kids for their own development. If I felt that we could trust the politics (6:00) rather more, I think I would push that one even further. But since I am not completely comfortable that we can always trust government to do what is best for people, I have real

reservations about giving government the authority to take people's children to educate them. But we do intervene in people's lives for physical health purposes, and it may be that we are going to have to find ways to intervene for education purposes.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Tell us about your work on desegregation.

EDMUND GORDON

I was only marginally involved in that, although I testified a good bit. My closest involvement, I guess, occurred shortly after I got to this country (7:00), not this country, shortly after came to New York. I was still a student at Columbia when Goodwin Watson called me, invited me into his office one day to say that he had a friend over at City College who was trying to review the literature on the effects of segregation on the development of children, and would I be interested in helping? I agreed, and of course, his friend was Kenneth Clark. And the document that I helped Ken and Mamie prepare was the brief that he and several other social scientists provided to the Supreme Court. That was the basis for the '54 (8:00) decision. I had no idea when I was chasing down articles in the library and writing abstracts that it would be that way. But I was very proud to have had that modest involvement. The other involvements were much more in court cases where I was invited in as an expert witness. I was not among the people who were courageous enough to go down into Alabama and Mississippi and protest. I think I was only in Mississippi once, and I would like to say that the opportunity didn't present itself again (9:00), but I really think that I probably avoided it. By that time I was beginning to have a family, young wife, and I think I was just scared to go down and do that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Along with your wife and four children, you founded the CEJJES Institute.

EDMUND GORDON

The CEJJES Institute.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

The CEJJES Institute. What is that?

EDMUND GORDON

Well, the name is made up of the letters, of the first letters of the names of our family. My second son is Christopher, C, my first son is Edmund, E, my first daughter is Jessica and my second daughter is Johanna, I'm Edmund, and Susan is S, the sixth member of our family. But the CEJJES Institute is right next door (10:00). Our youngest daughter used to live there. Then she moved to California. She and her siblings bought the property from her and gave it to their mother and me and suggested that we use it to do something for the community, to kind of commemorate our lives of service here. So the CEJJES Institute is a conference center, it's a culture center, it's a art gallery, my books and archives are there, it's a library, but it's a kind of cultural center for people of the African Diaspora in Rockland County. Charles White, the artist who did this piece and the piece over here, in fact, most of the work in this house was my fictive, fictive brother, we've got the largest collection of his work (11:00); and there's a gallery dedicated to him there.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That's great. You have been named one of America's most prolific and thoughtful scholars, you're the author of more than 200 articles and 18 books, Columbia University named its campus in Harlem the Edmund W. Gordon Campus of Teachers College Columbia, you are an elected fellow of various prestigious associations including the American Psychological Association, American Society of Psychological Science, the American Association for Orthopsychiatry, and fellow in the American Association for the Advancement of Science. In 1968 you were elected member of the National Academy of Education. In 2010 you just received the AERA Relating Research to Practice award. What haven't you accomplished that you would still like to accomplish today?

EDMUND GORDON

I think I've done enough. I've done my part. I don't (12:00) have any pressing aspirations since it looks like I'm still be alive and will be for a while.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You're good with that.

EDMUND GORDON

I will continue to be youthful, but until the idea of the commission on assessment in education came up, I didn't have an immediate goal. If that materializes, I certainly would like to do as well as I've done other things. I would dearly love to be able to change the national policy with respect to education to get a more equal focus on out of school and in school learning. (13:00)

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You termed that compensatory versus supplementary, right?

EDMUND GORDON

I guess I'm talking about supplementary versus compensatory. Now I've got to think about that. I wrote the book on compensatory education about 30 years ago. I wrote the book on supplementary education just 10 years ago. So in a sense, supplementary education supplants compensatory education. I think education still needs to be compensatory for people who have not had (14:00) as many opportunities and as rich opportunities to learn as others have. But I think education in general for privilege and underprivileged needs a strong supplementary, comprehensive element to it because both of those terms simply mean that there's much more to education and its facilitation than is covered by classroom instruction. I've got a recent paper, the title is something like "Education is Not Coterminous with Schooling." It begins actually, we know now, before conception, and it's certainly influenced by things that happen during the fetal stages, and in the postnatal stage, and the early childhood (15:00) stage, and throughout life. So that I think I've been talking about complementary and supplementary.

Video 4

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

The next section, which is the last section of the show, is a series of introspective questions. The first one is, what inspires you?

EDMUND GORDON

Human effort. Human agency. I alternate between pimples and tears when I see persons put forth the effort to achieve. I was reading yesterday about the Chilean marathon runner and the two men who helped him, who supported him. You know the determination and the effort of this chap and the commitment of the two (1:00) other human beings to help him do it. I still get tearful at that. That's what being a human being ought to be about. So that kind of achievement, it's not just the achievement, as almost as much the effort that's for the achievement.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What do you find uninspiring?

EDMUND GORDON

The selfishness and stupidity of so many of us, and so many of the things that go on this society, in fact, in the world, seem to reflect lack of thoughtfulness and simple, either lack of information or refusal to use the information.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What is your favorite word?

EDMUND GORDON

Word?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Word. (2:00) What is your favorite word?

EDMUND GORDON

I don't think I have a favorite word. A lot of them I like. I suppose if you were to force me to choose one, for me it would probably be a toss up between responsibility and intellect. When I think of I guess what I most proud of in myself, one is my capacity to think, and I guess the other is my sense of responsibility for both thinking well (3:00) and acting on it.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

If you were to choose a profession other than your own, what would you like to attempt?

EDMUND GORDON

I think I would have gone either into architecture or engineering, and probably engineering rather than architecture. I like the idea of designing things, but I am even more fascinated by building things. When I see a great new building, or the Golden Gate Bridge, the George Washington Bridge, the Verrazano Bridge, those are just remarkable human achievements. I would love to be able, I would have loved to have been able to do that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What profession other than your own would not have liked to attempt?

EDMUND GORDON

I don't think I would want to be an undertaker. It's a central service, but I think the way in which it has been (4:00) commercialized, it so turns me off.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

If you could have dinner with anybody dead or alive, who would it be, and why?

EDMUND GORDON

I'm going to be sentimental and say my wife and children.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I like that answer.

EDMUND GORDON

I can't think of anybody I know that I aspire to sit and have dinner with.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Besides them. That's a perfect response.

If Heaven exists, what would you like to hear God say when you arrive at the Pearly Gates?

EDMUND GORDON

(5:00) I am most comfortable and pleased when I can look at what I've done and even though there's not been perfect, I think of it as well done, and close to the best that I could have done. I think that's all I...

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That you'd want to hear.

EDMUND GORDON

That you did well. You did as well as you could have.

Video 5

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What are your words of wisdom for graduate students aspiring to be people like you?

EDMUND GORDON

Well, I knew you were going to ask that question, so I made some notes on it. And they are notes that are based upon things I think I have learned, and at least in recent years have been trying to teach my students. There are six of them. The first one, the notion that learned people seek to produce knowledge in the pursuit of understanding. Basically what I'm suggesting there is actually an extension to a response I was making to your question concerning what I learned from Du Bois. It's important (1:00) to know, but it's even more important to understand. Facts

contribute to knowing, but the meaning of those facts, the meaning of the experience, contributes to understanding. But you don't really understand if you only know from a single perspective, or in a single context, or from a single experience. You understand when you have an appreciation for the phenomenon in question. From the perspective of many other people or many different perspectives, and know how the thing operates in a number of contexts. And then (2:00) you have the hard task, and that is deciding, okay, what it means and what is my position in respect to it. Now when I end up at my position, I am being rather subjective. I have a responsibility of letting my students, my audience, my that that is my subjective opinion; but it is based upon all this stuff I know from all these different perspectives and different contexts. So to know is important, but to understand is more important. Now the second one, I have been thinking in recent years that the principles, that the principles that can be derived from health maintenance and the public health movement (3:00) are an appropriate model for education. The folk in medicine learned maybe 100 years ago that while hospitals were necessary and useful, they didn't contribute to the health of the nation, if you're talking about the health of the people in the United States. The fact that we have good hospitals, you know, contributes modestly to it. But the fact that we've got good garbage disposal systems, good sewage systems, that we are beginning to control air pollution, and even more important that people are beginning to take exercise and diet, the importance of fatty foods. These (4:00) changes in people's conditions of life changes in the infrastructure of the society, which contribute to health maintenance, account for far more of the health statistics in the country than do the hospitals we have. You know, when you get sick, the hospital is important; but when you are talking about health maintenance, it is the infrastructure that supports good health and the human attitudes and behaviors (5:00) that support good health that carry the weight. I'm convinced that the same is true in education. We need good schools, but even more than that, we need to infrastructure in the society that supports the conditions necessary for intellectual development. And we need the attitudes and behavior towards learning to support better. The third one, education is not coterminous with schooling. We talked about that earlier, so I don't need to extend it, and it certainly grows out of my public health approach, or the use of the public health model for education. Schooling is important. We want the very best schools we can get, and we want to have open and equitable access to them, but in addition to that, we need all these other things that happen in people's lives that enable schools to do their work. Bourdieu talks about his forms of education relevant capital, your health, informed human beings, material resources, nutrition (6:00), social networks, and one that isn't often discussed is called polity. Polity refers to a sense of membership or belonging. I think one of the neglected aspects of our approach to education is our failure to give sufficient attention to the sense of inclusion and membership, the relationship of the sense of inclusion and membership felt by the learner. That influences the way in which the learner engages the learning task and is felt by society or the teacher, or among the people who are providing it; because if I say once that you and I are members of the same family or the same society, I care (7:00) deeply about your education. If you are out of my domain, I could care less what's happening with your education. Fourth one, we've already talked about educational assessment should inform pedagogy and enhance learning. I don't object it's being used for accountability. I don't object it's being used to assist in management, and placement, and planning. But its primary function ought to be to help us teachers know better what we should do to teach and help learners know better what it is they should be doing in order to learn. When the AERA gave me my award for, what was it, transforming research knowledge into practice (8:00), or something of that sort, I talked about the bi-directionality of knowledge production, and by that, I'm simply

arguing that knowledge production we have traditionally recognized that practice is informed by theory. Research, we try to convert it into practice. But we've given less attention to the ways in which practice can inform theory; and I'm convinced that it is a two-way street. From the scholarly analysis of practice we can move to theory, and if one looks at the history of science, we see that in history it is the workers, it is the people who are involved everyday in doing the stuff who have contributed mightily to (9:00) technology and new scientific notions. Now it's true that notions they come up with in the tradition of the scientific method are subjected to confirmation or disconfirmation; but those notions that we test as hypotheses, most of them grow out of experiences of people who are doing things if, for no other reason, to make the job easier, to make it quicker, to be more efficient. So I would want my students to understand and appreciate that while using theory to inform practice is important, but using practice to inform the generation of theory is equally important. And the last one is not unrelated to it. And that's the idea that the hermeneutics (10:00) interpretive processes as interpretive strategists, interpretation is an important way of producing knowledge. In fact, I think it is probably the fundamental way because even those of us who are heavily steeped in empiricism, what we are finally doing is trying to make sense out of, trying to interpret the data that are produced by, or we go to my bi-directionality. We are trying to make sense out of the data that come from practice to inform theory. I think that we in education need to give considerably more attention to preparing our students to take more seriously both the (11:00) advantages provided by the opportunities and the responsibility for interpretation. That means you use your intuition, you use your imagination to try to think about what this means. C. Wright Mills would say, and not only what it means, but what it could mean. C. Wright Mills liked to ask the "what if" question. "Well what if this thing were different? What would it mean? What would it be?" Thank you.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Thank you.

EDMUND GORDON

You are more than welcome.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Calr Keastle states that he believes your greatest accomplishment is that you can push an agenda of civil rights and equal opportunity that is at once activist and urgent, and on the other hand, thoughtful and collegial. You combine passion with grace, broad vision with clarity, and pose old questions in new, fruitful ways (12:00). According the Ana Marie, you are one of the world's most thoroughly decent people she knows, and you are everything she thinks of when she defines a good man. Every one of your friends and family had the same thing to say about you. You should be congratulated for that. But Earnest Washington might have said it best, when he thinks of you, he thinks of a comment Miles Davis made about Duke Ellington. He said that at least once a year every jazz musician should get down on his knees and thank God for Duke Ellington. Your contributions to education and psychology have been many, and most go unreported. I think that each of us in education should at least once a year get down on our knees and thank God for Edmund Gordon. So we are down on our knees and thank you so much for being you, Edmund, and thanking you for everything you have done for us for future educationists, educational researchers, graduate students, and most importantly for students, especially those

who have needed and benefitted from (13:00) your wisdom and insight and contributions the most. So thank you so much for interviewing with me today. It's been a truly a pleasure.

EDMUND GORDON

Thank you.