

John Boccacino:

Hello and welcome back to the 'Cuse Conversations podcast. I'm John Boccacino, senior internal communications specialist at Syracuse University.

Rick Wright:

Dr. King, he loved good food too. And of course you got to realize in the African American community, especially in the South especially, I go back to Elizabeth City on Sundays and special dinners. My mother, Ms. Lily, May Wright, she could cook man. Of course, going over to Dr. King's dinner Dr. Edith Scott could also cook, his sister-in-law. But we were sitting there at a really a beautiful meal around the table. And the one thing that Dr. King impressed on me was education. And then of course, one thing he told me, he said, Roosevelt, one of the problems, one of the things that has happened here in America is that we as African Americans were brought to this country as slaves to basically work all of the fields and the agriculture of the South. And technically your families built this country. We did for free as slaves.

The one problem he said that America has got to wake it up to is this thing of superiority. He was saying that basically ... he told me that basically in the white community, they are immediately taught at birth that these African-Americans, they use other words, were inferior, they were dumb, they were stupid. You'll always remember, you are better than them. So basically Dr. King said that it was basically laid out that their worst was better than our very best. He said, now we got to basically get by this is education, schooling. Get smart. And of course, also to be humble in our presentation because Dr. King was a very

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Oh, this is indeed a pleasure and a wonderful opportunity. My God, I thought y'all forgot about me at Syracuse but here I am. I retired 11 years ago from the famous SI Newhouse School of Public Communications but my trip to Syracuse has been really a wonderful dream come true. It's been absolutely incredible and I can't say enough. Thank you so much for giving me this wonderful opportunity to talk about my reflections of meeting and eating and getting to know the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr many years ago in Elizabeth City, North Carolina.

John Boccacino:

It's a great place to start, Rick because where you grew up really was the heart of the segregated south. There were two citizens, there were the whites, and then there were African-Americans who were unfortunately treated as second class citizens with all sorts of segregated policies in place. You kind of grow up during this cauldron of American history, and I know you're a history aficionado yourself. I want you to paint the picture of your first connections. You get to go to Sunday school and Dr. Edith Scott Bagley, a talented opera singer, go YouTube her, go Google her, find out some incredible and audio performances of Dr. Edith Scott Bagley, she was your Sunday school teacher. She was also Coretta Scott King's sister. So connect the dots for us. What was that experience like and how did you come to meet Dr. King?

Rick Wright:

Yes, John let's go back in history to roughly, let me say, let's go with 1959, the year in which Syracuse University won the national championship in football.

John Boccacino:

Cotton Bowl champions with Jim Brown down there.

Rick Wright:

Yeah. And then later of course, Ernie Davis wins the Heisman Trophy here at Syracuse making him the first African-American to win a Heisman trophy. Now, what are you bringing this particular perspective up?





the Bagleys, Dr. Arthur Bagley and Edith Scott Bagley who was the sister of Coretta Scott King. Dr. King's sister-in-law was my Sunday school teacher. Man, I'm telling she could sing in the choir loft of the Mount Lebanon African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Reverend Felton was the pastor during that time, and he was also a big close friend also of Dr. Edith Scott Bagley. But that was the tone.

Then of course, sitting down to talk to him with dinner. And of course he was always incredible. I say this, I know you got probably other questions for there, John, but I never forget the first time that I shook hands with Dr. King with this hand, my right hand. To our great audience who's listening to us all over the country, I want everybody to know that when I shook the hand of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, I still feel it to this day. You know how you feel some people that their hands are rough or warm or whatever? The softness and the smoothness of Dr. King's hands, I still feel it today. It had to be, it was godly. It was like something entirely different. I'll never forget, I pulled out my NAACP card and we had a big student chapter there at Elizabeth State University and I gave him my card and he signed it. I have it somewhere in a box in my possessions.

John Boccacino:

Oh, that is such a cool and that's one of the reasons we wanted to have Rick or is unfortunately due to the passage of time. There's fewer and fewer people that have had these impactful encounters one of the greatest motivational speakers, mobilization forces, who got people to believe in the

Rick Wright:

Well, the dinners. Dr. King, he loves good food too. Of course, you got to realize in the African-American community, especially in the south especially, I go back to Elizabeth City on Sundays and special dinners. My late mother, Ms. Lily May Wright, Ruben Wright II's, grandmother, she could cook, Of course, going over to Dr. King's dinner, Dr. Edith Scott could also cook, his sister-in-law. There was ... let me give you an expression of the dinner, collard greens, candiyams. Oh my God. The potato salad was incredible. Fried chicken, ham, snap beans, where you snap beans, the beans, snap beans. Then of course it was always iced tea was also his other drink.

John Boccacino:

You are making me so hungry right now, Rick, as we're recording. It sounds delicious.

Rick Wright:

Yeah, and the cornbread that was being cooked by my mother's generation off the scale is what I'm getting at it. I should have those recipes there. But we were sitting there and really a beautiful meal around the table. The one thing that Dr. King impressed on me was education. Then of course, one thing he told me, he said, "Roosevelt, one of the things that has happened here in America is that we as African-Americans were brought to this country as slaves, as slaves to basically work all of the fields the agriculture of the South. And technically our families built this country. We did for free as slaves." The one problem he said that America has got to wake up to is this thing of superiority. He was saying that basically ... he told me that basically in the white community, they are immediately taught at birth that these African Americans, they use other words, were inferior, they were dumb, they were stupid. You'll always remember you are better than them. So basically Dr. King said that it was basically laid out that their worse was better than our very best. He said, how we got to basically get by this education, schooling, get smart. Of course, also to be humble in our presentation, because Dr. King was a very humble person. You also got to realize, he basically put together the nonviolent approach which came from who? Gandhi in India was his role model and mentor for the nonviolent movement. We basically









I tell you, my trip to Syracuse is really a dream come true. I first learned of Syracuse and its media program in the library of PW Moore High School. I never forget Ms. Lillian Perry, our librarian, one day called me and said, "Roosevelt, come to the library. I got something to show you." The National Education Association, NEA, had a division at that time called Audio/Visual Instruction, and it was a magazine. Of course they had a magazine that was dedicated completely to the whole field of audiovisual education. Ms. Perry gave me this magazine, NEA National Education Association, when it was dedicated to audiovisual. I read through the book, and guess what I found in the book? There were articles about Syracuse University and there were all these students setting up microphones and microdoing the games pictures of all the stuff we are doing today.

That was back in the 1950s, man. I said, when she said. So I read the book, but in the book there's always that cartoon caption, have a cartoon. There was a cartoon that day of a graduation exercise at a university. There were the trees and all the families around everybody's academic regalia. There was one gentleman, your headgear, your mortarboard that you wear, he was wearing a real emotion picture film. Off the film was about maybe what 12 inches of film and the tassel, and the caption for that cartoon and that NEA magazine that day was, oh, he must have majored in audiovisual education. I said, wow. That was Syracuse. Then, Mrs. Majet, who was the librarian at Elizabeth City State University, when she was a freshman, came to me one day and said, "Roosevelt, you know this field that you like doing audiovisual and everything? There is a school way up north called Syracuse," but she did her master's of library science here at Syracuse, Majet.

Lord, I never believed in my wildest imagination when she was talking to me about this school that I would end up at the same school, their media audiovisual, radio, television, film, as a professor and also getting a doctorate degree from the school in instructional technology. I did my dissertation on radio, by the way, and how radio can be used as a tool of instruction for teaching kids. Of course, there it is, Syracuse. The trip has been just absolutely fantastic. John, you've been my student, and of course I sure got a lot of the old students. I love all of you on the air and your old professor who's 80 years old now. I just try to be an authentic Rick Wright. I mean just myself. I didn't know where the mentors that I had from the Dr. Kings or Dr. Walter and Ridley of the world, Mr. CR Page.

educational media center, and of course Dr. El Milford Codwell, another great mentor of mine who was at Elizabeth City State, was now the head chair of the Department of Education at Delaware State.

He called me on the phone and said, "Row what you doing back home, man?" I had just did a tour in the Army, by the way, and a year and a half faculty in Elizabeth City State, then at Virginia State. So I'm handed to Delaware State, and then Dr. Hal Johnson, who's my advisor and head of the program, Virginia, said, "Roosevelt, you're going to go up to Delaware State? What are you going to do with the program?" I said, "That's going to be my research project for this program." Then of course, the spring of 1970, when I was finished up the Virginia State Program and also director of the Educational Media Center at Delaware State, I got a phone call from Dr. Hal Johnson who says, "Roosevelt, everybody in our institute has got to have an onsite visitation and have one of the top leaders in your area of specialization to come down to your person and sign off on your research project and all."

He said, "I'm going to send you Dr. Donald P. Eley, Syracuse University." I tell you, I've thought, what Syracuse Dr. Don Eley? He came down, spent three days with me and Delaware State teaching my classes. Delaware was finally putting money in Delaware State, which was HBCU for new buildings, and there was a new building that the education and humanities building. I laid out the plans for the Communications Center that is at Delaware State today, back during this time. So ag9Tw 20.239 0 Td .002c-0.7

Memphis, Tennessee to help the sanitation workers there. One guy had gotten crushed in a truck in Memphis.

John Boccacino:

I feel like our audience has learned a lot about both you, but also about the career of King and the Syracuse University connections and ties that really bond us all. It's honestly been a honor to get to tell your story here and have you on, and I just want to thank you so much for being so open and candid. You really are the major market that got all of us into TV, radio, film, got our passion started for more than 38 years as a faculty member. You've earned that Professor Emeritus title. Thank you so much for making the time today.

Rick Wright:

John, thank you so very much for being your guest. Also as we get ready for the annual Dr. Martin Luther King birthday celebration is the world. Famous JMA dome now where George Kilpatrick and broadcast for many years and it has become the largest on-campus celebration, the life story of Dr. Martin Luther King of any college or university the entire United States of America. A blessing of course, John, love you. You're major market, John plus.

John Boccacino:

That'll be January 21st. Again, in the JMA Dome will be our 39th annual celebration. It's the largest of its kind on any college campus. For my guest Rick Wright, I am John Boccacino, signing off for this week's episode of the 'Cuse Conversations podcast.