Hana: It is November 23rd. We are at Bates college. My Name is Hana Elabe, H-A-N-A E-L-A-B-E. Charles if you could say your name and spell it for the record.

Dr. Nero: My name is Charles Nero. You wish me to spell it you said?

Hana: Yes, please.

Dr. Nero: Charles, C-H-A-R-L-E-S, Nero, N-E-R-O.

Hana: I'd like to start off by thanking you for your time and cooperation in this project. I'd also like to add that this interview today is being recorded. However, you're not obligated to answer any questions. We can stop the interview at any time if you wish to do so. You can skip to answer questions if you wish to do so. We can start wherever you'd like. We can start in icebreaker questions, family origin, where would you like to start?

Dr. Nero: Whatever is convenient for you, is fine.

Hana: Okay, So how old are you Charles?

Dr. Nero: 64.

Hana: Okay. What is your race or ethnicity?

Dr. Nero: African American.

Hana: How would you like to be addressed gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer?

Dr. Nero: Gay.

Hana: What are your pronouns?

Dr. Nero: He, him, his.

Hana: Where were you born and raised?

Dr. Nero: I was born in Decatur, Alabama. I was raised in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Hana: When did you move to Maine?

Charles: In 1991.

Hana: So originally you said you're from Alabama. Why did you come to Maine if you don't mind me asking.

Dr. Nero: I moved from Alabama to New Orleans when I was five years old. And I came to Maine to work at Bates College.

Hana: Growing up can you describe what your family was like?

Dr. Nero: My parents. I had two parents, mother and father, and myself.

Hana: So, would you say your primary care takers were your mom and dad at that time?

Dr. Nero: Yes.

Hana: And you have siblings, you said are you close with your siblings as of today, your current relationship?

Dr. Nero: I did not say I had siblings. I am an only child.

Hana: Ohh sorry. What is your current relationship with your family of origin?

Dr. Nero: My parents are deceased.

Hana: I'm sorry to hear that. Maine being the whitest the state can you talk about, if at all has racism impacted your life?

Dr. Nero: Yes.

Hana: In what ways?

Dr. Nero: Well, do you mean my life here in Maine?

Hana: Your life here in Maine, as Maine is one of the whitest states.

Dr. Nero: Well, one of the most vivid encounters of real kind of in your face racism an agency tell that they were, they could not work with me because their children were certfiably white and they placed their children with white heterosexual families.

Hana: What year was this?

Dr. Nero:Oh gosh, let me see this would have been the last century, so towards the end of last century. I can’t remember exactly.

Hana: So would you say since that was the last century, would you say racism has, hmm.. has been not as impactful as it has been in the last century. Or would you say it’s still the same towards your incident?

Dr. Nero: Hmm. Now that was a very specific and unique incident. That's very vivid in my mind. If you ask me other ways, I experienced racism, I experienced racism as a faculty member at Bates college. When I first arrived here, I was asked to work in, I was hired in the African-American Studies Program. And to my surprise, I discovered that courses in African American Studies were not eligible to fulfill general education requirements. In fact, I was told

that we were a program, and that's why. Then of course I discovered that Classical and Medieval studies actually offer courses and their courses did fulfill general education requirements. Classical and Medieval Studies was a program just as African-American Studies was, but of course Classical and Medieval Studies was considered a legitimate area of inquiry and so therefore, worthy of fulfilling students' general education requirements. Whereas African-American studies courses did not.

Hana: Has homophobia affected your life?

Dr. Nero: Of course it has, yes.

Hana: In what ways would you say homophobia affected your life whether in private life or professional life?

Dr. Nero: In terms of it's one of the reasons why I teach at Bates College because I was doing gay scholarship and part of it was finding a place where I could do scholarship and teaching that was both about race and sexuality. And back in 1991 Bates was one of the few places that saw that as at least was willing to consider hiring someone who did that kind of work. I was told that when I did my PhD dissertation at Indiana University, my faculty mentor told me, dissuaded me from focusing upon LGBT scholarship. Because she said, If you do that kind of work, you will probably never get tenure.

Hana: And you have received tenure obviously.

Dr. Nero: I am now a full professor, I have in doubt professorship.

Hana: Have you since that was what that person had said to you, have you touched base maybe emailed them that you've made it? And regardless of their statement you obviously made tenure.

Dr. Nero: Ohh, I.

Hana: Or was it like insignificant would you say?

Dr. Nero: It has become.. it has diminished insignificance. At this point, this is not a person. I may have contact with them if I ran into them in academic conference thats it so this person is not truly significant in my life, nor any of the other people.But that becomes one of the ways in which both homophobia and racism have impacted my life. I consider myself an interdisciplinary scholar. And part of the reason that I do that is because it meant I had to find a place where I could define what it was I wanted to teach, what I wanted to do research on. Back in the nineties There was really no academic home. So essentially I committed I guess an academic suicide.

Hana: Would you say you are an active LGBTQ activities in high school or college?

Dr. Nero: That wasn't even a concept when I was in either college or in high school. I was educated in high school and college by Catholics. And neither of those Catholicism in last

century and actually as well as in this century as well, was incredibly hostile to anything having to do with LGBTQ issues.

Hana: When did you first discover and understand your sexuality to be something other than heterosexual?

Dr. Nero:Probably when I was a child, maybe six, seven. Seven or eight years old and realizing the kind of programs I enjoyed watching on television, it was usually like if I was watching Friends. Watching Westerns I realized cowboy western movies, I realized my friends enjoyed shooting and slaying of Indians whereas I enjoyed the investment. And I realized that made me different.

Hana: Zoning back to an earlier question, you said that Catholicism was mostly it looked down upon anything other than heterosexuality?

Dr. Nero: Still does.

Hana: And still does. So how would you say that impacted you? Like your attraction to like you not being heterosexual per se? Like how did that impact your childhood would you say?

Dr. Nero: I'm not sure I understand your question.

Hana: So. Catholicism, right? Looks down on anything other than heterosexuality and still continues to do so.

Dr. Nero: Correct.

Hana: You said you discovered your sexuality when you were seven years old. So my question is, how did that impact your child?

Dr. Nero: Oh, well, let me also premise. I'm, I was not raised Catholic. I was educated by Catholics I was raised in, Protestant, Christian protestant. I was raised as a Methodist. And specifically in Christian Methodist Episcopal denomination, also known as CME, the CME church. I'll just give you a brief history and you can do with it as you wish. The CME church, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, was founded in the South in 1870 and it was founded by the newly freed black people who had been enslaved and who wanted to practice Methodism. But they were not allowed to practice with the United Methodist Church. The United Methodist Church in the South did not permit black people to join. And so black people formed their own organization which used to be called the colored Methodist Episcopal Church. But in 1950 was changed to the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. That's the domination that I grew up in. . That domination being a Christian organization, was also, did not find homosexuality acceptable in fact in it's Book O buy homes, sexuality, etc. In fact, in its hook, this, which is the book that identifies and says, this is what we as Christian Methodist Episcopal Lee, It's called The Book of Discipline. The book of Discipline, it says marriage is only between one man and one woman. And that's one of my earliest memories of reading the Book of Discipline. And that was way back in the 1970's, even before gay marriage was an issue and that has not has not changed. So,

to go back to your question, which is how did that affect me? I realized at a very early age that I would have to make decisions about what, where I would live, where I would worship, what kind of affiliation I would have with my church. Even what kind of affiliation I would have with Christianty, whether it was Catholicism, whether it was Methodism I realized I had to make decisions. And probably when I was in college I began making those decisions. And those decisions were leading me away from organized Christianity.

Hana: Why college, if you don't mind me asking why college?

Dr. Nero: I'm sorry?

Hana: You said he started making those decisions in college. So why college?

Dr. Nero: Because I had more access to adult books. My decisions were very much informed as a college student I spent a lot of time if I wasn't in class I would either play cards with friends or I wasn't playing cards. More likely than not, I would go to the library and read books. And I discovered in the library, I discovered, I went to historically black institution, Xavier University of New Orleans. And at the time, Xavier had a room at it held African, African-American collection. And that was important for me. But I also discovered the section of the library that had books on homosexuality and deviant studies in the Decimal System. I forget with that section is it's now the HQ session in the new catalog system. When I discovered that area of the library, I would just go there and read books.

Hana:Can you think back to one of the first books that empowered to be like true to yourself. would you say? If at all a particular book.

Dr. Nero: Well, really not really, I wouldn't say I found a particular book at. I found books that pointed to psychology and psychoanalysis so that was new to me. It's that pointed to that were primarily I think in psychology and psychoanalysis talked about the origins of homosexuality. So that was meaningful to me. And so many of these books were not pro-gay, what they did was was they pointed that there were people that what I was thinking about was actually real and that people were studying and debating. And so I felt excited to join that debate and to follow that debate. There was a store, a gay bookstore, that opened in the French Quaters ohh gosh the name of the bookstore I no longer remember. But it was one of the few book stores in, New Orleans. And I would frequently as college students sometimes I go there and I discovered books by that was more a firm. Books, for example, that dealt with especially religion and being gay. And books like that were usually autobiography, memoirs, things of that nature. So that was it for me. And I also discovered, interestingly, the classics. Because classics were very interesting. Because frequently the stories and classes contain or embodied, if not just outright homosexual content and these books were considered great literature. They were written originally in Latin or Greek, so I found things like that.

Hana: Who did you first come out to about your sexuality or identity?

Dr. Nero: Probably, in college I was a theater major and that was also another source of where I found information about being gay. Because it was the 1970s and it was the beginning of the Stonewall movement that had the Stonewall rebellions happened in 1969. And following the

Stonewall rebellions, there was this creative outburst of drama by LGBTQ people. And I remember one of the first films I saw was based on a play called The Boys in the Band. And I won't say it was the most affirming gay drama I've ever seen. But it was one of the first and I remember seeing that film. And I went to there was another university, not my university had a film series and they showed it and I went to see it. And I was just blown away it was incredible. I saw other anytime anyone in the city was doing any kind of gay drama, I always went to see it. And those gave plays 1970s were very pivotal for me, very important because they show me that there were other people in the world who were thinking about being gay. And who did I come out to? I came out to fellow students.

Hana:So you brought up Stonewall Riot.

Dr. Nero: Rebellion.

Hana: Rebellion. So can you tell me your first initial reaction to stonewall, if you can recollect?

Dr. Nero: Well, I didn't have any memory of stone. I was in 1969, so I was probably I was going into high school. And so that was nowhere on my radar. I discovered Stonewall probably when I was in college. And there was was a gay pride parade I went too. And they said something about Stonewall. And I remember I think I asked about Stonewall. And someone told me thats where the riots were, that's where we had our first uprising. That was something I discovered much later on. Probably when I was in graduate school significance of it. When I was in graduate school I went to Lake Forest in 1978-1980. And there I had a another mentor, this one more firm and she was African American, and she was from New Orleans. And her sister had actually taught me at Xavier and, but she was, but this new professor was a lesbian and living with, she had a partner who was white American and they were living together. And she would often answer question, being older than I was she would answer questions I had. These questions, especially about these questions like what was Stonewall?

Hana: So you said you came out to fellow students. Were they supportive of your new reveal or were, was it not anything of significance per se would you say?

Dr. Nero:Ohh that's a complicated question because some some of the, the guy that this was the 19, the mid to late 1970s, 1974 was in 1978. And so it was a time of tremendous change, especially about sexuality. And so every, to be young at that point as we want it to be progressive and open-minded. And so in that spirit of being open minded. Some friends who were also theater majors said, Well, we're going to take you out to this dancing because you like to dance. And so they took me to this gay disco,on Bourbon Street. The Bourbon Street Pub and Parade. And it was my first time being at a gay bar, a gay disco tech. And I loved it. It was like, Oh my gosh, and so I was there with friends, both male and female. And we danced all night and had a great time. And then that was in the fall. And I remember maybe a month or so later, I went back by myself and still had a great time.

Hana: That's good to hear! So, would you say there initial reaction is complicated you can't pin it down to one word would you say?

Dr. Nero: No, it's complicated because, you know, it was it was the 1970s. We wanted to be, nobody wanted to be seen as close minded. And yet at the same time, it wasn't as though this was something that we wanted it to be, what my friends wanted to be open about. You could still get beaten up for being homosexual. In fact, we were at a performance we were rehearsal one

night. And a friend of mine who has passed away- died in the HIV AIDS epidemic. He was had a lead part, I may have been second lead something like that. But anyway, a guy who was very macho in the lighting who said that he was being too critical of the director and not taking directing advice and just jumped on him, beat him up. So, you know, we we're all willing to be open. And we all wanted to be like, Wow, this is like, you know, sexuality is something that we're all tolerant. But violence can happen at any point. And no one demanded any kind of justice or anything for this guy who beat this guy up.

Hana:I want to touch base on something you brought up violence and I am almost certain you are well aware of the Charlie Howard story.

Dr. Nero: I'm not sure which one that is, refresh my memory.

Hana: The man who was gay that was thrown off a bridge in Bangor, Maine after moving to Maine and hearing those stories of unfortunate events, did you say it and impacted how you felt about Maine per se, or no?

Dr. Nero: Well, I guess the issue for me is when I moved to Maine in 1991. I was fully aware that violence could fall on gay people at any time and that you might never have any, you can not expect justice If violence fell on you. It wasn't like he couldn't get justice. But you cannot expect justice.

Hana: So, expectation of justice is thrown out the window?

Dr. Nero: Yes.

Hana: Because of.

Dr. Nero: Anti-gay violence.

Hana: Right.

Dr. Nero: When I was here. More immediate to me was there were two cases. For example, when I first came, this was also the last century in which one case law involved. Both cases involve the homosexual panic defense, in which men, in one case, a man had shot or stabbed and wounded a man. Because he said he made a pass at him and he panicked so I was like wow. So then a year later, another crime like that happened. This time two men killed a man. They were all doing cocaine and took place at a hotel on Lisbon Street that's no longer there. But I decided to go to the case to go to the trial because I wanted to actually hear how this homosexual two defense worked because I also teach Lesbian Gay Studies. So I wanted to actually witness this. Yes. That is, although these men these men and with the murder and had a sexual relationship with both men for a long period of time. The argument was, in this particular case, he made that the murder victim made a pass at them. They had it, and they just decide they had to kill them to restore their masculinity. Masculinity was threatened and so they shot him, killed him stabbed him 17 times. Anyway. Yeah. Fortunately, the jury found them guilty. But that was one of those cases where justice was served. But hey, the victim was dead. And so that's something that, you know, for me, I always grew up with. I remember when I was growing up, I had two very good friends and we were close from third grade through sixth grade. And our parents decided that we were too close and that they appealed to the principle that it put us all well, we got to seventh grade yes. To put us in two different classes because we were too close.

And one time I was by one of my friend's house and his older brother said, yeah, because If I discovered that my brother was gay I would beat the gay out of him. And people just said that like no big deal. So I always knew that of course there were people I saw people attacked where I grew up in a majority black community. And I knew of men who got attacked,brutally attacked and even killed because they were gay.I knew of women who got raped because they were lesbian. So I guess when you talk about this particular case in Bangor, It doesn't strike me as anything violence directed towards gay people is not something that is outside my expectations.

Hana: So violence from the stories that you've told violence, it's almost expected?

Dr. Nero: You can think as a gay man, I know that violence can be full, that I can be visited with violence. Yes.

Hana: Has that changed over the decades? Like thinking back to 1974 till now do you think violence towards LGBT communities has changed?

Dr. Nero:I think there is now more protection. But nevertheless, I don't think you can, I think to be a gay person is to be aware that violence can be visited upon you. And that manifests in how you carry yourself in public. So, you know.

Hana: Can you elaborate a little bit?

Dr. Nero: Sure. If you are a gay person and you are in a relationship, are you going to walk down the street holding hands with your same gender partner? And you may make a decision. Yes, I'm going to do this. But when you make this decision, you might make that decision, yes. But you might also decide not to because you know that the world in which we live is profoundly homophobic. And so it you just simple not going to, you measure what you can do in public. Which is, for example, you know when people say, oh, why are you flaunting your sexuality? Which is something that you would never, ever ask of anybody behaving heterosexual. Heterosexual people do not flaunt their heterosexuality. If a gay person or two people who appear to be same gender are displaying their infection in public, they risk being accused of flaunting. And with that accusation also comes the possibility of violence.

Hana: Did you come out to your family of origin?

Dr. Nero: Yes, I did.

Hana: How did they react?

Dr. Nero: Very, very, very difficult. And let me see. I think I came up to my parents, so this would have been around that around 1987-1988. My parents were devastated.It was something that I looked back on, I now wonder about the wisdom of doing it. Because my mother actually was so stressed and she developed what they call that illness when we break out in hives that you have chicken pox. It's a terrible illness Anyways I can't think of the name on top of my head. But so she was so stressed about it. Part of the issue here, I realize my parents were very well educated people. They both had graduate degrees. And part of it was they feared what would happen to me would I ever, for example, be employed? How will this impact my ability to get a job? And was already going to graduate school. I wasn't going to graduate school in something that they understood by law or medicine. So this was like so there were those issues. So they just felt like, oh, this is that on the one hand, there was the issue shame. There was the issue,

blame that perhaps they did something wrong. My mother always felt that maybe I was gay because she worked she wasn't a good mother. It was just a lot.

Hana: Did they ever come to accept who you are?

Dr. Nero: I think by, when I moved to Maine, ohh I'm sorry I said 1987 when I came up, it would have been much sooner than that. It was more like 1983-1984, when I moved to Maine, I met my husband. I actually met my husband when I was in graduate school and I introduced them to him. And he was not African American and so I saw my parents especially my father negotiating. My father said something to me if my husband was African American than it would be easier, he could be explained as as a friend, a family member or something of that nature. But growing up and living in that mostly segregated, racially segregated South, to have a non-black person in their neighborhood which was all black was really obvious and pointed out so that was an issue. Yeah. So I saw my parents change a bit when I moved when my partner and I moved to Maine and we bought a house, and his parents had not accepted us there has been lots of f drama with them and my parents had not accepted us. We bought a house. My parents sent me a lot lawnmower, that was my father. And I think it was the beginning. It was very strange because clearly in their minds, whatever we, whatever we were, somehow we had managed to acquire property. And so the acquisition of property to gather as a couple has an impact upon them. Perhaps it's suggested that, well, this must be, there must be some degree of legitimacy here if they have bought a house together.

Hana: So the house was of significance to them?

Dr. Nero: Yes, to them and that was the beginning of their change.

Hana: Did you come out to your friends? You were in college when you came out peers. So in your friend group, would you say you came out to them about your sexuality slash identity?

Dr. Nero: Oh, yeah. We didn't, I don't think that we used terms like gay then. But we will just say you know he's into guys. So we saw yes, I did. Unfortunately, most of my friends from college are dead.

Hana: I'm sorry.

Dr. Nero: Yeah. Many casualties of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. And then I think perhaps that a consequence of that living throughout the 80's and the fear of HIV/AIDS it meant that many of us, those friends who were straight perhaps severed relationships between gay and striaght people. There was so much AIDS phobia and homophobia.

Hana: You were 24 years old when the HIV/AIDS epidemic began.

Dr. Nero:I guess so maybe you're right.

Hana: Can you tell me about your initial reaction to the epidemic when you first heard about it?

Dr. Nero:When I first heard about it, it was a friend of mine, an older woman, and her husband. Who friends in graduate school Aand I take I met him when I was in grad and so they were professional, older and they were like, you know, call me up and say Charles, you need to really be careful because there's something out. You have your read article I think in time with you

speak of New York Times somewhere about this disease that's hitting gay people. Yeah, yeah I read about it too. And as friends got sick and die, it became real. And it was just it was truly a frightening experience. Truly frightening. Because you just did not know, I mean, initially it was this this you didn't know if you were at that point was if you had a positive diagnosis. It was a death sentence. Everybody who you knew who had AIDS died. And so in 1987, I think that was first time I got tested. And I did so because I was working with an organization in Ithaca, New York called HIV/AIDS task force.We were raising funds for caretaking for people with aids education.

Hana: Do you remember misconceptions you heard at that time about the HIV/AIDS epidemic?

Dr. Nero: Oh yeah, this was God's punishment.I heard this especially I remember we went to with parents to visit family in Northern Alabama, which is when my mother said this frame. And the choir of the church, organist in the church, that my mother had grown up in was dying of AIDS. And my mother was I didn't go to the hospital with her. She and another friend of hers who live there to see him because he was a veteran, I take it back I did go and my mother was shocked because he was wearing a diaper. And I remember thinking this is all so sad. Something like, now I understand so completely homophobic is not that word I want to use. But it's what people think gay sex is. And she said something to the effect of, well, you know, the men, they just want to be like women and they take it up the buttocks and you know there is nothing there. And so they just get AIDS and die, they just get infected and die. And it was a very, it reduced. It was very reductive language used gay people to death like sexual practices. That is, this sexual practices were about only produce disease or death, which is something you would never say about heterosexual people. You would never say that about heterosexuality. Or I take it back or you never say that you would never say that about, You might say that about some heterosexual practices.

Hana:Why do you think there was no discussion or talks about the HIV and AIDS epidemic?

Dr. Nero: President Ronald Reagan. Because his political base was in that one. He's concerned about making sure that he maintained his political base, the affiliation of it, and loyalty of his political base. Why do you ask?

Hana: It falls under this question. If President Ronald Reagan had spoken up sooner about the HIV and AIDS epidemic, do you believe more lives would have been saved? Would you believe a cure would have been developed?

Dr. Nero: I don't know about a cure, but I would say better treatment absolutely. But then, had he spoken up sooner he might've lost his political base and someone even more reactionary and right wing might have come in. So I'm not sure I even know how to answer that.

Hana: You said friends that you are close to died from the HIV/AIDS epidemic. How did that impact you?

Dr. Nero: Ohh I was devastated, you know imagine, and I'm talking both men and women over that period of eighties, early eighties, mid eighties, late eighties. Top of my head I lost, seven friends. No, eight.

Hana:You said you joined the HIV/AIDS task force, what inspired you to join the task force, especially at such a risky time would you say?

Dr. Nero:Well, it was necessary, it was necessary to save lives. And if I believe in justice, and I believe that queer people have the right to life have right to dignity. And AIDS was this real challenge this threat to our life. And even if you were,not positive,it threatened your dignity. Even if you were elected, It threatened your dignity. Because this disease was associated with, was the way in which people were treated with such indignity. It was a challenge to improve. If you were a gay person, this was, this was watching the way that society was reacting to your death and you suffering. You realized very, this, show the extent to which society are, or some people in society, hated you and really wished you were dead. And so you have to fight back. And you fight back with the weapons that you had.

Hana: So you currently are a faculty member at Bates college.

Dr. Nero: Yes.

Hana: How did you come out to your employer before you started working at Bates College, if at all?

Dr. Nero: Oh, I did. I said I was I said, you know, by the time I came Bates college, I had made a decision that I was just going to say as in passing of a casual conversation as a black gay man. I believe, in passing. And I still do that even today in class. I will say things to my students. Today I say, well, you know, as a black man of a certain age, kind of a politically correct, just say that it's clear.

Hana: Have you faced any discrimination or hostile work environment from your employer, co-workers as because your are a black gay men? So I'm just curious.

Dr. Nero: When I first came here, I was fortunate that we had, the Dean of the college faculty was a lesbian woman, and she was out as a lesbian. And I showed a film, Marlon Riggs film, Tongues Untied. And there is a very brief scene of male nudity in the film. And students went to the Dean and complained and said, Professor Nero was showing pornography in class. And she very politely at students asked so what exactly is the problem? And that's the end of that.

Hana: Have you faced, when you started working here did face any like a hostile work environment or discrimination from your co-workers?

Dr. Nero: I think my coworkers didn't know. Some of them just didn't know what it was, that did. And because they didn't know what did, they didn't know what interdisciplinary teaching was. They didn't know what interdisciplinary scholarship was. It was this new thing. They didn't understand it. And so they just they would say, when I was going up for tenure, I had I had a series of publications that are mostly about queer studies, etc. And faculty people wrote for me for promotion. They could not use the word gay, they could not use the work queer they said things he writes about that topic. And in publishes in journals that deal with those topics. What idea was unspeakable. But I did it well.

Hana: Is your employer welcoming to LGBTQ workers and students before and now?

Dr. Nero: I think before it was kind of a or even now that I'd say because I'm going to say two years ago a black man didn't get tenure here and I think you probably had to do with both being black and gay. I know another. When I was going up for tenture there was a white gay man who

didn’t recieve tenture. And he’s went on to a successful career, both people have gone on to careers in other places. I think it depends upon the department that you're in and whether or not your department is open to the kind of research, scholarship, teaching, curriculum issues that you raise.

Hana: Why hasn't been there raised more like I created more like an inclusive environment for LGBTQ communities or individuals here at Bates. Why are people being refused tenure based on their maybe curriculum or their identification and why hasn't changed?

Dr. Nero: I think it has changed. But I do think that as I said it, it depends upon one's department. And, you know, those there are people who do not value that kind of scholarship. There are senior faculty, people who don't support that kind of scholarship who don’t support those kind of courses. It's very illiberal to say that you don't support that. So you'll find other ways of getting around talking about why you deny someone tenure or promotion. And me say, for example, well, they have published in this journal. And this particular journal is not a particularly, doesn't have a, has a very high acceptance rate. As though, you know, some of the more prestigious journals maybe incredibly homophobic and not open to your research. So you find where you can publish. And you know work on getting the scholarship out. And making a case for yourself. But that's, that's not easy. That's, that's difficult in terms of its, because I think academia is, there is still a huge as I said about the issue of these things are department focused. And so with how your department, individual department feels about the work that you do, matters.

Hana: Will you say that’s ever going to change?

Dr. Nero: I hope so yeah. It has changed. I think right now at Bates we're having this intense discussion about white supremacy. And the Dean has mandated that all departments focus and have foundational dialogues with funding to bring in guest speakers, etc. About white supremacy in the construction of their discipline. And there are some departments that are just hostile. And you know,I shouldn’t say hostile because nobody is a white supermcist now. But this is just, many people would say this is the demon has gone too far. This is dictatorial.

Hana: Can you give me an example of how your institution responds to diversity?

Dr. Nero: My institution says it wants diversity, values diversity. But as I've just pointed out with this issue about white supremacy, talking about white supremacy and its role in the creation of the discipline in which you work. Means you have to ask questions about what you teach, about what you study, and also what you don't know. And people with PhDs in a particular area don't like to admit that they don’t know.

Hana: Was there a time in your career where there was no professional acceptance for individuals who identified as LGBTQ? And if yes, how did that impact how and with whom you've shared your sexuality and identity, such as future employments? We've covered Bates college prior to Bates.

Dr. Nero: Sure. In my earlier teaching jobs, clearly, my first teaching job was in Valdosta Georgia,Valdosta College. My second one was at Ithaca College.In most places I played the game of, you know, I just, I was just, in Valdosta I was young enough to be a bachelor. And when I went to Ithaca College I was a bit older and I didn't say anything, but I didn't deny it

either. And so when I came to Bates, I decided I'm not doing that game playing anymore; this is who I am.

Hana: Did you face any in Georigia and in Ithaca college did you face discrimination and hostile work enviorment if you disclosed information about your identity and sexuality?

Dr. Nero: Well at Valdosta I'm not sure what would have happened. Valdosta was an incredibly racist institution when I was there, it was incredibly anti-black. I was teaching a course in intercultural communications and I started talking about race and I just got outright hostility from students. White students who would just say that this was reactionary you know that I was a communitist. Oh my god I didn't even know what that meant. I was a communist propaganda. But Valdosta state college was an incredibly anti-black institution. I was an advisor to the Black Student Union and we had this moment where the students said you know, they were talking about the kind of anti-blackness they experienced. And so when white roommates would discovered that they had black roommate on the first day on campus some of the white students would go and complain to housing. And then housing would say okay and move the black student to another room. And we uncovered that, had been a pattern of doing that and the President of the college called us in, student leaders, and faculty advisors in and threatened us and told us, who wrote this letter. This letter is incendiary. And the students said we did. And of course, we as faculty, the faculty advisor also looked over the letter, proofread it, and that the president who wrote this letter, I demand to know. Oh, it was an incredibly anti-black environment. It was so anti-black the idea of being out was just, was just an everyday struggle as a black person.

Hana: And then adding that, adding black to your sexuality.

Dr. Nero: You just had enough to deal with just being a black person. I have to get out of here.

Hana: So, is that the reason you left that specific institution?

Dr. Nero: Ohh yes, absolutely, it was unthinkable. I could not consider going on there, it was unthinkable.

Hana: You said you have a life partner.

Dr. Nero: A husband, yes.

Hana: Can you tell me a little bit about how you met?

Dr. Nero: We met my first or second week of graduate school. The first week of graduate school, 1983.

Hana: You're legally married. What does marriage mean to you?

Dr. Nero: Marriage means a shared love, shared commitment, and being joyful and happy together. And a willingness and commitment to being joyful and happy.

Hana: Were you involved in the struggle for marriage equality? If so, how?

Charlie: When Lewiston had several. I wasn't explicitly and specifically like know person in the streets, but when Lewiston to have some being considered. That weren't about marriage, that were about domestic partnerships,I provided financial support, attended meetings, things of that nature. Helped to talk about this as important. That was about it. But when marriage equality came, it was so sudden and so unexpected.

Hana: Do you and your husband have children?

Dr. Nero: Yes.

Hana: Can you talk a little bit about the decision and how that affected your sense of self?

Dr. Nero: One of the reasons why we were together. When we met, we talked about wanting to be parents and when to have children. And I was quite surprised that when I talked about my desire to have children and I was part of the gay relationship. He also said wanted same. So that was one of the reasons that I found him attractive and committed to our relationship.

Hana: So was the process, did you adopt your children?

Dr. Nero: Hmmm

Hana: So how was that process in terms of being yourself a gay black man, was the process complicated, how was the process?

Dr. Nero: I would say yes, because I had made a decision that was let me just check my time here. I made a decision that I wanted to have children. And for me, I wanted to raise african American children because I thought that was my political identity. And I had earlier on to make a decision that I didn't want to be an absent father. So I had two lesbian friends who asked me if I would be a sperm donor. This was different period of time. I said no because they wanted me to be sperm donor but they didn't want me to be active parent with the child. Or I could negotiate but they will clear that the child that they would practice the primary key takeaways. And I didn't really want that. So I decided against that kind of arrangement. So after I got tenure and after my husband we decided, well, you got to get serious about this adoption issue. And that's when we ran into the situation where this agency told us about the only placing white children with white families. They told us that, that was dispiriting. Then we did a foster care program and we went into being certified to be foster parents, but then we had to have a further taught and realized. That was not what we wanted. One, we didn't want the possibility of fostering and then having children taken away from us, so that was one issue. And a second issue is we wanted smaller children because we wanted to have a bilingual household. And it is easier to have a bilingual household if your children are young and they're acquiring language.

Hana: So we are running out of time.

Dr. Nero: Okay.

Hana: Is there anything here that we have not discussed here today that you'd like to end off by bringing up or talking about?

Dr. Nero: No.

Hana: Alright I have the release form for you to sign, so this interview can be released. While I have you on the record. I want to thank you so much for your time and your cooperation with this project. If at any time you have questions, you can get in contact with Wendy, my professor. If you wanted to, if you had more thoughts in history, you wanted to share with us, you can always schedule another interview and someone will come back and interview you. Other than that thank you so much.

Dr. Nero: You are very welcome.