

HBCU Radio Preservation Project Oral History Collection

Interviewer: Jocelyn Robinson

Interviewee: David C. Linton

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Transcriber: Jocelyn Robinson

Abstract:

David C. Linton was born in 1958 in Brooklyn, New York. He is the Program Director at Jazz 91.9 WCLK in Atlanta, Georgia. Linton describes his early life in New York City, his parents' occupations, and his educational and Baptist upbringing. He emphasizes the importance of entrepreneurship to his family, as well as how current events and local radio personalities shaped his worldview. Linton went to college at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. There, he met his future wife and majored in broadcasting. Linton got his first radio job as a student programmer at WSHA. The station, founded in 1968 and the first to serve a Black audience in the region, hired Linton as its Program Director after his graduation. Personal connections helped him land a second radio job at the commercial WDUR station in nearby Durham. Meanwhile, Linton helped grow WSHA's wattage in the early 1980s as a new NPR affiliate. He talks about the station's public affairs, news, music, and sports programming, as well as its connections to Black Raleigh. In 1985, Elizabeth City State University Chancellor Jimmy Jenkins hired Linton to develop an HBCU radio station from the ground up. After establishing WRVS, Linton left broadcasting to become a record industry representative and, later, senior executive at Warner Bros, Polygram (Island/Def Jam), Arista, and Capitol Records. He discusses what it meant to support Black artists and workers in the music business, some of whom were childhood idols. The record industry's decline in the early 2000s led Linton back to Georgia and, eventually, working in HBCU radio once again. Clark Atlanta University's WCLK station hired him as Program Director in 2018. Linton discusses what has changed about HBCU radio over his career and what it means to be a leader. He closes by considering his legacy and the impact of WCLK and the station's longtime General Manager, Wendy Williams.

JR: Okay. We are rolling. Due to the fact that we are on this recording. I take that as your consent to be interviewed.

DCL: Yes.

JR: (Laughter) I do appreciate it. So, let's start out by having you provide your name, the date, your location, and your current role.

DCL: Okay. My name is David C. Linton. Today is July 22nd, 2022. I'm currently in Atlanta, Georgia. I'm in the, my current location actually is, my, my location is Atlanta, Georgia. My current role. I'm the program director of JAZZ 91.9 WCLK, which is owned and licensed by Clark Atlanta University, the oldest HBCU in the South.

JR: Let's talk a little bit about David, the person. Let me know how old you are, where you were born, a little bit about your family and your early life.

DC: Well, I'm, I'm a very young 64. I was born in Brooklyn, New York. I am a native New Yorker. I was raised in Brooklyn, first part of my life. My family moved from Brooklyn, Bed-Stuy to Queens, South Ozone Park, where I did my junior high school, but I also went to high school at Brooklyn Tech, one of New York City's five prestigious high schools where you had to actually take an exam to get in. I thought I wanted to be an architect so [unintelligible] tells me how that goes. I'm, my parents are, are both deceased, David and Ruth Linton. My father was a businessman. He owned a trucking company, my mother was an educator. She worked in the public school system. I have two younger sisters. I'm the oldest of three. And, I come from a family of, of entrepreneurs, really. My, my grandfathers, both my grandfathers, were entrepreneurs, had their own businesses. I'm a Baptist. I came from a religious home; my father, my father, and all my uncles were deacons, and I recently became a deacon at my church here in Atlanta, The House of Hope Atlanta. And so, music has always been a part of my life, from an early age. So, you know, I always thought I wanted to be, subconsciously, in the broadcasted and entertainment world, because I was the guy who got the newspaper and read from the back. Where everybody else was going for the sports sections, I immediately went to the entertainment section so that I could see what was going on with, in, in the entertainment world. So, although I thought I was gonna be an architect, deep down inside, I think there was a guy who wanted to be in broadcasting and wanted to be on the radio at some point.

JR: So, was there something that, in particular, that inspired you as a young person to make that shift to entertainment, to the music business, to radio?

DCL: Well, to be honest, I always, I grew up, like I said, listening to radio. I grew up in the, in the media capital of the world, which is New York City, and I listened to radio, WBLS and WWRL, which were the two premier stations, first WWRL, and they had some great on air personalities, then WBLS, which became the number one station and was owned by, at that, that time Inner City

Broadcasting, which the chairman, the late Percy Sutton who happened to be Malcolm X's attorney.

I came from a house that was very, my mother was very -- made sure that we were aware of things that were happening in the world in terms, 'specially during the period of the social, should I say the civil rights era. And so by that awareness, I was really turned on by the fact that there was this Black man who had this broadcasting company, and he bought a radio station. And so I kind of followed him. But the on air personalities, particularly Frankie Crocker and Hank Spann, one was on F-, well, Frankie originally was on WWRL AM. And then he became the program director of WCLK, I mean, WBLS and then, Hank Spann, and I always liked those, those, the quote, the cool guys. They were always cool, but they had a air of sophistication, and class. So those guys were the ones who I always kind of patterned myself after. But I will say that my hero was my dad, who was, as I said, a businessman, good family man, a sharp dresser who made sure, and I got teased in school because I've always been the guy who wore sports jackets and suits even as early as elementary and junior high school.

So those are the things that inspired me, you know, being able to see that there's, there's more to life than what we may have seen. So, I was always intrigued by, by the world, beyond my vision.

JR: So, what is your earliest memory of radio?

DCL: well, the earliest, my earliest memory of radio really was when my father brought me a, a clock radio and I'll never forget it, because it was during the, it was the night actually, that Dr. King got assassinated, and we were living in Bed-Stuy, and of course there was a lot of looting and stuff going on and somebody dropped off at, I, I can remember today and it's kind of ironic, it was an old looking, looked like it was beat up, but it was a crimson and cream clock radio. And my father gave it to me. And I think the irony is that it's crimson and cream. I became a Kapp, a member of Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, and our colors are crimson and cream. And so I had my own radio, so I was able to listen to those disc jockeys. And I remember at night, my mother coming in the bedroom and said, "Turn that radio off. You gotta get up and go to school the next day." So radio was just always a, a part of my -- I had an, an affinity to radio and it had such an impact and it, because radio, especially during that period, was how Black people were able to get their news and their information, it became the, that became how we learned what was going on, through those stations. Because a lot of it wasn't being saw on tele -- You didn't see it on television, but you always heard it on radio. And the disc jockeys were always

the communicators. They became the real leaders, in terms of motivating people.

And as I grew in this business, I understood why some of those personalities didn't stay long at those their jobs because they got bigger than the radio station. And some of their employers didn't wanna pay them. And, or they were so powerful that when they said something, the community listened, I mean, the night Dr. King died, it was a disc jockey by the name of **Tony Byrd** in D- up in Buffalo, or Rochester who really was the one who, no, in Boston, who cooled the crowd when they were rioting, and disc jockeys across the country, you know, Magnificent Montague in Los Angeles, coined the phrase, "Burn, Baby, Burn." He wasn't telling people to riot, but that was just a part of his schtick, if you will. And so, you know, radio to me was always important in our family, whether it be listening to gospel or the R&B station. But even then, I did not think that radio was going to be a career for me. That did not happen until I got to college, when I decided to get into radio and even then, I didn't even know what an HBCU was. You know, I actually applied to -- I was, I'm what I like to call a "cool nerd." I applied to Ivy League schools and got accepted to a couple of them, but because of the cold temperature up in, northern New York, Syracuse, Ithaca, I didn't want the cold weather. So, I took my little college book out and went down and looked at a city. I saw Raleigh, North Carolina, the average temperature in the winter then was about 50, 55 degrees. And I was like, "Hmm, that sounds like a place I might wanna do" And then I saw this school, Shaw University. It said, private, Black Baptist institution. I remember like it was yesterday, and I said, "Okay, I'm Black. I'm Baptist. Let me apply." And I applied, they accepted me and caused a little turmoil in my home because my mother, knowing as a young Black man, having the opportunity to go to an Ivy League school was something that we didn't get a great opportunity to do in those days. But my father interceded and told my mother, "Well, if he goes where we want him to go, he may not finish, but if he goes where he wants to go, that's, it would be on him." And so, reluctantly, my mother agreed. And I enrolled at Shaw University on August 15th, 1976. And that was my introduction to the historically Black college world.

And when I got there, I found out that they had a radio station. I still wasn't interested in the radio station until one day, I saw this young lady walking across the campus, and I wanted to talk to her. So I was, you know, and I decided to go and follow her. We had a couple of classes together, but one day I followed her, and she was up at the radio station. And every day I would, she was a freshman. We were both freshman and she was doing a sports show and very rarely did freshmen get on, get on the radio at WSHA, at Shaw University. And one day the head of the department came up. He said, "You know what? You're up here every day. It's trying to see that girl. I know what you're doing.

Why don't you take an elective? And then you could be in another class with her and you could be up here in the radio station.” I'm like, oh, why not? So I, the next semester, I took an elective in radio writing for radio and TV because I'm a writer. I was going to be a business major, and I, but writing was always one of my strong suits. Long story short, I changed my major to broadcasting. I got the girl; we just celebrated our 41st wedding anniversary. And I eventually changed my career and I've been in broadcasting and the music industry ever since.

JR: So tell me about your very first radio job. What was, what was that? What was that like?

DCL: Well, my very first radio job was at Shaw University's WCLK. I mean, WSHA. I'm a radio broadcaster, I keep saying CLK. That was my, but was that WSHA. I started first doing news, rewriting newscasts. We had an AP wire would rewrite the news, and I did news, trying to eventually get on the air. And then one Saturday, somebody didn't show up and I was able to go on the air, but in those days, you had to go and pass the FCC third class license, the Element 9, unlike today, where you can just, I don't even know if they still do licenses the way we did, because we had to read meters and all of that, but I was able to get my license. And I went on the air on the weekend, a Saturday at 12 noon, and I was David C on your radio. And I eventually, and I was a student and eventually became a student program director and continued to work at WSHA upon graduation. But even during that period, my first commercial radio station job was at WDUR in Durham, which ironically was the operations manager was an alum of Shaw University, the late Alvin Stowe who gave me my first commercial radio job. And so that began my love and my broadcasting career, there on the campus of Shaw University. And then at WDUR as a overnight guy, weekend fill in, and then eventually I went full time and I did some other radio.

JR: So starting with WDUR, and this is post-Shaw, tell me about the, progression of your radio roles as time went on.

DLC: Well, even at Shaw, I became -- It was funny. I became the student program director and then immediately after graduation, I was actually hired by Shaw University. I did such a, a good job, if you will, at WSHA that I was hired as they were beginning to fill up, get higher professionals, to help with the training of students. And so I literally became, went from being a student to a professional. WSHA was a really unique situation at Shaw University. It signed on in 1968. It was the very first Black formatted FM radio station in the Raleigh-Durham market. So up until that time, African Americans only had AM stations to listen to. So Shaw came in with this FM radio station and during my, my senior year, my junior year, Dr. Vandergriff, who was the GM, and it was student run up until 1984, but I, I digress. So that, that radio station, was *the*

station. So we were able to do a lot of things at WSHA that most people at other college stations didn't really do. I'd have to say that because we, not only we did broadcast, we did a lot of public affairs programming. We, we covered sports shows, everybody who came through that program, 80% of them wound up at some professional setting in radio, TV, or some even went into film. In 1981 as I began there in '80 as a professional after graduating, in 1981, I was made general manager of the radio station, and, but with the goal of getting that station certified by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, what Dr. Vandergriff, the late Dr. Vandergriff did, Shaw signed on with, like it was a small wattage. We were at 12,000 watts when I was started as a student, we eventually went up to 25,500 watts. We did that to strategically keep another station owned by a predominantly white institution from increasing their power.

And with that 25,500 watts, WSHA became, you know, in broadcasting terms was a monster. We had the big stick and because of what we were able to do, I then, I led the charge to get us certified by the Corporation of Public Broadcasting. We got that accomplished in 1984 or so. We had a five, we had the staff, we got all the requirements to be, you know, become a CPB-funded radio station and an NPR affiliate. And that allowed us to do so many different things. But the fact that WSHA was the first and only at that early, up until about '85, the only FM station serving the Black community, it was a powerhouse. It was more than just a college radio station. It was *the* radio station, and we did a lot of things. And of course, as program director slash general manager, you know, I use, I am, I employed a lot of the things that I had learned from being on the commercial side. And so we didn't sound like a college radio station although we had students doing it, we set the bar very high for students to get on the air and, and it became a great station.

And then we did so many great things there at WSHA that I got called to, I got offers to go to other radio stations. I turned down an offer to go to Fayetteville State, their radio station. There was even an, an inquiry by me to come to WCLK during that period, but I turned all those down because we were on a mission to accomplish some things.

But in 1985, Dr. Jimmy R. Jenkins, who was the chancellor at Elizabeth City State University, presented me with an opportunity that I could not deny. And that was an opportunity to start a radio station from scratch. And northeastern North Carolina, right outside of Norfolk, didn't have a public radio station and they wanted to have one. And it took a lot for me to take that. That was the first time, if you will, me leaving the nest, even though I worked at the commercial stations, WSHA was, was always my safety net. It was, I was around people because when you go to an HBCU, the people that, who are your educators and your, you know, your, the administrators, they become family. It's like going to

school and having your uncles and your aunties, making sure that you are in class and you do the right thing. But I had really grown to the point where I needed to step out. And so I took that opportunity to go to Elizabeth City State. They said they wanted to start a radio station. I learned the first thing about negotiating employment contracts and getting all the facts before you take a job. Cause when I got there, all they really had was a CP, which was a construction permit, and they didn't have anything else. There was, the tower wasn't even up. So, I was like, what have I done? But you know, God put me there for a reason. And we were able to -- I went there in 1985 and then in 1986 we signed on WRVS, which I was able, I picked the call letters. I, I picked out all the equipment. I oversaw the construction of the, the erection of the antenna, the whole ball of wax. I interacted with the FCC.

[Pause recording]

Well, when I went to Elizabeth City, what I realized is that they had a desire to get a radio station, but all they had was a CP, which was the construction permit. There was no antenna. There was not a building for the radio station to be housed. There were no call letters. They still was in the application process. And so I had to do all of that paperwork, dealing with the attorneys and the FCC. And one of the things that sort of set the stage, even for me getting that. And I have to go back to the WSHA for a second. I know I've been in this business now about 40-plus years. I've known very few people who had an encounter with an FCC inspector. I was at WSHA one afternoon, and a guy came in and he showed me his badge and it was an FCC inspector and he wanted to see our logs, our public files and all of that. And my, and I immediately called my engineer. He rushed over, he was nervous. I was cooler than my engineer, because he too, had never had that experience. And they went through the station. Every, they found one or two minor violations and Dr. Vandergriff who was the station manager at the time, because I was the PD and I was the person on site. He made me respond to the FCC. So I had the right to reply. I did a reply. We got it okay. We corrected all the things. And so that kind of set the stage for me when I was being interviewed at Elizabeth City State. They said, "Well, have you ever had any interactions with the FCC?" Well, yes, I did, firsthand and so it helped me land the job. And like I said, we had to do everything. And so I'll never forget the day when we got the letter saying that the station, the frequency was approved at 90.7. We did need to apply for some call letters. And then I came up with WRVS which is "Wonderful Radio Viking Style." And the Vikings is the mascot for the Vikings at Elizabeth City State. [Drinks] Excuse me. And so, we, we were able to, and like I said, we didn't even have a place. So, we, they had, we took this old white house that was on the university's property. It really was a two-bedroom house. It took a two-bedroom house and turned it into a radio station studio. The living room

became the reception area. One bedroom became the production studio. The other bedroom became the main control room, and it was a three bedroom because the third bedroom became my office. And then I eventually hired a staff to help me. And I went back to get some of my, one, two of my former students from Shaw University who were out in the professional world. And I enticed them to come to Elizabeth City and, you know, that's Paula Sutton. She was our news and public affairs director and the late Andre Smith, who was our news and sports director. And we created the nucleus of what was WRVS. Today that station, some 37 years later is now at, up to 45,500 watts.

I was succeeded by another Shaw Bear, Miss Edith Thorpe who most recently was at Norfolk State University. And she also worked at WNCC at North Carolina Central. And so WRVS has a strong lineage of Shaw University DNA from WSHA.

JR: It certainly does. There are a few names that I've heard repeatedly in my site visits and my discussions with station managers, and it's a really important legacy, but it's also, at this point, a legacy from WSHA that really is important to preserve. And can you talk a little bit about what's happened with WSHA?

DLC: Well, and I, and I must mention another person from my WSHA, Kathis Hall, who left WSHA and she started the radio station at Virginia. So again, that's another station that has some DNA from WSHA. But WSHA over the years, after I left, there was, you know, there was a management change. And I will say this, I think, holistically, some of the historically Black colleges really don't realize the really valuable tool they have in their radio stations. They are not only just for entertainment. They can help tell their story. They can help with recruitment and a lot of different things. But they're, but they're, but they try to make them more academic units and versus being business units. And I think that was part of the issue which led to the demise of WSHA and I, along with Edith Thorpe and a lot of other alumni fought tooth and nail for WSHA to be saved, but the school did not see the, didn't see the real value of the radio station. They said they were having some financial issues. Somebody offered them, an amount of money, which I still think was under market value. Actually, I know it was under market value for that radio station because that radio station, had it been properly managed, run, and appreciated, really could have been, was more of an asset.

And in today's world of broadcasting with conglomerates owning radio stations, there are not many independent voices. HBCU owned radio represents real Black radio ownership, and I think that was an opportunity that was missed. And we waged a year-long battle to try to save that radio station. I was even brought in by the former president, who's Dr. Debroy, who's now at Howard

University, to come in and do a study to try to show how that station's, what the station's value was to the community. Not financial value, but the overall value. But when, you know, when people have their minds made up to do something, sometimes they ignore the facts. And they try to say we were emotional. We were emotional, but I'm fact-based. I left broadcasting go into the music industry. So, I'm a businessman, and I had a very successful, a very successful career in the music industry. And so, I understand, you know, profit and loss statements. I ran divisions, multimillion dollar divisions. But I also know the value, as a broadcaster, the power of owning a broadcast facility. And so they eventually sold it, and WSHA now is a memory. It was one of the first, one of the first HBCU radio stations in the country. And, definitely one of the, in its day, it was one of the leading, it was the blueprint for a lot of radio stations. And I just think that what's being done at WCLK is really an example of what WSHA should have evolved into versus being sold. That's the end of my commentary.

JR: Well, just to help fill in those gaps a little bit, can you remember a few of the programs that you think were really flagships at WSHA back in the day?

DLC: Oh yeah, there was several. One of the programs that I inherited, I didn't start it, but we had a program called *Perspectives From Within*, which was a show where we actually went into the Raleigh correctional facility and had inmates create -- we taught inmates how to create radio show and they did a radio, a weekly radio show every week. And it was a music show, but they did a very good job. In fact, one of the inmates when he was paroled, became a part of a part-time member of our staff. We also had a show called *BASE* It was a community based. It was Broaden, Anderson, Sanderson, and Enlow, which would the four high schools, yeah, four high schools in Wake County. We created a radio show where those students from those schools, it was an hour show. They came in and they were -- we taught them how to do a radio show and it aired in real time. And it was called *BASE*, like I said, Broaden, Anderson, Sanderson and Enlow high schools. That was a very important show, program. Some of those students eventually went to college. Some of 'em even came to WSHA or, or became students at Shaw University. We had a city, Raleigh was, I was there at Raleigh at the time when it was in a very transformative time period. And again, WSHA was the only Black owned radio station. And it was in FM. We helped through getting people -- we were doing the same things that radio stations are doing now. We did voter education and voter registration campaigns. We did things in the park and we were able to help get the first Black person elected to the Wake County school board, the first Black sheriff, Sheriff Baker, and the first city council to represent Wake County, Father Calloway. As a matter of fact, we, we created a program, *This Week in City Hall* where Dr., where Father Calloway, Councilman Calloway came in

every week and gave the community an update on what was going on in the legislature, in the city hall, council. And they could actually call in and get information about what was going on. The late Ralph Campbell, Sr. whose son became the mayor of Atlanta was a strong activist. I used to work with him. He was my first introduction into working and canvassing people to get people out to vote. He would ride around in his cars. Like, I don't know if it was a Renault or something, but it had a sunroof and I would stand up in the car with the bullhorn, telling people to go out and vote. And so those were the kind of things that WSHA did in the community, which was really where -- and it wasn't where that the commercial stations were doing it, but the AM station was a sun up-sundown station. So it was only up at 5:30. It was, it went dark, but we were 24 hours with students running it. And I'm really proud of the things that we were able to do. We created a program called *The Job Bank*, which Kathis Hall, who was our public affairs director, came up. We worked with the Wake County Employment Commission, and we were able to let people know what jobs are available and what the skill sets were. And we were able to reduce Black unemployment in Wake County.

I mean, those were the kind of things that WSHA did. So, it was more than just a music station. It was the voice for the people. And I, and I learned that because I knew the history of, of broadcasting and radio, how important it was, like WERD in Atlanta, that was, that gave Dr. Martin Luther King his voice to speak to the community during the, those days, early days of the civil rights movement. You had WLIB in New York. Those were the stations that those people came on, Malcolm X and all those people came to Black radio to talk to the people. And so, you know, because broadcast stations really operate, are supposed to operate in the public interest, convenience, and necessity. And of course, deregulation took some of those things, did no longer make those things mandatory, and it put more emphasis on the capital aspect, as in dollars and cents. But, and that's why I think public radio stations are so valuable, especially those who are owned by HBCUs. I think we have a mission and a responsibility to do that kind of thing, and I could go on and on about that, so I'll put a pin there.

JR: So could I. [Both laugh]

Well, so you've mentioned though that you left the radio biz and went into the music business for a period of time. Tell me a little bit about that.

DCL: Well, after being in, in radio for a, a period of time -- I love radio, radio is still my first love, but I'm a capitalist and I, as I learned about the music business and the relationship with radio, I saw that I could make a better living if I had an opportunity to go into the record industry. And one of the things that,

and again, this started at WSHA even though I got hired away from the radio while I was at Elizabeth City State, because something we did at, Dr. Vandergriff did it. I continued it after he left. And even when I went to Elizabeth City State, we used to have media conferences and I used to bring in people from the entertainment world, from the record companies, from film, from the press. And professional broadcasters would come in to the campus. And Dr. Vandergriff, brought in a gentleman by the name of Ernie Singleton, who was a music executive at Polygram Records and his mentor, Jimmy B who Dr. Vandergriff knew from their days in the military. And I met this person as a sophomore or junior at Shaw. And I stayed in contact with that person over the years, and we didn't have Google, we didn't have cell phones. So I had to go to the library. I had to go and read publications to keep up with this guy as he moved from company to company. But whenever I needed him or some of my radio idols, like Ken Webb out of WBLS in New York, and others, they always came down and spoke to my students. And by speaking to my students, I can develop the rapport. And so one day, Ernie was saying he was gonna be in the, he was going to Dallas. I called him about something and he says, "Well, I'm going to Dallas." And I said, "Well, what's going on in Dallas?" He said, well, I just took over the job as he was a senior vice president of Black music at Warner Brothers Records, in Burbank. And he said he was looking to hire a new rep in Dallas. And I said, "I've been asking you to hire me ever since I was a sophomore in college. Can you just humor me?" He says, "Man, you don't wanna do this." I was like, "Yes, I do." Long story short, we made a bet. I said, if you just give me an interview, then I won't, I can just take it off my list. If I don't get the job, at least I can say I had the opportunity to, you know, to get a job in the record industry. So long story short, he interviewed me, I got the job. My first job was the Southwest rep, Southwest regional for Warner Brothers Records. They moved me to Dallas, Texas, and it was everything that I thought it was. Not -- I never got in awe of being around the artists, but the, the perks, the salary. And eventually I went from Warner Brothers to, I rose up the ranks in Warner Brothers, then eventually went, was hired by another company, Polygram, which is now Island/Def Jam, to be a vice president of promotions. We had success there with, and when I was at Warner Brothers, I worked with Prince, Chaka Khan, Frankie Beverly, Maize, and, and *New Jack City* soundtrack, which really allowed me to get my bones because eventually they put me in charge of a label that they were reactivating, Reprise, which was originally owned by Frank Sinatra. And we were able to do what they hadn't been able to do, and that was to make that label successful. And then I got hired by other companies and I went to Ireland, wound up working as a vice president of promotions at Arista records, working with Whitney Houston, LA, and Baby Face, and Toni Braxton, Aretha Franklin, et cetera, and then eventually, I was hired to become a senior vice president at Capital Records. So, I went from one coast to the other coast, couple of times, and we were very successful at Capital

Records. And it gave me an opportunity to, not only as a record executive helping artists, but it helped us put money back into Black businesses. I was able to hire Black vendors, Black video directors, Black writers for this, you know, so we were able to take some of that money that we were generating and make sure that went back into our communities, with our businesses. Of course, a lot of that has changed with downsizing, industry and the labels have gotten smaller. Some of the power that we had as Black executives was kind of eroded. It's not as much or as many of us, although we are responsible for a good percentage of the, the music industry success. From a performing standpoint, there was a time when we not only had the performing aspect, but we had the executive talent. That too has somewhat eroded, but yeah, it was a great time and, I'm very happy. But what made the move to even the music industry, what made it palatable and, and delightful for me, not only, like I said, I was a capitalist and I, that's true, but it allowed me to still stay connected to radio. I've been in just about every major radio station in the country. And when I was in those positions, I made sure that I supported college radio stations that were at Black schools because on the pop side or, or the white side, that's a euphemism for pop, they supported their college radio stations with their alternative music or what have you. They made sure that they put in their budget. So, I put in budget for my Black radio stations that were at my colleges. And so, when I eventually wound up at WCLK, it was kind of interesting to talk to them and they say, you know, we broke this artist and we broke that artist. And I was like, yeah, I know you did, because that was an artist that I was working with. And in a lot of cases, when I couldn't get the big stations to play it, I knew that I could always find home at college radio stations, who are always, you know, more adventurous and a little closer to what's happening.

So, yeah, my, my career in the music industry was enjoyable, and I got the thing about it is I got to work and meet all of my childhood idols from radio. And the thing that made it really great is that when I met them, they weren't buttholes. [Laughter] They were, they were just as nice and cool. And, and so when, you know, I grow up listening to a Frankie Crocker, a Hank Spann on the radio, and now I'm working with Hank Spann, who was also a vice president at Warner Brothers. We actually were hired around the same time. And then I'm meeting a Frankie Crocker or having **Hakeem Webb**, or some of the other announcers to come to talk to my students, you know. So, it's been very fulfilling to be able to make those transitions. One, to be blessed by God, to have the kind of career that's allowed me to see the country and parts of the world on somebody else's dime, but also to be able to put back into our communities, you know. Trying to, I tried to talk to artists and helping them to understand the economics of the business, 'cause you've seen so many stories of how artists sell millions and millions of records and then they wind up living in mom's house or going broke because no one is teaching them the economics of the business. And so, I was

able to do that, because again, I went to Shaw as a business major. So, I was always interested even in radio. Once I got to radio and learned that the program director was in charge of all the DJs, and he was a part of management. That's where I set my sights. I never just set my sights on being a disc jockey. If I'm gonna be a disc jockey, I wanna be in charge of all of them. And then eventually I became a general manager. So, I did the same thing in the music industry. When I saw, I started working paths to grow, and God was able to bless me, to do just that.

JR: So you made a transition back to radio from the record industry.

DLC: Yes. You know, the radio, when the record industry imploded around 2000, it was, it was, it was crazy. You know, at one time there was like 20 record labels. And, you know, if you lost a job at one place, you could go to another. And in 2002 was the first time that I had ever been without regular employment. I mean, I, I, and in the business where that is a constant from the time I graduated in 1980, all the way up to 2002, I had uninterrupted employment, which is a rarity. And if it did, it was because I decided to leave one company to another because I also learned how you can grow financially is by leaving one company, going to another, just like if you're in an insurance, you can get a better rate if you leave the company, you you're at and going to another one cause they always have incentives to get you. But in 2002, and so when that happened, we were faced with some issues. I was living in Los Angeles, and me and my wife decided, and I did marry, my wife is from Macon, Georgia, and we kind of decided, wanted to know where we -- We had lived in New York, we had lived in Dallas, we lived in North Carolina, and everybody thought we were gonna go back to North Carolina, but we decided at that point, we really wanted to be closer to family again. We had been able to travel and be away from family, but always see them, but never really lived. The closest we lived around family is when we lived in New York. And so, we decided to come to Atlanta, long story short. So, we sold our home in LA and moved to Atlanta. And I came here. I was doing some consulting, and one day Edith Thorpe, who was in school with me at Shaw, who succeeded me at WRVS said, 'You know what, David, you need to be really back in, in radio. You've got too much knowledge. You've got too much this, that to just be sitting on the side, not doing it.' And I was like. And the thing was, I'll be very honest. I was a little discouraged. cause when I first got to Atlanta and tried to get jobs, nobody would hire me. One, because they thought they couldn't afford me, cause people kind of know what music executives made, I think. And then there was other people who thought that I might come in and try to take their jobs cause I've always been a leader. And so like, how can you be, if you've been leading all this time, how are you gonna follow somebody? But I always say in order to be a good leader, you gotta be a good follower. So, Edith said, I want you to meet

my friend. She's the general manager of WCLK, Wendy Williams, and you guys should just go to lunch and have a conversation. I said, eh, I messed around. I said, nah I said, nobody's gonna hire me. She says, just do it. So one day I, she set it up. I went and had lunch with Wendy and I was, already knew about WCLK, I listened to it, I listened to the station, but I was really impressed with her, and her vision for the radio station. And she had been running the station at that time about 20, almost 25 years or so. And WCLK had become, really become the model of what a public radio station owned by an HBCU should be. People always talk about HUR at Howard, but HUR is a commercial radio station. And so, and so you can't really compare HUR to the other stations that are, are non public. As a matter of fact, one of my students from Elizabeth City State, Traci LaTrelle is now the program director at WHUR. And so, I sat with Wendy and we talked and it was kind of interesting. We had a series of conversations and she told me what the compensation was. And I said, okay. And she said, it was funny. She said, did you hear what I said the compensation was? I said, yeah. And I love, I love her because all of the background in history that I have, she was not intimidated by that, but she saw it as an asset. And so, in September of 2018 she hired me as a program director.

JR: That's quite a story; you've made like a full circle. And in your professional life, that's really fascinating. So, you have seen so much in the HBCU radio world over the years. How has it changed in that period of time?

DCL: You know, when I came back, I saw some really good and I saw some really not so good. [Laughs] I saw some changes that were good, and I saw some changes that still needed to be made. I still saw, I see where radio from a technology standpoint, a lot of HBCU radio stations have really stepped up and they're employing some of those things. I still think they are still having the challenges in terms of finances. And I think that's what sets WCLK apart. Not that they don't have challenge, we don't have challenges, but WCLK has found a way and created different avenues of generating income. And then there's programming. When I left, there was not, NPR was not offering a lot of programming. Cause when we took WSHA into the NPR world through Corporation of Public Broadcasting, there was really no programming that really was tailored to our audience. And you know, you could, the information is good, but who's delivering the message, and the people delivering the message didn't sound like my audience. It did not. And when I came back, I'm still not seeing that kind of robust representation, but Wendy and Loretta Rucker, you know, created the public radio programming consortium, which, and I remember Loretta when I was at WSHA. So she was a part of the vetting when I came back to WCLK. So it was. Gosh, so a familiar face who could kind of vouch for my talents being away from the format and this side of the industry for so long. So, but I still see that is still one of the greatest challenges and I still

think that these, some of these radio stations are still not seen by their licensee as the assets that they should be. They still have to fight for dollars. You know, schools will take care of your overhead, but the other things, you know, equipment has gone up, technology. And then of course creating, you know, content, cause content is king. And I think when you go to -- I go to various public radio conferences since I've been back, as a matter of fact, been asked to speak on a couple of panels since I've been back in the medium, there's still not enough of that kind of programming that appeals to that segment.

And of course, our audience is diverse, but there's still a core. And your core in your base audience is still African American if you're an HBCU radio station, I don't care what your format is. You know, that's gonna be your, that's your, that's 95% of the time that's your core. And you've gotta have programs and information that speaks to that audience in order for them to be, you know, to lock in. Now, some people say, well, if you're a music station, you should be a music station. Well, it's easy for people from the mainstream to say that, because they still have a variety of choices. If they want to turn to, if they want to hear a particular type of music, they can turn to a station and hear that, if they want to hear news, they can turn to a station that gives them news, but in the African American community, we still don't have that.

I was very disheartened when my good friend, who I love, Cathy Hughes, when they had, who owns Urban One, formerly Radio One and T now TV One, when they gave up on the, the news format. I thought that was a very -- it's not as lucrative and you gotta have some -- but it's a very important aspect. And so what we've done since WCLK, since we've been here, we've created a couple of new programs. We have a very longstanding public affairs program called *The Local Take* with Kiplyn Primus that addresses those issues, and we recently just brought in Rushion McDonald, and his money making conversations, a program I've known Rushion for a number of years, and we brought him on board with a show that he was syndicating, which we started carrying the syndicated show and then I said, "Well, why don't we make your show different?" Here at -- he's here in Atlanta, "Why don't we make your show a live call-in show?" And he talks to people, he talks to decision makers, industry makers, but he also gives people a chance to call in and find out how they can help their business or follow their dreams. And so, it was really good to be able to have that. And we're now -- he considers us his flagship station for his show, which is, you know, heard on various stations across the country.

And the biggest challenge for us is creativity. And not creativity, but still financial because people still don't understand the value of underwriting a program on a public radio station now because of deregulation, it's enhanced u underwriting. That's what we called it when I left. And so you can do more than

just saying this program is brought to you by, you know, you ABC Record Company. You can now say this program is by paid by, and you could talk about their product, and the services that they offer without endorsing them, but just inform by -- from an information and WCLK has done a really great job in doing that. Just so happens that we are in the most competitive, we're in the market number six, which is the most competitive radio market in the country when it comes to African American listeners. There are like, there's like 47 radio stations or media outlets in this market and at least seven that are going for the same audience. And so I get to see, you know, the numbers, our ratings, have been good. They've been -- but we -- you can always see the duplication where we are sharing audience with another station. But, we get ours and it's -- and I think that if people would really embrace public radio, but public radio has to sound professional. And that's the key on WCLK is a very professional sounding radio station. We've always been accused that sometimes sounding like a commercial station, but that's what people are used to. Public radio, even public radio --and I've gone to a couple of conferences -- they've even asked me, what are you guys doing? How do you guys get the ratings? Or how do you get the kind of appeal and raise -- ? And some of the things that public radio used to fight against are now things public radio is realizing they have to embrace, because you now have just like radio terrestrial radio in general, people have streaming services. They can create their own, you know, their own playlist, they don't necessarily need to go to radio for their first, the best new song. And so just like radio as a whole has had to fight, so has public radio, but radio is still a personal medium and it still has its place. And so we just have to be more creative. We have to be more on the cutting edge of what's happening, but it doesn't -- I think that public radio, especially for HBCU radio is bright if the owners really realize what they have in these broadcast facilities. And I'll get on that soap box any day and say that a lot of them are missing the boat.

JR: I really love how you have even taken the sort of arc of your story full circle with HBCU radio and public radio in general. And, it's how important this preservation work is to, you know, remember the impact and to try to be inspired by the impact of, say a WSHA, and I really appreciate that.

So, at this point, I wanna kind of bring it back to you, and ask you a few questions to follow up that really are more ,once again, about David Linton. And I'd like to know what you feel your proudest accomplishment is in your career?

DCL: Wow. That's -- The proudest accomplishment. I mean, I, it it's really, I think there are, I think there are two that's kind of neck and neck, if there's one thing. I think I go back to WSHA, when we said we were going to, first of all, that station was broadcasting in mono. We converted it to stereo. When we said

we were going to become a CPB station, a lot of people were naysayers. Even the people on the campus, they were saying, it couldn't be done. You don't have this, you don't have that. And so, we were able to do that. And so, and the irony about that is, I was, we got certified in like '84. And I left in '85 so did it drop the mic? Go on. And then I, and then, then right there, it's gotta be WRVS. You know, to be able to -- I was 27 years old, and given the opportunity at 27 to start a radio station from an idea, you had a young chancellor who ironically just retired, Dr. Jenkins, who Jimmy Jenkins, who was, who just retiring as the president of Livingstone College. And he asked me to come and host his gala. And so I had the opportunity to be reunited with him a couple of weeks ago. But as I said that night, you know that to me, is it because Jimmy was a very, he was a brand new chancellor. He was the first alumnus to be elected chancellor and he was young. He was now having to be the boss of former classmates and that whole thing, you know, professors that, you know, he's going back as their boss. And then to say he was gonna put a radio station on, and the university had tried on several occasions to do one unsuccessfully. And so for him to take a chance on this eager, I-can-do-anything 27 year old at the early stages of his presidency for what is one of the landmark things that he can say he accomplished at his *alma mater*, to me was really special. And if anything has to be number one, that would probably be it, because he took a chance and we created something that others had failed that and we got it on the air and people said it wasn't gonna happen. We created a studio, we created a radio station. We laid the foundation for a recording studio and now they have a television station. So although I was only there for the radio station and laid the foundation for the recording studio, because I bought all the equipment for the radio station, I was consulting on a recording thing. And to know that 37 years later, and the students who came through that program with me, some went for the Voice of America, I talked about Traci LaTrelle, some have gone into the record business, and they've all been successful. And so, to say that, you know, you in essence gave birth to something that is still standing and that is impacting lives because students are still going through that radio station. They're still learning the art of broadcasting, podcasting, or whatever, and they're being able to go and make a way for themselves in the world. I have to say that WRVS, although I've got, I've gotten gold and platinum awards on my wall representing over 90 million units sold, over billion dollars, that I've been involved with some of the biggest artists on the planet at the end of the day, being able to impact the future through WRVS has got to be it. And now I'm getting the chance at WCLK, so maybe that chapter's not over, but up to this point, that's gotta be it.

JR: So, in achieving those proud moments, what would you say was the most important lesson you've learned?

DCL: One was, you know, not being afraid to take a chance, and not, you know -- I have been -- I'm a pretty, I'm a moderate to conservative guy to be very, you know, to be very honest. I mean, and I mean, I'm calculating, I put it like that and that's in a positive way. I've always, I believed early on that there's nothing, nothing, nothing really new under the sun. Everything has been done before, if not exactly the same way, it's been attempted or something. And so, I've been able to learn by other people's successes and by their mistakes. And to me being -- I've been accused of being a little cocky. Yeah. Cause I'm confident. But I also know that you need a team and the right people. And that's to me is one of the things that I learned. I learned if you're going to be a good leader, you gotta be a good follower, but -- and also if you get the right people, you give them the resources to do their job, and then you get out of the way and let them do their job. And I think that's the biggest lesson that I learned. And it was one of the things that I learned working for several great leaders, whether, especially in, early on with, with Dr. Vandergriff, Jimmy, all of my, all of my bosses have given me the resources and then they got out of the way, and I have this saying, "I know what I know. And what I don't know, I'm willing to ask," and I think that's so important, you know, there, you know, you can't BS the BS-er, you know, so you have to be, you just have to be honest, you know, we don't know everything. But I know that there's always the answer. So, you know, that's one of the things that I've just kind of, I've learned over the years, you know, we've, you know, we've made some mistakes, but the ability is of any leader is to, to admit it, cut your losses and keep moving and, you know, so there's several lessons that I've learned that way, I think, but that's, you know, but it really is, you gotta believe in your people, you know, you hire your good people. You give 'em the resources and you let 'em do their job, get outta the way and let them know it's okay to make a mistake. Cause sometimes people feel that you can't make a - if I make a mistake, oh my God -- no. You make a mistake, you learn from it, and then you keep moving on. That might have been more than one thing, but [Laughter]

JR: Well, another question was, do you have any words of wisdom to pass along? And you've sort of just did that in, you know, in relating that. So let me ask you, how you would like to be remembered?

DCL: Wow. That's, you know what, I'd like to be remembered as someone who made an impact, not so much as accomplishments, but that I'd left any situation that I was, I've been involved with -- I left it a little better than it was when I got there.

You know, I'm chairman of a nonprofit organization, the Living Legends Foundation, which is celebrating his 30th anniversary, and I always tell that that group, one thing that I wanna do is, I wanna leave the foundation better than I,

than I lo -- I found it when I became chair, I wanted to leave it better. And that's what I wanted to be, I wanted to be known as somebody who tried to make an impact to improve the lives of others. And I think if that's what somebody says, you know, David Linton -- And, and the other thing, something my grandfather used to always say, and I think it was one of the guiding principles for me, as it was for my father, et cetera. He said, your name will get there before you do. And so being a man of integrity is very important to me. And I always said I wanted to be, I wanted to have high integrity in a low integrity business, especially when I went to the music side. [Laughs] And I think that's, you know, that's what I like to really be remembered as, a man of integrity

JR: Is there anything else that you would like to talk about today while we are conducting this interview?

DCL: Well, you know, I would like to say about WCLK, you know, I'm at WCLK, and I think that it is, as I told Wendy, when I took the job, this is not a bad radio station. It needed some fine tuning, but I think what she has been able to do as a leader, especially as a woman, at a radio station in a market like this, especially in Atlanta, very competitive market, and to be able to guide this radio station for 20-plus years, 27 years, and have it be -- when I go to a conference and they start talking about things they want and they wanna do, there are things that WCLK has done or is doing. And I often go to these conferences to try to learn, and I do pick up something, but I find people are more interested in terms of what we're doing, as much as I'm trying to go get knowledge. So, I really think that WCKL is a gem. I think it too -- has that same, the same issue that other public radio stations, the people don't see the real value of it. They enjoy the music, but in terms of what it represents in the bigger picture, I don't sometimes, you know, people take things for granted and, you know, the pandemic really allowed us to connect without audience in a different way. When everything was abnormal, we became that normal. And when we do our fundraising and people make comments, you know, "Your radio station really got me through," you know, "If it wasn't for WCLK," you know, "I don't know what I would've done. I could turn on the radio and I can hear Morris in the Morning or Riva in the midday or Jamal in the afternoon." Those are our afternoon, and Debb Moore. Those are our top four announcers, "And to hear them play the music or say something that, let me know that, okay. You know, we might be going through this crazy thing, but it's gonna be okay." And that you can't get that from Spotify. You can't get that from Pandora. You can't get that from Watercolors. And those are all people that I know. I know a lot of those people that, but you can't get that from those services. You can only get that from radio, you -- And I think that's the biggest thing that radio has to always remember.

People always try to write radio off. But that person coming through that radio, that voice, that's a person who lives and breathes like you and they can relate to you in the local, especially when we have a lot of syndicated radio shows and I don't knock that hustle, but it did put a lot of people out of jobs. So, I do have my problems with some of those people and some of those people, doing those jobs are my friends. But the pandemic really showed the power of radio and especially HBCU radio, because we gave them news. We gave them information, we entertained them. We gave them the whole ball of wax and I gotta commend my staff because through it all, you know, we are essential workers. We came in. We had to be on. And we, unfortunately, because that's the problem of the HBCUs, we don't have all the technology, so we couldn't track at home and all that stuff, you know? Cause we, those are the things that fall in the gap for these, for HBCUs. And we don't have major, major benefactors with the last name Carnegie or Rockefeller that gives us money, you know? But we were able to show our audience the importance of the service and they in turn showed us how much they appreciated it.

And I think that to me shows the power of HBCU radios when they are properly run, properly staffed, and they understand their mission. You first have to understand your own mission. And when you do that, you can be the asset that you were meant to be

JR: David Linton, I wanna thank you for taking this time to talk with me and participate in this project. I hope to share this interview or highlights from it at the HBCU Radio Preservation Symposium that will be held at Clark Atlanta at the University Center in November.

DCL: Well, I look forward to it.

JR: And hope to meet you in person then.

DCL: Well, I look forward to it and thank you for the opportunity. I really consider this an honor, and it's not. And, I really do, I think that, and this is my pa -- excuse me. I really thank you. This is my passion. It has always been my passion, radio has been my passion. And I have a strong affinity for HBCUs. I'm a product of Shaw University, North Carolina Central University, where I did my graduate work, and I worked at, you know, Elizabeth City State. So for a kid from Brooklyn who didn't know what a HBCU was, I think, I've made up for that lack of knowledge early on, so thank you.

JR: You have indeed, yep. Take care and I will be in touch.

DCL: Okay, then. Thank you so much. All right, God bless.