



Michael Oriard Oral History Interviews, March 31, 2015

Title

“Cultural Historian of Football”

Date

March 31, 2015

Location

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

Summary

Interview 2 focuses more intently on Oriard's association with OSU, as well as his thoughts on the contemporary status of football and its future in the United States. The session begins with Oriard's recollections of the impact that was made on OSU by the Ballot Measure 5 property tax limitation initiative, and the role that University Provost Graham Spanier played in boosting the liberal arts at Oregon State. From there Oriard discusses the process by which he shaped his scholarship toward historical work, including his studies of historic newspapers, magazines, film and radio. He then recounts a period of great scholarly productivity in the early 1990s, including his publication of two books, and describes the way in which his profile rose as an expert on football.

Oriard next shares his memories of his tenure as President of the OSU Faculty Senate, followed by his move into administration as Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts. He likewise notes the continuation of his research during this time and his publication of two more books, *Brand NFL* and *Bowled Over*.

The final phase of the interview is primarily devoted to the fragile status of football in 2015. Oriard speaks to the explosion of emphasis on college football in Oregon and beyond that has occurred in recent decades. He then addresses the issue of head trauma and the threat that it poses to the future of football. He shares his thoughts on the economic implications that a decline in the popularity of football would pose to the finances of university athletic departments, and the further implications that this decline would portend for racial and gender equity in college athletics. Oriard also describes the extent to which his research and writing on football has impacted his ability to be a fan of sport.

The session concludes with Oriard revealing a few details about his next project, one that focuses on historic color illustrations of football. He also lends his thoughts on the current direction of OSU, and outlines the need to further bolster the liberal arts at the institution.

Interviewee

Michael Oriard

Interviewer

Chris Petersen

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/oriard/>

Transcript

Chris Petersen: Okay, today is March 31st, 2015. This is our second interview with Mike Oriard and we are in the Valley Library and our last interview we ended up at the end of the eighties, more or less, and so we'll start at the beginning of the 1990s. And the early nineties in this state, on this campus, were defined inordinately, I think, by a piece of legislation, or a ballot measure that passed. Ballot Measure 5 made a significant impact all across the state and I wonder if you could share your memories of what it was like here on campus and within English, the impact that it made.

Michael Oriard: Yeah, well Ballot Measure 5 was a copycat of an earlier ballot measure in California that the Oregon legislature had attempted to stave off. We defeated similar measures a couple times I believe, and one of the measures to hold it off was the passage of what became known as the kicker law, which dictates that if revenues exceed a certain projection, all of the excess revenues, not the revenues beyond the projection, but all of the excess revenues would be returned to the tax payers. So, we passed that to avoid the worst disaster of Measure 5 and then Measure 5 passed anyway and we were stuck with both of them and continue to be stuck to this day. So, the kicker law is an ongoing big problem that periodically gets talked about but without the will in Salem to do anything about it. It keeps us from accumulating a surplus in good years, or from simply doing well in good years. If we've got a really good year, we go back to zero, return the money.

Measure 5 had the comparable or companion long term impact of simply reducing property tax revenues, you know, our whole tax system in Oregon is screwed up of course, so heavily dependent on the state income tax and formerly the property tax with no sales tax. But what Measure 5 did right from the very beginning in 1991, I believe it was, was shrink OSU's budgets. And so the English department and the College of Liberal Arts were affected like other units on campus, but more so in that we did not have alternative sources of revenue beyond the state allocation. We didn't have the large research grants that you have in sciences and the technological fields and so on. So, we felt the budget cuts directly, and for us it's all of our budget was going into teaching. It dramatically affected how we can handle our classes. And so in order to meet budget cuts, we reduced faculty. We never laid people off in English but we simply didn't fill vacancies when people retired, which is a not very strategic way to do these things. It means you get holes here and there without planning where they're going to be. It just depended on the age of the people who used to teach in those positions.

And so that was one problem. We were not doing any new hiring. But also too, we had a president at the time who wanted to increase revenues, I mean increase enrollment, and more students brought in more money but they brought in less than the full cost of educating them, so increased enrollments were in fact hurting us more and more and more. And so the English department, for example, would start off with a budget a couple hundred thousand dollars in deficit and that part of the budget would be to cover the sections of writing, the required courses for the Baccalaureate Core and so on. And so this is just a really, really tough time and a bad time for the university in general and in particularly for the liberal arts.

Just a year or two earlier, I don't remember the exact date, the best thing that happened while I was at Oregon, OSU for thirty-seven years was we had a provost, Graham Spanier, whose wife Sandy was in—had a position on our department and so she had his ear, but he was a sociologist, so he was a liberal arts guy too and he came in the university where the faculty in liberal arts were teaching nine courses a year, three, three and three, and colleagues in other departments were teaching one, two, three, four classes, depending on how much they had for research funding. What that did—excuse me, Graham then reduced, he told us, he told us "you can reduce your teaching loads to two, two and two, but I have no revenues to give you in order to do this." And this was even before Measure 5, as I recall, and probably would not have even been done, had Measure 5 been in place.

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But what this did, reducing the teaching from three courses to two enabled people like me who you know, around this time or soon after, I became mobile in that I could have gotten a job elsewhere had I desired, but going from three courses to two made staying—it simply took off the table any possibility I might have thought about leaving, and I never did think about, seriously think about leaving. But I might have had to, simply because of the teaching burden. For outsiders, three courses, two courses, it all seems ridiculously small now, but each course is a preparation and there's papers and all this sort of stuff. It is a lot of time. So, in English and liberal arts we had reduced teaching loads, we had reduced faculty and we had more students. And the consequences were sort of obvious and inevitable: class sizes got a whole lot bigger,

more teaching had to be shifted first from tenure track faculty to adjunct faculty and then to graduate students. So, that sometime in the nineties graduate students in rhetoric and composition would be teaching Writing 121, the basic fiction and writing course, they having been undergraduates themselves the year before and now teaching classes and so on.

And so it was a rough time and a bad time and it really oriented the university in a new direction in trying to provide instruction for basic courses as cheaply as possible. But even then it was a struggle. Like I say, English department would start with a deficit and then have to somehow make it up by people being away on grants or whatever.

CP: I've heard from others that Spanier was pretty instrumental, I gather, by reducing the teaching load and sort of creating a scenario in which faculty in the College of Liberal Arts could actually publish, devote more time to scholarship.

MO: Yeah, the scholarly expectation was already there. I arrived in 1976, the second or third year of hiring in which there was any expectation of scholarship at all. Formerly liberal arts faculty had taught four courses a term and they were not expected to publish. One of the most distinguished members of our faculty over the last half century or so, a guy named Warren Hovland from Seligious Studies, just died at the age of ninety-six and his obituary mentions no publication whatsoever. Now, maybe he did a few articles, but certainly no books. And so it just was not expected in those years. So, I came in with the expectation of publishing, which is why three courses a term was a challenge, and I used my summers and other vacations and weekends and so on in order to do that. The reduction from three courses to two was an acknowledgement that with the expectation of scholarship you have to provide some time for people to actually do that writing.

And Spanier, his whole sense of the liberal arts within the Land Grant university was based on the major Land Grants in the country where the colleges of arts, liberal arts and sciences are the core of the university and the professional schools draw on them for teaching their students. And the weird thing about Oregon State is that the arts and sciences are not the core in any real way. And Spanier was attempting to make that more a reality than it had been until that time.

CP: Speaking of scholarship, you've described yourself as a cultural historian of football, I'm wondering if you had at any point felt like you had to acquire some new tools to fill that role of historian versus your training in English.

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MO: I guess I would say yes and no. I mean, there was no formal acquisition of the new tools, but in the early years of my career here, the discipline of literary studies shifted rather dramatically towards what was just sort of called theory, and theory took any number of forms but it was very philosophical and abstract and one of the outcomes of it was the recognition that the meaning of text was unstable and in effect, almost, that at some level a text could mean almost anything. And this alienated people outside of literary studies that had a more sort of empirical grounding in their disciplines. English professors seemed capable of making the most outrageous claims about stuff, and so when I sort of sent out basically to answer a simple question; what has football meant in this country and how did it acquire those meanings, one possible approach to it would be through theory or whatever, and just speculate on, you know, you could say it means almost anything, or you could sort of go back and ground it and try to find out how football was being written about and described when it was beginning in the 1870s and the 1880s and the 1890s and so on.

And that just fundamentally appealed to me more. For me, texts always have meaning. I mean, the reason I was in the profession was I loved to read and I didn't love to read for the sort of abstract, philosophical pondering of what is the relation of fictional truth to the real world and so on. I read for the stories and this is what got me into it as a kid, and I never quite abandoned that. And so I always really wanted to understand what things really meant. So, one of the...

Early on I became drawn towards American Studies, which was essentially the use of a literary text to understand the country. So, it was a cultural studies approach to American literature. And when I first started thinking about writing about football, I had this notion in my head that one of the things that most distinguishes American football from the football the rest of the world calls football, that we call soccer, is that we give the ball to one team or the other and it has a set of plays that it tries to run and it tries to advance the ball and if it's successful it keeps going and if it's not it has to give the ball up and the other team gets its chance and it divides the game into four quarters and provides all these other things. And so one of the sort of obvious aspects of this was that American football had a much more narrative structure than soccer or world football where the ball was just kind of up.

I mean, there was a kind of orderly progression of things and attempt to execute certain ideas and so on, but I thought "oh, this is really interesting," and I was familiar from the American literature side of things about the efforts to write the great American novel in the 19th century, you know, how could a writer sort of come to terms with the immensity and diversity of this, of this vast continent which was sort of newly vast as we acquired territory and all of that. And so I thought "hmm, I wonder if American football is sort of the great American novel in shoulder pads." There was some sort of perceived need to have some narrative through which we could tell stories about ourselves, and football was one of the places that we got into that. And so I thought "oh, that's a cool idea, that's a really cool idea."

And so when I started doing the actual research on the first book on football and reading the newspapers from the 1870s and 1880s and 1890s, I couldn't find any evidence that anybody was actually explicitly talking about football in those kind of ways. But what I found in the actual development of football was much cooler than that by far, because it was real. And it did in fact turn out that sports writers became aware of the dramatic arch of football games and sort of the narrative nature. And they used analogies to theater and all of that sort of business. So, my far-fetched, kneejerk leap into all of this wasn't completely off, but the actual story was more interesting.

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So, what I had to do in becoming an historian is just sort of wean myself away from the preconceived cool ideas and going and finding the actual texts that illustrated. What I didn't have to change was my basic orientation of what I did. I was still reading texts and trying to understand them and explain them and interpret them, but the texts I was reading now were not novels and poems but sports writing and that sort of stuff, what the early promoters of the game were writing and so on. And really approaching it as text, not just as information on a page but as something that is crafted, that has an author and it has an audience and it has a context in which these things were said, so you don't go to newspapers to find the truth, you go to newspapers to find out how people at that time were explaining things and understanding things, and in a period of which the vast majority of Americans encounter football in the sports pages before they ever saw it in person. Sports writers had a particularly powerful impact on the way the meaning of football was shaped in these early years. So, I was still doing textual analysis, just different texts. And not attentive to aesthetic matters but certainly attentive to metaphor and analogy and all the kind of wild stuff that these sports writers were employing back in those days to explain this new game.

CP: At any point has film come into play as a source for you? I'm just thinking especially of NFL Films and of course football being a sport that's ideal for television.

MO: Yeah. NFL Films to me is traditional, classic NFL Films, when it was putting together those highlight films with all of the Hollywood tricks. NFL Films, to me, is the most extraordinary creator of narrative texts about football over the last half century. And I wrote about NFL Films in my book that covers the NFL from the sixties to the present. Film before that, you know, I did, there may be a hundred and twenty football films written between the period in theaters between the nineteen teens and 1960, and I probably managed to view about seventy or seventy-five of them. So, I don't have any detailed analysis of that, and there's too many films and too much other materials out there, but I do try to account for the sort of the main things, the main characters and so on in the film as part of the cultural landscape.

You know, if you move away from the 1880s, 1890s when the media is the popular press, the newspapers and the weekly and like the magazines, when you get into the 1920s, then you have a continuing and much expanded popular press but you also have radio and film. And I had to try to come to terms with those, and their contributions were specific contributions, different from and similar to what's happening in sports writing. And so, and theatrical movies were part of that. Newsreels were also part of that. Newsreels came in with the movies and they were an important part of the movie-going experience, particularly by the late twenties and thirties when film acquired sound. And the ten minute newsreel before or after the feature film, about twenty percent of the material was always on sports. And in fall, that meant football. And so, trying to see, determine if newsreels had a specific, particular contribution, if they reinforced other things.

And then radio too, I mean how did radio announcers first describe the games and what did they bring to this. And the radio broadcasts are the most difficult to get access to. There's none that have—none survived before the late 1930s. They're at the Library of Congress or the National Archives, and games were being regularly broadcast on the radio by the mid-twenties, beginning in like 1921. So, a lot of that part of it had to be more speculative and projecting, except in

the early, in the very, very early years of radio broadcasts, newspapers occasionally published transcripts of the radio broadcasts.

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The Oregonian did one for a game at Multnomah Stadium and so on. So those, even though that's one game out of dozens or hundreds that year, presumably it's by this time, these things are rather formulaic and so you can see the way that that medium handled the sport as well. But if you're trying to do the cultural history of football, culture, and you're defining culture essentially as all those sources of information primarily through the media that we get, well the media vary over time and expand over time and so on. It becomes an enormous amount of material, and this is before television. Once television comes in, it becomes virtually impossible to come to terms with the breadth, the culture of football.

And today with the internet, we have twenty-four-seven media. If I were trying to write about the culture of football today in the early 21st century, it would require just enormous selectivity that wasn't necessary before. I couldn't read everything and listen to everything and watch everything but I could listen, read and watch a lot of it for those earlier periods.

CP: Well, the early nineties were a very prolific period for you, you published three books in three years, 1991, 1992, 1993, the first *Sporting with the Gods: The Rhetoric of Play and Game in American Culture*, the second *College Football, the Popular Press and the Emergence of American "Mass Culture"* and the third book *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle*. I'm interested in that period of your life and kind of the stories behind this work.

MO: Okay, what was the book in 1992, because I don't know that as a book.

CP: *College Football, the Popular Press and the Emergence of American "Mass Culture."* I might have that wrong.

MO: That would not have been a book, but a paper.

CP: Okay.

MO: So, let's skip over that.

CP: Alright.

MO: Then the two books. Okay, so the book in 1991 was published by Cambridge University Press and it was an enormous book and it is the book that I'd been working on since I arrived at Oregon State fifteen years previous, and I think in a previous interview I mentioned the defensiveness of somebody who'd written this dissertation on sports literature and needed to prove to myself, if to no one else, that I could write about Faulkner and Hawthorne and Twain and everybody else. That's that book and it's immensely ambitious, overly so. I finished it, fortunately, at a time when I knew enough to get a lot of stuff there but not so much that I knew it was impossible to write. So, you know Faulkner wrote about his books as "splendid failures," or he wrote about *The Sound and the Fury* as a "splendid failure." Or didn't write about it, talked about it. I don't put myself on Faulkner's level but this is sort of my splendid failure. What I attempted was impossible, but I think that there was a lot of stuff there. And there's enough stuff there to satisfy myself, irrespective of my professional colleagues, that okay, I've done it, I can do it, Cambridge said it was okay.

Because by this time, I was interested in writing a book more oriented towards American culture, thinking about the late 19th century, and at some point in the latter stages of writing that Cambridge book, I sort of came to the realization well, why not football? Let's see what happens there. And so, the first, my first football book, *Reading Football* came in '93 just two years after the other one. But the other one had been in press, in production for some time. So, I don't remember what year I actually started the research on the football but I wrote it really quite quickly. I mean, it was one of those kind of sort of not quite white heat burst through it or something like that. I mean, I'd always have to revise endlessly and so on.

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But it came sort of strangely readily to me, for being something altogether new. In part, the materials I was dealing with were manageable. I could read almost all of the popular press from the seventies and eighties and nineties because there

just wasn't much of it. And I didn't have to read every single, every one of the thirty-five New York dailies or however many there were, but I could read three or four of the major dailies pretty thoroughly through, and because the game was new, that there wasn't much about, there wasn't much commentary during the week. So really I had to read weekends in the fall from a couple dozen newspapers to get outside the city of New York as well. And then *Harper's Weekly* and *Leslie's Weekly* and the literary monthlies. And that was a manageable amount of material, so I wrote that book, for me, fairly quickly. It took only a few years and came out and it got a really good response. It was very satisfying.

One of the things that I discovered in that book is that even as an academic I could, in fact, reach a wider audience. Not a huge wider audience, but sports writers read it and a couple of sports writers have written books that were prompted by reading that one. And so, that was very satisfying and very gratifying. And then I started taking on the next; "okay, so I got this book, it ends around the early 1900s, there's a whole lot of football to go, and so why don't I take it on?" And if I'd realized what all I would have been taking on, I would have had some profound misgivings. But I sort of started out thinking "okay, I can read representative newspapers and representative magazines." I could read the *Saturday Evening Post* but I wouldn't have to read *Collier's* and *Liberty* and all this and I could read maybe four newspapers, something *LA Times* maybe, and *Dallas Morning News* and *Atlanta Constitution*, and maybe a couple in New York and Chicago, ah maybe I'd have to go through a half a dozen newspapers or whatever. And then for the fiction, the *Saturday Evening Post* and all that kind of thing.

So, that's kind of where I started out, but then the more I got into it the more material I discovered I had to take on. There was radio and there was newsreels and then there was films. The *Saturday Evening Post* was just the *Saturday Evening Post* and so if I really wanted to know what was going on in American fiction I did have to read *Collier's* as well. But also there were pulp magazines, so there was *Sport Story Magazine* that began publishing in 1923 and there were juvenile magazines, *Boy's Life* and *American Boy* and on and on and on and on. And we've talked about a lot of these different media but there was also the visual media, not just film but magazine covers and popular illustration of various kinds. And so, I sort of started off and then got going and then all of the sudden there was more; okay, I'll do that, and then all the sudden there, you know.

So anyway, '93 was when *Reading Football* came out and I think 2001 was when *King Football* came out, and those eight years were fully spent researching this sucker. And it turned out to be a long book. I mean, I think it's a really readable book but it's simply got so many—covers football from 1920 to 1960 and it just has so much stuff in it that it's been less widely read than *Reading Football*, which is much shorter and on that count alone, more readily accessible.

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But you know, the two go together. There's a lot of continuities; issues of race and gender and class and so on remain a big part of both, but in the twenties football becomes a truly national sport with all this regional variations, and that was fun, you know, how different regions, through their football teams and talents through their football teams attach their local and regional identities to their teams. And so when they compete, southwestern football writing is full of cowboys and broncos and all this kind of stuff and some of the sports writers write about football whenever there's an intersectional game with one of the schools, always were replaying the Civil War and that kind of business.

So, I mean it was a lot of fun, a lot of discovery on my part and a lot of juicy material, but just so much that maybe, for anybody who's not really seriously interested in football history, too much of a good thing.

CP: Yeah. Well, *King Football* received some significant acclaim; it was named one of the ten best college sports books ever by the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

MO: Yeah, I mean it didn't get ignored, certainly. It didn't get slighted. Yeah, I mean I'm not—it was a gratifying book to write as well. I think, though, it had less impact on sports writers. Well, it's hard to know. A lot of sports writers know my stuff, and how they've come to know it, most likely from the shorter things, but among my books, *Reading Football* and then a later book, the *Brand NFL* about the NFL, but otherwise seemingly most known out there among kind of popular readers and their spokesmen in the press.

CP: Yeah. So, I'm interested, we sort of touched on this a little bit, but I'm interested in the idea of the community that you've found yourself in. I don't know if there were a lot of academics that you were associating with or were working

on similar sorts of topics or if it was indeed these sports writers, sort of the literary sports writers, that kind of became a community that you were a part of.

MO: Well you know, in the eighties when I was still the author of a dissertation on sports literature and then I'd written some pieces and then wrote my football memoir in '82, I went to various meetings, gatherings with sports topics, one of which I remember quite vividly was at Stanford at the, it's not the humanity center but it's their equivalent of the humanities center. They had a colloquium on sports. I can't remember the exact title. And it was there that I met other young colleagues around the country who were writing about sports, and a guy named Elliot Gorn who wrote a wonderful book about 19th century bare-knuckle prize fighting, and Elliot and I would sit around and piss and moan about why our senior colleagues haven't taken us up and all that kind of thing, not realizing, particularly on my part, what a blessing it was to have it left to me. But I associated with sports scholars out of humanities and popular culture kind of people who tended to be out of the humanities.

When I did *Reading Football*, that sort of moved me towards the sport historian side of things, and I began to meet those people and go to their meetings occasionally. And at all of these meetings there would be sometimes a guest speaker invited who might be a prominent sports writer or whatever. But I didn't meet and hang out with sports writers so much as respond to phone calls and then later email inquiries and all that kind of thing.

CP: So, they started to seek you out as sort of an expert witness.

MO: Yeah, I started showing up on people's Rolodexes and got invitations to write op-ed pieces and that sort of stuff. So, I don't know exactly when.

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In the eighties, I wrote a couple short pieces for *Sports Illustrated* back in the nineties and that had been solicited after my football memoir came out and the piece I wrote about my teammate Jim Tyrer committing suicide appeared in *The New York Times* gave me a connection there, and I got to know quite well a couple of sports editors there. And things of that sort followed periodically, that came out of that early stuff on sports. But then at an accelerated pace after the football books started coming out in the nineties.

CP: Something I want to make sure I ask you about is you were the President of the Faculty Senate here in 1994, what are your memories of that experience?

MO: I mean, it was a real unusual experience. I was always somebody who didn't like to go to meetings, but I got elected to faculty senate and then one year I got approached and asked if I would be willing to run for president, and I, "you got to be kidding me," I sort of talked myself around to saying okay. And it was going to be a halftime position, so I'd have a reduced teaching load and I'd have a half salary in the summer, and all of these things, for practical reasons, are appealing. And the work itself, I had to kind of wrap my head around what does this entail and can I do it sort of.

You know, my most vivid memory of that actually came the year after. When you're elected president of the faculty senate, you're president-elect for a year, then you're president for a year and then you're immediate past president for a year. And my immediate past president year I was asked by, I think the provost, who was Roy Arnold, to chair a committee that would revise, do a major revision of promotion and tenure guidelines. And I mean it was a massive undertaking, a year-long series of meetings and so on that turned out to be remarkably and surprisingly rewarding because I had just a terrific committee to work with. Nobody with private agendas, narrow agendas and so on, everybody working together to really re-define scholarship and the expectations quite differently from before, based on the work of Boyer at the Carnegie Foundation. And to that time, various units had their own separate P&T guidelines, including library faculty and Extension agents and so on, and this was the first time of bringing everybody together under the same set of guidelines, and that's proven to be difficult in the doing, and a lot of sort of separation out has happened subsequently, where it didn't—where the universal guidelines just didn't quite match up well enough.

But that, apart from how good those revised guidelines were and how long they lasted or whatever, the experience of working with dedicated colleagues proved to be immensely rewarding. You know, we ended up getting the guidelines approved unanimously without dissent, which is sort of unheard of, but we conducted all kinds of forms and it was just,

it was a good experience and it sort of offsets the more cynical "oh my God, not another meeting" kind of mentality that you invariably develop as a faculty member, or probably in any organization where meetings are the least pleasurable and fruitful way to spend your time. That one was different, yeah.

CP: Well, I have a feeling that more meetings came about around 2004 when you transitioned to administration, Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts. What was the background behind that happening?

MO: Yeah, by then I was just ready for a change, I was ground-down, I'd been teaching for twenty-eight years and I thought about this. I mean, does this happen to people in every profession where just doing pretty much the same stuff for a long, long, long time grinds you down over time? Yeah, and I was ready for a change. After my years of faculty senate president, I got nominated for, or asked, to stand for every low level administrative position in the university, it seemed. I had no interest, none whatsoever in going into administration, yet ten years later I didn't have to be approached; I put my hat in the ring for that one.

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I was just ground-down and ready for something different. And initially, the difference was really gratifying. Again, I mean I liked working for leadership team in the college, and associate deans have no budget and no power, so they can't be jerks. All they can do is try to make things work more smoothly for the dean and be helpful to the chairs that report to the dean's office. And so that was enjoyable and engaging and so on, and I ended up doing it for nine years, and by the end I was becoming, you know, it was becoming more routine again, and the meetings were—once I understood the job better and felt on top of things, the meetings kind of felt like meetings often feel in the end. So, by the time I retired from the university after nine years of that, the last three of them being halftime, I was ready to retire.

But I had a—I was very fortunate in having twenty years in the English department, completely in the English department that felt good, and nine years in the dean's office that felt good. In both cases, I got out before things really started souring up for me.

CP: Did you find that you had more or less or about the same amount of time for your research in this new position?

MO: Well, I mean that was the weird thing; usually when you go into administration, a fulltime administration position, you more or less have to put your own scholarship on hold, and I had understanding with the dean who hired me, Kay Schaeffer. By then I was, I had been named a Distinguished Professor and I had several books published and I told Kay that my writing was still important, she said "well, I want you to be able to continue you writing." So, my position at the dean's office was roughly equivalent to my position in the English department in terms of the time commitment that the duties themselves entailed, and leaving me some time during the school year for writing during the week; some weeks no but other weeks yes, more, and summers were usually a bit lighter in the dean's office, so I'd get a little more. I never had the sort of absolutely free three months of the summer because I was working in the dean's office, but I had enough time to keep working away at things.

And when I entered the dean's office, I had very rough first drafts of a book on football since the 1960s that ended up getting split into two books and published during the time I was in the dean's office. But I had that sort of, the raw material that had I not had that then, it might have been pretty tough. To publish two books while in the dean's office is pretty unusual, I'm pretty sure, and likely would not have been possible had I not had, like I say, the raw material, the raw stuff already down there on paper somewhere, so that I had it to work with in the time I could find.

CP: And these two books were *Brand NFL* and *Bowled Over*, the first about the NFL, obviously, the second about college football.

MO: Yeah, initially this was to be one book about football since the 1960s, and I thought it would be kind of innovating to do college and pro football together. The two previous books were overwhelmingly about college football. Pro football didn't even matter in this country until the late fifties, and so there's maybe a chapter on the NFL and professional football and scattered comments on it in the book *King Football*.

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In the sixties, pro football, NFL actually passes Major League Baseball as America's favorite spectator sport, and so it ascends. And college football doesn't keep pace, but it remains important, in sort of the scheme of things. Professional football, major league baseball and college football are our three favorite sports, and college football is viewed separately from the NFL. But you know, it's all football. I'm interested in what football means in American culture and all that. So, I can't remember exactly what I had; I think I had kind of correlating chapters on pro football.

And an early reader—you know actually, I entertained the possibility that this might be a trade book rather than a university press book, and so I think, yeah, I approached an editor, I mean an agent. I never had an agent, but I knew a guy, a sport historian who had an agent and I'd contact him. I think he was the one who told me "nobody will take this book unless college football and pro football are separate topics." And so that led me to split them, which was a very good thing. And then once I split them, then I had a half a book length on each topic and had to flesh it out. And all of that led to good stuff.

I'm very pleased with *Brand NFL* in particular. I mean, I think it's a really smart book on professional football since the sixties, but I also think it's really readable. It's the prose is the most polished there. It's always mattered to me, the quality of the writing has always mattered to me. If I don't write clearly, take me out to the shed and shoot me. If I don't write well and pleasingly, that's really sad and it's not for want of trying. And I think the writing in *Brand NFL* is the best I've done in any of my books. I've written short pieces in which I liked the writing as well, but among the books, that's the one that I most like.

And it was very interesting dealing with, in both books, but more so in the NFL book, I wrote sort of from the inside and the outside. I mean, the fact that I had played football at Notre Dame in the late 1960s and Kansas City Chiefs in the late seventies, I could ignore that but that would be kind of weird, because any reader would know "okay, so how is this personally biased" and so on. So, it seemed to me I just had to be up front about that and say "in summary, this is a personal book, but I'm basically as detached as I can be in trying to deal with it, but if readers sense a little bias on behalf of the players against the owners in the NFL book, well, that's where it comes from." You know, that sort of thing. So, I wrote about the player's strike in 1974 where I lost the job. And then in the college football book I wrote about, acknowledged the perspective here is from somebody who feels like he was almost entirely a beneficiary of the system and got the best education his institution offered and sadly fears that that's not possible today.

So, the personal dimension of it was there in both of them but I liked it better in the NFL book. Maybe it's because I'm still part of a college community and so on that the college football book was the least fun of all the books to write, because it was writing about problems in college football that had been around since, as I knew better than anybody, or as well as anybody, had been around since the 1890s without solutions. And writing about athletes who read at the fourth grade level and the scandals that erupted over that in the 1880s—I mean 1980s—and all of that kind of stuff just wasn't fun. And it had all been written about so much before, as I knew well, and so what possibly new could I bring to this tired topic, you know? And I did the best I could, but it was more out of the need to complete the project that I wrote that book than out of the sheer pleasure and excitement of discovery and shaping this material, which had been my experience with the three previous books.

[0:50:32]

CP: Well, the college book came out in 2009 and it sort of dovetails nicely, I guess, with an explosion of emphasis on football in this state, at the University of Oregon especially, but also at OSU. I'm wondering what that was like for you to sort of observe that?

MO: Well, you know I was very, very consciously not going to write about—I mean I wrote about national football, not—I could have gotten access perhaps to archival materials on the OSU program in particular, maybe not the U of O, but I didn't want to do it. I didn't want to do, I didn't want to hold up Oregon State as an example of anything because what I was writing about was the problems in college football, which OSU shares in, but OSU is far and away not an egregious villain in all of this kind of stuff. And dealing with U of O—I mean actually the book came out before U of O really became a phenomenon. It was just starting to become a thing. It'd probably be harder writing today to not talk about U of O as a wholly owned subsidiary of Nike and the obscenely lavish facilities down there and so on, that would probably be hard to avoid.

But, what did, in fact, come from a book that was published in 2009, my basic argument in that book, reduced to just a few words, is that the problems in college football that fundamentally derive from an inherent contradiction between an extracurricular activity that is also a popular entertainment, those problems go back to the 1880s and 1890s when colleges first started bringing in ringers and that sort of thing. And so, we've been living with this contradiction for a long time, more messily at some times than at others, but the argument in the book is that in recent years, the consequences of that contradiction and the fallout from that contradiction reached a tipping point beyond which it's no longer tenable to hang on to this. An athletes' rights movement was starting to emerge, and this was even before the head trauma stuff started coming out and all that. But, I finished the book with a sense that college football is on the verge of some big, dramatic changes that are not going to be decided from within but without by some court decision or legislative decision or whatever.

And that, in fact, is of course what has been happening, with the O'Bannon case being the most primary, the primary example. There was another case pending at the time I finished the book, *White v. NCAA*, I think it was, that I thought might turn out to be the game-changer and it didn't. It was settled, and the NCAA had to give up something, but not much. The O'Bannon case is different in the whole movement towards the funding scholarships at the full cost of attendance and all that kind of thing.

You know, we're still on the verge of the big shake-up, but we're right on the verge now. We're, within the next twelve months or something, going to see a massive crevice open up between those universities that fund scholarships at the full cost of attendance and those who do not. And who would take a scholarship if they could get one here? And it's going to kill the mid-majors in basketball, for example, and it's going to create this even wider divide between top football programs and lesser football programs, and it's going to put real pressure on top football programs that are also top academic institutions, and do they want to be on this side of things rather than on the more amateur side, rather than the professional side? I'm thinking about the great private university, Stanford and Notre Dame and Vanderbilt and Duke and all that, but also the great public universities. I mean, what's Cal Berkeley going to do in this world, or Michigan or UCLA, UVA, UNC and so on.

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So, we're right on the verge of that happening, but we were kind of beginning to be on the verge of that when I finished the book in 2009, and that was utterly irrespective of anything going on locally in Corvallis or Eugene, but an interesting moment in college football history to which I didn't really feel I had anything particularly important to add, because these things have been talked about forever. I'm pleased as I look back on it, that it's looking to me like I got it right in predicting that changes would come from without, from within, rather than within and so on. Yeah, I mean that's the way it's going to be playing out and all that. But so what, you know, anybody who kind of seriously thought about these things would figure it out too, so I didn't have the kind of the historian's pleasure of discovery developing things, ideas that I didn't know again. Maybe that's the big, you know, I didn't—in the course of writing the book, aside from the details, I didn't learn anywhere near as much as I learned from researching the other books. Even the NFL book, where I learned about, a lot about NFL marketing and self-marketing and that kind of thing.

CP: Head trauma is obviously a major, major issue as far as the future of football, I'm wondering what your thoughts are on the future of this sport. I mean, is it something that will be changed fundamentally in the way that it's played to try to avoid head traumas, or is there a possibility it could cease to exist someday? We're seeing more and more parents not allowing their children to play the sport; we're now seeing in the NFL some promising young players quitting because of fear of their health.

MO: Yeah, I mean this is where football itself, irrespective of the level at which it's played, is at risk. And its future, you know, I can't predict, I would simply say it's profoundly uncertain. And the question is okay, so what we know today, and we know it only since I think 2005 when that paper was published about finding signs of CTE, chronic traumatic encephalopathy in Mike Webster's brain, at that point we realized that the concussions weren't just bruises, like we thought when I played, that healed perfectly over time like other bruises did, but could have long term consequences. And subsequently, you know of course much more information and research has taught us more and more about the problem.

But we are still so far away from understanding it perfectly and knowing how high the risks are, you know, what kind of blows at what angle, of what force, to what part of the head are the most serious. Are full-blown concussions more

dangerous long term than the accumulation of thousands of sub-concussive hits? At what age do kids' brains become less vulnerable to the most dangerous kind of hits? I mean, there's just so much that we don't know that we are learning only piecemeal. And sadly, we're learning it piecemeal at a time when science itself is under attack as basically just another ideology. What's playing out over climate change, say, or evolution, you know, is now playing out in this more intimate arena of my child's, your child's brain and your brain and my brain, if you're playing in the NFL or high school or college or whatever.

So, one thing that is already happening is that participation in youth football is down, and I have not read data on this but I absolutely know that it's down among those whose children have alternative options for self-discovery and self-development and future success and so on. So, it's going to be predominantly—it's going to be increasingly the poor and minorities that are there playing football. I mean, we haven't reached a kind of obvious divide yet, but we are moving in that direction.

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This young man, Chris Borland, who just retired from the 49ers after one year, he's white, he went to Wisconsin, I don't know that he was middle class, I don't know what his class background is, but in doing this he clearly has a sense that there are other things he can do with his life, to have a meaningful life without football. If he were black, from the inner city and doing this, it would be really stunning, because this would be a young man giving up whatever future he might have out of concern for the impact of continuing to play, on himself and his family, his future family and all that kind of thing.

The big problem, of course, is yes, we can make football safer. I'm guessing that football already is safer today in some ways. The NFL eliminating helmet to helmet contact is—obviously had to eliminate certain really dangerous head blows. Limiting the amount of contact and full scrimmage and all that kind of stuff, reducing the number of head blows in major and minor head blows, teaching kids to block and tackle more with their shoulders and less with their heads has to reduce the amount of trauma to the head, maybe, but what if it's, what if glancing blows are as dangerous as more direct blows? We don't really know that yet.

But let's assume that we're making the game safer, big question: is it safe enough? And we won't know that until we've had some time to measure these things in controlled kinds of ways. I mean, we really need longitudinal studies so that we find out what kids who played football in high school or college or the NFL are like in five, ten, fifteen years later. And there need to be control groups, and can you get control groups, I mean can you do this in a really hardcore, scientific way or not? I mean I'm not the guy to ask about that but I know that there are real challenges to that. So, huge question is, is football safe enough?

The other huge question is how safe can football—say, I mean, today football still looks like football and fewer kids are playing it, but still a whole ton of kids are playing it. But if that trend continues and efforts to make football safer continue to try to prevent the acceleration of that withdrawal from the game and so on, how safe can football be made and still be football? And here I actually have the most useful contribution to bring as a cultural historian, because I know how important what I call football's excessiveness has been to its appeal over the years. Football's dangers are not incidental to the game, they are fundamental to the game. And the crisis that even Americans who know no history have some sense of in 1905 and 1906, when Teddy Roosevelt had to get involved in all of that kind of business, that full-blown crisis over the game came close to being abolished but didn't quite.

It's fascinating to read the local coverage of that, and particularly see the local cartoons about it where it's obvious that Americans wanted the game safer but not too safe. There are these wonderful cartoons of the football players of the future as fops with hankies, you know, with teacups and all this kind of stuff, this anxiety that you're going to sissify the game and lose its hard masculine violence. There is necessary roughness in football and there are rules to eliminate unnecessary roughness, but how much roughness is necessary for it to still be football? And can you have enough of that without putting the head at risk? It's a big question.

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And this is one of those issues on which I absolutely know the question. Now, I know the question about as well as anybody, and maybe better than anybody, given all the time I've spent on this kind of material, but I haven't the foggiest idea what the answer is. I mean, the answer will only reveal itself over time. It's incon—I mean okay, if football is increasingly perceived to be horribly dangerous to a significant percentage of players, the NFL's own actuaries project thirty percent of players will suffer from some kind of dementia, that's, I think, about twice the general population. Do we find that acceptable? And if those players are increasingly poor and dark-skinned and the audience that can afford to buy the tickets is white and privileged and rich and all that kind of stuff, I mean that's a nightmare.

Football could, an alternative scenario to that is that football could simply lose its hold on the huge population that it—I mean it is so far and away the most popular. I mean, nothing is even close. Regular game, weekend games in the NFL outdraw most bowl games. The national championship game this year had about the same viewership as whatever round of the NFL playoffs was on that weekend. The NFL is just so far ahead of everything else. Is it possible that it could become a nixed sport, like in ultimate fighting, if the majority of the population become so horrified, not by what they see on the field, that's the problem, but what they know is the consequence of what they're seeing on the field? And maybe that alone will save the game, because you don't actually watch people being damaged, because the consequences of the damage don't show up for many years later. Will we be able to kind of say "alright, I can watch this, it's not, it doesn't make me feel like I'm a barbarian or a savage or something like that."

These are all questions in my mind. Like I say, I know the questions; I just don't know the answers. But the answers, interestingly, have, will have much to say about us as a people. I mean, I'd like to think that we would not tolerate a truly gladiatorial sport where the poor and minorities destroy themselves for our pleasure, our pleasure being white privilege, or just say the privileged. But I don't know, I don't know. Sometimes my fellow men surprise me in positive ways, sometimes in not so positive ways.

CP: It seems like an especially uneasy situation in the collegiate ranks as well, because on one hand, there is an imperative to protect the safety of student athletes, but on the other hand, almost every athletic department depends almost entirely on football for its revenue. And in certain cases, including this institution, it's leveraged itself against future football revenues to expand their stadiums.

MO: Yeah, and just as a medical issue, a public health issue, concussions should have great—should be much more problematic for colleges than the NFL. The NFL's paying salaries. In a way, you get what you sign up for, though no twenty-two year-old really understands what it'll be like to be forty and suffer from dementia. And you might think you know, but you really don't. But they're paying people to freely choose to sign up and so on. For universities, players choose to come of course, but the university attracts them with a micro fraction of what they're paying the football coach. But more fundamentally than that, universities are in the business of training minds, not destroying them, and so this particular risk—I mean if it was a horrific risk of knee injuries, I think a university could justify that and just everybody have a great program in knee surgery, you know, but destroying brains is somehow contradictory to what universities are all about. So, that's problematic.

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The things that are playing out already, as we've talked about; okay so, the programs that belong to these five conferences that have major television contracts that pay members twenty million dollars and up a year can afford to pay the full cost of attendance for athletes and all that kind of thing. And even facing the consequence of well, what about the non-revenue sports, what about Title IX and women's sports and so on, and when you think about these things, particularly when you think about Title IX, more so than the non-revenue men's sports, you think about gender equity. And with the men's sports, you think about well, I mean sports are supposed to be sports. I mean these are an extracurricular activity. Here's where the contradiction between the fact that this one is also this popular spectacle, this popular entertainment that can bring in twenty million dollars a year in television revenues versus this one that is some cost. That's where it gets a little tricky.

But then it gets trickier yet when you think about okay, so if you pay your football players and your men's basketball players the full cost of attendance and then have to share that with all the other athletes, okay so you've elevated compensation for these athletes whereas these over here are the ones that are generating all that revenue. And among those, in fact, you can really single out a handful, pull out a handful; your quarterback and your star players who are

really, in fact personally, more responsible for drawing them in and all that sort of thing. But let's just say that it's the players in general on the football team and the basketball team, well guess what, in football, big time college football, somewhere around fifty-five, fifty-five to sixty percent of them are African American, and basketball I think it's something like sixty-seven percent are African American. Not all African Americans are coming from lower economic classes, but sadly a disproportionate number of them do.

So guess what, you have poor African American football players putting their brains at risk and their future selfhood at risk in order to generate revenue to pay for the scholarships of your golfers and your swimmers and your tennis players, and your gymnasts and women's basketball players and so on. And over here on this side of things, we're talking about—I haven't read the numbers but I just sort of know from observation—these are predominantly white, middle class kids. So, you got poor African American kids subsidizing white middle class kids, and isn't that really offensive, you know? But part of that subsidization is mandated by Title IX on behalf of gender equity, and the rest, I mean you could eliminate men's wrestling and all those other sports. I mean actually, baseball players and wrestlers probably aren't necessarily middle class kids. Again, I'm just thinking anecdotally what I see around. But now the baseball players probably increasingly so, because they've got camps in the summers and all that kind of—anyway, you see my point. I mean, you got a really racially offensive economic order going on here, and that's a part—and this is only on the side of things where you have the schools that can afford all the expanding revenues for their scholarship athletes.

It all comes back to that contradiction, but as I say, we hit a tipping point beyond which things are just really skewed and out of control, and beyond either the control, or certainly the will, of the university administrators. This is why these things are being determined in courts and then university's scrambling to accommodate what the new rules, the new requirements, that sort of thing.

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CP: Have you found that your research and writing has impacted your ability to watch a game as a fan?

MO: I don't incessantly think about these ethical, economical issues when I'm watching games. Writing about the NFL in the nineties actually made me a fan again. When I left the NFL, and then particularly when I had kids, after I had kids, I had sons, I didn't watch much NFL football on TV at all. Part of it is a conscious effort on my part not to implicitly get my kids thinking, my sons thinking that I expected them to be football players too. In fact, my older son made it clear to me that I went too far. He told me once sometime recently "Dad, you know I just wish you'd watch more football games with us, it would have been fun." And yeah, I probably went too far in that direction. And initially there's always, you know, I was cut by the Chiefs and somewhat alienated from it and didn't want to go back, and then seeing players that I knew I was as good as, you know, you go through that stuff, but that's a relatively short period. And then, and also too on Sundays when NFL football was on, I was in my office at Moreland Hall getting ready to teach classes on Monday morning; I just had other things to do.

But, when I started writing about the NFL somewhere in the mid-nineties, I figured I need to see how this thing is being televised. I mean if I'm interested in the culture of football I got to see what the culture looks like, right? So, I started watching Monday Night Football with my wife and then Sunday Night Football when it came on. And it was kind of a joke, you know, we bonded over football, but my wife actually likes football, particularly, she couldn't care about one of the teams or other. So, I started becoming more of a fan and just appreciating the artistry of the game and fascinated by the media packaging of it, and the new camera that's on the cables that gives you the viewpoint from behind the quarterback. I mean, it's really extraordinary in a way.

In fact, it's gotten so good that nobody wants to go the stadium anymore. In fact, stadiums now have monitors so you can see what the game looks on television. Instead of the media, radio and the newspapers trying to recreate for people who didn't see the game what it was like to see the game, now the whole packaging of the game is an attempt to recreate what the media gives you.

So anyway, so writing and researching pro football made me a fan. And I'm still a fan. I'm a little less promiscuous a fan, you know. It has to be an interesting game to engage me. And I don't, I watch very few games all the way through until you get to the playoffs and all of that. College football, I can't care about college sports at all unless I care about the team. On a Saturday morning when the games start at nine o'clock and they start with Indiana and Illinois, or even Michigan and

Wisconsin, I could care less. Insofar as I'm a football fan, I'm more an NFL fan than a college football fan, unless it's a team I care about, which basically means OSU and Notre Dame and then the Pac-12 a little bit more generally. But even there I'm not likely to watch a Cal-Washington State game for very long. Now, a Cal-Michigan game, one of those Pac-12 against the rest of the world, I'd be a little bit more engaged.

But in doing this, no, I'm not thinking about the ethical issues that are really fundamentally wrong with the game. I'm aware of the head concussion stuff only when I see hits that are clearly dangerous, and then to see whether they're called or not, but I am not yet personally horrified by what I see as violence on the field. And maybe that, in fact, is kind of a horrible message, that we can sort of adjust to it.

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But I haven't read anything yet, because we don't have the research yet that says that "oh my God, he's going to pay for that down the road." We just don't have that. So, maybe I'm all too sadly typical that way, in that I don't know exactly what it'll take for me to be horrified by the game. I'm not sure what it would take. I really don't know.

CP: What do you think is going to be the next project for you? You've been retired for a year or so?

MO: Yeah, I'm almost completing two years and so far I'm a big fan of retirement. My routine is to write in the mornings and then come to campus to work out at Dixon, come here to the library to look at microfilm or look up something related to what I'm writing. I am not sort of full-blown into major books and so on, but I need to be writing stuff that interests me. I don't have anything to prove to myself or anybody else. That's no longer an issue, either subtly or overtly for me. I got to be interested and it's got to somehow feel I'm doing—

I've actually finished, since I retired, a draft of a manuscript on American football art, and a press is looking at a proposal for it now. I have a couple other presses already said no on it for reasons that I've anticipated. What I want is a book with a ton of gorgeous color illustrations, I mean a fine arts book, but it's popular football illustration from the 1880s, 1890s and all up to 1920. And it's, I think it just might not be economically possible for a press to do a book like that. I haven't had—I've been prepared for that possibility from the outset. Hasn't dissuaded me from working on it, because it's been fun. I mean, I love this old artwork. And I really like these images, but I'm incapable of knowing how widely my enthusiasm might be shared.

The press that's looking at the book has been anxious to publish something of mine for some time, but I don't want them to do it knowing it's going to lose them a ton of money. And I don't know, I don't think they would, they're so eager to publish something of mine that they would publish something that they're going to lose a ton of money on. So, we'll see how that goes. As I say, I've known from the outset it might be unpublishable, but there's all kinds of online publishing possibilities that I haven't even begun to explore. I don't even have a website, you know, but I could probably figure out some way to just post this online with links to the images or whatever. Maybe that's the route I would go. I mean right now I'm still a little more proprietary over stuff than I would need to be to just sort of throw it out there. I mean, I spent a lot of time tracking down these images. I mean it's kind of low-level research, but it is research. Yeah, it takes more than time, you got to know what you're looking for and all that kind of stuff, so I do have a kind of proprietary stake in it that I'd have to give up.

But anyway, so it's those kind of things. I mean I'm interested in things like—I mean boxing kind of fascinates me as I discovered that boxing was hugely popular in the twenties and thirties in kind of glorified ways like football was, and because I grew up with boxing in which it, in the fifties it was utterly corrupt and then Muhammad Ali saved it for a while on political grounds, but now it's clearly a niche sport. But there was a time when it was much more broadly a popular sport, and it's clearly about masculinity. It's more about masculinity. And so I'm interested in is it about masculinity in different ways. I'm interested in the relationship of football to boxing, say in the twenties and thirties and how it was portrayed and so on in fiction and nonfiction and art and all that kind of thing. You know, a really narrow topic that for different reasons other than the expense of reproducing images might not be attractive to a university press. I mean actually, there are probably presses out there that because I've got a reputation by this point, they would be willing, but I got to feel like it's worth putting out there for the public.

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But anyway, I haven't even started that. I've just been tossing it around in my mind, and so I'll see where that goes. And a woman from Colorado State who's the curator of the library there contacted me about a year ago. She found out about me and she's putting on an exhibition of football art, and so I've been working with her on that and contributing pieces from my collection, which are more those weekly magazines and that kind of stuff, and writing an essay for her, and I'll go back to be a writer in residence for a week at Colorado State next fall. So those little things, those things, as they come up. But I have no control over that. I mean, if I could have one or two of those gigs a year, and that would keep me satisfied. I don't feel any need to do more scholarship. I simply want to be intellectually engaged with things that interest me, and we'll see how that goes. I'm only sixty-six I think now; I could have a long time to go. I need to—I don't need to be productive, I just need to be engaged. And that's the way I'm dealing with my retirement.

CP: Well, my last question for you is one that we've been asking most of the folks that we talk to for this project, and it's just to give their perspective on where the university is right now. Things have changed a lot since you've been here and a lot in just the last few years. Where do you see OSU being right now or positioning itself as it heads towards its sesquicentennial?

MO: Well for me, given where I came from within the university and what I did most recently in the university at the dean's office, I'm much aware of the relationship of the College of Liberal Arts to the university as a whole, and it is so obviously clear to me that the university's institutional aspiration is to be a top Land Grant university, whatever term we're using this week, you know: top ten Land Grant, top tier Land Grant, whatever. It has more to do with the College of Liberal Arts than any other on campus. Making the College of Engineering better won't have much impact on our institutional standing. Forestry's already at or near the top and Oceanography and agricultural, it's 20th century Land Grant technologies, 21st century Land Grant.

But what holds us back institutionally, and our reputation among peers, is the absence of Ph.D. programs in the College of Liberal Arts, more than any other single thing. And I think central administration understands that and would like to do something about it, not to the extent that they want to pour tons of money into it, because that money would have to come from somewhere else. I mean, budgets here have always been a zero-sum game. But there's also the problem now that you can't, I mean the world right now doesn't need another Ph.D. program in English or a Ph.D. program in philosophy or a Ph.D. program in history. We came too late to that game. This should have been done back in the forties and fifties when the institution chose not to do those things, not to develop their liberal arts.

So, the future of graduate education in College of Liberal Arts will have some impact on the future of the institution of Oregon State University. And the College of Liberal Arts is in the process now of trying to figure out innovative graduate programs. And they don't have the faculty for Ph.D. programs yet. I mean that would take an infusion of institutional resources just to have the faculty that could handle these programs. But first, well chicken and egg things, you got to come up with the ideas. And so that's a challenge; okay, so what could they look like?

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The most recent Ph.D. before I retired was a Ph.D. in public policy, and that's looking like a really solid program and the sort of thing that the college more generally needs to do, but how many opportunities are there is going to be difficult to find out. You know, a university that has sort of consciously ignored the liberal arts for most of its history can't just suddenly decide to pay attention and have this change instantly. Most kids don't come here to major in the liberal arts. Most of the majors in the liberal arts here transfer in after they're here and they really like the courses they had or they discover that they're not cut out to be engineers or whatever it might be.

So, I mean how you build this, from top down, from bottom up, I don't know. It's a great challenge. A whole lot of people out there are trying to meet that challenge. And Larry Rodgers, as the relatively new dean, is working really, really hard to raise funds, which had never been done before, for the college. You know, scholarships and professorships and funding for a sort of signature building, probably a fine arts or performing arts building, something of some sort that would materially signify the importance of the liberal arts here. I mean, a lot of people are making an effort in that, but we're still at a point where in general folks around here don't see arts and sciences as the core of any great univ—as the necessary core for any great university. And until that mindset changes, it's hard to imagine—well again, it's another chicken-egg thing. I mean, you do changes within liberal arts, force people to recognize that this is what great universities have to be, or does it have to be a commitment from the top that enables the growth to come up?

So, I'm absolutely lousy at predicting the future, as in my own scholarship. I know the questions a whole lot better than the answers. And so I don't know what the answer will be. I mean, I think there's value in the energy of attempting to build something more important and more significant, whatever the final outcome. And so, I guess that's where we are right now. And you know, in all my years in the English department, we always had a great faculty in the English department, a consequence of the job market. When we were hiring people, we used to get four or five hundred applicants for a job, and then the pool shrunk all the way down to two to three hundred, but we still get applicants in the hundreds rather than some of the sciences and engineering, they're lucky to get a handful of applicants for their jobs. There's just a huge pool of unemployed or needing to be employed Ph.D.s from top programs. I mean, we hire only from the best programs in English and history. The humanities has sort of the hardest challenge of proving their importance, because there's usually no direct application of what those disciplines are good for. We all know that over the course of a professional career, a background in the liberal arts proves to be invaluable, da da da da da da da da, but it's kind of like the long-term consequences of head trauma; what are the long-term consequences of the humanities degree? And there's all these jokes about English majors waiting tables or working as baristas and all that kind of thing.

[1:35:02]

So, we've always had really, really good faculty and we've had some great scholars. Not uniformly across the college, but a whole lot of good scholars, and particularly in the humanities in English and history and philosophy. But increasingly so in the social sciences as well, particularly more recently. That's a good thing, but it's not a brand new thing. It's certainly not a brand new thing for English. So yeah, what the future will be is going to depend more than anything else on budgets, but it's also going to depend on the leadership. Not just within the college, but outside the college too.

CP: Well Michael, I want to thank you for the time that you spent with us. This has been a lot of fun for me. I appreciate you sharing your memories of your career and wish you the best in retirement.

MO: Thank you, I appreciate the fact you didn't ask me any questions that I didn't really want to answer. Even if I had to try to think about how I could answer them.

CP: Terrific, thanks Mike.

MO: Okay.

[1:36:23]