

**Angela Gilliam**  
**Interviewed by Anthony Zaragoza**  
**The Evergreen State College oral history project**  
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**Begin Part 1 of 2 of Angela Gilliam 8-29-17**

**Zaragoza:** Why don't you just start by telling us your name, and where you're from?

**Gilliam:** Okay. My name is Angela Gilliam. I was born in Boston on September 2, 1936, which means I remember little pieces of the war, and what it was like to live in Boston. But I have to say, I see myself as being part of a family that was a part of two Great Migrations.

My father was from Oklahoma. He was born in Indian Territory. That sounds romantic, but that's just the name for Oklahoma before October 1907. My father was born in May 1907, so he was at the tail end of that. My mother was born in Missouri, in Old Dixie, the pro-slavery part of Old Dixie. And so they both wanted to leave their homes and go north. And because they arrived in Boston—they got married there in 1934, so I think they're like the tail end of that Great Migration from the South—even though they bordered the South, not behind the Mason-Dixon line, but certainly those values they were fighting against—going to Boston.

When I was 11, however, we became part of another famous migration, which is referred to as the second Great Migration, which was from the Northeast to the West. And not to just any "Old West," but to Los Angeles. We went to Los Angeles in 1947, in the post-World War II era. So, they ended up, without knowing it—and I didn't know it until Scott Kurashige, who may be like, perhaps, close to your's and my daughter's age; he may be 50 or something—he wrote this magnificent book called *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans and the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles*. That's more or less the title. And we lived in that.

He happened to be here a couple of weeks ago in Seattle. I went up to him and introduced myself as "Hi, I'm from Arlington and Jefferson." [chuckles] At first, it put him off, but then he realized I was talking about Los Angeles. Because that book, where he talks about these two co-terminus migrations—the Japanese-Americans coming back to Los Angeles after World War II, and then at a time when Chief Parker—who was this horrible Chief of Police in Los Angeles—at the time he's the Chief, it's also the time of the greatest African-American migration to Los Angeles. And that has a lot of impact on

our family, on African-Americans, and why I wanted to leave LA. It was said to be a city of a group of suburbs looking for a city, but what it was, was Sundown Towns looking for a city.

So, on at least one occasion, my two brothers ran into that whole thing: “you’re not supposed to be here after dark” kind of ethos that was in Glendale, Pasadena, Burbank, the Valley, etc. So, I kind of had my sights set on—I started very young using an imitative skill, where I could sort of imitate, to learn, first—I guess, it was at the same time—Japanese as well as Spanish.

**Zaragoza:** So, you began your anthropological work quite early.

**Gilliam:** Yes, because on my 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> birthday, one of my dad’s friends bought me a Cuban record called *Bonito y Sabroso* by Benny Moré, and begins—and I listened to Cuban music all the time on the radio. Someone called Chico Sesma had a fantastic radio show... At the same time, not just being in this neighborhood, but going to school with a lot of Japanese-American kids, it was a way I could get out of being seen as Black, or avoid being Black. I was smart, number one, mostly. I was a nightmare in math, but otherwise, I got good grades. And I started imitating—I picked up a lot of Japanese language particularities, you know? For example, I would tag on “des ne” to my English sentences like I heard my Japanese school friends do.

As a matter of fact, in my first year of high school, both of my parents sat me down on the sofa together. My brothers and I had this thing that they fight so much, when they sit you down on the sofa, and they are in agreement, watch out, because it’s big, whatever it is. And I had one of those big occasions, when they sat me down and said, “You’re not going to be invited to their social gatherings. We want you to have Black friends. We’re going to take you out, and you’re going to use your cousin, your uncle’s address.” Some cousins lived in the neighborhood for Los Angeles High School, and so that’s where I graduated from—LA High, not Dorsey High, which was the district that I should have gone to.

It’s kind of an interesting story, the process by which I became the first person in the Third World, from the Third World, to identify with the Third World, and then an African-American. A lot of it’s due to Ray Charles, which is a really interesting story I tell in my book, but anyway . . .

**Zaragoza:** Then you go on to UCLA. How does that early anthropology manifest itself there?

**Gilliam:** My experience at UCLA was unusual for this reason. I stayed in a dorm. I got admitted to a dorm that the religious council, something like the university religious something or other—because in ’54 you couldn’t live on the campus if you were Black, or most minorities.

My mother always wanted me to have what she never could have, and that was being able to live in a dorm, and go to college, and have that Betty Boop kind of college experience. So, the University Religious Conference—I think that was its name—which had bought this dorm way far away from campus—you had to take a bus to get to school from this place on Westgate Avenue in Santa Monica. There was Hershey Hall, which was the major dorm of UCLA, and about the time I got there, there was a Black American girl that nobody knew was Black. She wasn't passing for White or anything; they just let her [laughing] into the dorm because she seemed like she was White, in terms of the way she looked, but she hung around with Black people. Virginia Rose, I think her name was, Rose-something. In any event, she was the only Black person in Hershey Hall.

Then you had these sororities and fraternities, and this was where much of the ruling class sent their kids to live on campus. There was no getting into that. This geography marks me still...

**Zaragoza:** This was mid-'50s?

**Gilliam:** This was the mid-'50s. So, one of the ways you paid back for this gift was that you had to give a speech to all these little organizations that the Religious Conference had some kind of relationship with. They would want to hear you speak, talk about how you were really just like they were. You were a real person, you were normal . . . yeah.

I remember this young, White man in some Rotary Club activity saying, "Well, do Blacks think like we do?" And I just didn't know what to say. I had no idea. What does that mean? What did that question mean, the whole thing? That's the only thing I remember about any speech I ever gave, was trying to convince someone that I could think like they could think. [laughing]

However, I had two or three, maybe three or four, tragic incidents of plain, flat-out racism that I had to deal with at UCLA, which only strengthened my commitment to leave the country. At the end of my sophomore year, I got a job at the Department of City Refuse—which meant the garbage department—and I saved money so that I could go to Mexico to school. It was the first time I left the country, and my dad was excited because he had always been like a foreign-oriented geek, and one of his best friends was Chicano. I went there for a summer school course.

**Zaragoza:** And you go to graduate school there, right?

**Gilliam:** I went to graduate school in Mexico in '58, yeah. I don't know if I need to say these two incidents, because I think I'll save that for the book, but at least the four incidents of racism I want to talk about ... So, I don't mind you saying that. That way I can say, "Oh, yeah, this is what I wanted to mention."

But, I had experiences with racism at UCLA. One of the experiences, which is really interesting, was around my one year of Portuguese. So, being a Latin American Studies major—because this was the easiest thing. All through high school, I took Spanish. It was my easiest thing. I had picked up that Spanish language accent from my Cuban music. So, it was just something really easy, and I slid all the way through on that.

Then, when I got to UCLA, I had to take another language. I had to take Portuguese, because I was a Latin American Studies major. That makes sense. And I couldn't get an A. I didn't get an A, I got a B. Well, I accepted that, because there were a lot of things going on in my life, so that was okay. But I got a C—I remember this well—in my second semester. And that hurt.

In those days, it's like being a woman. Half of my blinders on, you see, was because I was a woman, and I was not supposed to succeed in certain things, like math and whatever, because that was against my gender. That was the kind of stuff I believed. On the other hand, a lot of it was that I accepted the racism, but some of it hurt, and I just couldn't understand this C in Portuguese because I could imitate so well. So, when I decided that I wanted to go to Brazil—and I had already been five years in Mexico after graduating from UCLA, and I had friends who were Brazilian, and I heard all the time "*Voce é como Brasileira nata.*" "You're like a native Brazilian," it was just really interesting.

I took this Japanese freighter, an immigrant ship, a Japanese boat from San Pedro, and I was gone. I was determined I wasn't coming back. My parents didn't cry or anything, but I cried. I remember being on that boat and just sobbing, as though I was being pushed into exile. They knew I was coming back. [laughing] They didn't cry at all.

But—this is the part that relates to that Portuguese class—I was detained briefly, because one of my school buddies, who's still alive—she's in her nineties—she was at the boat to meet me in the Port of Santos in the State of São Paulo. I didn't really have trouble. They didn't *arrest me* arrest me, but if she hadn't been there, I don't even know what would have happened to me. Because they thought I was a Brazilian who had stolen an American passport. And, because I had all these Ray Charles records, and I had a sewing machine, I was gone forever. I was not coming back, because I thought I wanted to live in a country with no racism. Well, that was not Brazil. [laughing]

**Zaragoza:** Because this is the early '60s?

**Gilliam:** Hm-mm. The first time I went, it's before the military dictatorship, but that's getting ready to jump off. Right? But when I came back to the U.S., five days before the March on Washington—that's

what my passport says—that March on Washington that Martin Luther King led—I came back to the United States permanently. I decided I was going to stay. I was home.

I didn't know why it was so important for me to see Mr. Zeitlin. He was my Portuguese teacher, and I loved this man. I really did. He was a great teacher. I can't say that he wasn't, because I learned Portuguese. With only a year, I learned how to speak it, read it, and write it—well. But I didn't have a consciousness of that. I can see that in hindsight. I just didn't have a consciousness of why I wanted to see him so badly.

I remember having driven to his house, just to go visit. And it was night, you know, and he's living way out in the middle of West LA, and I live in this inner-city kind of thing. It wasn't until I told him that I was detained, and I saw his face, and I realized that this is why I had to see him and tell him that face to face. I was a C student, but I was detained for being a Brazilian who had stolen an American passport. My Portuguese couldn't have been a C. It just couldn't have been. [laughing] And so then I could leave him, and I could go back into my inner-city, and my mission was done. I didn't even realize that that was my mission until I actually saw his face, you see.

So, these things happened at UCLA, but you don't even want to go into what happened in Brazil. I mean, Brazil was—mm—Brazil was also difficult. I didn't even finish the year. I stayed a year, about, in Brazil. There's a historian, who's now gone, but he has this wonderful expression: "Brazil is a place you love with all your heart and hate with all your head." [laughing] That is so true.

So, from '54 to '58, I was at UCLA. From '58 to '62-'63, I was in Mexico. And then, I spent that year, part of that time in Brazil, and then I came back in August of '63, to stay. And one of the things that you'll notice in my bio is work history. One of the most important work histories that I had was working in a prison.

**Zaragoza:** Which prison did you work in?

**Gilliam:** Las Palmas School for Girls. It was a place for basically rich, White kids. But if you were a real marshmallow, let-anyone-just-step-all-over-you type of Black kid, or Chicano, Mexican kid or whatever—you could get in there. They didn't want anybody that seemed to have any . . . I don't want to say *cojones*, but [laughing] . . .

**Zaragoza:** . . . verve.

**Gilliam:** Verve, exactly. They didn't want anyone like that. But I learned so much about race and racism. That's when I started feeling, oh, I want to go into this. I want to dig deeper into what is going

on in this country. [laughing] Not just what's going on in this country, but what's going on the hemisphere, in the world. That was a really important experience for me. Really important.

I was fired from that job for what would be called "over-identifying with an inmate." It's one of two jobs I was ever fired from. But it was a really important experience, to learn the different, subtle ways that racism manifests itself, even by, through and around other Black people.

**Zaragoza:** This is now going into the mid-'60s.

**Gilliam:** Yes.

**Zaragoza:** Movements have been going on for decades, but now, really starting to pop up and take national attention.

**Gilliam:** Exactly. And teach us. The whole country is learning. So, yeah. It's that, that makes me feel that this is a period of liberation, not just—my first feeling of real liberation was in Mexico. I mean, my father had a buddy in the post office to whom he complained to in private, saying he was worried about his kids. He was going to send—my brother had just gotten out of the service; he was going to send him with me to Mexico, but he was worried.

So, Esteban, this friend, said, "Well, I have a first cousin who lives in Mexico City. I'll write her a letter." So, that's how I got another family—we adopted each other. For my birthday party in 2016 one of the daughters in that family, and her son, they came up from Mexico City to my party. You know? So, we're a family.

**Zaragoza:** That's a deep relationship.

**Gilliam:** I called her mother "Tia," which means aunt. She was just a wonderful second mom to me. And they were real regular people. They weren't fancy. Tia had taught herself to read and write. I mean, she'd had a hard life, but she had such a *joie de vivre*, such a joy. Oh, man, I just loved her to death. I mean, she came when I got pregnant to help me to be pregnant in New York. She was just a wonderful person, and her daughters were, too. We traveled together and everything. So, that was one of the places where I gained another family.

**Zaragoza:** Are there other particular memories from that time that you get back from Brazil, up to right before your daughter is born? Memories that you'd like to share of that latter half of the '60s?

**Gilliam:** Yes. And, in a way, I'm in the process of trying to process how to write about it. Because, around '60—well, I moved to New York to escape segregation in California in part. That's when I go to

New York. I leave after I no longer have this job at Las Palmas School for Girls, and I go sort of chasing a man to New York.

And I meet this Brazilian man, Abdias do Nascimento, who identified himself as being an exile. He came with his companion, not wife. But he had been married once before. He was a playwright. I can show you some pictures later that I have that he painted. He was entering a phase of reaching out to the African experience. And I learned a lot from him, because I was also his interpreter, his interpreter/translator. That was really an important thing, to go to New York and to become—because, first of all, he was the one who introduces me to a man who hired me at the State University of New York.

It's been very hard for me to write about this, because he also was kind of . . . you know, he didn't have the same politics I had, so we disagreed on stuff. But just to be around, and to be participating in this world of interpreters and translators was really important, even though to tell you the truth, I hate interpreting—absolutely loathe it—because you don't have any identity.

**Zaragoza:** Except being someone else's mouthpiece.

**Gilliam:** Exactly. Can't stand it. So, when I get offered this job at SUNY, I'm seven months pregnant. You know? And I also get offered this job at Sarah Lawrence, where some of the students had taken, oh, there was all kinds of warfare at the school, based around the Black kids insisting that they wanted a Black teacher to teach them Writing from Experience. And I didn't know anything about teaching anybody writing, but these students, who got into this school, they were so smart, I could hardly keep up with them. They were just brilliant. And I have a book I can show you by one of these students, who published a book—*And the Sun God Said That's Hip*—as part of his work in "Writing from Experience." Right? These students gave me a baby shower!

Anyway, that was a wonderful thing. It was just wonderful. My dad gave me a birthday present of a year of his life. He left LA to come—he had just retired, and he went back to take care of—to help with my daughter for a year while this new version of the State University of New York, where—oh, there were so many battles, the most important of which was that we all agreed that we had to have equality; and equality meant 30 percent African-American, 30 percent White American, 30 percent Latino, and 10 percent Other, across the board—students, faculty and staff. Those were big battles. But the beauty about those battles is they were not based on race, they were based on other kinds of philosophical pedagogical issues. You see what I'm saying?

**Zaragoza:** Yeah.

**Gilliam:** Because there were so many Black people, you didn't have to fight over the one Black. You know what I'm saying? That was really interesting.

And there were strikes the students led. And White women who lived on Long Island got divorced, because their husbands couldn't handle the wives having an opinion. [laughing] It was really amazing. It was an exciting school to teach in. But there were all kinds of battles—battles between Black Americans and West Indians, for example—but it was an exciting time to be involved in education, you get paid and whatever.

In the middle of this timeframe, from 1970 to 1988, when I was there, I had two amazing experiences, which were, I got a job at the University of Coimbra, which is in Portugal. It's a school that was founded in 1293. You have no idea what that felt like to go, [and] realize that I was going to be teaching at a place that was founded in 1290-something.

**Zaragoza:** How long were you there?

**Gilliam:** Just a school year, but that was an amazing experience. So, I'm leaving out the fact that I went back to do my dissertation research in Brazil in 1973.

**Zaragoza:** Your daughter goes with you?

**Gilliam:** My daughter was with me. She's part of this huge adventure that we had in Brazil, when I was doing this research, because she was just learning to talk. By the time we get ready to leave Brazil, she's speaking to me in Portuguese. And we're trying to get back to New York in time for school. We're going home, and once again, somebody [laughing] thinks "Oh, no, you are not an American." Right?

**Zaragoza:** Because now, we're in dictatorship times.

**Gilliam:** The dictatorship is in full bloom, right. So, people were always giving her money, or pinching her cheeks so she'd smile, things like that. We're in the line. Let me just back up and say—because this is what has given me somewhat of a reputation in Brazil; a teeny reputation, but nonetheless, a reputation that's important, and I should mention it, because it's the reason why, in 2008, one of the research historians in Brazil came up here to do an interview with me, just like you're doing, sitting right there where you're sitting, because of this thing.

What it was, was that the military had passed a law called AI-5, Institutional Act Number 5, which said that you can't say anything about Brazil that will divide the people, and talking about race in Brazil is right there. So, Brazilians were afraid to say anything about racism in Brazil. I was asked by a



friend, “Will you do it?” I said, “I’ll only do it the day before I get ready to leave,” because I knew that they were killing priests and all kinds of things like that.

I went down, as a stupid idiot. I had no clue where I was going, or I would have left Onik’a. You know, I just didn’t have any really substantive knowledge about the country, even though I’d been there a decade before. So, it was agreed. I’m going go to this newspaper called *O Pasquim*. *O Pasquim* was . . . kind of like a mixture of *Playboy* and *The Stranger*.

Anyway, what happened was they ended up arresting this newspaper. The censorship went from state to federal. It was a huge mess. But, they didn’t publish it until I left. But when I got to the airport with Onik’a and someone had given her money, and I said, “You know, you can’t smile for money. That’s against the rules of the family. You can’t do that.” She started crying, saying, “Mommy, that’s my money,” “*Aquele é meu, mamee.*” And the soldier said, “*Aquela criança é brasileira. Onde está a autorização do pai?*” “That child is Brazilian. Where is the paternal permission?” And I didn’t have a clue where her father was.

And, yeah, huge mess. I had to leave her in Rio. And the only thing that saved me was that, in those days, working-class Black people, or people who were dressed in the initiation outfit of Candomblé—you know, Santeria—do you know anything about Santeria?

**Zaragoza:** Just a touch. You should tell some, just to give the story some of its flavor.

**Gilliam:** The African-Yoruba-based religion that’s mixed with Catholicism—not just in the Caribbean.

**Zaragoza:** Venezuela, Brazil.

**Gilliam:** In Venezuela, Cuba, Louisiana, Brazil and so forth. One dresses all in white, from head to toe. So, María, this friend, and her two kids, who were around the age of Onik’a—this man, who was a baggage carrier, I owe him so much; now that I’m older, I realize how much I owe to different people—he saw this kerfuffle, and he knew what bus line, in this huge international airport in Rio, where to find my friend. And he went out and said, “Come back. Your friend is in trouble.” “*Volte. Seu amigo está com encrenca.*” An *encrenca* is a huge mess. “Your friend is in an *encrenca.*”

So, that was Onik’a being Portuguese-dominant the first time, right? Three or four years later, when I get this job in Portugal, she couldn’t speak any Portuguese, but she became Portuguese-dominant again, only this time, metropolitan Portuguese. It’s just very, very different.

So, that was an interesting experience, teaching American Intellectual History, American studies in Coimbra right after the Carnation Revolution, of getting rid of fascism in Portugal—Salazar. That was

an amazing experience. So, Onik'a's had a lot of, as have I, really interesting—so, that was the first thing. They had this little rhyme that I am going to share. *“Preta da Guiné que lava a cara com café, Preta da Guiné que lava a cara com chulé.”* “Black girl from Guinea who washes her face in coffee, Black girl from Guinea who washes her face with toe jam.”

And she hated this. She hated the fact that kids would do this and call her “African.” She says, *“Eu sim sou Americana! Eu no sou Africana!”* “I am so American! I’m not African!” So, I figured, now I have to go to Africa. We’re so close. Portugal is so close to Africa. And her father is from Kenya. But she came down with malaria—bad—and I almost lost her. And this was a time when all the Cubans were like being haunted and hunted by Americans and everything.

We got into Guinea-Bissau with a safe conduct pass. I didn’t even use my passport. And the hospital was closed the night that she went into a coma. And there’s another debt. The guard at this closed hospital, over the weekend, he saw me just hysterical, crying. I’m carrying Onik’a with one of the students who had invited us to visit him in Guinea. And he said, “Stay here. I think I know someone who will come.” And it was a Cuban doctor who came and saved her life. He also had an Angolan assistant who was a blood specialist. So, that was kind of scary. That was in ‘76.

But, two years later, I got an offer to go teach at the University of Papua New Guinea, and I took that. So Onik’a had this life experience that’s made her very international, very global, very different. I wanted her to be just like a typical American, but that was not to be.

Papua New Guinea was—oh, god, how do I describe Papua New Guinea? It was just the most wonderful experience. My claim to fame there was organizing the first international film festival in independent Papua New Guinea.

**Zaragoza:** Wow.

**Gilliam:** So, that was amazing. And I stayed there for two years.

**Zaragoza:** Do you have any recollection of what you showed, and how many different countries those films came from, or any sense to give us a flavor.

**Gilliam:** Oh, yeah, I have a list somewhere here, but I can’t find it. I’ve been looking for it, but I did see it, I have seen it here. Because Evergreen packed me—that’s another story—and I’ve just been going through the boxes this month.

**Zaragoza:** Wow.

**Gilliam:** Yeah. Okay, the American Embassy didn't want me to have this film, but I got in touch with the filmmaker, Peter Davis, who did *Hearts and Minds*.

**Zaragoza:** Oh, wow.

**Gilliam:** He was so mad about his secretary. I didn't talk to him, I talked to his secretary, or somebody. He lent me his personal copy—which is interesting. That's something that I share with Coimbra. Because I took with me teaching this American intellectual history, I wanted to teach the history of activists like myself, and I was really militant. In the '70s and '80s I was like [makes guttural sound], you know, really, yeah.

So, there's this film called *The Sound of Rushing Water* that a group of Indians from South America, who are erroneously labelled "headhunters"—the Shuar—they asked this White American—Jewish American, actually, because at least my New York experience is that Horowitz is Jewish—Bruce Horowitz who made the most amazing film. And I have to say—[laughing]—so you can't say this, but I lied when I came back from Portugal. They said, "What is this film about?" And I said—trying to be very sort of stuffy, a stuffy academic—"I'm an anthropologist. This is an anthropological film about the Shuar people."

So, he went into his drawer, pulls out this drawer, and has this list of body parts that I'm not supposed to have. Any film coming into the United States couldn't show these body parts. One of them was the thighs. Of course, the first scene of this movie has this shaman taking this drug or something. And it's really funny, because that guy believed me. That's why you can't—I don't want to say that I did something wrong. [laughing] So, you've got to take that out. But that was just really wonderful.

The name of the film festival is I Kamuapin, which sort of means moving on up, or coming up, improving oneself. And that's in *Tok Pisin*, or in Pidgin English. The Ambassador said, "These people are too emotional for that film." And I was so upset, I just was determined. Because what I wanted to show—the rules of the film festival—Oh! Hold on.

Okay, one of the things was that the organizer of the University of Papua New Guinea Film Festival, Angela Gilliam, da da da da. I can't find the . . . oh, I guess I do have it all. In any event, this was from the newspaper.

So, what else did I have? *Hearts and Minds*. They let us have it. Oh, the African New Yorker Films wouldn't let me have. They said like "New Guinea?" [said with astonishment] You know, as if I had said, I don't know, some nineteenth-century, closedminded, I come from the only civilized culture in

the world. You know, that kind of stuff. And they wouldn't let me, and I just recently found the letter that Ousmane Sembéne himself wrote me, saying that I could have these, his films.

**Zaragoza:** Wow.

**Gilliam:** And that he was sending this message to New Yorker Films. So, the next year, I did "Africa Through the Eyes of One of Its Sons." There were like five films there, but this had around 20. So, the American one was *Hearts and Minds*. There was—you know the guy who does Indian films from India?

**Zaragoza:** Ray?

**Gilliam:** No, no, no.

**Zaragoza:** Satyajit Ray?

**Gilliam:** Oh, gosh, you know, he does all these films about caste. Anyway, I had one of his films about caste, because we had a lot of people, especially in the law faculty, who had department meetings in which the Indians were arguing from a position of caste, not about the program or the pedagogy. They brought this Indian problem to Papua New Guinea to argue at the University of Papua New Guinea. So, I thought, oh, okay, we need that film. So, we had that one about caste. He did three films.

**Zaragoza:** Yeah, *The Apu Trilogy*.

**Gilliam:** Yeah, whoever did that. Okay, so we had one of his. I think the most important one to Papua New Guineans—oh, *The Last Supper*. Honey, the missionaries tried to get me deported with that one. It was from Cuba. It's the best film about slavery you can ever imagine. *The Last Supper*. Let's see, what else?

**Zaragoza:** Is that Gloria Reynoso?

**Gilliam:** Uh-uh. There's a book called *Sugarmill*, which I have about Cuba, and that film is based on that book, about a sugar mill in Cuba in the nineteenth century. It was really good. Anyway, I got that one. The Soviets gave me—the Russians gave me—more than one. I can't remember what they were, though. But the one that was really good from Russia was actually done by a Japanese director, *Dersu Uzala*. Have you heard of that?

**Zaragoza:** Uh-uh.

**Gilliam:** Oh, honey, you've got to see *Dersu Uzala*. *Dersu* was a Dostoyevsky novel, okay? Nineteenth century. It's about a Siberian hunter, who lives like, you know, he belongs to a nomadic people, da da da da. So, the urban soldiers, who were based in either Moscow, St. Petersburg or whatever, they

kind of, when they find him or come across him, they see him as kind of like White Americans would see Native Americans back in the day.

**Zaragoza:** The kind of savage stereotype.

**Gilliam:** The savage stereotype. The whole thing. They need him. Time and time again, he saves their butts, because he's the only one who knows the terrain—that film was the one that the students really loved, because they could see themselves in it. I felt really proud. And you know who directed that? Oh, the guy who did . . . you know, the Japanese master.

**Zaragoza:** Oh, Kurosawa.

**Gilliam:** Kurosawa. Yes, he did *Dersu Uzala*. So, I had around 20, 18 to 20 films. That was the biggest thing I did in Papua New Guinea.

**Zaragoza:** Yeah, that's a big accomplishment, actually. I mean, that's international. It's not like getting a bunch of films from people around the city.

**Gilliam:** No.

**Zaragoza:** It was around the world.

**Gilliam:** It was really important to me, because I came there right after independence, and people were still talking about all these people able to be dependent, and take care of themselves, or they still need us. That whole narrative was there in Papua New Guinea, the whole narrative.

As a matter of fact—well, I shouldn't tell you this one... But this is what really gave me the feeling that I've done something decent here. When a student of mine said, "We were primitive until the missionaries came, and now we're on our way to being civilized," I was horrified. Absolutely horrified. I was a Latin American Studies major, [and] I stopped all that stuff, and decided, before I left there, I was going to get together and start a book on how this anthropology, this savage anthropology stuff, the savages stuff.

Okay, this is really germane to what I'm saying, too. This kind of anthropology is just ruinous, not just to the people we presume to be describing, but to ourselves. Right? Okay. So, this puts me in touch with this mission of writing a book. You want to see the book?

**Zaragoza:** Yeah.

**Gilliam:** This puts me in touch with Archie Mafeje, a South African writer, who critiqued social sciences. He critiqued it. Who else? Oh, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. This whole primitive narrative stuff. I need guidance, because I can't get it from here. You see? I felt I couldn't get it from. Who else? Ngũgĩ.

Archie Mafeje, for sure. And he wrote me a couple of letters, too. [She returns with the book.] So, that's one of my greatest accomplishments.

**Zaragoza:** Uh-huh. *Confronting the Margaret Mead Legacy: Scholarship, Empire and the South Pacific*. And that comes directly out of experience with a student in Papua New Guinea, though its seeds, of course, as you've been telling, had existed your whole life. So, you have these three big international experiences while you're at NYU.

**Gilliam:** SUNY, not NYU.

**Zaragoza:** Oh, yeah, SUNY. And which SUNY is it?

**Gilliam:** Old Westbury.

**Zaragoza:** Okay. First, you go to Mexico; then to SUNY; then you go to Brazil; then to Portugal; and then to Papua New Guinea. And then, you go back to SUNY with all this worldly experience. How does that change your approach when you arrive back in New York City?

**Gilliam:** Well, it wasn't so hard, because—and forgive my narrowmindedness, but New York is kind of international. [chuckles]

**Zaragoza:** Right.

**Gilliam:** And I lived in the heart of the city. And in the '80s, okay, what happens to me in the '80s before I come to Evergreen, I had a radio program, *Every Woman's Space*, or, *Women in the World in the 1980s*—it changed its name. But not just that. I also represented an NGO. They criticized me a lot, some of the young anthropologists, because I wasn't sufficiently feminist enough. I had a lot of trouble with what I called "bourgeois feminism," where you just sort of, you know, you want to be able to do what men do, as opposed to transform the culture. And I just, you know—Jean Kirkpatrick is not a revolutionary, you know. Margaret Thatcher was not what women around the world were trying to become. You know what I'm saying?

**Zaragoza:** Yep.

**Gilliam:** And a lot of people couldn't understand that. Even a lot of gay people—lesbian thinkers—would fall into that thing of assuming that the fact that I am gay or lesbian means I have reached some whatever. No, that's not what it is. You've got to be on the side of human beings, and you have to be committed to the notion that *everybody's* baby deserves support and nurturing. I mean, it has nothing to do with some of the stuff that people, you know—and I see that that's still a problem, still unaddressed.

**Zaragoza:** Glass ceiling versus quicksand bottom kind of stuff.

**Gilliam:** Yeah, yeah. So, it really . . . let's see, what else did I do in '80 that was so interesting? '80 was, for me, my big year, I mean, my big decade. So, I come back in '80 from Papua New Guinea, and in '80, I go to Cuba for the first time, with three generations—my father, my daughter, who was 10, and me. We go to Cuba, the three generations, and we become part of another family. So, [chuckles] that begins in '80, that whole family thing, with becoming attached to Cuba. It's very deep. And it's still in existence, so that, this little girl, who's reciting a poem in 1980, and Onik'a's like, oh my god, about she will defend Cuba, and this, that and the other. Onik'a's going "God, who thinks about defending a country when you're 10?" [laughing]

I have a picture of her and Esmilidia together. In any event, Esmilidia grows up to have two kids, who are now like, I would say, 27 and 17. Onik'a is 17. So, Onik'a, her middle name is Alegna, which is Angela spelled backwards. So, the Cuban Onik'a is named after this Onik'a, my daughter. So, little Onik'a, who is now 17—so, she's not little—but we would just stay together. And I tried not to break laws. You know, I tried to not go, but this was a poor family who recited this poem, and it's been quite wonderful knowing them, and having another family in another country. [laughing] You know what I'm saying?

**Zaragoza:** Yeah.

**Gilliam:** Okay, so that was '80. Then, from like '80 to '85, I'm working with the UN as a representative of an NGO—a non-governmental organization—called . . . oh, god . . . it's the International Women's Anthropology Conference. I went, and those are the women who sort of . . . they don't . . . whatever.

But when I was in Papua New Guinea, I went to New Caledonia for the first time. And in New Caledonia, I got really involved in that national liberation struggle, so that when I was in New York representing IWAC, a lot of times the South Pacific Forum nations would ask me to speak on behalf of the Nuclear-free and Independent Pacific [Movement], and I did that on at least three, using New Caledonia as the anchor, as the excuse and stuff.

Let's see. I also had a radio program. The critique that I am very close to the UN has a certain validity, because I think that Ronald Reagan, in the '80s, tried to just destroy the United Nations. And I felt that it was my job, as an American citizen, to do everything I could to keep it going, especially because, you know, at UNESCO, UNESCO was really trying to keep the independence, you know, and to spread the concept of independent nations, fighting the neoliberalism; that they also were spreading that too, who has the right to speak for whom? So, it wasn't just the NIEO—the national, or

international, economic NIEO—the Nationwide-something, I can't remember, I have it all written down because I wrote about this, about [how] Ronald attacks the Third World. NIEO is the New International Economic Order! But also, who represents who? Who gets to represent who? And, do women have a say in all that? Etcetera.

So, I go to the UN meeting in Nairobi, and I organize a session at that big meeting of women that the issues of UNESCO are the same issues that women have been using to fight forever. So, that was good. I felt that that was an important thing to do.

Now, I think it's because of that the Cubans invited me to be part of a research group. Somebody must have met me in Nairobi or something. It was just this big thing. But I started doing—I can only remember one or two times going to Cuba to do research. But the Cubans protected an American like me. I didn't have to spend a dime. You weren't supposed to spend a cent, not one red penny in Cuba according to U.S. government policy. I never brought back a thing. I never spent a thing. They fed me. I had a place to stay. We would just talk and stuff in doing this research.

In any event, after I went to—okay, so besides Nairobi in '85, in October or November, around October, I went to Uruguay to a special session of the Latin American Parliament on the debt. I went for a little small newspaper, a Black-American, internationally oriented newspaper. I went with somebody else. We went to that. That was important for me, because everybody was there about the debt except the person from Ecuador, who was interested in fighting the drug thing, or having some sense that made sense. So, I decided—aha—this is the person I want to interview.

Is this interesting to you?

**Zaragoza:** Sure.

**Gilliam:** So, when I went to interview him, I decided to take one of my questions from Crockett and Tubbs, which was the name of that program.

**Zaragoza:** *Miami Vice*.

**Gilliam:** Yeah. "Is it true that Andean countries pay or service the debt, pay on the interest, with drug money?" Oh, this man just chewed me out. Oh, it was just embarrassing. But it was very interesting. So, I wrote up what he said. I found recently the papers. I'm going to just quote it from that [chuckles] for the memoir.

But it was interesting. He said, "You are the market. How dare you? How dare you come down here and blame the Ecuadorians? We are stuck between a producer country, on one hand, and a refiner



country on the other, and you blame us for the drug thing? It is you! When you fix Humboldt County, you can come talk to me.” Humboldt County? Where is that? I had no clue! [laughing] Isn’t that funny? That was one of my best international experiences. “When you can take care of Humboldt County, you can come talk to me.”

**Zaragoza:** You have amassed, over this period, Angela, vast international experience, vast academic experience, vast life experience, and so many different things that you’re all bringing together—journalism, activism, academics, international relations, seeing and experiencing the world with your daughter. Then, what brings you to Evergreen? How do you make that transition?

**Gilliam:** Well . . . what brings me to Evergreen is my dad, to whom I owe a lot. I may have said he’s got Alzheimer’s by this time. Somebody back at SUNY told me that they were looking for someone of color.

Patrick Hill was the one, and he didn’t get along so well with other people at the Tacoma campus. But when I applied for a job, he’s the one who came. He used to teach at Binghamton—not Binghamton, that’s Upstate New York—Stony Brook. He used to teach at Stony Brook. So, he had some kind of business he had to do, and he wanted to meet me while he was there.

**Zaragoza:** Because he had somehow heard about you through your book, or through . . . ?

**Gilliam:** No, no. I didn’t have a book at that time. I was just a regular person, going to the UN, doing stuff. And my mother died in ’78, right before I went to Papua New Guinea. She made me promise to not leave my dad. But he couldn’t really deal by himself. And I have two brothers, and it’s not fair to leave to the wives—because, you know, that’s how it works out; the women will end up doing the caring, being the caregivers—and I figured I owed this to my dad. I owed it to him.

So, I applied for a job in California, where the Department of Anthropology was full of young Reaganite people, and I just . . . you know? I didn’t want to do that. But in any event, I just realized I had to become his caregiver. He lived in California, but if I brought him to New York, if I lost him, I’d never find him. I knew that. So, that’s why I came.

And I guess it’s that conglomeration, that mishmash of all that stuff that you just mentioned—the journalism mixed with the experimental academic stuff—all of that mixed together made him think I would work on the Olympia campus. And I wasn’t all that thrilled or enthusiastic. I knew I had to do something. I knew I had to get into some situation where I could take him with me, but I didn’t know what to do. So, I would sort of find excuses. [laughing]

I mean, not really negatively. I don't mean that as negatively as it sounds. But when he offered me this job, I said, "Oh, well, you know, oh gosh . . ." and I'm looking around at my apartment—it's huge—in New York, and it's got junk everywhere. "Mm, I don't know if I'd be able to pack in time." And he said—and I quote—"We'll pack you." I'm packing now! [laughing]

**Zaragoza:** Thirty years later.

**Gilliam:** Right! "We'll pack you." "Mm, even my car?" And he shipped my car. I had no excuses. Everything I made up, I had no excuses. Now, some of the old guys didn't like me at all. They didn't like—

**Zaragoza:** Like already, prior to you getting out to Evergreen?

**Gilliam:** Oh, yeah. They were having trouble with Pete Bohmer. Oh, and then there was another person, a Chilean—oh, what was his name? Do you know the guy from Chile?

**Zaragoza:** Yeah. He's since gone.

**Gilliam:** Where did he go?

**Zaragoza:** I think he retired.

**Gilliam:** Oh, okay. Well, that makes sense.

**Zaragoza:** He went back to Chile, I think.

**Gilliam:** Really?

**Zaragoza:** I think so. Don't quote me on that. I'm not sure. And I'll think of his name before we're done talking.

**Gilliam:** He shouldn't have been put in that class.

**Zaragoza:** Jorge.

**Gilliam:** Jorge. Right. He shouldn't have been put in that class with those people. He should not have been. Now, I wasn't put in one that was much better—Jeanne Hahn and somebody else, I can't remember.

**Zaragoza:** Oh, Jorge, his first placement was in a teaching team that . . .

**Gilliam:** . . . that he should never have been in. And these guys were not used to Latinos who sort of fight back.

**Zaragoza:** Yeah. Jorge Gilbert.

**Gilliam:** Jorge Gilbert, exactly. Now, I have to admit, Jorge wasn't always a charming fellow, but there was a lot of—

**Zaragoza:** But he was a strong guy.

**Gilliam:** Yes, that's what I'm saying.

**Zaragoza:** He was a sovereign human being.

**Gilliam:** That's what I'm saying. They were not used to a Latino—any brown man—who would disagree with their interpretation of tyranny. That's the only argument I remember, that he had the temerity, and the unmitigated gall, to suggest that they were misidentifying who had the tyranny. What? So, we came together.

**Zaragoza:** Who was in his teaching team?

**Gilliam:** Oh, god, it was like some of the old White guys that should never have agreed to take anybody brown. Never, never. To them, freedom, liberty, justice, that only belonged to Americans and stuff like that. I mean, they were really provincial. Well, literally, it's the tyranny. They couldn't handle how Jorge—and he talked about Chile, and 9/11, the first 9/11. The whole thing. Mm, they weren't ready. They were not ready.

**Zaragoza:** Like Nicanor Parra said, "USA, where liberty is a statue"...

**Gilliam:** Oh, yeah. [laughter] Actually, Barbara Smith asked me once to go, I think it was . . . oh, he died. What's his name? He was gay. He was an attorney also. Anyway, Chuck Nisbet wanted to pick on Pete Bohmer. Somehow, she asked me to whatever, and all I remember is going [laughing] to sit in on this meeting. And all I remember is "Excuse me?"

One of the things that I've learned about seminar-ing is that you try, if possible, to look at everybody as you talk, so that everyone feels included. Why does everyone just look at Chuck, like he's the only important person to be addressed here? I find that—so he just [makes guttural sound]. But that's how I had to fight constantly. And one day, I told—I had gone there a few years when I told Pete that I didn't want to fight anymore, and that I was not going to go to any more faculty meetings, because I wanted to give White faculty the opportunity to exercise leadership on race. Done. Finished. [laughing]

Yeah, you can put that in there, because I said it. I did say it, so you could keep that in there. And I refused to go to any other meetings after that. But I felt that Chuck . . . yeah, he didn't have enough respect. And there were a lot of people like that, so this story, you'll really like.

I went to some conference at Harvard—I can't remember, but it was at Harvard. It was some conference. And I was talking to somebody, and he was wondering, "What is it like to teach at Evergreen?" I said, "Well, you know, 40 percent of the faculty are absolutely incredible. They're wonderful. Forty percent of the faculty are absolutely grotesque, and you shouldn't have anything to do with them—ever, ever. The other 20 percent, in the middle, are either great or awful, depending upon the rest of the team. But I found 40 percent." And he goes "You mean you found 40 percent that you really enjoy teaching with? Wow." [laughter] Isn't that funny? He thought that 40 percent was a very—

**Zaragoza:** Quite a lot.

**Gilliam:** Was a lot! [laughter]

**Zaragoza:** Part of that might be because a place like Harvard or wherever else is so much based upon competition. And it's not like that doesn't exist at Evergreen, but that it's de-emphasized in some ways, or in-formalized in some ways.

**Gilliam:** Mm-hm.

**Zaragoza:** And so other kinds of values and ways of being and working have a chance. Do you think that's true?

**Gilliam:** I mean, like Nancy Allen. Mm, But I didn't so much like Nancy Allen as much as, let's say, for me—let me just give you an example. Therese Saliba was really special. I really liked teaching with Therese.

We taught—and this is one of the courses I put down—Orientalism and Afrocentricity. And I was driving Ngũgĩ from here to Evergreen, where he's going to give this lecture. So, he's reading over the syllabus, and he says, "Oh, I would have loved to have taken a course like this."

Now, that was the height of a compliment. From Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o? I just—you know what I mean? That he, an African, who spent time in prison for insisting that an African language—[laughing]—oh, man, that he would say that about a course that we had designed, that was the height of—it was just, how do you explain it? It was just wonderful. It was just wonderful. [chuckles]

But, yeah, some of the other people were just not so thrilling. Who else did I like? I did like teaching The Black and the Green with Patrick.

**Zaragoza:** Did you do that one a few times, or did you do that once?

**Gilliam:** We did it more than once, but the second time, we added Larry Mosqueda. So, we changed the name to Hidden Histories, I think. If I'm not mistaken, that's what I recall was that we were teaching this whole African-American and Irish-American thing, both from this precolonial situation in Europe, or in Africa. And then, as Americans. We had this fantastic film by this guy named St. Clair Bourne. Oh, god, he was just wonderful. And his film, it was just an unusual experience for me.

**Zaragoza:** What made that program so special?

**Gilliam:** Well . . . that's an interesting question, because I don't think Patrick would say the same thing that I would say. I would start off by saying two things. One starts in Portugal, because when I was teaching in Portugal, that famous scene where some guy takes the flag and pokes it in the Black guy's—remember that scene? He pokes a Black guy in the stomach with the point of a huge flagpole. You didn't see this?

**Zaragoza:** Are you talking about *Burn*? What's the film you're talking about?

**Gilliam:** No, it's not a film. It actually happened in Boston.

**Zaragoza:** Oh-h-h.

**Gilliam:** And I was in Portugal.

**Zaragoza:** I don't know about it, no.

**Gilliam:** Oh. Well, I looked it up, and that man lived. He survived. But here I am, teaching [laughing] American Intellectual History, and there's this scene of this Black guy being speared by a White guy with the American flag. I mean, what more nightmarish situation to describe and explain could that have been?

**Zaragoza:** Yes.

**Gilliam:** I was just, oh, god. So, to be able to sort of like teach around that in some kind of responsible way was very important to me. The other thing was that, while I was still in New York, there was a program on the same radio station where I had—you know, Pacifica. This was called *Behind the Green Curtain*, this program. And those people invited me to join a special program that they were going to do, where they were going to interview Bernadette Devlin McAliskey. You know Bernadette Devlin?

**Zaragoza:** No.

**Gilliam:** Oh, she was this Irish militant feminist—just an incredible person—and she was in New York. This is what I miss about [laughing] the East Coast, is being close to stuff like this. So, I asked her a question.

I asked Bernadette a question. Oh, yeah, she was talking about how close the Irish identified with the civil rights movement in the United States. So I was asking, “Could you explain that, how you identify so closely to the civil rights struggle? And yet, there’s this thing, why is there such a difference between the Irish in Ireland and what happens in Boston?”

What she said was, “Well, the Irish, we share something very special with African-Americans; that, the minute we get up off our knees”—I think she said; I seem to recall “off our knees,” and I have a CD or DVD called *Off Our Knees*, so I’m pretty sure that’s what she said—“that as soon as we get up off our knees, we see how both of us share how close we’ve come to the ceiling.” You see? In other words, there’s not that you’ve come to the top; that you’ve reached your pinnacle already, and that that both African-Americans and Irish share.

So, to be able to teach a course and look at the complexity of all of that stuff together with somebody who—even though Maureen says he wasn’t so *Irish* Irish. But he was Irish enough for the students to feel that they were getting the real deal, to feel that he was approachable with their dilemmas that they had about race and stuff like that.

**Zaragoza:** How did the students deal with the complex issues that inevitably come up in a program like that?

**Gilliam:** Mm. Well . . . to tell you the truth, I only remember some of the messes that I had. And this was when I just adored Patrick, when students would come to complain about something in my seminar, and he would like—“Shh!”—just cut it off. “You’re not in my seminar. You have to go to your seminar leader.” Just dismiss [them]. “No, you’re not going to play that number with me.” He was really good.

That’s what I really liked about, not just Patrick, but Michael Vavrus, when I taught with him. Oh, Don Bantz. I taught a course with Don Bantz. Did you know him?

**Zaragoza:** Yep. He was the Provost when I arrived, and then, for five years after, maybe six.

**Gilliam:** Okay. I’m trying to think of when it was more problematic, because that was always like a—there were different ways the students had of sort of like being ornery. One of them was in International Feminism, when they refused to read—it was amazing—most of the White women would refuse to read a book, and that book was *Medical Apartheid*. No, no, no. No, it wasn’t *Medical Apartheid*, it was *Killing the Black Body*. They would just—uh-uh—weren’t going to read it. And you could tell that they hadn’t read it by the sophomoric discussion that they would try to bluff it in seminar. And sometimes, it would be the good students.

Yeah, that was a mystery. That was one of the mysteries. Why didn't they, you know? I know it's not an easy subject. But it wasn't an easy subject to teach either.

**Zaragoza:** That's right.

**Gilliam:** And the premise of *Killing the Black Body* is that not everybody has the same position on abortion. So, I don't know. But Patrick, like with Jimmy Lowe coming into class to talk about lynching, it was like really—to have that young woman come up to me and say, "I'm too sensitive and too fragile to have been forced to hear this man talk about lynching," I was stunned. I mean, most of these things that I remember left me speechless. You know?

Sometimes they were interesting, like . . . there were just weird things sometimes. Strange. But I remember the things that were odd, and that were wonderful and odd at the same time, mostly. So, let's say, I remember Black Feminist Thought. I had some men in there, in Black Feminist Thought. One guy wrote a magnificent paper called . . . oh, what's the name of that? . . . 1896, you know, that law passed?

"Plessy v. Ferguson Meets Don't Ask, Don't Tell." I mean, that took some thinking, where he took two moments in history, both revolving around refusal, rebuttal, rejection of a specific group, and how it shapes the history. Oh, it was fabulous. It was a gay guy, who clearly—when Don't Ask, Don't Tell was really new and everything. But I thought, that was a really amazing piece of thought to come up with that.

Then there was one of my favorite situations, where someone has this discovery. It's Maids and Madams. I can't talk about it in my book, so I might as well tell you, because it's going to reveal the name of a student. Because it's the name of a course, and he was the only male. He was the only man in the class. Right? So, it's Maids and Madams. We looked at all of the issues of power between—

This was Maids and Madams. I don't think there was anybody else Black. I don't remember anybody, you know, a woman who was Black. I think they were all White women taking this class. So, the only Black person is this guy. He's really quiet, and he calls me "ma'am," which means he's from the South.

So, he's having this lightbulb-over-the-head moment, and he goes [said with a Southern accent], "Well, let me see if I understand this right. Now, my roommates, they know I don't like a lot of junk, and they leave it for me to do, to clean up, so I can have it as clean as I want it to be. Are you saying that that means that my labor is being feminized?" [laughing] And all the women are clapping! It was so funny when he said, "Are you saying my labor is being feminized?" Oh, god, it was the greatest

moment! It was so funny. It was hilarious. “Yes, that’s what we’re saying!” Anyway, that was one of my favorite teaching and learning moments.

But who else? What other class? The example that I put in that letter that I wrote to the whole campus about the Day of Absence.

**Zaragoza:** Tell us about that.

**Gilliam:** Let’s see. I have that with me, because I sent it to the newspaper, and I’m really glad they didn’t publish it. Okay. Oh, no, this isn’t the original.

**Zaragoza:** Angela, when did you send this?

**Gilliam:** I don’t know when I sent it. Well, this is all during this time, in June, around the Day of Absence stuff.

**Zaragoza:** So, this year.

**Gilliam:** This year, right. So, this is one of my cases, right? So I described what I learned, and the fact that [reading] “I was the sole African-American woman faculty member permanently assigned to the Olympia campus from 1988 to 2004.” [chuckles]

[Reading] “Let me share one of my cases. Imagine a circular group of enthusiastic students, in which there is a single student of color. She has attempted to introduce a comment grounded in her experiences as the daughter of farmworkers. Students listened to what she said, but after she stopped speaking, the group returned to their prior analysis without acknowledging her contribution. After seminar, I told her, ‘You have to do something to change that. If you don’t tackle it, I will have to. But if you find a way, you will have learned how to address a complicated meeting on the job. And if you use our seminar strategy of *mutually respectful dissent*, some day you might even feel comfortable facing a difficult superior. If I do it, you will take none of that with you as something learned.’ Not only did she do it, she eventually became one of the campus leaders.”

She was Latina. Everybody else was White. And they were sweet kids, but they were not raised to pay attention to someone like her.

**Zaragoza:** To “the help.”

**Gilliam:** To the help, exactly! [laughing]

**Zaragoza:** As they would see it.



**Gilliam:** Some of the faculty, they sit back and they say, “No, you’re not supposed to direct them. They’re supposed to work this out.” Uh-uh. No. After my first year, I realized I couldn’t do that. No, we were going to have to be a little bit more inventive or something. I couldn’t just let something like that happen.

But that woman, I wonder what happened to her? She became a real leader of the students of color on campus.

**Zaragoza:** Of this period, from ’88 to 2004, what were some of the major events that you remember going on on campus that were kind of pivotal, or that led to some kind of change?

**Gilliam:** What I remember is the year of the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting was in Seattle, because I was teaching a class to which we had given a nasty name, a name to scare the students to death. Because my experience was the more you scared them to death with, oh, this is going to be so difficult and so hard and so impossible, that’s the way you get the best students [chuckles] is to scare them half to death.

So, the WTO year—’99, I think it was—the students were wonderful. But it was complicated, because we had, you know, just the whole process of defining—oh, what was the name of it? Interrogations: Whiteness, Maleness, and the Morality of Wealth. Oh, boy. We figured we would have a small class. No, everybody came, all the students of color, especially the women, all of the—and there was one student from a country I can’t say, because you’ll know immediately who it is, because she’d be so easy to identify. She was so way ahead of everybody, it was all I could do to keep up with her.

But that was a special year, because a lot of Evergreeners would come into Seattle to participate in that. That was an amazing year. And all these people from different parts of the world, who were experts on things like neoliberalism, or Vandana Shiva, you know, these biggies. It was just amazing.

1992, or ’91-’92, was a big year for me, because I left the school to my daughter. I felt I didn’t want her to have to compete, and be on Evergreen campus, while she’s in her last year. That was her last year. She graduated in ’92.

**Zaragoza:** And where did you go?

**Gilliam:** I think I went to the place I went more than once, which was Seattle Central. That was an amazing experience. The immigrants who were there when I had a special little group, they were actually immigrants that would take your class, as opposed to Evergreen. That was really enjoyable. Really enjoyable, ’92.

One year, I taught *The Redneck Manifesto*. I taught that because I really, I loved it—it was this complexity that you speak of that’s so interesting. Let me tell you, that book was so problematic, because the author used an epithet for Black people. Either that, or the editor changed his language. I always suspected that he really wasn’t thinking, the author, I can’t remember his name. Jim Goad.

This one day, I think it was—I don’t know which quarter it was, because I left the whole year to Onik’a—but one of these years, we were working around that book, and that textbook was hard, because the White students had never tried to talk about “redneck” versus “White trash.” Well, I saw the epithet, but what they were trying to say about both the concept of “redneck” and “White trash” was that they were not epithets, but rather, there were ways that White people in the Northwest were trying to find a way of identifying themselves with pride, because everybody else had one of those ethnic labels and they didn’t have one.

They had an interesting—and they were really—you could see that they were trying to use *mutually respectful dissent*. Now, I only had two people of color in the class, and I was the third person. And I always tried to not be the third one that gives the students when they—lots of students of color, especially women, you could feel them pulling you into their world, as you’re not just Angela Gilliam, the faculty. You are a woman of color. [chuckles] And you belong over here with us. And that this was my constant battle, even at Evergreen.

Now, it wasn’t so much at this particular—this was North Seattle, and they were really interesting, talking about the flag, so I know they’re having—I mean, I just remember them. And they were both respectful, but trying hard to let you know how they felt, but in a way that wouldn’t be offensive. All these students. It was quite interesting.

And, I have to say—maybe it was because I told them, and I did—I felt absolutely that chapter two of *The Redneck Manifesto* that deals with being a serf, and what serfdom meant in Europe at a particular time, and why that would pull so many people out of Europe into another—or, as the Portuguese would say, “We went to sea because we had nothing to do on land.” [chuckles] Eduardo Lourenço, so that’s his line. But, yeah, I appreciated that. And I tried to keep a stance of appropriate distance, but at the same time, be there with them. It was hard.

See, some people don’t even know what that begins to feel like. We don’t even have that kind of pedagogy—and we should be doing it at Evergreen. I don’t know. It’s interesting.

**Zaragoza:** For you, during your time at Evergreen, what were some of your major accomplishments, contributions, successes?

**Gilliam:** Okay. I would say, I was elected Speaker of the faculty in 2001. The Inaugural Lecture in 1988 on *Black Athena*.

**Zaragoza:** Do you want to talk a little bit more about that, the Inaugural Lecture?

**Gilliam:** Well, it's my joke, really, because there's no such thing in the United States as an Inaugural Lecture. That's strictly Queen's English. Those two-to-four-hour lectures that [she closes the door].

Well, let me just say, one of the things that I remember about Martin's [Bernal] book, or Martin's discussion. I wrote—I let him see—it was taped, so I let him see—or hear—what I said, and he really liked it, Martin did. And that begins this friendship between us, in '88.

But he also told me that he had gotten a letter from the publisher saying that some prisoners had asked the office to write him, and ask if they could borrow a copy of that, *Black Athena*, and maybe share it. And he was very proud of that, and he did. He said, "Yes." And after six months, he said that they said, "We enjoyed it immensely. We learned so much. Thank you so much for lending it to us." And it was something in his life that he felt was really important that people could see that this book could have been that important to that population. It's clear that he had something in mind, close to what I was envisioning, for the importance of that book.

How I saw it when it came was this total interrogation, or critique, of this concept of civilization and primitive and everything, and it only reinforced my own commitment to critiquing the concept of—and all of my academic work has been to challenge who's primitive and who's civilized. That's been my whole thing. So, that book helped a lot, even though I liked the criticism, too, the people saying—when I say I like it, I mean it made me think. People—who was it?—one of the Senegalese thinkers—I've got his book, too, somewhere—he was saying that you're not really seeing—well, you're seeing it's coming from Egypt, but you're not seeing how much of Egypt is Sub-Saharan, and what does that mean?

**Zaragoza:** That it's just contact point.

**Gilliam:** Yeah.

**Zaragoza:** But it comes up through that place.

**Gilliam:** Mm-hm. So, that book made me very sensitive to volume one—I think it's Volume One, or Two—of that UNESCO set of books called *The General History of Africa*. It is an amazing . . . no wonder that Reagan administrative folks were at war with it from the very beginning. I'm so sorry.

So, this whole thing of "primitive" versus "civilized." Which way is moving forward? Which way is backward? Who has the right to define which? And why did it cause so many people to be so upset?

That was all a part of what I thought, well, that's interesting. *Not Out of Africa* by Mary Lefkowitz is the name of a book that I have.

**Zaragoza:** Yep.

**Gilliam:** And the anger that is in that. Okay, what does that mean? So, because of that, I took opportunities to have Martin talk about his book, and its relationship maybe to anthropology, in sessions that I organized. For example, I organized the session called "Blacks and Jews 1992: Where are we going?" Something like that. He's Jewish, but very lightly Jewish. I mean, he wasn't like somebody who thought about Judaism 24 hours a day whatsoever, but he did have a background of Jewish identity. So, because of that, I asked him to participate in "Blacks and Jews 1992: Where are we going?" that was in 1992 in San Francisco.

But there was also a book *The Social Construction of the Past* that I worked on with some English people, and Martin had, mm, I think, possibly his best piece, or his best argument that he makes on this long road in *Black Athena*. It's where he's showing how it relates directly to the United States. Hold on, because I have it.

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**Begin Part 2 of 2 of Angela Gilliam on 8-29-17**

**Zaragoza:** Oh, I do remember this book.

**Gilliam:** The thing is that he helped me to deepen this notion, or his critique, and helped me to be able to use his work to think more deeply about what I was trying to do in that whole business of primitive versus civilized.

**Zaragoza:** And then, for you, other successes, contributions to the college that you can remember, or that you want to highlight?

**Gilliam:** Well, I wouldn't say this directly, but when Les Purce was there—when I say I'm not trying to hide from it, I'm just saying I'd have to think about it more—but I did write him a letter—Les—to say, "Thank you for sitting me next to Eduardo Galeano at the dinner at your house." I mean, I never thanked him. So, I did—that's in here somewhere—and he said, "Sometime in August"—and clearly, August has passed, but that he would come up after his children or something come here; that we would talk about that visit, 1991, I think it was, that Eduardo Galeano was here.

Les was President, and he invited me to his house for dinner. I don't remember saying anything to him, I was so—it was like being a 10-year-old with a movie star. [laughing] Ngũgĩ was like that, except that we just took Ngũgĩ. Whether he would have wanted it to be like that or not, I don't know.

But he allowed himself to be just sort of absorbed, Ngũgĩ did, when we brought him to campus. But this was . . . you know, that *Broken Veins*, that book, which was just the whole hemisphere.

**Zaragoza:** *Open Veins [of Latin America]*.

**Gilliam:** *Open Veins*. Right. So, to sit next to him at dinner—I know because I spoke Spanish; that’s the only reason [laughing] why. But it was just—I mean, I didn’t know what to say. This was such a major event. That’s one of the nice things about being the only one, sometimes. [laughing] When you’re the only one, then you get to do these things more frequently. Yeah, that was great.

**Zaragoza:** Were there other things that you wished you had done while you were at Evergreen?

**Gilliam:** Yes. I really needed to live in Seattle, but I really missed the people that I met in Olympia. I wanted to say I lived in Seattle. There’s a part of I-5, when you’re getting ready to make this curve; and the minute you make this curve, off in the distance you see all these big, tall buildings, and it looks sort of just like New York. Oh-h-h, I’m back home! I did feel like that, every single time I came in, especially because I sometimes fought sleep on the road near Fife. But I missed the people, the really good people. Like Anne, or Therese. You know what I mean?

**Zaragoza:** Yeah.

**Gilliam:** People who—yeah, I just missed them. I couldn’t keep up the friendship. They weren’t coming in to Seattle, and I wasn’t going to go down to Olympia. So, I feel that very, very profoundly that I couldn’t establish a social base in Olympia, and have it work at all. Yeah, that’s one of things that I miss. Does that make sense?

**Zaragoza:** It does. And, thinking about Evergreen now, is there advice that you have for us? Are there things that we should be thinking about?

**Gilliam:** Okay. What I would say is that the college should make more of a commitment to seeing itself, and what happened this year, as part of a big strategy, or a big battle that has historical roots; that is that this whole notion of the college and the Day of Absence thing, that whole thing, this is a huge thing. It’s happening all over. It happened at the University of Washington, it happened at Berkeley. Who is an American? Who does the country belong to? Whose freedom of speech has to be protected?

I think the battle—I’ve got to write this down, because I want to think more about it—the battle ahead is to take back the flag—if we ever had it. I don’t think people whose hands dug in the soil ever had the flag. But, by golly, that’s the battle for me. My great-grandfather and great-grandmother dug this soil, and they helped build this country, and I’m just simply not going to let some lazy-ass motherfucker take it away from my grandchildren. Period. And I think that’s a noble battle.

The college, and the Democrats, have to be drowned [laughing] and let something new come up out of the swamp, because being Republican-Party-light is not the fight. I was a Bernie person, and even though he wasn't perfect, you could feel that there was more gumption there than all the Schumers, all the Democrats. All the Obamas even, even though I went to enjoy his inauguration. We flew there to be a part of that in 2009. But the battle for the country is with us, and I just think we have to be serious about that. I don't know. Does that make sense to you?

**Zaragoza:** It absolutely does. Angela Gilliam, thank you very much for speaking with me. Thank you.

**End Part 2 of 2 of Angela Gilliam on 8-29-17**