RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH STEVEN DINER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and
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NEWARK, NEW JERSEY
APRIL 30, 2019

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Donald Koger: Today is April 30, 2019. This is session number two of the oral history interview with Dr. Steven Diner, in Newark, New Jersey. This is Donald Koger.

Shaun Illingworth: This is Shaun Illingworth, and thank you very much for having us back.

Steven Diner: My pleasure.

SI: Last time, we left off with your becoming the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences here in Rutgers-Newark. How do you get settled in a job like that? How do you determine what are the best courses of action? What do you see as the number one priorities?

SD: Well, I came with a very clear idea of what I wanted to accomplish. Obviously, as dean, you oversee all kinds of things, but my overall objective, was how do we take advantage of our location in downtown Newark to strengthen Arts and Sciences? I did a number of different things along those lines. One of the most important, I began having departments shape their recruiting of new faculty around a couple of broad interdisciplinary areas. One was cities, urban life, et cetera. The other big one was race, ethnicity, immigration, and group identity. The reason for the second, of course, was that Rutgers-Newark had already been ranked for years as the most diverse campus in America, by *U.S. News*, and I knew we had this extraordinary student diversity. So, each time a new faculty line opened up, if it was in the humanities or social sciences, I discussed with the department chair, how to somebody with interests in these particular areas. Also, one of the things I negotiated in my appointment was several new faculty lines, I used those to recruit new faculty in key areas that would strengthen our focus on cities, race and ethnicity. That was very, very important, and I put a lot of energy into that.

One of the things I was told when I got here was that we were having trouble recruiting students and in particular, recruiting good students. The enrollment numbers weren't great, but I had this idea that we could recruit top students to an honors college. Our emphasis in recruiting students would be, here's a chance to really learn in the city and take advantage of all these connections and all those opportunities. This honors college was actually quite successful in recruiting students, stronger students, who they may have been or may not have been interested in the city before. So, that was really important. As part of the deal I negotiated to come to Rutgers-Newark, I had some money that I could give to faculty to design new courses that were based on the city. So, we gave out grants to various faculty members and a whole bunch of new urban-oriented or race and ethnicity-oriented courses emerged.

I was chatting with a faculty member here, whom I recruited when I was dean. She's now director of the Urban Systems Program, which is an interdisciplinary doctoral program. We were chatting one day and she said, "Steve, a group of the faculty who you recruited are all good friends and we continue to get together and share our interests in cities." I was blown away. No university can teach everything. You need areas of focus. My idea was that scholars and students interested in urban issues, and in race and ethnicity would see Rutgers-Newark as the campus they really want to come to. In many ways, it worked.

SI: Let us talk about the honors college for a second.

SD: Yes.

SI: You said something had been in place already, and you kind of changed the emphasis to more living and learning in the city.

SD: There had been a modest, very small, ineffective honors program, nothing much was happening in it. There were very few students in it. I basically appointed a new director with a mission to really start recruiting students around the learning opportunities in the city.

SI: Are there other aspects involved structurally, other than kind of fine tuning the mission and appointing a new director? What other things do you have to do to get something like that up and running on your level? Obviously, the director has to do a lot.

SD: Yes, well, you've got to provide funding and engage leading faculty in the Honors College. I needed to find offices for them. Finding space on the campus is one of the biggest challenges any administrator faces. So, that was an issue. I don't remember exactly where we put them, but it got resolved nicely. I sought to connect the honors program with as many departments as I could. Obviously, as a dean, you spend a lot of time with department chairs, and that's probably your key constituency. In fact, I had monthly meetings with all the chairs, plus everyone on my staff. I left the agenda pretty open, so chairs could bring up whatever issues they wanted. I also presented issues that I thought we should talk about, and among them were things like the honors program and the focus on cities.

SI: Now, part of that addresses this issue that I hear in many contexts of all three campuses, but, particularly, Newark and Camden being in the city, not of the city, and it seems like you are addressing that with the renewed emphasis on cities and embracing ethnicity. Were there other ways you were addressing that with constituency around the city?

SD: Oh, yes, from day one, as dean and even more as chancellor. As dean, I made appointments to meet many of the very important people in the city. I talked to them about my goals. I remember meeting with Sharpe James, who was mayor before Booker, and was generally thought to be this rough [African] American city guy who was contemptuous about academics. But he was wonderful. He said, "I am so glad you came to see me and how wonderful that you're putting an emphasis on the city and studying the city." [Editor's Note: Sharpe James served as the Mayor of Newark from 1986 to 2006 and State Senator representing the 29th District from 1999 to 2008. Cory Booker was the Mayor of Newark from 2006 to 2013. Since 2013, he has served as one of New Jersey's Senators.]

One of the national higher education organizations I was involved with brought group of visitors to the campus. I think they were international. They were spending a day or two in Newark. One of the things I did was arrange for them to meet Sharpe James in the Performing Arts Center. It was so interesting, because Sharpe James was the last person I thought would be

really into the arts. But he said to the visitors, "This building is here because of our commitment to the city and we're building a greater city." He seemed thrilled, to be showing people the Performing Arts Center, which surprised me at the time. He was proud of everything that got built in Newark. I also got to know members of the city council. There's one city council member I met with that I probably should tell you about. [Editor's Note: The New Jersey Performing Arts Center, or NJPAC, opened in 1997. It is located at 1 Center Street in Newark. Nearby is the Prudential Center, an arena that is home to the New Jersey Devils.]

SI: Sure.

SD: His name was Cory Booker. He had just been elected to the city council when I arrived. We had a wonderful conversation and talked at some length. He's a politician, but he's also an academic, Rhodes Scholar and all that. When we finished our conversation, he says, "Let's stay in very close touch. I really want to work with you and the University." He said, "But don't tell anyone else in the city government that you're meeting with me because if you do, they won't meet with you because I'm such a pariah to them." Also, I met with many civic leaders. One of them was Ray Chambers. [Editor's Note: Cory Booker earned a BA and MA from Stanford University. He then earned a second MA from Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar. He then earned a JD from Yale Law School. Ray Chambers is a former business executive and philanthropist. He was born and raised in Newark and is also an alumnus of Rutgers-Newark. He has been involved with the United Nations and currently holds a position in the World Health Organization.]

SI: Yes.

SD: He is an alumnus of Rutgers-Newark who funded so much of the redevelopment of Newark. Another one was Art Ryan, the CEO of Prudential. I met with many other people at all sorts of organizations. [Editor's Note: Arthur F. Ryan was the CEO of Prudential from 1994 to 2008. He is known for revitalizing the company and making it a public company. He is active in many philanthropic activities as well.]

SI: Given the complex relationships between New Brunswick and Newark, did having somebody who was intimately familiar with the Newark Campus and its goals and challenges affect your job and the fate of the campus during that?

SD: Absolutely.

SI: Okay.

SD: I think it was after my second year as dean, Norm Samuels and I met and he said, "I've been doing this job long enough and I want you to be my successor, and I think I can arrange that." I'd been dean two years, and I said, "No, I need a bit longer. I don't think I can just step down from the dean's position now." So, basically, we waited another year and a half or so. Then there was the proposed merger of Rutgers and UMDNJ, which became a big complicated issue. So, one of

the things that happened was that Samuels became, for a period of time, the acting president got on very well with board people. I think they tried to talk him into staying in the job, but he didn't want to. He had been provost here for twenty years and didn't want to continue in administration. But he wanted to get me appointed as his successor, which he had indicated earlier. So when McCormick took over as president, approached me and said, "There's all this uncertainty about the merger and the universities in Newark and you would be the ideal person, can you serve as provost?" I said, "Yes." But it's very interesting, there was never a search, and his reasoning was that there could not be a national search while proposals to merge the universities were pending. We don't have time to do a search. We need good leadership. So, I got appointed without a search and did it for ten years. [Editor's Note: Richard L. McCormick was a Professor in the Department of History at Rutgers from 1976 to 1992. He also served as the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences for three years.]

SI: Okay.

SD: Over time, McCormick and I had significant disagreements, but at that moment, he was brand new. Well, he was never brand new to Rutgers, but he was new in that role. Based on Samuels' advice, he was eager to get me into the leadership position.

SI: You brought up what was known as the Vagelos Plan, which, if I am thinking correctly, would have basically happened anyway with the merger. Some aspects would be different but bringing a medical school into the system.

SD: Yes.

SI: Going from the Dean of the Arts and Sciences college to Provost, overseeing all these universities and then potentially bringing in medical aspects, did you try to prepare yourself in any way for what might be coming at that point?

SD: Prepare in what sense?

SI: Well, I guess just thinking about what you might do if the Vagelos Plan came to pass.

SD: Oh, yes.

SI: Yes.

SD: Yes. For one thing, I had close ties with the leadership at NJIT and UMDNJ. The tie with NJIT was troubled. Bob Altenkirch who was president at that time, pushed to become the higher education leader in Newark and he saw me in his path as interfering in that.

Nonetheless, I took a deep, deep interest in discussions about the merger. My vision was, "This is wonderful, we can combine UMDNJ Newark and NJIT with Rutgers-Newark and make it a separate institution." That's really what I wanted to see because the idea was, so long as it's a

system governed through New Brunswick, we would always be stepchildren and we would never get full resources. Norman shared this view with the idea, if we could just combine these three institutions next door to each other into a single university. That would be a major Newark entity and also free us from domination by New Brunswick. [Editor's Note: Bob Altenkirch was president of NJIT From 2003 to 2011. In 2002, Governor James McGreevey appointed the Commission on Health Science, Education, and Training, chaired by Dr. P. Roy Vagelos, retired President, CEO and Chairman of Merck, who served on the Rutgers Board of Governors from 2002 to 2004. The committee was charged with reorganizing the state higher education system. The plan that emerged from their work, identified closely with the chairman as its primary architect and known as the Vagelos Plan, recommended merging Rutgers University, the New Jersey Institute of Technology and UMDNJ and creating three public research universities in the northern, central and southern regions of the state. A Review, Planning and Implementation Steering Committee, also chaired by Dr. Vagelos, began meeting in January 2003 to take steps to implement the plan, but these efforts collapsed by December of that year.]

SI: Well, that brings me back to my earlier question, that year that Dr. Samuels was the acting president, did you see any changes in how Newark fared? Was there more justice in how things were given out or just changes in the way things worked?

SD: I don't really remember. The focus, at the time, was on where are we heading and restructuring rather than, "How much money am I getting for this and that?" So, I don't really recall a significant change in the day-to-day management or Rutgers.

SI: Okay, well, this question kind of bridges both the deanship and then going with the provost years. You talked about how a lot of your visions focused on the social sciences and the humanities departments, but obviously you have the sciences or hard sciences, however you want to put it. Do you just see those as a separate entity to deal with, or do you try to bring these into the larger plans of dealing with the city and dealing with issues like race and ethnicity?

SD: Okay, that's a very good question. I did not think, for the most part, that you could give chemistry and biology and physics an urban focus. I felt strongly that it was very important for Rutgers-Newark to have first-rate science programs. Norman Samuels made building the sciences one of his top priorities. He recruited world class faculty to build particularly in the behavioral program a Center for Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience (CMBN).

I certainly wanted to see the sciences strengthened. My thinking from the beginning was, "We have the University of Medicine and Dentistry right here. We need to have strong sciences that interact with UMDNJ." As chancellor, I encouraged faculty to develop collaborative research programs with UMDNJ.

The chair of the Department of Geology, Alex Gates, and he had a much broader vision for his department. He thought it should be the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, and he started a major research focus, the levels of pollution in the Passaic River in Newark. So, that's one instance where I helped to build a specifically urban focus in the sciences. [Editor's

Note: Alexander Gates is a Distinguished Professor at Rutgers-Newark. He joined the faculty in 1987.]

The other instance was in the neuroscience program. Paula Tallal, cofounder of the program did a great deal of research on how students learned to read. So, obviously, while she wasn't necessarily working in the Newark schools, clearly, her scholarship and that of many psychology faculty focused on how kids learn, and this has obvious implications for Newark Schools. [Editor's Note: Paula Tallal is Professor Emerita of Neuroscience at Rutgers-Newark. She began her career at Rutgers in 1985. She was also the Co-Director of Center for Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience at the university.]

SI: When you became provost, did you just expand on these goals that you had been formulating? Obviously, the Vagelos Plan is out there and could change everything, but I think within a year it kind of implodes ...

SD: Yes.

SI: … Or does not get the support it needs to go further. How do you kind of refigure your priorities at that point, or do you?

SD: Well, certainly, in the back of my mind was, I believed the merger would come up again so it was important for me to continue to build close relationships with the other universities in Newark. But, it no longer was my central focus. I continued to focus on building and strengthening our academic programs by taking advantage of our location in the city and how could we attract more students and stronger students, taking advantage of our location in the city?

The law school, for example, had pioneered in connecting legal education with community service and the needs of poor urban residents. It was great working with the law school. The business school had not been involved in any significant way in the city. One of the things I did as chancellor was to get the school to establish a program in small business. We recruited a specialist in urban entrepreneurship and other faculty with related interests. So, this became an important new focus within the business school. This focus included urban business, minority entrepreneurship and the like. I was very pleased that I was able to do that. [Editor's Note: Jerome Williams served as the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost at Rutgers University-Newark. Williams is a Distinguished Professor and Prudential Chair in Business and research director of the Center of Urban Entrepreneurship and Economic Development]

SI: I want to ask you about building relationships with other constituencies like the alumni, which was maybe not given the same emphasis in the past as other colleges. Did you find that was a deficit or something you had to really work on to build a relationship for alumni to come back and support?

SD: Well, it was definitely one of the things I worked actively on. It is the case that relationships with many alumni were quite weak. So, yes, I got much more involved in that. I appointed Irene O'Brien as a vice chancellor for development and she took the lead and started setting up all kinds of luncheons and meetings. [Editor's Note: Irene O'Brien was appointed the Vice Chancellor for Development in 2009 and currently maintains the position.]

SI: Do you have any questions before I go further?

DK: Do you have any specific memories that come to mind when thinking about the partnerships with the local businesses at the time? Are there any stories that pop up about a particularly victory there?

SI: Prudential, obviously, has a strong relationship with this campus.

SD: Yes.

SI: Were there other businesses that either had a strong relationship or that you tried to cultivate specifically?

SD: Audible. So, yes, that was one entity, for example, that we worked with, particularly, as they were just getting started. I met with the CEO. He and I talked a lot about what Newark was like, its business possibilities. I was able to get some ties between him and faculty. I also developed good ties PSE&G. On occasion they turn to me and ask for a faculty expert who could help with this or that. [Editor's Note: Audible was founded in 1995. The company produces and sells audio entertainment, such as audio books. In 2007, the company moved its headquarters to Newark. Public Service Electric and Gas Company, or PSE&G, is a utility company in the State of New Jersey. It is operated by Public Service Enterprise Group (PSEG).]

SI: In terms of your most important tasks as provost and then chancellor, obviously appointing deans and making good appointments elsewhere is a part of that.

SD: Yes, yes.

SI: Do you have any other memories of people who you identified that you felt really could carry your goals forward and wound up doing that? Maybe just give us a little insight into what your thought process is in trying to make those appointments.

SD: Yes, it's a very good question. Well, one of the recruitments, I remember, was Dean of the Law School, and obviously the law school was very community oriented. I thought I had made a fabulous appointment when I persuaded John Farmer to come and be dean. Unfortunately, other opportunities emerged for him. He was clearly committed to the kinds of community engagement that the law school had been well known for. In the business school, I was able to appoint Glenn Shafer, who is quite an accomplished statistician. He had run a program for a long time, which prepared working professionals to get an MBA. Glenn was very, very

committed to Newark. In fact, he and his wife, Nell Painter, who's an eminent historian, bought a house in Newark and were living there. He was very committed to focusing the business school much more on urban issues. The School of Criminal Justice, by the very nature of what it does, was focused on the city. The nursing school was a bit more complicated, because, in this time of transition, it didn't really see itself as belonging to Rutgers-Newark. Its leaders thought it should have closer ties to UMDNJ, and so the deans resisted much of what I wanted to do, which was unfortunate. [Editor's Note: John Farmer was Dean of Rutgers Law School from 2009 to 2013. He also served as the Attorney General of New Jersey from 1999 to 2002 and the Governor of New Jersey for ninety minutes on January 8, 2002, after the resignation of Governor Christie Todd Whitman. Farmer held the post of Senior Vice President and General Counsel for Rutgers University. Since September 1, 2019, he has been the Director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers. Glenn Shafer served as Dean of the Rutgers Business School from 2011 to 2014. He has been on the faculty of the business school since 1992. His wife, Nell Irvin Painter, is a historian, author and artist. Painter is a Distinguished Professor Emerita at Princeton University and also an alumna of the Mason Gross School of the Arts. They have lived in Newark since 2002.]

SI: Well, another area is student life and the campus. The field has changed quite a bit over the course of your time in administration here, but, in particular, building student life on an urban campus that focuses on the city. Can you talk a little bit about what your thoughts were there in looking at some of the experiences from people of the 1980s, when there is really no life on campus or very little? How do you try to build that as part of the experience?

SD: Yes, very important. One of the things I was determined to do was to create more student presence in downtown Newark. Interestingly, this is peripheral, but when I was able to negotiate the purchase of 1 Washington Park, I remember, I got a lot of criticism from a few people in the business school who said, "You're moving us off campus. How can you remove us from the campus?" But a lot of people said, "This is wonderful. Students and faculty are now walking along the street here and you've helped create a street presence in our neighborhood." Obviously, if there's more students on the street, they're presumably more available, more able to engage in student activities of various kinds. So, that was important.

One of my goals was to get more students living on campus because I saw that as really important toward creating 24/7 campus life. I engaged a consulting team of experts on the demand for student housing, and they did a full study of our campus. They came back and said, "You have a demand for several thousand more beds, and you also have a demand from graduate students and law students who need a different kind of housing." I worked quite vigorously to try to get new housing built.

SI: Okay.

SD: I ran into all kinds of conflict with New Brunswick over housing, because housing was not funded out of the core budget. It was funded out of the fees that students would pay for housing, and that became a separate fund. It was used to pay off debt from construction costs. The

person in charge of it was the Director of Housing in New Brunswick, and he didn't want to see any money spent in Newark on housing. I do remember --and we'll talk about this later. When Dick McCormick came to kick me out, one of his "reasons" was I was too aggressive on housing. I believed that if enough students lived on campus, not only will they be more involved, but other students would have reason to be on campus because the resident students created activities. That, in terms of student activities, student life, that was really critical. Also, I encouraged the student affairs staff to work on service to the community, by developing projects where students would go into Newark neighborhoods or would tutor Newark students here on campus.

SI: You mentioned a few building projects. Aside from the struggles with New Brunswick and obvious costs, what else goes into building a building in a place like Newark that you have to deal with?

SD: Well, neighbors. That's a particularly challenging thing, not just here, but on many campuses. After we acquired 1 Washington Park, I believed that we desperately needed more parking over there. We owned a vacant lot next to James Street, and so I remember we began talking about building a mix of instructional facilities and parking over there. All hell broke loose from the James Street residents. James Street was a two-block area of upper-middle-class housing in a city that was overwhelmingly poor and working class. Those folks had been there a very long time so they felt very passionate about protecting their "neighborhood." There was one woman there who was enraged that I was talking about building parking adjacent to where she lived. I remember, at one point, she wrote something that said, "Well, Steve Diner has no understanding and no passion for cities." We eventually came to terms, and we didn't actually build that parking structure in part because we didn't have the money.

By the way, the James Street Residents were perfectly happy when we acquired 1 Washington Park. When, we acquired it, students would be walk back and forth making the street very lively. In acquiring 1 Washington Park, I did not think of it as off campus. My vision was that the campus would extend to 1 Washington Park. My vision of an urban university was not necessarily something compact on a fixed campus. Look at NYU. Wherever you walk in that neighborhood, there's an NYU building and then a private building and then another NYU building. So, that was my vision of what we should head toward as an urban university. [Editor's Note: In 2007, Rutgers decided to purchase 1 Washington Park, a high-rise office tower in downtown Newark, and relocate the Rutgers Business School to the space, which Rutgers shares with Audible.]

By the way, one of the things I often commented on was the design of the Rutgers-Newark campus. I said, "If you look at that campus, you could see that it was built as a fortress to keep out the community." It's almost completely surrounded by walls. I then bragged that with the opening of the new law school building and then the business school, we were finally becoming a campus that is in the city, not just a protected zone, within the city.

SI: You mentioned earlier, as dean, the issues of admissions, levels of standards of admission, that there was a, I won't say crisis, but a problem. Did that continue into your provostship? How did you face the issue of admissions at that point?

SD: I think, fairly quickly, people came to accept the premises that I had put forth, and we did have a significant growth in enrollment and in applications. Some of it was statewide or national, but some of it was because Newark was getting a better reputation.

One of the programs that I started--I did this with Marcia Brown--was a program in which we paid students at Rutgers-Newark who grew up in Newark and who were Newark residents, to go into every junior high school and high school in Newark and talk to the kids about going to college in general and going to Rutgers-Newark, in particular. At that time we had growing enrollment but only a limited number of students from Newark. When I arrived as dean I was told that Newark kids don't want to come to Rutgers-Newark because they view it as a white college. I found that hard to understand. We had been ranked the most diverse campus in the country by U.S. News. But historically, Rutgers-Newark had been a place where whites and very few blacks went to school. It had developed this image among working people in Newark, that it was not welcoming to students from Newark. Now, we've substantially reversed that. [Editor's Note: Marcia Brown is Vice Chancellor for External and Governmental Affairs at Rutgers-Newark.]

SI: At that time, in the early 2000s, early to mid, was admissions another place where you had to come to loggerheads with New Brunswick, or did you have more independence in that regard?

SD: We had more independence.

SI: Okay.

SD: Because the way admissions worked at that time at Rutgers, students could apply to multiple campuses. Then, central administration maintained a database for making admissions decisions. They would attach numbers to you based on desirable characteristics. It ranked applicants on one's grade point average, SAT scores. Points were assigned for each criterion on how many advanced courses the applicant had taken. If you had points above a certain level, you were automatically admitted. If you had points below a certain level, you were automatically rejected, and only if you fell in between, did they read the whole application. I changed this practice at the Newark campus and told our admissions staff, "No student from a low-income zip code can be rejected without looking at the total application." That's because I know from a lot of experience that often there are students who have some great strengths, who are capable of doing great things, but if you only look at SATs and their grades, you don't see that. Ideally, I thought we should look at every applicant's full application, but we didn't have the resources for that. So, that's why I insisted that every student from a low-income zip code must be evaluated through the whole application. That began changing the nature of our student body.

SI: Let's pause for a second.

SD: Yes.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: All right. Well, thank you. Along with obviously making admissions more equitable, retention is also a huge issue. Were there any policies that you put in place regarding making sure that these folks who came from particularly first-generation backgrounds actually stayed and completed their degrees?

SD: Certainly low-income students who were admitted through the EOF program had continuing counseling and support. A substantial number of all of our undergraduate students completed their degree within six years. The numbers of students who just didn't finish was relatively low. I'd like to think this was all the result of the good things we did. But a lot of students, particularly students who live in the area went to community college the first two years. The reason they do that is it's cheaper; tuition is lower. So, we get a huge number of students from Essex County College. Long before I came, the University had developed a collaboration among faculty in key disciplines from Rutgers-Newark and Essex County College so that they could agree on what the first and second-year courses in biology, math, chemistry, and other subjects students should learn, so that a student who graduated from Essex County College would have the same knowledge and had been exposed to the same material as students who did their first two years at Rutgers-Newark. Our rates of completion were very good, and that's an important accomplishment. [Editor's Note: The New Jersey Education Opportunity Fund (EOF) is a source of financial and other support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.]

SI: Okay, all right. Historically, this had been a place of a lot of political activism. Are there any of those examples that stand out from your tenure as provost into chancellor?

SD: One incident in particular stands out. The campus ran a bus from Penn Station to campus, and the idea was to help students get around. One day, the bus was stopped by Newark police. They went on to the bus and asked students some questions. One woman student was very hostile to them, "Who are you? Why are you stopping me? It's because I'm black. Why are you doing this kind of thing?" So, they arrested her, and she spent a couple of hours in jail. I got law school faculty to work on her case immediately. A group of black students occupied the chancellor's office saying, "You're not doing enough to protect students and you have to strengthen our support of students." Marcia Brown, she's a long-standing black activist. She insisted she wanted to handle it. She met with the students, and then she arranged meetings for me with students. At those meetings we often talked about the campus and the experiences of low-income and minority students.

I also remember the GLBT [gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender] student association asked to meet with me. They were not hostile but said that Rutgers-Newark was a terrible campus for them. In fact, I remember one of them saying, "This is a campus of first-generation immigrants

and they come from places that have no use for gay people and so they reflect that religious bias." As a result of these meetings, we set up a GLBT meeting room, a place where they could hang out and talk to each other.

SI: What about initiatives to diversify the faculty, which is an ongoing issue at Rutgers? From what I understand, the faculty, as well as the student body, was relatively diverse compared to the rest of the system. How do you continue that? Did you see areas where this was needed more?

SD: Yes, but the faculty was not terribly diverse when I came here, and there was a system-wide program, which if you identified a "minority" faculty member, you might get special funding from New Brunswick for the person's first three years. In any case, I strongly encouraged departments to seek out minority faculty, and I got somewhat involved in that. As dean I would meet with pretty much anyone who was interviewing for a faculty position. As chancellor, I did not do so automatically, but if faculty thought meeting with me would help them recruit a very desirable minority person, I certainly would do that.

One of the people I remember recruiting, was Sherri-Ann Butterfield. I met with her and persuaded her to come to Rutgers-Newark although she had an offer from a much more prestigious institution. She's now the number two person in the chancellor's office. She says I persuaded her that this place was a great place to come, given that her scholarship focused on racial and ethnic identities among American-born kids in Brooklyn. I strongly encouraged departments as dean and as chancellor, to attract and recruit the best minority faculty. [Editor's Note: Sherri-Ann Butterfield is Executive Vice Chancellor and a professor of sociology at Rutgers-Newark.]

SI: I forgot to look this up, but when did the change in title from provost to chancellor take place approximately?

SD: It was in 2008, I got an offer for the presidency of Wayne State University and it was very tempting, but my wife had a title chair at NYU and our youngest son was still in high school. So, I didn't think I'd take it. I went to McCormick and said, "I have this offer and I'd like to stay here, but I'd like you to change the title. The title misleads everybody." It's true. Wherever I went, people said, "Oh, so you're the provost. Who's the president?" I said, "There is no president of Rutgers-Newark." People found that very strange. McCormick agreed, and he agreed to that and so that's how the title got changed. Now, at the same time, I believe, they were searching for a new provost or chancellor in Camden, and I believe that the key person they were looking at would only come if they changed the title. So, it turned out that the timing was very good because there was also pressure from Camden to change the title. [Editor's Note: The title of provost was changed to chancellor in 2008.]

SI: With the title change, was there any other change in your day-to-day powers and responsibilities?

SD: Not very much. But it did enable me to appoint someone with the title provost. In most institutions, the provost is the chief academic officer. So now I was able to have the provost oversee all of the academic matters.

SI: Before we get to the issue with the second merger, were there other areas where you might run into problems with New Brunswick?

SD: Well, budgeting and funding was clearly one, and housing, but we've talked about that already. I'm sure there are a whole lot of others.

SI: Okay.

SD: Well, one of the things was that University meetings of senior administrative staff were always held in New Brunswick. On one level, this made sense because New Brunswick is geographically between Newark and Camden. But it also diminished the campus.

SI: What about your relationship with the Board of Governors? How did you maintain that and build this relationship?

SD: Oh, that's an excellent question. It was complicated because, on the one hand, the president is the guy who runs the university and the relationship with the board is the central activity of the president, and my involvement with board members could be problematic for him in that way. I did develop good relationships with a number of board people, and Norman Samuels did before me also. I would meet with them and talk with them about our situation and what we needed. McCormick never told me I should not do that. At one point, the board chair was a Rutgers-Newark alum, who still lived in Newark and was very active in the city. He was very, eager to see Rutgers-Newark treated well. [Editor's Note: Eugene M. O'Hara, UCN '62, retired CFO of Prudential Insurance Company, served as Chair of the Board of Governors from 2001 to 2004. Albert R. Gamper, Jr., UCN '66, former Chairman and CEO of the CIT Group, Inc., served as Chair from 2004 to 2007.]

SI: What does that translate into in terms of what you might propose? If you do have a favorable chair, does that make you more likely to ask for certain programs or initiatives or ask for more of the budget pie?

SD: Yes, but it was tricky. The budget was managed by the central administration, and it would be pretty unusual for a board member to intervene and say, "You need to have more going to Newark for this reason, or, that reason." Now, if the board approves some kind of special initiative; that would be different. No, I can't really think of any instance where the board intervened on behalf of Rutgers-Newark because I asked them to.

SI: Let's see, before we talk about the second merger, is there any aspect from your time as chancellor that you want to go over? Did athletics take up much of your time?

SD: Almost none. We were a Division III institution, with no athletic scholarship and major investment in our teams. I always brag about that. I was very pleased that was the case.

SI: Yes.

SD: But one other thing I could talk about, as chancellor, I became highly involved with national higher education organizations. In particular, I worked very closely with the Coalition of Metropolitan and Urban Universities. It's an organization that published a journal, *Metropolitan Universities*. It would meet once a year, in a city. I hosted a regional meeting on our campus, and that helped me promote Rutgers-Newark as a leading urban institution. You can promote your college to the general public and students who are applying, but, in this case, we're talking about promoting it o leaders in higher education. One of the things I was quite successful doing was significantly raising the awareness of leaders in higher education about Rutgers-Newark, about the City of Newark. I have one little add-on. [Editor's Note: Founded in 1989, The Coalition of Metropolitan and Urban Universities promotes a mission of strengthening the relationships between urban universities and their cities.]

SI: Sure.

SD: Nancy Cantor told me that when the position of chancellor became vacant, she got a call from Professor Clement Price and she said [that] she really wasn't thinking at all about coming to another institution. She had been chancellor or president at two or three places, I think. She said to me, "I remember the meetings we would go to of leaders of urban universities and you talked so vigorously about Newark and all the exciting things that were happening in Newark," so she said, "I decided to pursue it." Could she have been persuaded to be a candidate if we had not met? I don't know, but she said that's what got her interested in pursuing the position in Newark. [Editor's Note: Clement Alexander Price was a Distinguished Professor of History at Rutgers-Newark. He lived from 1945 to 2014.]

SI: I am just curious, Clement Price comes up quite a bit in the interviews. Do you have any memories of him and his work here?

SD: Oh, yes. Absolutely. When I interviewed for Dean of Arts and Sciences, they had Clem give me a tour of Newark. I was immediately taken with him, and I talked to him about the importance of an urban focus and community engagement. It resonated with him immediately, and he said, "Oh, wow, a dean who's really going to undertake this stuff and share this focus." So, we became colleagues but also very good friends. He and Mary Sue, his wife, came to us for dinner a few times. I remember I was in his house a bunch of times, including 9/11 because I lived in New York and the trains weren't running. So, Clem said, "Oh, just stay with us." So, we were very close and shared common interests in developing engagement with the city and emphasis on differences in race and ethnicity and the like.

SI: Again, working off something you just said, in relation to 9/11, I know afterwards, particularly in this region, there were attempts by law enforcement to try to surveil students, that

sort of thing. Did you deal with that issue here? I think, the University, at one point, gave a blanket statement, they were not going to cooperate in any way, or words to that regard.

SD: I did not have to deal with that but sometime after that, federal officials asked for lists of immigrant students or undocumented immigrant students. The University said, "No, we're not going to give you that."

DK: I do have a question, but it is kind of stepping back for a moment. When developing programs, it is an interesting concept how these things evolve and change. I am curious as to the development of programs that are federated, like the history department that is shared between universities. Is that a result of the earlier merger plans that we talked about or does that come later? Was that something you were involved with?

SD: Actually, not. It was already in place when I arrived in 1998. I think it grew out of the desire, of the small number of historians at NJIT to become part of a larger history department. So that federated arrangement preceded me and the discussions about merger.

SI: The second merger kind of grows out of the work by the committee chaired by former Governor Kean and the Kean Report. Did you work with the committee at all? I think they reached out to a number of academics and administrators. Did you testify before the committee or anything like that?

SD: I think I did, but I know I had long conversations with Roy Vagelos.

SI: I do not know about the second, which I guess took off around 2010. I forget the exact date for the Kean Report. [Editor's Note: The Commission on Health Science, Education and Training, chaired by P. Roy Vagelos, M.D., issued its report in October 2002. The plan was abandoned in 2003. In 2007, the State Legislature appointed a ten-member Task Force on Higher Education to take up the issue of restructuring Rutgers, UMDNJ and NJIT. Thomas Kean, former governor of New Jersey, chaired the Governor's Task Force on Higher Education, which recommended an overhaul of medical research and education in January 2011. On July 1, 2013, the New Jersey Medical and Health Sciences Education Restructuring Act went into effect, integrating Rutgers University with all units of UMDNJ, except University Hospital in Newark and the School of Osteopathic Medicine in Stratford.]

SI: Okay. Once that became a public issue again, did you become actively involved in supporting it or aspects of it?

SD: Yes. I met with legislators. I met with board members and others and articulated my view that if you brought together the three higher education institutions in Newark, you would have a major entity. Now, it wasn't going to be world class just because you brought them together, but with the right resources and leadership, this would become a major, major institution. I thought, that would really play a key role in the continuing revitalization of the city.

SI: As this developed over the months, I think over at least a year and a half, how did this affect your relationship with the McCormick Administration?

SD: Oh, very strained. McCormick kept telling me that he did not want to see Rutgers or the entities in Newark separated from New Brunswick. He was very much opposed to the idea that there could be a separate entity here which received its own funding, had its own board, and so on. But he was very much in favor of making the New Brunswick medical school part of Rutgers. He was against merging Newark University of Medicine and Dentistry with Rutgers, partly because the hospital was having all kinds of financial problems. McCormick wanted to see the New Brunswick facilities of UMDNJ merged into Rutgers-New Brunswick. He didn't want to see UMDNJ in Newark merged, and, of course, I did. So, things started getting tense.

SI: What do you think was the breaking point?

SD: Oh, well, as the legislation was being considered and it was getting a fair amount of attention, he came to me, one day in my office, which was very unusual. When we met, it was almost always in his office. He said, "By the end of December, you're out," for two primary reasons. One is our differences on the merger, and he said, "I can't have a leader of this campus operating against what I want to see done." The other thing he said was that I had made too much of a fuss about housing financing. He basically said, "If you let me know in twenty-four hours if you agree to resign," he said, "You'll have a year's leave and then I'll have you named a University Professor, but if you don't accept it, I'm going to remove you and then you're not going to have any of those benefits." I made a huge mistake by resigning. Clement Price, among others, said, "Terrible mistake. If you had told me, I could've called the mayor, the governor," and he was very well connected. He said, "It was unfortunate that you did that." I think, in retrospect, it was.

SI: What goes through your mind during something like that? It must have been shocking.

SD: I didn't expect that to happen. I was thinking that basically I would step down in another year. I was getting tired, but because the merger issue was still out there, I thought, "This is not the time to leave. The institution has to be supported, protected, and I just can't step aside." So, I thought, "One more year, and hopefully by then, the merger will have gone through in a way that gave much more autonomy to Newark." So, no, I wasn't planning on it, and I wasn't expecting it.

SI: Looking back over your time as chancellor, what would you say your most vivid memories were or the things you look back on most favorably or proudly?

SD: Strongly expanding the view of the university as connected to the city. Making that mission clearer to people across the state and across the country. The thing I'm proudest of, was to really focus the university as an urban institution.

SI: While you were in administration, did you continue teaching at all?

SD: I did teach occasionally, I think maybe one course every other year, just to get to know the students and keep my fingers in it.

SI: Did you have any concerns rejoining the faculty?

SD: No. It's interesting, I had been thinking for a while that when I left administration, I wanted to write a book on the history of universities and cities. Many people who leave senior administration positions don't go back and do scholarship, but I thought I really wanted to, and that would be the obvious subject for me. When I left administration, I had a year off, and so I immediately plunged into research and found fascinating material. Then I came back, I taught for a semester, and I was able to negotiate another year off. As a University Professor, you're kind of free to do different things. At the end of my second year not teaching, I finished the book and it was published.

In terms of teaching, the History Department was very welcoming, not demanding in any way. Also, when I came here as dean, the History Department had a whole bunch of very contentious people, and by the time I left administration, all of them were gone. It's a department of really nice people who get along well, doing very good work professionally. As a University Professor, I don't participate in department meetings for the most part, and I don't participate in tenure decisions. In one case, there was somebody up for promotion to Professor II, which we now call Distinguished Professor. The department needed a committee of at least three people who were Professor IIs. As a University Professor, I qualified for that. So, they called and said, "Do you mind doing this?" I was perfectly happy to do it.

SI: What courses have you been teaching?

SD: I've taught four different courses, not all at the same time. Almost every semester I've taught, I did one graduate and one undergraduate. Of the two graduate courses that I've been teaching, one is American immigration history, which I love. The other is the "History of Urban Education" and that's also been a lot of fun.

One of my undergraduate classes, is in Public Affairs. Its title is "Newark and Urban America," and it's about contemporary issues in Newark. Since I'm a University Professor, I don't have to be tied rigidly to teaching history. The other course, always my favorite, examines public policy issues in America that grow out of racial, ethnic or religious diversity. After an initial week of historical context, I assign popular articles on opposite ends of hot button issues, and I have the students discuss them. So, one week, we'll do racial classification. How should the Census count people? What categories should they use? For that matter, how should a university count people? Then, we'll discuss affirmative action, and then hate speech. One week, I do gay rights and religious rights. For example, we talk about the baker who would not bake a cake for a gay wedding. [Editor's Note: Dr. Diner is referring to *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, a 2018 Supreme Court ruling that protected a baker's refusal to bake a wedding cake for a gay couple.]

The thing I love telling people about is when I teach this course on diversity, and when we consider racial classification, I begin each class by going around the table and having students react to what they read. Whenever we do racial classification, nearly every student says, "Who invented these categories? I'm not black. I'm not Asian. I'm not Hispanic. I'm not white." On this campus, it's just so interesting because students have multi-national identities. For example, one student, a woman, forty-ish with very black skin said, "I'm not black. I'm not African American. I'm African." Then, she said, "It's not that I think there's anything wrong with being African American, but I came to the United States from Ghana when I was twelve years old, so I haven't shared their experiences. My experiences are different than longstanding black residents." So, teaching about race, ethnicity, religion, and immigration on this campus is so interesting because the students come from all over the world and they're heavily immigrants or children of immigrants.

DK: What goes into the crafting of courses? Are these courses that you came up with?

SD: Yes, I came up with them. The diversity course, I actually did a version of it when I was at George Mason, quite different from what I do now. Rutgers-Newark is the place I was meant to be, just given both my personal and scholarly interests in cities, immigration, race, and ethnicity. I taught at an all-black college for thirteen years and got really immersed in issues of race there. I grew up in the Bronx, a child of Jewish immigrants and as a child developed, an awareness of cities, neighborhoods, and ethnic groups. I tell people that I identify very closely with our students because in many ways I've been more or less in the same place. Now, I grew up with working parents in the Bronx. I didn't experience the kinds of hostilities a Muslim or Hindu student might experience at Rutgers-Newark in the city. Although our students' social interactions are different from mine, I still identify very closely with them and take great pleasure in teaching them.

SI: All right. Anything you would like to add about your non-Rutgers life?

SD: I sing in a chorus.

SI: Okay. [laughter]

SD: We're performing Friday night at Carnegie Hall. [Editor's Note: Carnegie Hall is a concert hall built by industrialist Andrew Carnegie in 1891. It is located in Midtown Manhattan.]

SI: What is the name of the chorus?

SD: The Cecilia Choral Society. I think I told you I went to the High School of Music and Art, and I was a voice major. I sang the first couple years after I moved to Washington. Then my first child was born and I thought, "Oh, I'm not going to have time for this." Nearly fifty years later, when I stepped down from administration, I thought, I'm going to find a chorus, and I did. I joined it five years ago. [Editor's Note: The Cecilia Chorus of New York was founded in 1906.

Maestro Mark Shapiro is the current director of the chorus. It performs at least twice a year at Carnegie Hall.]

SI: Great. All right, well thank you very much. This has been very informative, and we really appreciate it.

SD: My pleasure.

----------END OF TRANSCRIPT----------

Transcribed by Jesse Braddell 8/29/2019
Reviewed by Donald Koger 3/16/2020
Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 3/18/2020
Reviewed by Steven Diner 4/1/2020
Reviewed by Donald Koger 5/7/2020