

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD W. ROPER

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history with Richard W. Roper, on September 11, 2019, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for coming today. I really appreciate it.

Richard Roper: My pleasure.

SI: To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

RR: Yes, I was born in 1945, in DeLand, Florida. There's a very interesting tidbit related there, too. I was born on September the 20th, 1945, but my birth certificate provides the date of September the 26th, 1945. My mother explains that the reason for that is that I was born in a hospital, but this was pre-the civil rights period and it took them six days to record my birth. It says I was born on the 26th, but I have celebrated the 20th as my birth date from year one.

SI: For the record, what are your parents' names?

RR: My father's name was Henry Thomas Roper, and my mother was Dorothy Cassandra Johnson Roper.

SI: Starting with your mother's side, what do you know about her family background and where her family was from?

RR: Yes, interestingly enough, I tried to do an Ancestry.com project and was not very successful on my mother's side. I can go back, personally, only as far as her mother and her father. I don't know who their parents were, but my mother's mother was Henrietta Johnson and my mother's father was Alfred Johnson. They were Floridians. They grew up in Florida, but I simply don't know anything about their early period, other than that my grandfather, Alfred Johnson, worked as a janitor during the depression at a local Episcopal Church that provided employment for him when other employment was not available.

On my father's side, I can go back a few more years, not many, but a few more. His mother was Elizabeth Bradley. His father was a guy by the name of Roper (I don't know his first name). He and my grandmother, my father's mother, were married, but he died during the First World War. She subsequently remarried to a guy who also was a veteran of the First World War, William Bradley. He did not adopt my father, so he retained his biological father's name, the Roper name. I don't know very much about my father's father or my father's stepfather. I know that my father's mother, Elizabeth, was one of eight children. They grew up in what's now called Geechee land, the islands off South Carolina. They spoke this dialect, and all of her brothers and sisters lived to be at least eighty years old. My grandmother's mother, whose name was Mary Young, lived to be 115 and died in 1957. So, I got to know her. [Editor's Note: The Geechee, or Gullah, are an African-American group who live in coastal areas of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. The Gullah language is an English-based creole marked by vocabulary and grammatical elements from various African languages.]

SI: Wow.

RR: I did not know her parents, however. I always like to bring up the fact that when she died, in 1957, at 115 years of age, she had been a child in slavery, but when she died, she still had one original tooth in her mouth. I've always thought that was an interesting observation.

SI: Just to pick up with that, are there any stories from her life that she shared with you that stand out in your memory?

RR: Not really. She didn't talk about it that much. She was much more future oriented and looked back on that period as one during which she persevered. She did not talk about her husband. She did not talk about her life. She only addressed issues that had to do with the present day.

SI: I am curious, I have heard about the dialect from other sources, did your father's family try to keep up the dialect?

RR: No, no.

SI: No, okay.

RR: It wasn't something that they were proud of, quite frankly. Being a Geechee meant that you were from the islands and that you were economically disadvantaged more so than you would be on the mainland. They formed a community of their own. My grandmother Elizabeth could neither read nor write but continued to go to elementary school into her eighties. She couldn't read and she could write a little bit, but she could count and she was an entrepreneur. She established a little five-and-dime store that she operated out of a small building in the middle of the ghetto and sold soda pop and cookies and candy and things of that nature, and she did that well into her sixties and early seventies. She was a domestic for most of her life, as was my mother, even though my mother, who graduated as the valedictorian of her high school class in DeLand, Florida, an all-Black school of course, went to college for one year. She attended West Virginia State College but dropped out after her first year because she had me. My aunt often remarked that I should have been smart, since I spent a year in college before I was born. [laughter] Not very nice of her, right?

SI: The area where your grandmother had the store, was that in the Brunswick area? [Editor's Note: Brunswick, Georgia is a city on the southeastern coast of the state. It is the county seat of Glynn County.]

RR: In Brunswick, yes. That's where I grew up. All of mother's children were born in DeLand. That is, my mother, when she was pregnant, would go home to have her children, to be with her mother, and all five of the brothers and sister were born in DeLand. I have three brothers, one sister. One brother is deceased, two brothers still live, and my sister's still alive.

SI: Your mother's parents, do you have any sense of what their lives had been like?

RR: In Florida?

SI: Yes.

RR: Not really. I wish I could say more about that, but like I indicated earlier, the ancestry search that I did produced very little about them. I assume that even if I were to try today, I would have difficulty trying to collect accurate information, because of the census problems associated with growing up in the South.

SI: Did you grow up knowing them, or had they passed away?

RR: No, I knew my mother's father and mother. Like I said, my mother, for six years, had a child almost every year, except between me and my next younger brother; we're separated by two years. He's the brother who's deceased. All of the kids knew our grandparents. My mother's mother died when I was about seven or eight, I would suspect, and my mother's father, I guess I was in high school when he passed. It may have been a little later than that, but that's what I recall.

SI: How did your parents meet and get together?

RR: My father was in the Navy. He was a petty officer, which is to say, as a Black Navy man, he was a cook. He was stationed for a period in DeLand, at the naval base at Daytona Beach. My mother was an attractive high school student. My father had been married before, but they met at a social in DeLand. They got married. She went off to college. I was born. She dropped out of college. They came to Brunswick to establish their family, moved in with my father's mother and his stepfather. They shared space in a pretty large house, quite frankly. My grandparents partitioned it so that one half of the house was available to my grandparents, and the other half was available to my mother, my father and the five children. We were cramped and we were very poor, dirt poor, but the community in which we were located contained a lot of very poor people. So, it wasn't a unique situation for us. It was the norm.

It was a part of Brunswick that lacked paved streets. It lacked lighting at night. When it rained in the summer, the streets would flood and so would our backyards, and sometimes water would come into the house. When it rained hard, the tin roof, portions of the tin roof would fly off. These were shotgun houses in the sense that both sides, my grandparents' side and our side, you can stand in the front door and look through the house, so the rooms were all on one side or the other.

I spent seventeen years in Brunswick and graduated from high school there. I left to go to West Virginia State College, where my mother had attended. I wanted to go to Morehouse, but we couldn't afford it. West Virginia State was much more available in terms of the finances, and even that was a real stretch. My mother tried to enlist the support of one of my uncles, who lived in Newark, this was her oldest brother, to help finance my college education, but he wasn't able or willing to do it, so we struggled to make it possible for me to go to school. I graduated fourth in my high school class. I also was a high school orator, and I was relatively successful. I never won the state championship among Black students, but I won a couple of regional competitions. Because I was an orator, instead of the salutatorian giving the salutatorian address, the faculty

decided that I would do it. It hurt me, to a certain extent, to know that one of my classmates who deserved to be the speaker did not get to speak, but I was better.

SI: How did you get into oratory?

RR: Well, I thought it was interesting. I was academically oriented, academically inclined, and I thought that I could do reasonably well as an orator, tried out, won the local competition, and stuck with it for about three years. My father thought it was a waste of time, but my mother often accompanied me when I went to competitions in other parts of the state.

SI: Well, let's go back to your childhood. You described the area of Brunswick you lived in. In general, can you give me a sense of how big a town Brunswick was?

RR: Back in those days, it was twenty thousand or less, thereabouts. I would imagine it was demographically maybe forty-sixty, African American to white. It's the county seat for Glynn County, and Glynn County is made up of Brunswick, the county seat, along with Jekyll Island, a resort, St. Simons Island, a residential island, and Sea Island, a very upscale, exclusive resort. In fact, the Morgans and the Rockefellers, Jimmy Carter and his cohorts vacationed there when he was president. Jekyll and Sea Island were predominantly white, Sea Island because it was a resort island and Jekyll because it was recreational. But African Americans weren't allowed to live there, although there was, after the 1950s, a portion of the islands that African Americans could visit, including a beach area on Jekyll Island for Coloreds.

Brunswick was semi-industrial. We had a paper mill that stank up the city every summer. We had a rocket propulsion plant making fuel for rockets in the late '50s. We had [Hercules] Powder Plant, DuPont armaments factory. Those provided a lot of jobs. Then, of course, we had the fishing industry, shrimping and fishing, et cetera.

SI: Now, your father was in the trades as a plumber.

RR: My father was, as far back as I can remember, an assistant plumber. He worked for the Cranshaw Construction Company, and Cranshaw had a business that I guess employed maybe five or six workers. My father was one of them. He could not be a plumber, because African Americans were not licensed as plumbers in Georgia. He had to function as an assistant plumber, and I think he worked with this guy for at least twenty to twenty-five years. Then, when the guy went out of business, lost his business, went bankrupt, my father of course lost his job, but he also discovered that Social Security payments had not been made by the firm. Therefore, he was without a pension and he was without Social Security coverage as well. But he was lucky in that his side work as a plumber was highly regarded in the community. The local school board ended up hiring him, and he had a pretty decent life after he lost his job with Cranshaw Construction.

SI: Your mother worked as a domestic.

RR: Yes, she tried to get a job as a telephone operator, but African American women were not being hired in those days for positions of that type. The only job she could get was as a

domestic, even though she had a year of college and was a very smart woman. She worked for only one family for, I guess, twenty-five years; a family headed by Dorothy Oates, who lived in the middle-income section of Brunswick in the downtown area. I must say that my mother, when I was in the seventh grade, had a serious kidney problem, kidney disease, and required surgery, and unfortunately, my family didn't have any insurance. She did not have a way of financing her medical care, and the woman for whom she worked, Mrs. Oates, financed it on her behalf. I think that's why my mother stayed with her as long as she did. Had she not have had the surgery, she wouldn't have lived. She had to have one kidney removed because it was so badly damaged and the other kidney had to have stones removed. She managed to live, what, thirty-five years with one kidney and died when she was sixty-nine. My father died at the age of sixty-three from lung cancer. He had been retired from the school board I think maybe a year before he contracted lung cancer.

SI: Did he ever talk about what he did in the Navy?

RR: Just that he cooked. [laughter] No, he didn't.

SI: Do you know if he went overseas, or was he Stateside?

RR: No, I don't. I think he was Stateside for most of the time.

SI: Tell me a little bit about what your everyday life was like in this neighborhood. When you were coming of school age, what would a typical day be like for you?

RR: My mother would get us up around seven, seven-thirty. We'd have breakfast, which was usually grits with butter. We didn't have eggs. We didn't have bacon. Those things were luxuries for the weekend. We'd get dressed. If it was summertime, the clothes we wore were pretty standard, lightweight stuff. If it was winter, it was a challenge, even though winters in Brunswick were not harsh, as one would describe them in a New Jersey context, but in late January and early February going into March, there were some pretty cold days. Often, we were--and I can recall this vividly--we were without adequate clothing. I was a school crossing guard in elementary school, not in high school, and I can recall the teacher who supervised us telling me not to come back the next day unless I had better shoes. I would wear my father's shoes with stuffing in them to make them fit, or I'd wear shoes that had holes in the bottom but would have paper, cardboard paper, in the bottom, too. It was obvious to the teaching staff that we were dirt poor, but that didn't stop us from doing well in school. All of us, all five of us, were relatively successful, which is to say that both our parents were smart. My mother was, of course, the smarter of the two of my parents. My father did not finish high school. He finished the eighth grade, I think. But he could read and write, and so he got by.

One of the other interesting things about my childhood, before we got to middle and high school, is that my father didn't make that much money--Cranshaw didn't pay him that much--but when we needed school lunch money, five kids, four of us in school at one time, the youngest, my sister, was probably not in school with most of us, my mother would send me in the morning, early in the morning, to my great grandmother, my father's mother's mother, Mary Young, who received Social Security. She didn't do anything with her money, because people would bring

food to her. She didn't cook in her little room. My grandmother, her daughter, would prepare meals for her, or her other daughter, Eva Baker, or the other daughter, Minnie Salins, would prepare meals for her, and bring them to her. She just sat in her bed or sat by the fire and reflected on life, I suspect is the right way to say it. My mother would send me to my great grandmother and ask her if she could give us a dollar, so that there would be twenty cents apiece for us to get lunch at school.

Now, when I was in the eighth grade, I think, maybe it was the ninth grade, the city was confronting the need to provide educational services for African Americans that might allow for the city to delay the push for integration, school integration. The area in which we lived, on Gordon Street in Brunswick, was designated for reuse as the site of a new elementary school. As a consequence of that, my grandmother received a payment for proposed demolition of the house in which we lived, and instead of demolishing the house--my father's mother was something else--she gave my father and my mother a share of the money that she received and then the portion that she kept, she used to move her house to another area of Brunswick, where it remained until she died at the age of ninety-six. My father and mother built a little, what do you call those, cinder-block house in an area near my grandmother, not on the same street but several streets away from that, in an area that had been a lower-class white community. We lived next to white people in this area and got along reasonably well with them, but they, too, were low income. They were not middle-class white people. I graduated high school while we lived in this, what we thought was, a very modern house. Just to give you a sense of how odd this situation was, we had a picture window in our little green cinder-block house. At Christmas, my mother, I'll always remember the last couple of years that I was there, had a rotating silver Christmas tree--no, the tree didn't rotate, there was a light concoction of some type that was shaded red, green, yellow and blue, and that would rotate and that would reflect on this silver Christmas tree. It looked pretty from the outside, but it wasn't very traditional Christmas, if you will. We didn't know what snow was like. We never encountered snow in Brunswick, but subsequent to my leaving, there has been a couple snowstorms, just enough for people to skid on the ice but not much more than that. What else can I tell you about that experience?

SI: You mentioned the reason for this move was they were building a new school. Did you wind up going to that school?

RR: No, by the time the school was built, we were all either in middle school, or I was in high school. None of us went to the newly-constructed elementary school.

SI: What was the elementary school experience like for you?

RR: I went to Perry Elementary School. I went to Risley Elementary School for one year. Perry Elementary School was built while I was in the first grade at Risley, and because of where we lived, Perry was closer to my house than was Risley and I walked to school, although there were school buses. We were within the geographic area that did not require school buses, or school bus service was not provided to us. I walked up the hill to get to school and then I walked up the hill to get home--no, not really. [laughter] I walked up the hill to get to school and then down the hill to get back to the house. Risley was fun, but I really enjoyed Perry Elementary School. I got

very good grades in elementary school and enjoyed it. I enjoyed school. I was active in elementary school activities. I didn't play sports, but I had a pretty enjoyable time. I did okay.

SI: What were the conditions like in the school?

RR: The elementary school was fine. It was relatively new. I wouldn't have known whether the quality of the school condition was good or bad because I didn't have a context within which to evaluate it. The teachers, in my view, they were superior. I remember some of them, Ms. Adams, Ms. Rome, Ms. Noble, all of whom were African American women. They cared about us. I remember the school principal, Ms. Massey. She had this awful habit of clearing her throat that I found objectionable, but other than that, she was fine. My mother was active in the PTA [parent-teacher association] and was PTA president for several years. She worked well with the principal. It was a community school, and the faculty and those parents who were active were reasonably close and cooperative and collaborative. The principal was responsive. It was a good experience.

SI: Did religion or church play a significant role in your life growing up?

RR: Yes, it did. Neither of my parents were churchgoers. In fact, I don't recall my mother or father attending church when I was growing up, but the family that lived next door to us convinced my mother to let me go to Sunday school with them. As a consequence of that relationship, I ended up becoming very active at the local church I attended with them. I remained active in that church, that is, I went to Sunday school, I went to church in the morning, and then I went back to church at night, until I left that church to join a church that had a younger African American minister, Julius Caesar Hope, who also became the president of the Brunswick NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]. I was active in the NAACP in my junior high and senior high school years. This guy thought I should consider the ministry. I had never thought of considering the ministry, but to make a long story short, I was very active at Zion Baptist Church, where I was baptized at the age of thirteen. I was a frequent speaker on Youth Sunday at Zion. As a result of my speaking at Zion, I was invited by other local churches on January the 1st to read the Emancipation Proclamation in celebration of the freeing of the African American slaves, and I did that, I think, over a three-year period. [Editor's Note: On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed all enslaved people in areas under the control of the Confederacy.]

SI: Zion was the second church you went to?

RR: Zion was the second. The first was Jordan Grove Baptist Church, and that was a real thumper. Zion was less of a thumper but still thumped. Again, I would go to church and Sunday school in the morning, and then I'd go back to church in the evenings often on Sundays. I have to admit that I was a bit of a pain for my brothers and sisters, my sister will tell you this, that whenever we had difficulty with neighborhood children, my younger brother would want to fight and I would want to read a Bible verse. [laughter] She still reminds me of that.

I sang in the school choir in high school. I played in the school band in high school. I was president of my homeroom class in ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade and I was an officer



in the student government. I don't think I was president. I can't recall. I think I was VP [vice president] of the student government association. As I said, I graduated fourth in my class. I didn't get any scholarships to colleges, but I got some recognition in the final year. I don't think anybody at our school got scholarships to college. I don't think our guidance counseling was very good in that respect because some of us should have gotten some financial support. We were on our own after we graduated.

SI: When you were growing up, did you have to work outside the home?

RR: [Yes]. I would joke with my mother that I started working in the third grade, which is a lie. [laughter] Actually, I was in the sixth grade when I started working, and I started working for Mrs. Oates, the white woman who employed my mother. I did her yardwork, and in some instances, I would help in the house, mopping the floors and helping to move furniture and things of that nature. From the time I was in the seventh grade through high school, I worked for a couple of other families in that neighborhood in which Mrs. Oates lived, both at their homes, primarily in the yard, but also one of the families had a hardware store that also sold boats and I worked there on a part-time basis after school and on Saturdays. I'm trying to think if I did any other work. I think that was about it, those three jobs.

SI: I also heard from a lot of African Americans who grew up in the South that seasonal field work was kind of part of their life growing up.

RR: We didn't have any farming in our area. It was, like I said, the seafood industry, the paper plant, the munitions plant, DuPont, Hercules Powder Plant it was called, and the space industry-related activity. Mrs. Oates, for whom I worked more than any of the others, said I was smart and that if I worked hard, I could become a mailman. I thought that was amusing, even then, be that as it may.

SI: It sounds like your job brought you into contact with whites quite a bit.

RR: Yes, quite a bit.

SI: From what I gathered from people I interviewed, there is a prescribed way of acting, not acting, but certain things you could do and not do.

RR: Sure, yes.

SI: What do you remember about that?

RR: Well, the thing I remember most is that neither my mother nor I were allowed to use the front door. When we were working there, we arrived and we presented ourselves at the backdoor. There was this subservient posture, relationship; you walked a little behind but never in tandem with white people, be they your employer or anybody else, for that matter. We had colored and white water fountains. We had colored and white spaces in the bus terminal and, on the municipal bus, whites sat up front and African American or colored sat in the rear seats. It's the typical southern Jim Crow environment in which we lived. Anything you read about that in

textbooks or hear about through the movies is an accurate depiction of what we had to experience, what we dealt with.

SI: When you were growing up, you were probably about ten or so when what we really think of as the modern civil rights movement began with things like the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

RR: That's right, yes.

SI: Were you aware of these things when you were growing up?

RR: Sure, sure. I became active in the civil rights movement through my church because, as I said, the pastor of the church, when I was in the seventh, eighth grade--I wasn't ten, I was a little older than that then--was president of the local NAACP, and we had a youth chapter that was affiliated with the city-wide chapter. We organized boycotts. We organized sit-ins. We hosted Vernon Jordan, who worked at the time for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, as well as Constance Baker Motley, who argued a case on our behalf in the local court system in Brunswick. That period was an exciting one for me. We did sit-ins at the Woolworth lunch counter. I think we sat-in the bus terminal in an area that was set aside for whites. When I was leaving for college, getting my ticket to get on the bus at the Greyhound bus station, the white ticket agent told me that I had to get out of the line for some reason. I just went off. I was with my father, who was very obsequious in the presence of white people. He tried to calm me. I wouldn't have it. He said, "You're going to get us arrested." We didn't, but I'll always remember that incident, yes.

SI: You got involved through the pastor and the NAACP. Do you remember, did they give you any initial training, or did they just start having actual protests?

RR: No, we just started doing stuff, yes. There was no formalized training in terms of what we do when we were on the picket line or sitting in. We were just expected to be nonviolent, to do whatever we did in a way that would not result in us being arrested for assault or something other than maybe invasion of privacy or something of that nature.

SI: When you would perform these actions, I would imagine there would be a white reaction or resistance. Would they do anything violent?

RR: No. We never encountered any violence. We encountered rude and crude comments but never any violence.

SI: What about the police? How did they treat you?

RR: They didn't bother us. They let us do what we wanted to do. We didn't obstruct traffic. We didn't deny other people access to the space that we occupied. We simply wanted to occupy the space as well. The police didn't have a reason to attack us. I don't think we had any Freedom Riders in Brunswick. I don't recall Freedom Riders, although there may have been. [Editor's Note: Beginning in May 1961, African American and white "Freedom Riders" began testing the desegregation of interstate bus travel made legal in the 1960 Supreme Court decisions *Boynton v.*

*Virginia and Morgan v. Virginia*. They faced violence, arrests and imprisonment, when hostile southern mobs and local law enforcement refused to honor the ruling.]

I will always remember my senior year in high school, 1963, the pastor, Reverend Julius Caesar Hope, and I'll come back to him in a moment, arranged for us to go to the March on Washington. I was in the middle of that mass of people, and I happened to be in an area where Mahalia Jackson, the African American gospel singer, passed right next to me. I heard the speeches, and I heard John Lewis, who I subsequently got to know and I'll tell you about that when we get to it. I heard Martin Luther King and I heard Walter Reuther and I heard A. Philip Randolph, just very, very special. [Editor's Note: On August 28, 1963, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom occurred on the National Mall, during which Dr. Martin Luther King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech.]

SI: What was the trip like going up there?

RR: Terrific, it was a party, because we were all on this bus that we had rented. It wasn't a commercial bus. It was a chartered bus. It was terrific going, and it was terrific coming back. It was a party.

SI: It was all people from the NAACP?

RR: [Yes], from the city.

SI: Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech is one of the most famous speeches in history. Do you remember how you felt or how the crowd reacted when you were there?

RR: Martin Luther King inspired us, at that time, at that early phase of his leadership in the movement, every time he spoke. So, it wasn't anything special. It was just Martin Luther King speaking. He was president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. [Editor's Note: Dr. Martin Luther King served as the first president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which was founded in 1957 in the aftermath of the Montgomery Bus Boycott to coordinate bus boycotts and other civil rights protests occurring throughout the South.]

SI: Reverend Hope was the young reverend ...

RR: The pastor of Zion Baptist Church.

SI: Yes. Would he bring in speakers to either your church or to speak to the chapter?

RR: No, no. We were self-contained. We'd talk about the challenges that confronted us, the impact those challenges had on our lives, and whether we should do something to address them, and in some instances, we did, and other instances, we chose not to.

SI: What would be an example of something you chose not to do, if you recall?

RR: A good example of that--I think this was before Jekyll Island became accessible, or maybe Jekyll Island was accessible, but there were restrictions on the beach area that we could use, and there was a proposal to sit-in on the white beach. I think that was rejected because we knew the cops would beat us on that one. [laughter] That's the only one I can remember, but I do remember that one, yes.

SI: I am curious, in general, did you spend a lot of time on the water or on the beach?

RR: I didn't learn to swim in my youth. I learned to swim in my forties or maybe even my fifties. In Brunswick, there was a park for African Americans, Selden Park, that was pretty nice. You could barbeque there. There was a clubhouse, where a meeting space was provided. There was a public swimming pool there. A lot of community events took place there. It was not a run-of-the-mill kind of community amenity. It was really very nice, very nice. Even though there was a pool there, I never got in the pool. I just never had an interest in swimming. To this day, I'm not into beaches or swimming. I can remember the entertainer from Augusta, Georgia, James Brown, who I'm almost positive performed at Selden Park.

SI: Oh, wow.

RR: Yes, the park was pretty nice, pretty nice. It wasn't in the Black area of the city. It was in a residential area that was surrounded by white families and a business district, very interesting location, now that I think about it, but the Black cemetery was adjacent to it.

SI: You mentioned that the second neighborhood you lived in was a mixture of black and white. Was there kind of prescribed things you had to do when interacting with whites?

RR: No. By that time, the racial barriers were less intense. Brunswick reacted reasonably well to the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. It had attempted to forestall being forced to integrate by building this elementary school that I told you about and then subsequently upgrading the high school that I attended, Risley High School. I went to Risley in the first grade, which was an old school building, huge school building. Then, I was transferred to Perry Elementary School when it was built. I went, in the seventh grade, to the new Risley High School, which was on the opposite side of town and farther away from where I lived when I attended the old Risley. The old Risley School became Risley Elementary. Perry Elementary was intended to reduce the impact on the Risley of the earlier period and served as the feeder along with the Risley Elementary School to the new Risley High School and middle school.

SI: Were the facilities and such at the high school pretty decent?

RR: They were okay. They were not up to the standards of Glynn Academy, which was the white high school in town. That, too, was on the opposite side of the city in a different direction, farther to the east. I know that the facilities were different, because we often got books that had been used at Glynn Academy for use at Risley High School. The science labs were not as comprehensive. The outdoor recreational and sports spaces were not as nice. Both high schools used the local football stadium. The white kids had the stadium on the weekend, on Saturdays.

We had the stadium on Fridays, Friday nights. The white kids had the stadium on Saturday afternoon.

SI: This academy, was it a public school?

RR: Yes, a public school.

SI: I thought maybe it was one of these white private schools.

RR: No, that was the local public high school for white kids, called Glynn Academy.

SI: What did you think of your teachers in high school?

RR: I thought our teachers were super. They prepared me reasonably well for college. I didn't have to take any supplemental, remedial courses once I got to college. I'm trying to remember--did I have remedial English? No, I didn't have any remedial courses. I was reasonably well prepared in the sciences as well. I was not very good at math, but I got through geometry. I didn't take calculus, and I should have. I didn't take calculus in college and should have, since I was an economics major. I don't know how I managed to do that, but I did.

SI: You were very involved in oratory. Did that involve traveling around to contests?

RR: Yes. If I was successful at the local level, and I tended to be those three years that I competed, I made it to the regionals, and I didn't make it to the [state championship]. I think part of my problem at the regionals is that when I was growing up--I have congenital blindness in my left eye--and because of that, my eyes met in the middle, or this eye sort of moved into the [middle], and I think it impacted how I was perceived on the stage. I'm trying to use that as an excuse for not having won at the state finals, probably not valid. Those two years that I participated in the state championship, I didn't make it. I came in third one time.

SI: Was there ever any trouble traveling around in this era?

RR: No, we knew where to go, how to travel. The things we did conformed to the racial norms of the area. We didn't encounter anything that was out of the ordinary, and the ordinary was you stayed in your place.

SI: Before we talk about college, does anything else come to mind about your early years that you want to share?

RR: One final thing.

SI: We can always come back to this period.

RR: Yes. When I was in high school, I guess in my junior year, it could've been my senior year, eight of us got together and formed a group called the Lads, L-A-D-S. I'm going to describe each of these guys because it's important. One was an athlete. He played both basketball and

football and was a star performer. One was the guy who should have been recognized as salutatorian, because he had the second-best academic record in high school. A third was the son of the local Episcopal priest, African American. Another was just a regular guy who everybody liked. I'm going to put names to these fellows in a minute. A sixth was also a regular guy. The seventh was a crazy guy who could always find a reason to cut up, and myself. It was Royal Randolph, Maurice Bacon, Robert Martin, James Daniel, Melvin Hindley, Matthew Walters, Herbert Stevens and Richard Roper. Royal is now a doctor, a psychiatrist. Martin is a lawyer. Maurice retired from, I want to say, IBM. I think it's IBM. Matthew retired from another major [Fortune] 500 company, and our salutatorian, for whatever reason, didn't do very much with his life and he died this past year. He had been the smallest member of our group. He was about five-foot-five and slender, but in his sixties, he weighed about three hundred pounds. Herbert Stevens was just as bright as anyone could be. He became a fundamentalist Christian for reasons that escape me; but he got very much into his church. We didn't connect that much after high school, but in our senior years, about ten years ago, we started getting together again. Seven of us gathered several times, but Melvin never showed up. We met in Atlanta for lunch. I flew down each time. Royal Randolph, who lives on Maui, often visited Atlanta to see his children and grandchildren, so we decided we would use that as a basis for getting together as a group to renew our acquaintance. Over a ten-year period, we did about three times. We have been Zooming every other month in order to stay in touch, but death has captured Herbert and Matthew.

SI: It was a social group, the Lads.

RR: [Yes].

SI: I am curious, were they involved in the NAACP or other things that you were involved with, or was it just in school?

RR: I don't think any of them were involved in the NAACP. I'm reflecting--now, that's interesting, nope.

SI: Okay. How did your parents react when you started getting involved in civil rights actions?

RR: Yes, my mother did not want me involved but understood my desire to be active. I don't think my father had a position, one way or the other. My mother did not want me to go to the March on Washington because she was deeply concerned that there would be violence and felt that I might get hurt, but I insisted. I wouldn't accept a stricture in that instance. They were supportive as concerned African American parents might be and concerned to the point of not wanting me to do some things, like the sit-ins and demonstrations, but overall, they were okay with it.

SI: Can you tell me a little more about Reverend Hope, what role he played in your life?

RR: He was a dynamic young man. I guess he must have been in his late twenties when he became pastor of Zion Baptist Church. I began going there shortly after he arrived. We built a relationship, personal as well as spiritual. He was very supportive of me, thought I had potential,

encouraged me to be a part of the NAACP, and I jumped on it. I was very active, as I said, in Sunday school and the church youth group. He remained pastor of that church for several years after I left Brunswick, but then he left Brunswick to take a church in Detroit, Michigan. From there, I think he retired from that church and became the assistant or associate director of the NAACP national office, assistant director for religious outreach or something like that. So, he was the guy who served as the front man with all the preachers across the country. He died about, I think, three years ago. He remained true to his commitment to the NAACP and the civil rights movement. [Editor's Note: Reverend Dr. Julius Caesar Hope, who died in 2018, served as the National Director of Religious Affairs for the NAACP. He was Pastor Emeritus of New Grace Missionary Baptist Church in Highland Park, Michigan.]

SI: I'm curious, the comment from the middle-aged white woman about how you might one day be a mailman, what did people you knew expect from you, such as your family and friends, and what did you think for yourself in your future that you might do for your career or your life?

RR: That's good. I think my family and friends were of the opinion that I would do okay, I'd be all right, I'd do reasonably well. I think the expectations were not real high but high.

SI: Did they expect you to go to college?

RR: I think so, yes. I think they expected me to go to college. My father wanted me to be a schoolteacher because he said that if I got a college degree, being a teacher would certainly be an option for me. I had no desire to be a schoolteacher once I got to college and realized there was a world out there that needed to be explored, which I think contributed to my decision not to major in secondary education or anything like English or history and to study economics instead. I thought that implied a care about, a concern for, and a view of the world that was much broader than teaching, school teaching. Yes, I think they envisioned me doing okay, probably becoming a schoolteacher, but I never saw myself in that role. Frankly, I couldn't conceive of what my role in the larger society could or should be, and it was not until I got to Rutgers-Newark that I began to formulate a vision of what my career could involve.

SI: Okay. Let me pause for a minute.

RR: Okay.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: In 1963, you went to West Virginia State.

RR: Correct.

SI: What was that whole experience like?

RR: Culture shock, pure culture shock. I think I arrived, I took the train to--nope, I took the bus, that's right. Remember I told you that I was getting a bus ticket when I had that encounter with the ticket agent. I took a bus from Brunswick, Georgia to Institute, West Virginia.

I had been out of Brunswick any number of times in the least. When we were growing up, we would vacation every summer in DeLand, I should have told you, all five of us. This was a big thing for us. Every summer, we would go to DeLand for at least a week's time. My mother's sister, Ruth, and her husband, Charles Cusack, were the parents of two boys, Charles Jr., Chuck, and James Cusack, Jimmy. Chuck was my favorite cousin. I thought the world of this guy. He was four years older than me. He was as sociable as they come, the life of the party. Girlfriends just hung on him. We were close. We were very close. I looked forward to going to DeLand every summer, as did my brothers and my sister, but especially because I would get to hang out with Chuck.

Now, I'll tie this back to going to West Virginia State. I arrived in West Virginia, off the bus in my straw cap and country attire. [laughter] West Virginia State, at that time, two things about that place. One, it was a Historically Black College until 1954, when it integrated following the [*Brown v. Board of Education of*] *Topeka* Supreme Court decision. Almost immediately thereafter, it became a majority white school during the day, and it was all Black at night. None of the white kids lived on campus, but they were in large numbers during the day. That's number one. When I got there, my roommate was a white student, and he hadn't gotten the memo that whites don't sleep on the campus. Within six months of having gotten there, he was gone.

The other aspect of West Virginia State is that it was a safe school for a lot of African American kids from New York, New Jersey and Connecticut and Chicago, who couldn't get into the local schools where they lived. They tended to be middle class and they would show up in their sports cars and fine clothes, and I was like the poor mouse in the living room. It was very, very stark having to come to terms with the fact that I was not a part of the mainstream at West Virginia State. I was an outlier. Like I told you, when we were growing up in Brunswick, all of us were poor. There was no differentiation between me, my family and the rest of the community. When I got to West Virginia State, the majority of the Black kids were middle class or upper-middle class and the reason they were at West Virginia State was because they couldn't get into the schools like Rutgers or NYU or, I would imagine, Montclair State, assuming they were interested in that. They would show up at West Virginia State, and they'd have a good time.

The one thing that I'll always appreciate about West Virginia State is that it helped solidify my view that I could perform in an academic environment, and it gave me the opportunity to join a fraternity. The fraternity was made up of all these middle-class Black boys, but we got along famously for the year that I was there, after crossing the line. It was fabulous. It was terrific. The fraternity was Alpha Phi Alpha. I became a member in 1964. In 2019, I joined an alumni chapter, Alpha Lambda, in Newark, New Jersey.

I had to drop out of West Virginia State, because my parents couldn't afford to keep me there, especially in view of their desire for the brother behind me to go to college. He was two years behind me. I got two years at West Virginia State. When I dropped out, I took the bus, and instead of going home, I traveled to Newark to get a job and live with an aunt, who's actually my cousin, but to whom I related as if she were my aunt, in Hackensack, New Jersey.



When I got to Newark, the first stop I made was at the home of my mother's sister and her husband, Thelma and Only, O-N-L-Y, James, in--I guess it's the Central Ward of Newark. They had a big house. They lived on the top floor, and they rented the bottom floor, a very nice place when compared with what I was used to in terms of where Black people lived. My aunt said that I wasn't going to Hackensack, that was I was going to stay with them. Sure enough, that's what I ended up doing. She said that her son, another of my cousins whom I also got to like a lot and he was also four years older than me, worked at Sears, the department store in downtown Newark, and a week after I got there, I had a job at Sears. He facilitated that. We worked there together for a couple of years, and I'll come back to him later because we worked together in another instance. I helped him get that job.

Simultaneously, however, I noticed as I was coming into Newark, going to my aunt's house, that there was a campus of Rutgers being constructed in Newark. I knew about Rutgers because one of the Christmas holidays, while I was at West Virginia State, I got a ride with some of the guys going to New York City, who dropped me off in Newark at my aunt's, my mother's sister's house, and passed by the Rutgers-New Brunswick campus. Actually, what I passed by was Rutgers on the Raritan; as we're going across the Raritan Bridge, I saw these lights associated with a huge place. I said, "What the heck is that?" They said, "Well, that's Rutgers University over there." Anyhow, I saw this campus was being constructed in Newark, and I said, "Maybe I'll explore this."

That's what I did. I enrolled in Rutgers-Newark University College, the evening program. After I took a course in psychology and got an "A," I said, "This is easy." I then applied simultaneously to Rutgers-Newark, NCAS, Newark College of Arts and Sciences, and once my transcript from West Virginia State was reviewed, I was accepted and started matriculating at NCAS. I started in '65 at the evening program; and in '66, I became a junior at NCAS, majoring, as I had at West Virginia State, in economics. I became active in the life of the Newark campus. I joined the local chapter, the student chapter, of the NAACP. I was elected, I guess, to the program board at Rutgers-Newark. I became member of RSVP, Rutgers Student Volunteer Program.

SI: Rutgers Student Volunteer Program.

RR: Rutgers Student Volunteer Program. I did reasonably well. I had two courses where I didn't do that well. One was an accounting class, and I still don't know accounting well. The other was my Spanish class. I have a terrible time with languages. I did French in high school, and I struggled through Spanish. I have a mental block when it comes to languages, be that as it may.

In the latter part of my junior year, I was elected president of the NAACP chapter. We were then in the midst of the student uprising across college campuses in the North, and we decided we didn't want to be the NAACP any longer because it simply lacked an assertive posture and was much more responsive and not proactive. We decided we would create another organization that reflected our view of how these issues should be addressed. I was in the lead in helping to think through what that organization might look like, and we ended up creating BOS, the Black Organization of Students. We met at my apartment, because by the time this was happening, I

was no longer living with my aunt and uncle but had gotten an apartment in downtown Newark, off Broad Street, with a white student, a guy who was very active in the civil rights movement himself. He had been active in SDS [Students for a Democratic Society], as did I, for that matter. I forgot to say that I became a member of SDS. He and I hit it off and we got an apartment in downtown Newark, and that's where my coterie of Black colleagues from the campus met to talk about this new organization. We came up with this name, which spelled out what we wanted to advance as our agenda, and got underway. When my senior year began, the NAACP charter was returned to the national headquarters, and a new organization was formed. When I met with the Dean of Students to talk about what we were doing, he told me that the name was grammatically incorrect and I think I said, "We weren't concerned with grammar. We were concerned about impact." We thought that the Black Student Organization wouldn't have the same impact as the Black Organization of Students, BOS, if you will.

SI: Before we move on, did either that dean or other administrators resist the creation of BOS?

RR: No. The vice president of the University in charge of that campus was a guy by the name of Malcolm Talbott, who was very supportive of us. He went out of his way, as a matter of fact, to be responsive to our--we didn't offer demands--we offered proposals and recommendations, which was different from what the students on the New Brunswick campus were doing. New Brunswick Black students advanced demands and insisted they be met. But I guess because of the temperament of the Rutgers-Newark students and the responsiveness of Malcolm Talbott, our posture was not demands but recommendations. Then, Talbott was reinforced by the posture of the dean of the law school, Willard Heckel. They lived together. Heckel was very supportive. In fact, he led the creation of the minority student admissions and support program at the law school. I was not aware of that when I was there, because I don't think it took place while I was attending NCAS. It may have happened a year or so after I left. I graduated in '68. [Editor's Note: Malcolm Talbott, a faculty member and administrator at Rutgers Law School, served as the Vice President of Rutgers University in Newark from 1963 to 1974. C. Willard Heckel joined the faculty of Rutgers Law School in 1946. He served as dean from 1963 to 1970 and acting dean in 1973 and 1974. Founded in 1968, the Minority Student Program (MSP) at Rutgers Law School is a nationally acclaimed post-admissions program that serves students of any race or ethnicity who are members of groups that are underrepresented in the legal profession and who have faced discrimination or overcome social and economic hardships.]

During my senior year, as the leader of the Black students at Rutgers-Newark, we did not occupy any buildings, we did not demand, we made requests/recommendations, and we sought to appear before the Board of Governors. All the Black students were, in fact, invited to a meeting of the Board of Governors in April of 1968. We each made presentations. Our presentation was informed by the support of the first Black member of the Rutgers University Board of Governors, Bessie Hill, who lived in Newark, in the Colonnades, and who had encouraged us to be--I don't think she said respectful, I don't want to say dignified either--but to be responsible in the manner in which we presented ourselves, because that would generate more support for what we were doing than being antagonistic or confrontational. We were not confrontational; we were not antagonistic. I made my presentation shaking like a leaf while holding my notes. I think it was Bruce Hubbard, who, I think, was president of the New Brunswick student organization,

someone from Douglass, and someone from Camden who also spoke. The bottom line is that we all made presentations, and the board accepted our comments.

The thing that was most memorable about that meeting was not the fact that we had been invited to address this body called the Rutgers University Board of Governors, but an exchange between Mason Gross, then the President of the University, and Bruce Hubbard, who was either the president of the Black student organization or a senior member of their officialdom. When the discussion focused on the construction underway of the Rutgers-New Brunswick campus center and the proposal from the Black students that it be named the Robeson Student Center, Mason Gross said that that couldn't happen because of Robeson's Communist connections. Hubbard said, "That's hypocritical," or something to that effect, since the Secretary of the Rutgers Board of Governors was formerly a Communist himself. I think the Secretary's name was Schlatter. Mason Gross went through the ceiling. He was incensed that this information was being shared in this public venue, but he had opened the door. The bottom line is that that almost brought our presentation to a close, our conversation to a close. It didn't, however, and the conversation continued. I don't know how, but it did. [Editor's Note: Paul Robeson, who graduated from Rutgers College in the Class of 1919, went on to a career as a singer, actor and activist. In 1949, Robeson delivered a speech at the Paris Peace Conference that was misquoted by the Associated Press and interpreted as being sympathetic to the Soviet Union during the years of the Cold War. As a result, Robeson's passport was revoked, which prevented him from traveling for work and performances, and he was ostracized by much of American society. Years later, when called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), Robeson invoked his Fifth Amendment rights and admonished members of the committee. Richard Schlatter served as the Provost and Vice President (1962-1971) of Rutgers University during the time that Mason Gross served as University President (1959-1971). Schlatter had been a Communist while a graduate student at Harvard during the 1930s. In 1953, Schlatter was subpoenaed to testify before HUAC in private executive session.]

In fact, recently, I was in a meeting with Bruce, as we were talking about some other issues related to Rutgers-New Brunswick in particular and the low percentage of African American students here, and I said, "Bruce, I'll always remember that exchange with Mason Gross." He said, "Yes, but you know I went to his house a couple weeks later to apologize." I said, "You did? Why did you do that?" [laughter] He said, "I wanted to get to graduate school." [laughter]

The presentation was relatively successful, I think, because the Rutgers-Newark campus began almost immediately to try to address some of our concerns. They didn't address it fast enough or as comprehensively as students would have liked, because after I graduated, the following February, the students occupied Conklin Hall, not led by the president of BOS, who was Harrison Snell, my successor, but by a much more radical member of our community, Joe Brown, who was very confrontational. He and a small group of students decided that Talbott and the University were not moving fast enough and were not being comprehensive in their response to our requests, which had now become demands, and that they would occupy Conklin Hall, which they did. [Editor's Note: On February 24, 1969, members of the Black Organization of Students (BOS) took over Conklin Hall, one of the main classroom buildings at Rutgers-Newark, to protest the lack of minority students and faculty on campus. The takeover lasted for seventy-two hours.]

I, by that time, had been hired by Ralph Dungan, the Chancellor of Higher Education in New Jersey. Dungan sat on the Rutgers Board of Governors and had been at the presentation where I spoke. He subsequently invited me, along with a couple Newark community representatives--in particular the one I remember most is Gustav Henningburg, who was the president of the Greater Newark Urban Coalition--to his house in Princeton. There, he introduced plans being formulated by Governor Dick Hughes, who had been elected just a couple years prior to the rebellion in Newark. He wanted to do something to address some of the inequities confronting African Americans, in particular, but also the Latinx community, and was proposing the creation of an educational opportunity program that would be available to educationally and economically-disadvantaged high school graduates from across the state. [Editor's Note: The Newark Rebellion occurred in July of 1967, during which time Richard J. Hughes served as the Governor of New Jersey (1962 to 1970).]

Dungan had the lead in crafting the legislation. There must have been no more than twelve people in the room to talk about the legislation then being framed. I gave him feedback from the perspective of a student. I was financially disadvantaged, but I wasn't educationally disadvantaged. So, I spoke about financial support and assistance. I acknowledged that there might be students who would need some remediation, but once you got admitted to Rutgers, if you couldn't read and write, you didn't belong there, was my view.

The legislation was introduced. The Speaker of the Assembly was, I don't know who the President of the Senate was at the time, but the Speaker of the Assembly was a Republican by the name of Tom Kean. He embraced the bill, as did the Democrats. He got the Republicans to embrace the bill, and it was enacted. Hughes signed it into law. Dungan was charged with creating the regulations and rolling out the program. Now, Tom Kean gets the credit for EOF [Educational Opportunity Fund], but it was Dick Hughes' legislation. The reason, I think, Kean gets credit is because Dick Hughes is dead. Nobody speaks up for Governor Hughes and Dungan and the role they played in the creation of the Educational Opportunity Fund.

Before I graduated, I get this call from Dungan at the campus center. He wants to explore my interest in coming to work for him, for the department, when I finished, and I said, "You betcha." He wanted me to work with the guy he had hired to help design and implement the EOF, and his name was Richard Rettig. He had a Ph.D. in political science, I think, from Cornell, but I'm not sure. I've been trying to locate this guy for the past ten or so years, and I just have not been able to do so, a very, very smart man. He was relatively young. He should've been in his mid-thirties, I would imagine. I joined the staff, along with another of my classmates, Cheryl Green. She and I, both Black, joined Rettig's staff and served as technical advisors to the colleges as they were attempting to address what might be regarded as the educational and financial needs of minority students. We also assisted in encouraging colleges to create EOF programs. We visited the campuses, talked with the administrators about what the program might look like based on what Dick and the larger staff had formulated. We addressed these issues from the perspective of minority students.

I was also asked by Dungan, when the students took over Conklin Hall, to serve as one of his eyes and ears at the Newark campus during the occupation. I show up in Newark and am housed

in the law school building, where all of the officials are holed up, trying to monitor developments. My presence was appreciated by the students, because they felt that I would address concerns from their perspective and I attempted to do just that. I think I did that for about the length of the occupation, which was a couple of days, three days.

Then, Dungan assigned me, along with a white guy, Alexander Sharp, who had recently graduated from the Woodrow School at Princeton, to write up a report that discussed what had taken place and how the University had responded, how the students had reacted, how the community had responded, et cetera. I worked with Alexander, Alex, to produce this report that was then presented to Dungan. What he did with it, I do not know, but I was pleased to have participated, let's put it that way.

The year that I graduated, I applied [to graduate school] after the fact, because I really hadn't thought about graduate school. I applied to two schools only. I applied to Harvard for a graduate degree in economics, and I applied to the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton. I was interviewed at Harvard, where I got to meet and chat with John Kenneth Galbraith.

SI: Wow.

RR: I tell you. But he did not interview me. The dean of the faculty interviewed me. I think because my application, first, was late--it was after the application deadline by months, not by a couple days, but by a month--and because my economic credentials were not Harvard material and I knew that, but I was interviewed on the day that Martin Luther King's funeral took place. So, I'm in Cambridge being interviewed, while on television there's this funeral taking place. I was offered by Harvard special student status for the coming academic year. That did not involve any money. There was no guarantee that I would subsequently enroll in the Ph.D. program, but it would give me an opportunity to demonstrate my ability to be competitive in that environment. I couldn't do that. I couldn't afford to do that. [Editor's Note: Dr. Martin Luther King's funeral services occurred on April 9, 1968, in Atlanta. He was assassinated on April 4th.]

My application to Princeton was received late, but I was encouraged by the director of admissions to reapply the following year and I decided I would do that. I had some assets, by that time, over and above my undergraduate record, which was okay but not spectacular. It wasn't 4.0 caliber. It was much more 3.5, maybe a 3.6. But I had a job in the public sector by that time. I had the strong recommendation of the Chancellor of Higher Education, a Woodrow Wilson School alum, who had worked for John F. Kennedy, had assisted in the recruitment of the Secretary of the Treasury, whose name escapes me, but it will come to me eventually [W. Michael Blumenthal]. Alexander Sharp also gave me a strong endorsement.

The long and the short of that is my application was accepted for the Class of '71, which meant I would be admitted in '69. I was invited, along with a number of other students who had little question marks by their names, to spend two days being interviewed, interacting with the faculty and staff at the Woodrow Wilson School. I roomed at the Nassau Inn with another student from, I want to say, Brown [Colgate], whose name is Tom Blatner. He and I are friends to this day. Tom is white. He and I were both admitted. We did our two years at the Wilson School. I served as vice chair of the Woodrow Wilson Graduate School Association during my second

year. I was responsible for bringing the first Black California Congressman, Ron Dellums, to the campus to speak and to have dinner with the students.

I graduated in '71. I was interviewed by the dean and one of the senior faculty the week or a month before I graduated and offered a job as director of the Urban Affairs Program at the Wilson School, which was the school's outreach to the New Jersey public policy sector, the state and local government agencies that would offer internships to students, and to supervise the internship program. I called Ralph Dungan and told him about the offer and asked what he thought, and he said, "Is that really what you want to do? Is that why you went to the Woodrow Wilson School?" I said, "Not really." He says, "Well, what do you think you should do?" I said, "Well, I think I should use my skills to advance either the educational development or the community development of communities of color." He said, "Well, that's what you should do."

I got an offer from Clark Atlanta University to head the newly created Center on Urban Affairs. I got an offer from the City of Newark, Office of Newark Studies, created by several New Jersey foundations and housed as a part of the mayor's office but administered for the city by Rutgers University.

The reason I took the latter is not only because I thought it would be a terrific opportunity to put my skills to use in Newark, but because Bob Curvin, who had been active at Rutgers, both in Newark and in New Brunswick, and who was then working on his Ph.D. at Princeton in political science, encouraged me to take it. The guy who encouraged me to take the job at Clark Atlanta University was Sam Proctor, who served on the Woodrow Wilson Foundation Fellows selection committee. The foundation supported Black colleges doing things in the public policy/public affairs arena. The foundation was supporting the center that was being created at Clark Atlanta University. [Editor's Note: Samuel DeWitt Proctor served as the president of Virginia Union University from 1955 to 1960 and president of Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina (now North Carolina A&T) from 1960 to 1964. From 1969 until his retirement in 1984, Proctor held the Martin Luther King Chair in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University. After 1972, he also served as pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem.]

Well, I took the job in Newark. I worked at the Office of Newark Studies on the establishment and operation of a mayoral education task force designed to bring stakeholders together after the longest teacher's strike in the nation's history at that time. I recruited the members who comprised the task force; I identified them and then the mayor sent letters of invitation inviting them. I identified and recruited the chairman, a guy by the name of Reverend--at that time, I don't think he was Doctor--but Reverend James Arthur Scott, the pastor of Bethany Baptist Church, where I subsequently became active. Jim served as the chair of the task force. After the task force was set up, the parameters that defined its mission had already been established, but Jim and I tweaked it some, to maximize the talent around the table. I served as staff director for the initial period, but I got that assignment because my graduate thesis, my master's thesis, was on education policy. I didn't know that much about education. But I got the job, so I had to make it work.

SI: This was after Ken Gibson had been elected? [Editor's Note: Kenneth Gibson served as the mayor of Newark from 1970 to 1986.]

RR: Oh, yes, this is during the Gibson administration, yes. I was hired a year after he was elected. He was elected in '70. I was hired by the Office of Newark Studies in '71. The office was created to provide Gibson with access to experts who didn't want to work for city government, who didn't want to be confined by it. Paul Ylvisaker was an active promoter. Ylvisaker had been the Director of Poverty Programs at the Ford Foundation and was then the first Commissioner of DCA (Department of Community Affairs) in the Hughes Administration, a luminary in urban policy in America. Anyhow, I served as staff director for about, I guess, six months, but during that period, I was also trying to identify somebody with extensive education policy experience to serve as the full-time executive director because I didn't think that was something I could do effectively. I thought I had hired a guy from New York, who had worked for the New York City Public School System, and at the last minute, this guy backed out for reasons that escaped me. I also had identified another guy, Donald Harris, who worked for Senator [Walter] Mondale. He was serving as staff director of the Education Committee that Mondale chaired in the Senate. I convinced Don that this was the job he had to take. It turns out that he was the son-in-law of--oh my goodness.

SI: The psychologist?

RR: Yes, Kenneth Clark. [Editor's Note: Kenneth Clark was an African American psychologist and civil rights activist who frequently collaborated with his wife, Mamie Clark, also a psychologist. Kenneth Clark served as a professor at City College of New York and president of the American Psychological Association.]

SI: Yes.

RR: Yes, he was Kenneth Clark's son-in-law. His wife wanted to come back to New York to advance her career, so this was an opportunity for him to do something that was supportive of his wife. He came on as the task force's executive director. I stayed in that role as a staff member of the task force for a couple of months, but I was ready to move on, now that I had gotten the task force effectively underway. I told the mayor that I had done my thing at the Office Newark Studies, and I wanted to know if there was something else that I might do in the administration. He says, "Well, Richard, you know, I've got this guy coming back from Oxford who's going to be my chief of staff, but how would you like to be co-chief of staff?" [laughter] I said, "What's a co-chief of staff?" He said, "Well, you guys would share the responsibility." The person was white, Dennis Sullivan was his name and was someone I admired and respected and liked a lot. I think he had him in mind to manage things related to white people and I would manage things related to Black staff and issues, et cetera. I thought about it and I said, "Well, this bifurcation is not going to work."

I had been offered two other possibilities. One was as deputy director of the New Jersey School Boards Association and the third was assistant to the director of the recently-created Division of Youth and Family Services in the Department of Institutions and Agencies, State of New Jersey, in Trenton, both of which paid more than what I was making at City Hall, but that still wasn't paying that much. When I worked for Dungan, I made nine thousand plus a year. When I worked in the Office of Newark Studies, I think I was making eleven thousand dollars, twelve

thousand dollars at the most. The job at School Boards Association, if I'm not mistaken, it was about seventeen thousand dollars a year, and the one in Trenton was close to that but a little bit better. The reason I took the job in Trenton is two-fold. First, I would get exposure to state government policy making and second I would be working for a Black director. Fred Schneck was the first director of the division. I think he may have been the only Black director of the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS). I'm glad I made the decision to move on, but I ended up hating the job.

My assignment at the division was to craft a plan for the state to expand its involvement with child care services across the state. It was a boring assignment, and thankfully, just six months or so after joining DYFS, I got a call from a guy in New York, who was the lead person in setting up the school reform initiatives being established across the nation, one in Texas, another in Illinois, one in New York, another in Florida, and one in New Jersey, or something to that effect. I remember the Texas one because I got to know the director of the project quite well. Anyhow, the caller asked if I might be interested in talking about heading the education reform project being planned to be housed at the Greater Newark Urban Coalition. I said, "Yes, I would." That resulted in my going back to Newark in late 1972 to develop a research-based advocacy program to identify issues and provide a voice for urban parents and school system leaders, in the conversation about school finance reform. This was on the heels of the *Robinson v. Cahill* decision. [Editor's Note: In *Robinson versus Cahill* (1973), the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that the state's system of financing public education through local property taxes was not meeting the "thorough and efficient" requirement of the state constitution. The court ordered the state to revamp its system of financing education, which led to the passage of the Public School Education Act two years later.]

I hired a guy who was twice my age, Larry Rubin, as my research director. Larry was just super, a Jewish guy who was simpatico with the effort underway to bring some equity to the delivery of education services and who did a great job helping to frame research issues, develop a method of presentation that allowed me to go out and make the case for how urban districts could benefit or should benefit from the school finance [reform]. I did that for almost two years. Ken Gibson reached out to me again in 1974 and asked if I'd be interested in coming back to City Hall--actually, I hadn't been in City Hall before, because I was in the mayor's cabinet as a part of the Office of Newark Studies, but it was external to City Hall--and joining the mayor's cabinet as his legislative aid representing the City of [Newark] with the governor, the legislature, and the executive offices. I said, "I certainly would." This was based on having built up a presence in Trenton as a result of my work with the education reform project. I went to work for Ken in mid-1974.

SI: Yes, it was '74 to '76.

RR: I was in Trenton when the legislature debated the implementation of an income tax. That was fascinating, a great learning experience for me, in terms of how people with differing views achieve compromise and produce an outcome from which everybody benefits, although nobody is completely happy with. Discussions were late into the night and into the morning. Anyhow, that was my most memorable experience as a legislative aide.



My biggest and most memorable experience occurred in '76 when Jack Krauskopf, the first director of Office of Newark Studies, left to become deputy secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services in the State of Wisconsin. Ken asked if I'd be interested in taking his seat as director of the office, and I said, "Yes." I did that, and my first task was to set up a task force focused on how the city might derive some income, revenue, from its nonprofit entities, with the help of Horace DePodwin, who chaired the task force and was dean of the Rutgers Business School. The task force focused on how the city's nonprofit sector might participate in some way in contributing to the city's overall financial health. It arrived at the concept of a payment in lieu of taxes, a concept that had been undertaken elsewhere in the country and was considered a possibility for New Jersey. The Office of Newark Studies (ONS) staff, with Horace in the lead and with the support of staff in the New Jersey Office of Legislative Services, crafted a piece of legislation that the task force endorsed. The Essex legislative delegation introduced the legislation, and it was enacted. It was a big success. It lasted until the mid-1990s, I think, when it was phased out and something else was created in its place. I can't remember, but I can check my records and indicate what replaced it. It, however, was never fully funded. I think it lasted about twenty, twenty-five years.

My appointment as director of the Office of Newark Studies was well received by most, but I think some of the white members of the City Council were concerned. When the task force report was published and distributed to all city officialdom, I got a call from Anthony Carrino, the North Ward, Italian City Council member, telling me what an amazing product it was. I thought, "Well, why are you surprised?" but I didn't say that. He thought it really was top shelf. Horace did much of the writing, of course. I had contributed a little bit to the process, but I have to give Dr. DePodwin credit for the quality of the product.

That was the most important product during my tenure. I then supervised the final phase of the report proposing the reassignment of WBGO FM, a public radio station owned and operated by the Newark Board of Education, recommending the creation of a nonprofit entity that would broaden the use of the station and make its resources more accessible, not only to Newark but to the region. A guy named Bob Ottenhoff had been hired by Jack Krauskopf, before he left, to conduct this study with the support of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Bob was in the process of drawing his study to a close. Then, the question became, "How do we get this done? How do we get the Board of Education to give up an asset that although underutilized--in fact, not utilized at all at the time because the district didn't have the resources to do so; yet was a resource that in theory was a considerable moment for the district--how do we get them to allow a nonprofit to take over the FCC license?"

That was a conversation that I had to lead with the mayor in the presence of the president of the Board of Education, who was also an aide to the mayor, Carl Sharif. He and I were friends and served as aides to the mayor simultaneously, he, in a general sense, dealing with the local Newark community--he was a Muslim--and I as the mayor's legislative aide. Carl, with the backing of the then school board general counsel, another friend of mine, Robert Pickett, the first Black general counsel of the board, were opposed to giving up the license. We each, he and I, in the final analysis were brought before the mayor to make the case--we had already been discussing it with the mayor--and after our presentations, the mayor said, "Well, Carl, I think we should do this." In effect, because the mayor had appointed Carl to the board and I also had

helped orchestrate his election as board president, Carl couldn't do anything but go along [with it]. He still didn't like the idea, but he complied. At a subsequent meeting of the Board of Education, the board members voted to accept the proposal from the Office of Newark Studies to reassign the license to an entity to be created, called Newark Public Radio Inc., and that's what happened. Subsequently, the station, which initially was going to be news, public affairs and music, took on the coloration of the region's premier jazz radio station, with public affairs and news as components. That was my second most important accomplishment in that office. [Editor's Note: WBGO was formed in 1947 as a radio station for the Newark Board of Education. In 1979, the broadcast license was transferred to Newark Public Radio, Inc. in cooperation with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. In 1980, it became affiliated with National Public Radio.]

A third, I can't take much claim for, except for having managed it--actually two. One I incubated, and the other I facilitated. I incubated the creation, that is, I brought on the staff person who did the work to create Newark Emergency Services for Families, a twenty-four-hour, seven-day-a-week crisis intervention program. The person who did this, whose name escapes me, was on loan to the city from the U.S. Department of Health and Welfare. I think that's what it was called then. Her responsibility was to help design the crisis intervention. She was housed at the Office of Newark Studies, so we collaborated in framing what was subsequently established as Newark Emergency Services for Families. I served on the board of WBGO as a founding trustee. I served on the board of Newark Emergency Services for Families also as a founding trustee.

Then, the final program that I had some role in facilitating was the work that George Hampton did in looking into the issue of redlining in Newark. George wrote the report, which I presented to the mayor. The mayor embraced the problems the report revealed and, in fact, had a meeting with local bankers to talk about it but decided not to push the issue out of fear that the private sector would abandon him on some other stuff, so the report was shelved. Those were the four major things I had a role in advancing in the three-and-a-half years I led ONS.

SI: Well, let me pause again for a moment.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We are stepping back now to dig into some of these issues you just talked about. You came to Rutgers in '66.

RR: Actually '65.

SI: '65, yes.

RR: That's when I started at University College and took my first course as a Rutgers student. I'm pretty sure it was a psychology course. I got an "A" and determined that, "Okay, if I did okay on that, I should be able to take a shot at NCAS."

SI: What was the state of the African American community there? Was it growing? What are some of the issues that later became the basis of your requests?

RR: Let's put it this way. The African American community in Newark was not well served by government, quite frankly. It was concentrated in primarily the Central Ward, and it was growing. In fact, it was growing substantially, and it was reaching into the North, West and South Wards. There was little penetration in the East Ward. I can recall, in 1965, when I first arrived in Newark, Black people were not expected to drive through the South Ward because of racial discrimination, in my view, and the ward was predominantly Jewish. But after the '67 rebellion, racial barriers fell, and the Black population began to swell. The North Ward was heavily Italian. The Black community was encroaching upon it as well, as was the Latinx community. The Central Ward, when Ken and his folks arrived, I think it was called Ward 3. Anyhow, the Central Ward was predominantly African American, if not exclusively African American, and the Black community was spreading out from there. As Jewish and Italian people moved out, those places were occupied by African Americans. Then, in '66, the Black community put a Black candidate forward for mayor, that was Ken Gibson. He was defeated, but the campaign served to demonstrate that the Black community could in fact be successful if it was organized. The year after Ken ran, the Newark rebellion took place, and that solidified the Black community's focus on becoming more politically active.

During my senior year, the Model Cities Program was launched by the federal government. I think it was '67 or '68. I was asked in 1968 to serve on the Model Cities Board as a Rutgers student. I didn't serve because the process by which that decision was made was thrown out. I can't recall exactly who threw it out, whether it was the feds or whether it was a local entity through the courts. It was my first engagement with the local politics of Newark, and it was a learning experience. What else can I say about the Black community at that time? [Editor's Note: The Model Cities Program existed from 1966 to 1974. It was part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty. The program provided funding to cities for redevelopment.]

SI: What kinds of issues were you dealing with on the Model Cities board?

RR: Housing, quality of housing, transportation services, recreational services, employment, neighborhood revitalization. The Model Cities process allowed those areas designated as Model Cities within cities to get all kinds of support, financial support and help with all kinds of services. Not long after Ken Gibson was elected mayor in 1970, maybe '72, '73, the entire City of Newark was designated a Model City. Any of the programs one wanted to launch in Newark could be launched as a Model Cities Project and therefore be eligible for financial aid from the feds.

SI: Was there any particular program that you spearheaded?

RR: No.

SI: Would people just bring you ideas on the board and you would debate them or approve them?

RR: I never got to participate on the board, because the selection process was determined to have been inappropriate.

SI: Okay. Well, to step back, were you in the city during the '67 uprising?

RR: Yes, yes, I was.

SI: What do you remember about those days?

RR: At that time, I was living in downtown Newark on Bridge Street with my white roommate, Larry Lorre, who was the nephew of Peter Lorre. Do you know who Peter Lorre is?

SI: The actor, yes.

RR: I had two girlfriends. Both of them lived in the Central Ward, but on different ends of the Central Ward. The girlfriend that I maintained and who ultimately became my wife lived off of Central Avenue in the Central Ward. I would typically walk from Bridge Street to her home whenever I wanted to visit her, and it was also an opportunity for me to get a well-cooked meal by her mother, so I would go often. Anyhow, Central Avenue was the main corridor by which troops from the National Guard came into the city. I was not involved in any way in all of this, but I got to experience the occupation. It was scary. That's all I can say.

SI: When you would try to go back to your apartment, did you face any trouble from the Newark Police or the National Guard?

RR: Nope. The center of attention was Springfield Avenue. Springfield Avenue is, what, a good ten blocks from Central Avenue. My walk to Marlene's house was along Central Avenue, so no contact, with the exception of troops. Central Avenue was a staging area, I guess.

SI: What was the impact that you saw in the months and weeks after the uprising?

RR: How would I describe it? It was civic trauma, if you will. An inability to absorb what had happened and an attempt on the part of the [Mayor Hugh] Addonizio administration to explain away his a priori assessment that the African American community in Newark was not unhappy with its place, position and prospects. I guess the rebellion reflected a coming to terms with just how seriously the African American community was alienated from the political leadership of the City of Newark. It also highlighted an increased dissatisfaction with the African American community's ability to orchestrate change, and I think the effort to begin mobilizing politically crystalized.

SI: When you come back, when the semester begins again that fall, was that the same period that you made the change from the NAACP to BOS?

RR: That's correct.

SI: I would imagine that was probably one of the big reasons.

RR: Absolutely. We felt that we were not as proactive in support of the disaffection of the African American community in general and were incensed by the lack of attention to African American engagement with the Rutgers-Newark community. We were further incensed by the fact that the newly-constructed campus center on High Street had a high fence around it, and that was, we felt, an insult to the citizens of Newark who happened to be residents in the area in which the campus center was located. Rutgers took it down in response to student and community criticism.

SI: It is interesting that issues surrounded the campus centers at both campuses.

RR: By the way, the campus center in Newark is the Robeson Campus Center.

SI: Yes, but that happened a few years after.

RR: That is correct.

SI: Yes.

RR: That's right.

SI: I was curious, the whole issue that New Brunswick was bringing up with Robeson, did that resonate at all with the Newark students?

RR: No.

SI: Okay, all right.

RR: Not at that time.

SI: Okay.

RR: Let's put it this way, I suspect following the occupation of Conklin, it may have resonated to the extent that it contributed to the decision to name the campus center in Newark Robeson Campus Center.

SI: Okay, when BOS was created, were you looking at models at other campuses?

RR: No, no.

SI: Were you working with the students at the other campuses at all?

RR: No. We had episodic but not sustained or coordinated collaboration with neither the New Brunswick or the Camden campus. The relationship with the Camden campus was almost nonexistent. The relationship with the New Brunswick campus was a bit more focused but still not as strong as it could have been, because the New Brunswick campus saw itself as a bit more

elite, if you will, than the Newark campus. The Black students at Newark and the Black students in New Brunswick would communicate, but there was no real strong sense of cooperation or collaboration, just a utilitarian relationship.

SI: Now, I would imagine that most of the African American students were from Newark or relatively close by.

RR: Montclair, Newark, I think were the two communities from which most of the African American students came, although there were more Montclair students than there were Newark students. Remember--in all four classes, freshman through senior--there may have been thirty, thirty-five, at max forty, African American students at Rutgers-Newark. When EOF was created in '68, New Brunswick's Black student population was probably less than one percent, and the Black student population across universities in New Jersey was two percent or less. There were virtually no Latinx kids in these colleges and universities. The numbers were so small, it was almost meaningless.

SI: That formed part of the demands to bring more Blacks and Latinx onto New Jersey college campuses.

RR: Yes.

SI: Do you remember other parts of your platform, how they developed or what you thought was the most important?

RR: Black faculty. Courses that addressed the African American experience in America. Cultural activities to which African Americans might relate. Community engagement. Financial assistance. There was nothing in our proposals about educational assistance though, the assumption was if you could get into Rutgers, Rutgers-Newark, Rutgers-New Brunswick, you were not academically weak. The reason most of the kids applied to Rutgers-Newark had less to do with an interest in Rutgers-New Brunswick and more of recognition of the ease of getting to Newark and the financial obligations that could be obviated by staying at home and commuting to campus. That was true for the Black kids. I'm not so sure if that was true for the white kids.

SI: Would you say that most of the African American community was, in some way, involved with BOS?

RR: No, not during the early days.

SI: Okay.

RR: But after the occupation, oh, yes, very much so. The relationship between the Urban Coalition, the NAACP, CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] and BOS heightened following the student occupation, and the engagement by African American students in the broader Newark community grew as well. The Newark Area Planning Association, headed by Junius Williams, who had come to Newark after graduating from Yale Law School and got involved in community action, played a central role in Ken's election in 1970; students worked with Junius

especially because of his age. Then, there was the UCC, the United Community Corporation, which was federally funded, the CAP [Community Action Partnership] Agency that was engaged in providing community services across the city. BOS became intricately involved in all of those organizations.

SI: You said you were presenting and requesting rather than demanding.

RR: Making demands.

SI: Were there any protests or anything like that that you recall that BOS was either leading or participating in?

RR: We didn't have any protests until the occupation.

SI: Okay, yes.

RR: Thereafter, I don't know what happened because I wasn't there, but we didn't have any demonstrations during my tenure.

SI: Now, you said you also joined Students for a Democratic Society.

RR: Yes, just as a participant, not in a very active way. I didn't know until subsequently that it was supposed to be socialism, but it was just a bunch of kids who were interested in social justice issues. It happened to be white, for the most part.

SI: Students for a Democratic Society is often associated more with the anti-war movement than the civil rights movement, but it was interested in both. Do you remember taking part in anti-war activities?

RR: Not at Rutgers, but at Princeton, I did.

SI: Okay.

RR: At Princeton, students demonstrated in front of the Engineering School building. It was a military-involved facility just off campus. Yes, we demonstrated about the Vietnam War and our opposition to the war. I forgot about that. [Editor's Note: Between 1967 and 1972, there were numerous demonstrations at Princeton University against the Vietnam War and the ROTC program. In one such action, termed the "Hickel heckle" on March 5, 1970, nearly seventy-five students demonstrated against U.S. Interior Secretary Walter J. Hickel as he spoke in Jadwin Gym.]

SI: You were a student for a part of this, during which time you would have been deferred, but were you concerned about the draft at all?

RR: I did not tell you about my experience with the military. My draft board in Brunswick, Georgia, informed the draft board in Newark, where I was living at the time, after I dropped out

of West Virginia State, that I was eligible for induction, notwithstanding the fact that I am blind in one eye. I was called for induction, that is, to take the exam to determine where I might be most appropriate to fit in the U.S. military. I was horrified, I was terrified, and took the exam. When the exam was about to be given, the person in charge said that we should attempt to do as well as we could, because if you didn't do too well, you're going to be in the infantry. [laughter] I knew I would do okay on the exam, but I still didn't want to get into this mix. I finished the exam, and then we had a physical. We had to go to a different facility for the physical. During the physical, the doctor who examined me said nothing about my eye, my vision, but that because I only weighed 123 pounds, that it would cost more to feed me than it would to train me. I got a 4-F because I was underweight. I could not believe it. [Editor's Note: 4-F is a Selective Service classification that means that the registrant is not qualified for military service.]

SI: Wow. You were involved in the EOF planning while you were still a student. I think the way you put it is you were more concerned about the financial aspect than the educational support.

RR: Right.

SI: Basically, what did you hope for out of the program, and then as it was being worked out, did that mostly get supported, or at the end, did it look different?

RR: Yes, two things. The goal from my perspective was to enroll more African American students as matriculating members of the Rutgers University community, in the first instance, and then to get more African American students enrolled throughout New Jersey's colleges and universities. Rutgers, however, chose not to participate in the EOF program, when it was originally launched. Instead, it decided to create its own outreach program called the Urban University Program. It was a complete and total mess, largely because Rutgers went to the extreme of not establishing a set of criteria that helped identify students who were financially and also educationally disadvantaged but who also were highly motivated and wanted the opportunity to participate in an academic environment. Instead, it was sort of an open university approach to this population that we had identified as being in need of support, and for two years, the attempt was made to make that work. Ultimately, I think it was in 1970, Rutgers decided that it would end its urban university concept and buy into the EOF program. As a consequence of that, over the years, the EOF program at Rutgers, especially at Camden, primarily because of leadership there, and to a lesser extent at Newark and New Brunswick, has worked reasonably well in attracting highly motivated but financially and educationally challenged students as it was intended to do. And the reason it works is because they, Camden especially, have not considered it inappropriate to provide educational supports for this cadre of students on a concentrated basis, to give them the academic underpinning that will help them get through their first two years of undergraduate education engagement. The financial support has also been critical. EOF students have done reasonably well at the three campuses. I'm trying to think of some good examples, but I can't. I know that they're available and can probably be identified, but there have been some Fulbright fellowships awarded to EOF students. There have been EOF students who have gone on to elite private schools for graduate work. It has demonstrated that traditional criteria, that is, SAT-based criteria as the sole basis for matriculation may not be as dispositive as some would think it is.



SI: When Rutgers made the move towards the Urban ...

RR: Urban University?

SI: Yes. Did you try to ...

RR: I wasn't there. I had gone on to work for the Department of Higher Education, and then, from there, I went to Princeton. I went to Princeton in '69. The Urban University was put in place in '68 and '69.

SI: '68 and '69.

RR: '68 and '69 and then replaced in '70.

SI: Okay. In your position though ...

RR: In the administration.

SI: In Dungan's office.

RR: We couldn't do anything about it. He and Mason Gross did not get along. Mason did not think that Dungan had the academic standing to tell college presidents across New Jersey how they should think about the provision of higher education services. That wasn't Dungan's charge, quite frankly. His role was to help create a system of higher education services that was comprehensive but diverse, where each of the college types would have a set of academic responsibilities. Not every college would become a university. Not every college would be comprehensive. Some of them would remain teacher colleges, et cetera. There would be a space for research universities. There'd be a space for non-research universities, et cetera. Mason Gross was of the view that the colleges should be allowed to make those decisions. He fought Dungan every step of the way, which set the tone of the relationship between the chancellors and the higher education communities thereafter.

SI: It sounds like you had a good relationship with Dungan. What were your impressions of him and how he did in his position there?

RR: I thought he was terrific. I thought he was very smart, extremely articulate, very analytical, and politically astute. I mean, he survived as chancellor. I'm trying to remember how long he was there. I know he was there through Hughes' administration and maybe through a portion of [Brendan] Byrnes' administration, but then he went back to Washington as the executive director of the Inter-American Economic Alliance or something of that nature. I think that's where he ended his career. The subsequent chancellors, in my view, didn't measure up to the man who was first the chancellor of New Jersey's Higher Education system. [Editor's Note: Ralph Dungan served as the Chancellor of Higher Education of the State of New Jersey from 1967 to 1977. He went on to serve as the executive director of the Inter-American Development Bank from 1977

to 1981. Governor Christie Todd Whitman eliminated the position of Chancellor of Higher Education and the entire Department of Higher Education in 1994.]

SI: Before we leave your time Rutgers, you majored in economics. Do any professors stand out in your memory either from economics or other courses?

RR: Oh, boy, I'm trying to think. I had a couple political science professors who were very impressive. On the economic side, no, no one really stood out. But Norm Samuels and Bob Curvin, those two were special. Clem Price was not at Rutgers at the time; he was at Essex County College. In fact, one of our requests/recommendations had to do with the recruitment of Black faculty, and that's how he got to Rutgers-Newark, quite frankly, as a result of our pressing that issue on his behalf. Nope. [Editor's Note: Norman Samuels, a Professor of Political Science, served as the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Rutgers-Newark from 1976 to 1982 and then as Provost of Rutgers-Newark from 1982 to 2002. In 1969, Dr. Clement A. Price (1945-2014) began teaching history at Rutgers-Newark, and in 2002, he became a Board of Governors Distinguished Service Professor. Robert Curvin was an author, activist, scholar and administrator who graduated in 1960 from the Rutgers Newark College of Arts and Sciences and earned his Master's of Social Work in 1967 at Rutgers. He subsequently earned his Ph.D. in politics at Princeton University.]

SI: Okay.

RR: Remember, I was only at Rutgers-Newark for three years.

SI: Well, it was an exciting three years. [laughter]

RR: Yes, they were interesting.

SI: Were you still working?

RR: Yes, I worked full time. I paid my way through undergraduate school with work and student loans.

SI: Always at Sears, or were there any other places you worked?

RR: I worked at Sears, and then I worked at Bonds Clothiers. Those were the two principle employers for whom I worked. I sold shoes at Bonds and I sold hardware, men's clothing, toys, those three things at Sears.

SI: Were you involved in other kinds of political activity? For example, when Ken Gibson ran for mayor of Newark in '66 and '70, were you involved in that?

RR: No, I was not.

SI: Or any other kind of activity?

RR: Not off campus. I was not doing anything off campus in those days. In '66, he ran. I wasn't engaged in '66. Remember, I had just started NCAS in '66. '67, that's when efforts began to frame a more diverse mayoral and city council ticket, if you will; but I wasn't involved in that either.

SI: Okay. You were also part of RSVP.

RR: Yes.

SI: The volunteer program.

RR: Right.

SI: What did that consist of?

RR: Well, it was providing off-campus assistance to groups, community groups, seeking student assistance. I can't remember any of the organizations that we assisted. I do know that we had a presence off campus that I think was reasonably appreciated, but it wasn't a big deal. Our Rutgers Student Volunteer Program was small in scale. We didn't get any financial assistance from the University. It was all volunteer work. I think organizations approached the University about getting students to do discreet tasks. I cannot give you the name of an organization that I was involved with, but I know I did something because I still have the Rutgers Student Volunteer mugs we were given as participants in the program.

SI: In general, would you say the faculty and the administration were pretty supportive of the BOS and what you were trying to accomplish?

RR: The administration was. The faculty were ambivalent at best, and some of them were really hostile. But the tone was set by Malcolm Talbott and his administrative staff. They were relatively responsive and wanted to make the experience for the Black students on campus as positive as possible and to open opportunities for others to join them.

SI: Do you know if anyone faced any kind of blowback or repercussions?

RR: No, nope, none of that happened, at least that I'm aware of, and I would have known because students would have shared it with me had that occurred. I don't think I had any instances of students complaining about mistreatment or maltreatment by faculty or administrators.

SI: I was also curious, because I have heard stories in this period of the Newark Police just being more ...

RR: Aggressive, aggressive.

SI: Yes. Did you have any experience with that?

RR: Not me personally. I knew that that was the case because the rumors were such that it had to be the case, but I did not experience it personally, nor did I encounter any students who faced that. No, I can't think of any instance when a student brought to campus concerns of what happened to him or her off campus. The campus police were very responsive. I mean, there were so few of us. They didn't see us that often. They didn't see that much of us.

SI: When you were with the Department of Higher Education, you mentioned this assignment to go and observe the Conklin Hall takeover.

RR: Yes, on site, the takeover.

SI: You mentioned the students liked the fact that you were there. The officials and authorities you were with, how did they react to your presence?

RR: Malcolm Talbott was a friend of mine, so he was happy to see me. Any help I could provide, he'd appreciate, and Willard Heckel, of course, because the administrative team overseeing the occupation were housed at Ackerson Hall, which was the law school building and was right across the street from Conklin Hall, so things could be observed on a very close basis. But they were very responsive and very supportive. They wanted to be sure the cops didn't do things to exacerbate the situation. Anthony Imperiale and his friends from the North Ward showed up with protest banners and so forth, and the cops were expected to keep them away from the students who were marching in support of the kids occupying the building. There was some of that, but no violence occurred. That was what I think the administration was concerned about. [Editor's Note: Anthony Imperiale gained notoriety first as a vocal opponent of busing to achieve school desegregation in Newark and then during the city's uprising in 1967, when he advocated for white residents to take up arms in self-defense and formed the North Ward First Aid Squad, which was accused of vigilantism. He won election to the Newark City Council in 1968 and 1970 and went on to serve in the New Jersey General Assembly (1972-1974, 1980-1982) and State Senate (1974-1978).]

SI: It is interesting, Imperiale comes up quite a bit when we talk about Newark in other interviews. Since you had so much experience in Newark over these years, did you have any run-ins with him, or is there any further trouble he may have generated for you?

RR: Not me personally. When he was most active, I was--where was I? One year, I was still in graduate school, that's '71, until I came to Newark in September '71. Then, the next iteration of my interaction with Newark was in '74, yes, '74 to '76. Imperiale, by that time, I believe was on the City Council, and he was giving Ken a hard time from that position but didn't have to demonstrate, and from the City Council, he went to the legislature as an Assemblyperson, so he was no longer demonstrating. He was causing problems from a policy perspective. When I was working as a legislative aide, I didn't have much to do with him. When I was in the Office of Newark Studies, I stayed out of his way.

SI: Getting to Princeton, when you went to the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, what stands out the most from that program? What do you think shaped your experience there the most?

RR: I think my interaction with faculty. Mike Danielson in the domestic policy stream of the program. The Wilson School is divided into domestic policy, international relations, development, and economics in public policy. I was in the domestic policy stream. Mike Danielson was a key professor in that stream. So was Jameson Doig, Jim Doig, and Julian Wolpert. Although not a full member of the faculty, Jim Johnson, who got his Ph.D. at the Wilson School, was also impactful. After leaving the school, he went to Washington and worked for Walter Mondale and then served as president of Brookings Institution, he was an active player. Dick Leone was not on the faculty, but he was an advisor to Wilson School students in the domestic policy stream. Paul Ylvisaker also was a professor, as well as a full-time commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs. I had very good and close working relationships with a number of the faculty, and those relationships continued. I think that's probably why I ended up returning to work there when I had turned down the opportunity to do so in the first instance, because I remembered the relationships I had with those guys and felt I could come back as a more senior member of the administrative and academic community than would have been the case in the first instance.

SI: I do not know if this was part of the program, but you spent a summer over in London.

RR: That was my summer experience. Between the first and second year of the two-year program, you are expected to do an internship in your field, but that can be domestically, or it could be international. I chose to do an internship at the Greater London Council working on transportation policy, and the guy who directed the transportation unit of the Greater London Council happened to be a faculty member at UC Berkeley. During the school year, he was at Berkeley, and during the summer and, I guess, other times, he was in London. I had a great experience.

SI: Was that your first time out of the country?

RR: That was my first time out of the country, yes. I lived in a flat in Chelsea with two classmates. One of the two guys, both Jewish, I am still close to, Larry Wiseman, lives in D.C. and was the president of the [American] Forest Foundation, on whose board I served for a while. The other was Jeffrey Lynford. He came to Princeton rich, and he's still rich. [laughter] He is on the NYU Board of Trustees and he's also a commissioner of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Then, there was Suzy Solomon. She was also an intern that summer at the Greater London Council, but she didn't live with us because it was just guys in the flat. She was housed somewhere in London as well. I think she has done public policy consulting throughout her professional career. I think she was rich too, so she could afford to do that. [laughter]

SI: Were there any eye-opening experiences being overseas?

RR: I'm trying to remember. No. It was a pleasant experience, both personally because of the relationship I built with those guys, professionally, because I got to see how people trained at Princeton compared with folk whose educational backgrounds included Oxford and Cambridge and the London School of Economics, all of whom were doing internships of one type or another in these places. I'll tell you this, one of the guys we met asked where we each went to school.

Larry Wiseman did his undergraduate work at Amherst and Jeffrey Lynford did his at Columbia and I did mine at Rutgers-Newark, and the guy to whom we responded said, "Oh, you all went to Ivy League Schools!" [laughter] Rutgers' name resonated across the pond. I'm sure his vision was of Rutgers-New Brunswick, but Rutgers is Rutgers.

SI: Tell me a little bit more about the Mayor's Education Task Force. You were there for a year. You mentioned a little bit about setting it up, and you had this mix of folks. How was that determined how to break that up?

RR: Well, we determined who the key stakeholders were. We knew we wanted the religious community represented. We wanted Newark officialdom represented, so we chose a City Councilman. We enlisted the police director. We wanted community activists. We wanted representation from the Title I parents' association. We wanted representation from the Italian community. We wanted representation from the teacher's union. Who else did we [include]? Oh, we wanted representatives from the Latinx community. We had both a professional and cultural lens through which we viewed the individuals to be recruited to the task force. [Editor's Note: Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA), provides financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet state academic standards. Title I requires each school receiving funds to develop jointly with parents a school-parent compact that outlines how the community will share responsibility for ensuring improved student achievement.]

The categories were identified by me. That had to be approved by the mayor. Then, the individuals that we identified for each of those categories were presented to the mayor with first, second and third rankings, in terms of who might ultimately be invited to serve. Then, once the selection was made, I had to interview all of these people to make sure they were interested in serving before the mayor would send them a letter inviting them to serve, because he didn't want anybody to turn him down. That meant I had to be relatively clear about what the task force's purpose was, how it would function, the policy, pedagogy, and politics it would involve, and the timeframe that it was expected to get its job done. It lasted for three years after being established.

SI: That was what you turned over to Don Harris.

RR: That's exactly right.

SI: Before that happened, were there any kind of directives in those fields that you mentioned, like pedagogy and politics, that the mayor wanted to see happen?

RR: There were no parameters established for each of those areas of exploration. Remember, this was an attempt on the part of the mayor to bring together the disparate forces or segments of the Newark community--oh, parents, aside from the Title I parents, non-Title I parents had to be represented too--to bring all of these people together to first get them to begin talking to one another because the atmosphere had been poisoned by the city's eleven-week teacher's strike. I think it was eleven weeks, it could have been more than that, almost three months. That was the

first hurdle over which the group had to surmount. Then, the next level was the identification of those things that the group felt had to be on its agenda in each of those three areas. We weren't expected to proscribe, if you will. [Editor's Note: For three weeks in 1970 and eleven weeks in 1971, the Newark Teachers Union went on strike.]

SI: When you went to DYFS, you had been in Trenton before.

RR: I had been in Trenton as the mayor's legislative aide, so that meant I would go back and forth based on what was happening in Trenton. Either the legislature was meeting, or something was going on with the executive branch that I needed to be plugged into, so that I could share the city's perspective or the mayor's perspective on issues of policy.

DYFS was the first time I actually worked in Trenton, physically located there. That was the job I liked least of all of the things I've done professionally. I think it had to do with my being isolated and working out of an office by myself in a building that was separate from the headquarters of the Division of Youth and Family Services. I had been in the headquarters, but when the office was being remodeled or reorganized, I don't remember exactly what, we were spread out over the City of Trenton in government buildings. I happened to be in the building that housed the Bureau of Children Services. I'm working on childcare statewide, but I don't know any of these people. My office is on the third floor. It's about two-thirds the size of this room [five-by-eight]. I am trying to formulate a plan that builds on what's already in place to enlarge the state's footprint in the provision of childcare services. I didn't have anybody to talk with, except when I went to chat with the director about where things were going or to chat with the woman who was in charge of the Bureau of Children Services. It was painful. Anyhow, I got through it.

SI: Had there been any kind of publicly-provided daycare?

RR: Oh, yes, the Bureau of Children Services had a small, I think, centralized in Trenton-based childcare services program, but the state wanted to replicate childcare services across the state, primarily in urban places. The issue was, how do you design a system that isn't the same but is able to deliver a service that families would find useful, and how do you do that in places where there is no infrastructure at the moment? How do you determine the criteria to be used in determining who could and/or should be allowed to offer these services, and who shouldn't be allowed? There were daycare services in places, family daycare. There were some private daycare services that were not publicly subsidized. Once the state got into the business, then regulatory policy had to be formulated that would determine whose services meet the criteria the state would put in place as a contingent for operating services. Some existing programs might not be eligible; others might be, if they upgraded. I had the role of helping to shape the regulatory policy, defining how programs would be financially supported, at what level, and on what basis, the whole megillah.

SI: Was this your entire project during your tenure there, or were there other things you had to work on as well?

RR: [Yes], except one other thing, one other thing only. The director was pursuing a master's degree at Rider College and asked me to write his term paper. [laughter] I did, and he got an "A." So, as far as he was concerned, I was golden.

SI: Well, let me pause again for a second.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: This concludes the interview session with Richard W. Roper.

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Transcribed by Jesse Braddell

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