RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
CAMDEN

AN INTERVIEW WITH

WAYNE GLASKER

for the

BLACK CAMDEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

in collaboration with the

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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(recorded remotely)

SESSION 2: FEBRUARY 26, 2022

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Kendra Boyd: This is an interview with Dr. Wayne Glasker, conducted by Kendra Boyd and Jesse Bayker on February 26, 2022. Thank you for joining us again Dr. Glasker. Can you tell us a little bit more about your time at the University of Pennsylvania?

Wayne Glasker: Sure. What I'd like to begin to discuss is admissions. In 1967 Penn adopted a new admissions plan. A committee of faculty came up with the plan, and the Trustees approved the plan. It was August of 1967, to go into effect for the class that would be recruited during 1968-69. Penn wanted to have a more diverse undergraduate student body, and as part of that process they implemented something called Special Admissions. They were seeking not only people who have a 1600 SAT score, but also a broad range of talents, abilities and gifts. Imagine that you have someone who was in the astronomy club in high school and they discovered an asteroid. Well, that's the kind of person you want. They might not have a 1600 SAT, but they have distinguished themselves from the rest of the pack with an outstanding gift or ability. So under this Special Admissions program, 10% of the incoming class, which at this point was more than 1000 students, would be SA. Five percent (5%) would be set aside for athletes. Now a person might be an outstanding athlete, but they don't have such a great SAT. 3%, and this is where it was controversial, would be from students from socio economically and culturally deprived backgrounds, whatever that is. It is not a race specific category. This could be someone who grew up on a farm in rural Western Pennsylvania and their parents are dairy farmers. Or it might be somebody who's white and from West Virginia and their family are coal miners. It doesn't have to be Black. But it could also be Black students from inner city public high schools who were from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. So, SA could become a proxy racial category. Then 2% of the 10% was reserved for children of faculty, staff, and alumni of any race. These were not quotas, these were simply soft goals or targets. That was the Special Admissions program. Remember, Penn is an elite Ivy League university.

So, in October of 1978 – this is why I mentioned the admissions plan – an article was published in the *Daily Pennsylvanian,* the student newspaper. This was a newspaper that was printed Monday through Friday, so not once a week, but every single day. Splattered across the front page of the student newspaper was a statement which said as the headline, “half of minority students enter as special admits.” The article said approximately 50% of the minority students in this year's freshman class – again, this is October of 1978 – were accepted under the special admits program. Then the second paragraph said, students admitted under this program have lower SAT scores, high school grade point averages, and class ranks than students enrolled under the regular standards. This kind of exploded as a bombshell, and I will explain why. But just as a point of comparison, let me point out that back in 1969, when Penn first admitted a large cohort of black students, 150 black students, many from inner city public high school backgrounds, the average SAT score for white students at Penn in 1969 was 1308 and the average SAT score for the Black students was 1016, which is a difference of 292 points. I would imagine that that gap

closed a little over time, but still you have this gap of perhaps 200 points between the white students and the Black students.

So to come back to the newspaper article. Facts are simply facts. They're just numbers. But what happened here is that the writers of this article in the student newspaper weaponized the data. What this did was to sort of label the Black students as underqualified, unqualified. "Do they even deserve to be here at all?" The stereotype of the undeserving minority, a person who was here simply to fulfill an affirmative action quota or something of that nature. So it stigmatized Black students. I mean, you could be a Black student who had a 4.0 GPA and was on the Dean's list, but what people see is one of those underqualified, unqualified Black students. It just sort of created a climate that almost said they don't deserve to be here in the first place. It was almost as if minority students had to justify their existence. It just sort of reflected a climate that some people would perceive as hostile, and almost a kind of resentment, that we resent your presence. I was like, “you have intruded into our exclusive little country club, and we're not happy with it.” That was part of the climate. It just created a kind of resentment and a counter resentment, and a hostile atmosphere for some people. I will say that there were some freshmen living in my dorm at that time, and their facial expressions, they just seem dazed and confused. It was almost as if someone had hit them upside the head with a brick and they didn't know it was coming. If you know what's coming, you can be prepared, block it. But it was like out of the clear blue sky. They just seemed so hurt, because I don't think they had ever expected something like that to happen. So it just amplified the situation. I don't want to go so far as to say that it poisoned the well, but I think it made people feel as if they were functioning in an environment that was hostile and unwelcoming. You just had to filter that stuff out. It was part of the climate, part of the landscape. I also want to be clear, I'm not saying it was all white students, I'm not saying it was most white students. It might simply have been a vocal minority. But it was almost a toxic climate that people had to fight with.

Let me ask you if you have questions about what I've just said, or if I should move on?

KB: I think that's good. Do you want to talk about how this racial climate you just described affected your experience as you continued at Penn? Or were there any incidents on campus?

WG: I think that for many of us, this was something that we had to learn to cope with. We certainly had to accept the fact that there's this hostility, there's this resentment, there's this sense of grievance on the part of certain people, that these people don't deserve to be here. But at the same time, you have to remain focused. We were simply trying to thrive and flourish, get our degrees, achieve and be excellent. This stuff was just like chatter. It was just noise and you had to overlook it and remain focused. It was just a stumbling block.

I'd like to move on to another episode that occurred, bearing in mind of course that what was happening at Penn was happening everywhere. I mean it was not unique to Penn. This was the experience of Black and minority students at predominately white institutions everywhere. And I'd also like to point out that at this time, and I'm hoping that I can find the data that I brought with me. There were at this point in time, if we go back to 1975, just a few years before this incident. At that point, in 1975, Penn admitted 127 Black freshmen, fourteen Mexican American students, and fifteen Puerto Rican students out of an incoming class of more than a thousand. It was not until 1975 that Penn graduated its first Mexican American undergraduate. It was just lagging so far behind. As bad as it were for Black students, it was much worse for the Mexican students and the Puerto Rican students because there were just so few of them.

I want to go on to an event that occurred in October 1979. It was Halloween. A fraternity hangs a Confederate flag, a huge Confederate flag, from its windows and it's Halloween so they have a costume party. I guess it's full inside, so the party spills outside. This is at a location that's on the central axis of the east-west axis of the campus, Locust Walk. The party spills outside onto the grass in front of the building and in public view right there in practically the central axis of the campus there are three people wearing Ku Klux Klan robes. Now again, this is a costume party, and they seemed to have thought it was a prank. “Can't you take a joke?” It was supposed to be funny. Some Black students who saw this approached one of these people and asked him, “Do you understand what this symbolizes to Black people?” The response was some epithets; people had been drinking. It's kind of what you would expect.

But the Black Student League took offense and organized a protest against this incident, went down to the frat house and organized and protested in front of the frat house. They continue down to College Hall, the central administration building on the campus where you have the offices of the president and the provost and the legal counsel and the trustees, and held a demonstration there on College Green demanding that the fraternity be punished and that it be suspended. The fraternity in its defense said, “Well, these people were guests at the party, but they were not Penn students. We don't really have any control over what they do.” The outcome of this was that there was an investigation, and ultimately what the university did was to indefinitely suspend its recognition of that fraternity. They continue to get into more trouble over other things like drunken fights with other students and fights with other fraternities. The indefinite suspension was February of 1980. Since the events were in the fall semester, the punishment came in the spring. But ultimately, the recognition was withdrawn for three years.

So, you live on a campus where there are people who behave this way. The thing that was sort of dismaying was not the behavior itself, but the attitude on the part of so much of the campus that it was just a prank. “You're taking it too seriously.” “It was just a joke.” “They didn't mean anything malicious by it.” Somehow this behavior was acceptable. Well, people have choices. We can choose to be victims who simply suffer in silence, or we can choose in some way to stand up and fight back, whether it's symbolically, whether it's letters, protests, whatever. In this instance, the Black Student League, and I was one of those people, said we're not going to just be

victims and suffer in silence. The least we can do is say we don't like it, criticize it, condemn it, and try to hold people accountable. In a place where there were not yet very many mechanisms for holding people accountable. So that was peer-to-peer harassment, or whatever you might want to call it, even at a symbolic level.

I'd like to mention one last episode. I mean, there's so many more, but I'll just go with one more. This occurred in November 1984. We have a class in Legal Studies in the Wharton School of Business, and there is a part-time lecturer who is under contract semester-to-semester, maybe year-to-year. He is a lecturer, and he's lecturing about the 13th Amendment, which is the abolition of slavery. He singles out the four African American students and he asked them to recite from memory the 13th amendment. Well, they could not do so. They might not have known what the 13th Amendment was. He only asked them, he did not ask any of the white students this question. He then essentially berated the students for not knowing the 13th Amendment, you know, they should have given thanks every day of their lives that the 13th Amendment had been passed. He proceeded to say that as a Jew, that he gave thanks for the liberation of his people from bondage in Egypt every year at the Passover. Therefore, he could not understand why Black Americans did not do something similar with respect to the 13th Amendment. The students were hurt, they were embarrassed, they were humiliated. But what could they do about it? What happened was, they waited for the students to get their grades at the end of the semester, and in the spring semester the BSL swung into action. The leaders of the Black Student League literally led a protest march through the campus, down to the Wharton School of Business into his classroom and demanded an apology, which of course, he did not give. Then they followed him to his next class and demanded an apology, and he canceled his class. Next, the Black Student League demanded that the president of the university fire this part time lecturer. I'm deliberately not mentioning his name. This then led to a whole back and forth, that the president of university cannot fire a lecturer, there's academic freedom, that sort of thing. Meanwhile, the students are having protests on campus including a vigil at the mansion where the president lived on campus.

The Wharton School finally conducted an investigation, interviewed the students who were affected, interviewed the students in the class, talked with the lecturer, and concluded that his behavior was inappropriate. What they did was to say we will not bring him back in the fall semester. That then turned into a yearlong suspension. “We're not going to renew your contract, you cannot come back to teach for us, and in order to teach in the future you must attend racism awareness workshops.” Part of what was happening is that the Black Student League was demanding that there be racism awareness workshops for the faculty. It’s kind of a you get half a loaf. They didn't fire him, they didn't suspend him that year (spring semester), but he was not brought back for a year because of his behavior. The students were so hurt by that. For him to actually refer to them as ex-slaves, when in fact they were born in the 1960s. They were not former slaves. They might have been descendants of slaves 150 years ago, but they were not ex-

slaves, any more than white people walking around today are ex-slave masters, whatever their ancestors may have done.

So again, this is part of the climate that we had to cope with. But the question becomes what do you do about it? How do you put mechanisms in place, a code of conduct? Eventually what came out of this was a racial harassment policy. It took two or three years to get a racial harassment policy and a sexual harassment policy, at least on paper, but eventually that was adopted. I know that things like this happen at other universities. Even when we go back to the incident of the Klansmen, I mean in 2021 there are still people dressing up in Klans robes for Halloween and they think it's funny, they think it's a prank, and it is acceptable. Still dressing in blackface, still having mock auctions to sell off their fellow Black students. That mess still happens. I'm just saying it was part of what was happening at Penn. Sadly, it still continues to happen in some places to this day.

But, when I look back on my experiences at Penn I remember the good things. I remember the positive things. I remember the things that I achieved and accomplished. All the rest of this stuff was just speed bumps. But I don't know how you as a parent who has a senior in high school, prepare your child to understand that when you go to college, these are the kinds of things that you can expect. I don't know how you prepare somebody for that. What do you say? But it is the things that that people encounter, and generations of people have encountered, and we're still coping with.

I want to shift gears and talk a little bit more about my relationship at Rutgers and really the relationship of Rutgers to the community. In fairness to Rutgers, I do want to acknowledge that Rutgers does have a charitable and philanthropic relationship with the Camden community. Rutgers is committed to civic engagement. I'm singing the praises of Rutgers for a moment. There are people on the Rutgers campus, faculty, students, who partner with community organizations, and bring in canned goods for the Food Bank of South Jersey. I was involved with something like that with a community partner, Cathedral Kitchen. Every semester we would pull together canned goods, bottled water, paper towels, personal hygiene items, and white socks to take over to the Cathedral Kitchen. We had fraternities and sororities that do the same thing. Whether it's trying to help with homelessness or food insecurity, Rutgers has for years and years played a role in that. There are fraternities that every year have a day of service, and they go to some abandoned lot and they clean up the trash, the garbage, and the tires. Then the next year, they have to go back and do it again because somebody has dumped all that stuff again. Rutgers does have this charitable philanthropic aspect. We do have civic engagement There are students in various classes who provide tutoring, they go to elementary schools, and they help with after school programs. Rutgers really does deserve praise for doing those things.

On the other hand, that does not negate the kind of gentrification that is occurring, not necessarily from Rutgers, but from actors way far up the food chain above Rutgers, who want to redevelop the waterfront and the area between the Rutgers-Camden campus, Cooper Hospital,

and our new nursing school. Just this one example, in between the main Rutgers-Camden campus, at Fifth and Cooper, and the new nursing school on Federal Street, there was a methadone clinic, right there next to the PATCO station. So students, faculty and staff coming in to the university on PATCO and coming up to street level would find all of these people congregating there waiting for the methadone clinic. It was just a block from City Hall. A lot of people did not like those optics. It is my understanding, and I'm talking back in 2019, 2020, that methadone clinic is not there anymore. It has been moved, and Rutgers has aspirations of developing that space maybe for new dorms or for an expansion of the business school. Things like the methadone clinic that are in the way, "well, they just need to be moved somewhere else." Despite our generosity to the community, people still are concerned that when they go to their car in the parking lot, they want to make sure it wasn't vandalized by somebody. People still have concerns about the people who are OD'ing on the steps of buildings on Cooper Street. So it's both things at once.

I suppose the last thing I want to talk about with respect to Rutgers and the community is that in recent years – I have to give great credit to Phoebe Hadden for this, our previous chancellor, she developed something called Bridging the Gap, which I think it is important to talk about for a moment. Bridging the Gap is intended to encourage more four-year students to come to Rutgers Camden, as opposed to what traditionally was students going to community college for two years and then transferring to Rutgers. But in order to attract more of the four-year students, you need to offer them financial aid. Under Bridging the Gap what happens is, you fill out the information for your Pell Grant and you get whatever aid you're going to get from the federal government and the state, and then Rutgers will give you a scholarship for the difference. If your family income is perhaps something less than $60,000, Rutgers will pay 100% of the difference. Let's imagine using just hypothetical numbers that it costs $10,000 a year to go to Rutgers, it probably costs more, and your financial aid, your Pell Grant, gives you $5,000. Rutgers will give you a fellowship for $5,000. That's good, it has good intentions. You can only praise that. That is definitely trying to expand access and opportunity and inclusion.

But there are two other issues that have to be brought into the conversation. Yes, you get these benefits, provided that you earn 30 credits per year, which is to say five courses at three credits per course each semester. Also, you must remain in good academic standing. If either of those parameters fails, you lose the funding going forward. We offer this promise to people, but in reality, a fair number of those students fail courses. If you get a D and a F, how close are you then to academic probation? Are you still in good academic standing? And if you fail a course, now you're minus three credits. Well, if you fail a course in the fall, you could take a sixth course in the spring to compensate for that. But how well are you going to do now trying to take six courses? The reality is that many people, they don't maintain good academic standing, their GPA, and they are on academic probation, so they've now lost that funding. Or, because they failed courses, they don't have the 30 credits at the end of the year. Either way, you're going to lose the funding. I praise Bridging the Gap, I think it has very good intentions. The difficulty is

that I think in a way, we're promising more than we can deliver because the students are not going to maintain academic standing, or then they are going to fail courses and not have the requisite 30 credits. What starts out as a good thing, they then lose. That's not our fault as an institution, you know, it's their misfortune. But it's almost like we're offering them something that we have every reason to know they're not going to be able to maintain. That's why I say it almost looks as if we are offering more than we really can deliver. Because the students are not necessarily going to be in a position to maintain the two things that are required in order to keep the benefits.

I guess I feel a little ambivalent about Bridging the Gap. We have a campus where our academic support system is not as robust as it should be. So it's almost as if we're bringing students in, who we have every reason to know are not going to succeed, but we bring them in anyway. It's almost as if they had been set up to fail. I'm talking about in recent years. Bridging the Gap, I think it's been within the last five or so years. It's a fairly new innovation. It's a good thing, but it has these two aspects of it, which sometimes cause students to lose the benefit that was promised to them if they can maintain the conditions, which they cannot.

And the last thing I want to say about that is that back in 2020, when I retired, given that there were any number of students who were on academic probation, in the School of Arts and Sciences, we had five academic coaches, for all those students who were on probation. Five academic coaches. Where is the support system to help the students who are in trouble? I'll just say it's not as robust as it should be. If we're not going to provide the students who are at risk with the support system that they would need in order to succeed, then we probably should not be admitting them in first place. Because we're just setting them up to fail, and telling ourselves that "we've given them opportunity, and beyond that, there's nothing more than we can do."

Which brings me back to something I mentioned earlier [in part 1 of the interview], that only half of the Black students graduate in six years. Much of that is because they're failing courses, especially the developmental math. It takes them six years and they still haven't graduated. Back in 2019, I had a student who finally graduated, thank God, after 10 years. It took her 10 years, but at least she finished. It sort of makes me wonder how many others were not as fortunate. I do want to say, sort of in closing that my experience at Rutgers has was positive. I benefited, hopefully the students benefited. If I'm critical of Rutgers, it is because I love Rutgers. I am a loving critic, and I just want to see the university do better and especially to do better for its students. So those were the things I wanted to add that I didn't quite get into the first time around.

Jesse Bayker: I wanted to ask you one follow up question about civic engagement. I wonder if you could talk about your own experience teaching a civic engagement course.

WG: I would teach African American history among other things, or a course on recent US history since the 1960s. But what I did was to build in a civic engagement component, which was the community service. Some people actually went over to the Cathedral Kitchen because that was our partner, to volunteer there, and that was something they could do, but did not have to do. What I encourage everyone to do, and really required that they do, was to bring in canned goods, the things that the Cathedral Kitchen said it wanted and needed. To the extent that they want to use their money for food, what they really need help with are things as simple as bottled water, if we give them cases of bottled water, then they don't have to spend their money to buy it. If we bring in paper towels then they don't have to use their money to buy that, they can focus on food, and also personal hygiene items. So, most students were willing to do that. That was one way that my community service project worked. I had a friend in Childhood Studies, she sent her students to do work with after school programs. There are 100 different ways that people can be involved in civic engagement, community service. Because the university wants a research aspect, I asked the students to write a paper comparing Camden with two or three other communities in New Jersey, and they could go online and gather the statistical information and respond to the questions. Wendell Pritchard really started this push for civic engagement.

JB: I think we can wrap up here, unless you want to share any other parting thoughts?

WG: Well, I just want to thank the two of you for inviting me to participate in this oral history project and hopefully someone will read it and get something out of it.

KB: We hope so too.