

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD ROPER

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins the second oral history interview with Richard W. Roper, on October 2, 2019, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for coming back today. To begin, we want to continue with our look at your career. Last session, we ended with your time at the Division of Youth and Family Services, which you made that transition in 1973, to your next position as director of the New Jersey Education Reform Project. How did that opportunity come about?

Richard Roper: I happened to be sitting in my office working on a report that I was preparing for the director of the Division of Youth and Family Services, summarizing my suggestions as to how New Jersey might build upon its, at that time, very limited focus on the provision of childcare services in selected parts of the state. The intent was to broaden the state's role in the provision of childcare services through the Division of Youth and Family Services.

As I was laboring with this project, I received a phone call from a guy whose name I cannot remember at this juncture, but who was responsible for setting up a number of education reform projects across the nation that were being established in response to state initiatives based on decisions of state courts establishing that the school finance systems in place in those states were inadequate and not working to the benefit of districts that were resource poor. There was a plan under consideration to establish a project in New Jersey like the project in Texas and the project in Florida, as I recall. The founders of these initiatives, the Carnegie Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, and several New Jersey foundations, were looking for someone to provide leadership for the New Jersey project, and that was the purpose of the call, to inquire about my interest in being interviewed for that position. I was offered the job, and I accepted it. I saw it as an opportunity to get out of DYFS but also as an opportunity to return to Newark and to work on an issue that was central to the quality of life in the city. The project's intent was to provide a voice for urban superintendents and urban parents in addressing the issue of how schools in the state should be financed, the role that the states should play in providing the resources needed to operate local public school districts.

I brought on to assist me in this project a guy by the name of Larry Rubin, who was much older than I, but who had an Ed.D. and was very much interested in educational policy and in particular educational administration. He came on as my research director, and the two of us framed an agenda, circulated it among urban school superintendents, and based on the reactions we received, decided to undertake a series of small research studies to identify the critical issues confronting urban school districts across the state. That was used to produce several reports that were distributed statewide. They were shared with local organizations interested in advancing public education in urban places.

I did that for two years, if I'm not mistaken, and in the course of doing that, established a working relationship with a goodly number of state legislators and some executive branch members in Trenton. Because I had, I guess, developed this relationship with individuals in Trenton, the Mayor of Newark, still Ken Gibson, reached out through his chief of staff, Dennis Sullivan, to inquire about my interest in rejoining his administration as his legislative aide. I then met with the mayor, following my contact with Dennis, and after a conversation that was pretty impressive, I decided I would rejoin the administration as the mayor's legislative aide, serving, in effect, as the city's lobbyist, if you will, in Trenton.

SI: What impressed you about his plans for this position?

RR: Ken was, I think, very much focused on raising a positive image of the city of Newark after, this was in 1974, if I'm not mistaken, '74, yes--I'm pretty sure it was '74--and he wanted to improve the city's relationship with members of the legislature and with the governor, who, at that time, was a Democrat, [Brendan Byrne]. But the Speaker of the Assembly was a fellow by the name of Tom Kean, and he was not that positive about Newark. Ken thought having someone who might be able to present the city in a favorable light on an ongoing basis would serve Newark's interests, and he thought I might be able to do that. I had already gained some visibility as a result of the work I had done with the Education Reform Project, so Tom Kean knew me, as did other members of the legislature. The mayor had a purely Newark-focused agenda, how to get more resources from the State of New Jersey that might help the city meet its challenges, and how it might build relationships both with the legislature and the governor's office, and that was my assignment. [Editor's Note: Tom Kean, Sr. served a member of the New Jersey General Assembly from 1968 to 1978, during which time he was Speaker of the Assembly in 1972-1973. He served as the New Jersey Governor from 1982 to 1990.]

SI: One of the big accomplishments of that time was the agreement over taxes.

RR: While I was in that role, in fact, New Jersey was forced by the State Supreme Court to take under consideration the establishment of a new tax to help finance public schools, and that's how New Jersey got the income tax. I was closely associated with the process, because the Essex County delegation played an important role in getting the legislation enacted. It was an exciting point in my career in Newark, because I got to observe the workings of the New Jersey Legislature up close. The session that produced this favorable outcome lasted well into the early morning hours, with legislators sleeping on the floor. I didn't do that, but I was there to observe the process. I was impressed with how the Democrats managed this process. Brendan Byrne was governor and did a terrific job.

SI: A lot has been said about the relationship between Kean and Byrne, particularly over issues like this. Do you have any thoughts on that or memories of how you worked with both to achieve what you wanted?

RR: I guess the memory that lingers longest is my early attempt, after taking on this assignment, to establish a relationship between Tom Kean and Ken Gibson. I approached the speaker and indicated that the mayor would like for me to arrange for Assemblyman Kean to meet some of the senior members of the Gibson administration, and Kean's response was that he wasn't interested in meeting those people. If the mayor wanted to see him, he would be happy to meet with him, but he wasn't interested in meeting with his cabinet. That didn't work out as I would have liked it to, but after that exchange, the relationship that I developed with him was relatively positive. At a later point in my career, I would interact with him again in a very positive instance, but we'll get to that later.

SI: Again, on the issue of taxes and getting resources, you also worked on getting about eight million dollars in tax payments for the city at this point.

RR: I think I was instrumental in making that happen through one-on-one interactions with members of the legislature. The governor was supportive of this, and as a result of his support and the relationship that had been built between the city through me and the legislature, additional funding was provided for the city.

SI: How do you build these relationships? Is it going to meetings and presenting material?

RR: It's more informal than attending meetings. There are restaurants in Trenton that are frequented by members of the legislature. I became a regular at those restaurants and would interact with members of the legislature on issues that were central to Newark at a given point in time. It's more personal relationships that determine whether a legislator or legislators are going to be willing, one, to listen to you, to give you a hearing, and then to consider in a favorable way the proposals that you present to them. I think the mayor had begun to develop a better relationship with members of the legislature, in addition to those who were members of the Essex County delegation, and as a result of that, the things that he proposed through me, through my work with the legislature, tended to be more favorably entertained.

SI: In terms of what you would be pushing for, did you have a voice in determining what that would be, or would you follow what was coming out of the mayor's office?

RR: I didn't shape policy at that time. I was strictly the guy responsible for making sure the governor's office and the members of the legislature understood what the city was attempting to do through its policy proposals and then working with those two branches of government to ensure that those policies/proposals got favorable attention and hopefully were enacted.

SI: You were there until 1976. Why did you shift then to the Office of Newark Studies (ONS), which you had actually helped set up?

RR: That was my first job following graduate school, working in the Office of Newark Studies. I saw myself as a policy person. As a member of the mayor's staff as legislative aide, my policy-making role was relatively limited. It was insignificant. I carried the water, but I didn't determine what was in the water. Here was an opportunity to preside over the unit of local government, although administered by Rutgers University, that was responsible for initiating, designing, and implementing policy initiatives that would impact positively in the City of Newark, and I saw that as an opportunity that I could not forgo. Jack Krauskopf had served since 1971 in that role, and here, five years, six years later, I was being asked to take on that role. I respected Jack a lot. I respected his intellect. I respected his integrity, and I saw the office as a critical piece of the policy-making infrastructure of the city and I jumped at it.

SI: What were the main challenges you saw when you got into that position?

RR: I think the biggest challenge I faced had to do with the perception that an African American might not be able to achieve the kind of programmatic successes or design the kind of policy initiatives that had been undertaken during Jack's tenure. The first project that I worked on, after assuming the directorship, was setting up a task force that focused on identifying ways in which

the city might be able to generate revenue from the nonprofit infrastructure in the city, and with the aid of Horace DePodwin, then the dean of the School of Business at Rutgers, the task force was established. An agenda for the task force was designed. I served as executive director of the task force, and over the course of, I guess, about eight to twelve months, I'm not sure exactly the length of time, but it was pretty substantial, the task force conducted research, did analysis of the profit making and the nonprofit-making infrastructure of the city and produced a report that proposed designing legislation that would allow for payments in lieu of taxes by the state, and the state only, for state-owned properties in localities across the state. New Jersey, I know it wasn't the first, but it was certainly among the first states to establish pilots of that type. We did not propose imposing in kind tax payments, if you will, by churches and by community-based organizations. We only focused on those entities that were owned and operated by the state. That program was so well received by the City Council that one of my erstwhile critics of the North Ward, Italian Councilman Anthony Carrino, called me the day that the report was released to tell me how impressed he was with the work, and at that point, I knew that I was moving in the right direction.

SI: It is interesting that that attitude still existed after several years of Ken Gibson's administration and a much greater representation of African Americans in the administration.

RR: When I was on the mayor's staff as his legislative aide, an incident occurred that highlights the continuing tension between the Italian North Ward and the Black mayor. That was the point at which the mayor made a decision about the appointment of a replacement for the police precinct captain in the North Ward, and he proposed someone that the North Ward political infrastructure did not support and did not like and did not want. The mayor dismissed their complaint and moved forward with the appointment, and the North Ward's political leadership was so incensed that Councilman Carrino, along with a group of other North Ward Italians, broke into the mayor's office while he was in his office and demanded that he rescind the appointment. The mayor sat behind his desk eating grapes and listened to them and then had them escorted out of his office. It was an amazing incident, one that's recounted in the book that will be coming out shortly by Bob Holmes and me. Yes, the tensions existed through the mayor's second term at minimum and into the early part of his third term in office but abated thereafter. [Editor's Note: Robert C. Holmes and Richard W. Roper are the editors of *A Mayor for All the People: Kenneth Gibson's Newark* (Rutgers University Press, 2020).]

SI: In addition to your work on getting the task force up and running, what other duties did you have?

RR: The second most important project on which I worked was the implementation of a project that had been initiated by Jack Krauskopf, and that was establishing a manner in which an asset of the Newark School District called WBGO FM Radio Station might be maximized. At the time and for several years before that, the asset had sat unused by the school district, and it was felt that there was something more that could be done that would benefit the City of Newark and perhaps even the region. Bob Ottenhoff, a Rutgers-Newark alum, who Jack Krauskopf hired to conduct a study, funded in part by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and local foundations, to determine what might be done with the station. The report that Bob produced recommended creating a new nonprofit entity to which the school district should transfer its FCC

license for the radio station. That report was presented to the mayor and to the Board of Education.

I had the responsibility of making the case with the mayor and trying to make the case with the Newark School Board. It so happens that the president of the Newark School Board had been my colleague as an aide to the mayor, when I served as the mayor's legislative aide, his name was Carl Sharif. Carl had been appointed to the board while sitting as an aide to the mayor and had been elected president of the board by his colleagues at the urging of the mayor. Carl had a different view of how the asset that the district owned should be maximized. He felt that as time progressed, the district would be able to find the resources necessary to actualize this asset, and I made the argument before the mayor that that was not likely, given the financial challenges the district faced and I didn't think the state would provide additional resources just to support a radio station. I made the case that it was possible for Newark to realize, in the short term, the benefits of having a public radio station that provided news, public affairs, and maybe music, but it was not clear exactly how that would be organized. In fact, that would be up to the new management of the station once it was put in place. The mayor ultimately agreed with me and decided that Newark Public Radio Incorporated should be established, that it should be provided with the FCC license, and that it should be responsible for the operation of the radio station. WBGO FM is still in place and is perhaps the region's, if not the nation's, premier jazz and public affairs radio station.

SI: You were on their board for quite a while.

RR: I was on the board. I served as chairman of the board for a number of years. I remained on the board until I took the first job I had at the Port Authority because it wasn't possible for me to do both.

SI: Now, from what I understand, the jazz orientation came later?

RR: The jazz orientation came a couple years later, after it became clear that news and public affairs was not going to generate a lot of listener contributions, and the station is a public radio station and survives based on the financial support provided by government--federal government, state government--and listener support. As it happens, the decision to do jazz emanated from the fact that Newark had been a major jazz center in the region, and Bob realized, who became, by the way, the first general manager of the station, Bob Ottenhoff realized that perhaps this was how the station might establish itself and create a financial base to support it. Shortly after the decision was made to do that, the jazz radio station in New York, which was a commercial radio station, folded, and WBGO went from an eight-to-twelve-hour radio station to a twenty-four-hour, seven-day-a-week jazz, news and public affairs radio station. As a result of that, financial support increased substantially. The interest of the jazz community was solid and remains solid. The station purchased a building, a not-so-substantial building, but one that provided it with the freedom it needed to do musical programming on an ongoing basis and, subsequently, was used as equity to purchase a much more modern, upscale facility, where it is housed today.

SI: When there was the initial transfer out of the Board of Education's hands to ...

RR: Newark Public Radio Inc.

SI: ... Was there any benefit derived for the school system other than just getting it off the books?

RR: Nope, nope. They gave up ownership of the station. The school board had designated representation on the board of the radio station for many years, but that arrangement, one in which there were also representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, from the academic community, and from the community at large, comprised the leadership of the station, the board's composition. I would imagine that lasted for at least fifteen to twenty years, and then the classification, the groupings, were disbanded. The board's composition is now completely board-member determined. It's a self-perpetuating board.

SI: What about other challenges or duties in your role in the Office of Newark Studies?

RR: There was a third project that I think was pretty interesting, and that had to do with the issue of redlining in the City of Newark by local banks. That project was conducted by another Rutgers Newark alum, George Hampton, who had been a classmate of mine at Rutgers-Newark. George was tasked by the mayor through the Office of Newark Studies to do the basic groundwork to determine the extent to which some neighborhoods in the city were being redlined. He produced a report that identified the strengths and weaknesses of neighborhoods as reflected in decisions by local banks to provide loans to residential homeowners. That report identified a serious problem of redlining in the Central, West, South and, to a lesser extent, the North Ward. He presented it to the mayor. The mayor then convened a meeting with the banks' leadership to discuss this report. That conversation led virtually nowhere, and the mayor was reluctant to press the issue, largely because he did not want to lose the support of the banking community in the city, so the report lingered on the bookshelf.

SI: What would you say was the impact of what the banks were continuing to practice through redlining and other means?

RR: Well, the project fit well with what was under consideration in Washington at the time about establishing a Community Reinvestment Act requiring local banks to make financial commitments to the communities in which they operated. George would say, I think, that his research informed the decision of Congress in that regard. I think that is probably a bit much, but it was consistent. It spoke to issues that were being addressed by Congress, and because we had done the spadework, when the legislation was enacted, the city was able to press the banks to move forward in an aggressive way to mitigate the impact of redlining in the city.

SI: Aside from Horace DePodwin, were there other figures from Rutgers-Newark that you remember being very active in the office and its work?

RR: Not really. ONS was of but not in Rutgers. There were a few Rutgers-Newark faculty members who on occasion got involved with the work of the office. The chairman of the Education Task Force that I set up early in my days at the Office of Newark Studies, back in 1971, was on the faculty as well. His name was Reverend James Arthur Scott. I don't think Jim

had gotten his Ph.D. from Rutgers at the time, or he may have because he was a professor of education at Rutgers-Newark. I'm trying to think if there were other faculty members. Clement Price was on the faculty, but because his area of expertise and involvement was history, I don't think he did anything through the Office of Newark Studies that I can recall. George Tapper, who was housed in New Brunswick, was our principal point of contact with the flagship campus, but that was for purely administrative purposes, not for programmatic or policy development purposes. Those are the names that come to mind.

SI: Let me pause for a second.

RR: Okay.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You also began your involvement with the New Jersey Public Policy Research Institute at this time.

RR: I'm glad you brought that up. NJPPRI, the New Jersey Public Policy Research Institute, Incorporated, was the brain child of three Rutgers University alums and one--I think he was a Swarthmore graduate: Vickie Donaldson, Rutgers-Newark, Richard Roper, Rutgers-Newark, Jerry Harris, Rutgers-New Brunswick, and Sam Shepherd, Swarthmore. Both Sam and I had graduated from the Wilson School, the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton, with master's degrees in public policy. Vickie had not gone to law school yet, but she would eventually become a law school student. Jerry, I think at the time, was doing graduate work at Rutgers-New Brunswick at Livingston College. We felt that because we had been given the opportunity to develop, from an academic perspective, an appreciation for the impact of public policy that we should use what we had acquired through our schooling to promulgate issues impacting African Americans across New Jersey. From that seed emerged a larger group of young African American professionals in the public sector who came together over time. I think our first discussions about this was back in 1975-'76, thereabouts. I may have been the director of the Office of Newark Studies at that time, but I'm not sure. The issue of public policy and informing New Jersey's citizenry and New Jersey's policy infrastructure of the needs of African American communities was central to our decision to create this entity. I don't think we called it NJPPRI initially, it was something else, the name of which escapes me. But gradually, by 1980, it was NJPPRI. I think we were incorporated in 1977 as NJPPRI.

Our first big project, aside from a couple of policy papers that we wrote ourselves and then distributed ourselves, was to take on the assignment of preparing an agenda for the African American communities, based on the report prepared by the National Urban League, for then State Senator Wynona Lipman. I guess there must have been at least fifteen or twenty of us by that time. We worked, I guess, it must have been at least two weeks on this project, maybe a little bit longer than that, quite frankly, putting together this report that looked at issues of economic development, housing, education, social welfare, criminal justice, and a couple of other issues that should be on the state's policy agenda going forward as 1980 was beginning. We produced this document as NJPPRI, but it was released as Senator Lipman's policy agenda. It got good coverage. We got a feeling of accomplishment as a result of having done it. We had

a press conference with Senator Lipman, and it was a very, very positive experience for us. We determined, based on the success of that, that we would release a report every year on different issues. *Blacks in New Jersey* was the title of the report we produced. We did that consistently for at least fifteen years and then sort of tapered off, and every once in a while, we would produce a report. [Editor's Note: Wynona Lipman served in the New Jersey Senate from 1972 to 1999. When she won election in 1971, she became the first African American woman elected to the State Senate.]

We followed up each report with conversations with legislators, African American legislators, in the first instance, but also other members of the Essex delegation and the delegations from places where our members were residents, if you will. What did we accomplish? It's hard to say. I think we brought attention to a goodly number of issues. I can't say we were successful in getting any particular piece of legislation enacted. We provided support to Wynona Lipman and to the other members of the Black Legislative Caucus.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Okay, go ahead.

RR: We didn't write any legislation. We tried to inform the policy-making process, so that our views would get reflected in the legislation that was enacted. I think we could probably lay claim to having helped Wynona and the other Black members of the legislature identify issues that got some enhanced consideration in the legislative process, but particular bills, I don't think we can lay claim to anything of that nature.

SI: Okay. It's interesting, as you pointed out, the three of you from Rutgers were all prominent leaders in the Black student movement.

RR: Correct.

SI: Had you just stayed in touch since then, or were you brought back together through your careers? Why were you three coming together to form this institute?

RR: Yes, we had been close since our days at Rutgers, the three of us. Sam Shepherd, unfortunately, died about twenty years ago, but Vickie, Jerry and I have remained friends. Vickie and Jerry are contributors to the book that's coming out shortly. Vickie was inducted into the RAAA three years ago. I was inducted last year, and Jerry was inducted this past session, this year. We talk often. We stay informed in the public policy arena, although Jerry now lives, as of last year, in South Carolina. He still serves on the board of the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice as vice chair, as a matter of fact. He goes back and forth between New Jersey and South Carolina to keep his New Jersey agenda in play. [Editor's Note: The RAAA is the Rutgers African American Alumni Alliance. Every year, the RAAA inducts members into its Hall of Fame.]

SI: Now, another board commitment that started in this period was your work with WNET?
[Editor's Note: WNET, or Thirteen, is the primary Public Broadcasting Station (PBS) member station in the New York City area. The station is licensed to Newark.]

RR: WNET. I got involved with NET through my role at the Office of Newark Studies. There was always resentment over the fact that Governor Meyner, Robert Meyner, a Democrat, had agreed to the transfer of the station's location from Newark to New York City, not the transfer of the FCC license, however. That remains, if I'm not mistaken, that remains a Newark asset, but the station became New York-centric and has remained that way. It promised, however, to include in its programming activities, events, news, et cetera, that focused on New Jersey, but that never materialized in a serious way. There was some superficial coverage of events and superficial programming targeting New Jersey. I think Caucus New Jersey that Steve Adubato produced ultimately got aired on NET [and] was a principle contribution to New Jersey by WNET. There were a few other things that were of marginal value to the city and to the state. Very little was relevant to Newark itself. [Editor's Note: Steve Adubato, Jr. is a broadcaster and lecturer who also served in the New Jersey General Assembly from 1984 to 1986.]

The station also agreed, during the transfer, to establish a board that reflected both New York and New Jersey interests. That did not materialize either. The local foundation community, at the urging of the Fund for New Jersey, then called the Wallace-Eljabar Foundation, proposed the establishment of a coalition, a New Jersey coalition, with a laser-like focus on WNET, and I was invited to be one of the coalition members. I guess I served on that for eight, nine years, it could be even longer. I think, as a result of our work, Steve Adubato got his television program. I don't think we got much more than that over that period of time.

Incidentally, after WBGO achieved regional success and after the composition of the board changed from sector representatives to a self-selected board, the issue of the station's location rose among board members. Because I was no longer on the board when these conversations began, I was invited back to address the board by board members who were concerned about the prospect of a transfer occurring. I was invited to provide the then board with a history of the station. I, along with Phil Elberg, who had provided legal counsel during the formation of Newark Public Radio Inc., and Oliver Quinn, who succeeded me several chairmen later as chairman of the board of WBGO, [impressed] upon the board the need to keep the station based in Newark with a New Jersey identity because it was an asset to the region and to the state. We were very concerned that if the station were to relocate physically to New York City, it too would become like WNET, a New York institution. As successful though NET was in New York, we thought BGO could retain its then success and grow even greater where it was located. That conversation creeps into the WBGO board discussions every so often and largely because several of the more financially successful members of its board are New Yorkers and feel that since their heavy support of the station contributes to its financial success that they should be in a position to dictate some aspects of how it should operate.

SI: Before we go into your time in the federal government, you have co-authored this book on the Gibson administration that's going to be coming out.

RR: Later this month.

SI: Yes. Having looked back in depth at it, can you kind of share your thoughts on the administration and how you think it did and maybe tell me a little bit about the book?

RR: Okay, let's see, how should I say this? I think Ken Gibson did several important things during his four terms as mayor. I think he will be remembered for maybe a couple of those things but not all of them. The book is intended to put before the public interested in topics of this type some of the other things that ought to be a part of his legacy. The first of the things he was able to contribute to the City of Newark in my view was a calming of the political waters following a period of racial and ethnic turmoil in Newark. The rebellion in Newark occurred in 1967. Ken assumed the mayoralty in 1970, three years later. The city was still struggling with the immediate aftereffects of the rebellion. The race for mayor, that election, 1970's election, was very racially charged. Ken's successful campaign resulted in a low-keyed, calm-demeanored civil engineer as the city's chief executive. He was able to bring his personal self-effacing calmness to steady the city as it began to move beyond the 1967 rebellion. That's the first contribution he made. The city was still racially divided but less visibly so. The police department had a new director who was more sensitive to the concerns of the minority communities. There was greater attention being given to issues that had been the source of complaints from African Americans and Puerto Ricans in Newark over the years. There was a willingness to listen to what minority community leaders had to say. That was the first of his contributions.

The second was his willingness to engage early on young talented individuals in key roles in his administration. The book contains the names and titles of at least fifteen or twenty of the young people Ken brought into his administration and I'll name only a few, but there are more than I'll be able to remember off the top of my head. I'll start with Junius Williams, who was Ken's campaign manager. Junius was a graduate of Yale Law School, undergraduate alum of Amherst. He was the mayor's first Community Development Director in the administration. There was Dennis Sullivan, who was a graduate of Princeton and had gone for a year to Oxford. He had been involved in the mayor's campaign as well as a campaign aide, a white guy. He was the mayor's chief of staff. In fact, the mayor had offered me co-chief of staff on Dennis' return from Oxford, and I had turned that down and went to work in Trenton. There was Jack Krauskopf, who headed the Office of Newark Studies. There was Dave Dennison, who, in his early thirties, had worked in state government at the Department of Community Affairs in Trenton and in HUD [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development] in Washington, D.C. There was Bob Holmes, a Cornell undergraduate and Harvard Law School graduate, who the mayor hired to be the first director of the Housing and Rehabilitation Corporation. There was Sam Shepherd working with Jerry Harris in the [Newark] Urban Institute, an office that was created by the mayor to identify and establish a talent bank for the city. Who else? Tom Massaro, a Harvard undergraduate, white, who insisted on working for the city even after he had been told three times in trips to the city asking for a job that there were no jobs available for him. But Dennis finally convinced the mayor to hire this guy who would not stop showing up, even though he hadn't graduated from Harvard at that time. I'm trying to think of other people who fall into that category of talented young people. They were all smart. They were all progressive. They were all committed to making a difference in a city that was in distress, a city that had declined and was continuing to decline, and they felt, and we felt, that our energy and our efforts and our

commitment could help turn it around. That's the second thing, I think, Ken did that was important. He was not intimidated by people who, some would say, were smarter than he was. I think he was sufficiently confident, self-confident, that he could engage with bright people, younger bright people, without a fear of being undermined, if you will, or minimized in his stature.

The third thing he did was to focus on healthcare delivery in the city. He created, over the course of his four-year tenures in office, a network of health centers, community-based health centers, that, if I'm not mistaken, are still operational today. There must be at least six or seven of them. He was quite proud of that as they were being developed. Dennis Cherot, another talented young African American whose educational background I don't recall. I think he attended the University of Maryland, but I'm not sure of that. Anyhow, he headed the Health and Welfare Department and was responsible [for launching] the community health care centers. That was the third thing Ken did.

Ken presided over a number of innovations. Some were successful. Some were successful for a while and then dissipated. The agency that Bob Holmes headed, the Housing Development and Rehabilitation Corporation. The mayor's Office of Policy and Planning that Dave Dennison headed. The Newark Emergency Services for Families, which I incubated at the Office of Newark Studies, a fourth project that I didn't mention earlier that's still in place. The Newark Watershed Development and Conservation Corporation. The Planned Variations Program, an initiative of the Nixon administration, designed to replicate on a city-wide basis the activities that were initially funded and operated through the Model Cities Program. Those were things that were novel in terms of urban programming across the country. Ken presided over those programs and projects, because he had the kind of staff infrastructure that was able to help formulate those concepts and get them operational, including the pilot program, payment in lieu of taxes, by the state for state-owned properties in municipalities. That's the fourth thing for which Ken deserves credit.

What more can I say? He's a historical figure by dint of having been the first African American mayor of a major Northeastern city. He is historical as well because of the nature of his temperament and the calmness he brought to a city in crisis. He's historical for having embraced young talent for whom he provided an important foothold in public policy implementation, who have subsequently gone on to relatively successful lives in the public sector, all of them, with a couple of exceptions. Those things I regard as having been major accomplishments of Ken Gibson.

Now, what things did he not do that I think a lot of people expected? Many of the people who worked to get him elected hoped that he would bring the Black Power Movement into his administration, that he would reflect the Black Power philosophy in his administration. That didn't happen. Several of the people who were strongly behind his election and principal among that group is the father of the current Mayor of Newark, Ras Baraka's father, Imamu [Amiri] Baraka who was a Black nationalist. He was also a founder of the Black Arts Movement; he was very much disappointed in Ken Gibson and became so shortly after he was elected. In the days that followed, Baraka would describe Ken as a neo-colonialist, if you will. There were others who were not Black nationalists but who were on the left and very progressive who felt that Ken

failed to live up to their expectations in terms of an agenda, a municipal agenda, that reflected a degree of enhanced sensibility toward the concerns of African Americans and Puerto Ricans. While he professed to be concerned about those communities, they maintained that he didn't demonstrate it in a sufficiently aggressive manner. Okay, I'll leave it at that.

There were others who felt that his leadership of the education reform initiative in the city was inadequate, that he was unable to achieve a turnaround of the public schools, resulting in enhanced educational service delivery, that he was not creative in the appointments he made to the Newark School Board. As a consequence of that, shortly after he was reelected in 1974, the citizens of Newark, by referendum, decided to establish an elected school board, rejecting a mayoral-appointed school board. That was an area in which he was not able to make much progress.

Then, on the economic development front, the community development front, his success was limited. It was marginal at best. Some would say that there was very little progress made in terms of economic development. In terms of housing development, the one project that he started before he left office is Society Hill, which is a success, but I think Sharpe James, his successor, takes credit for that more so than Ken. But I think it was an initiative that Ken launched. [Editor's Note: Sharpe James served as the mayor of Newark from 1986 to 2006.]

I think, finally, that he was able to help the city embrace the construction of the medical school, the New Jersey University of Medicine and Dentistry, as a piece of healthcare infrastructure in Newark. The initial plan had been to decimate a much larger section of the Central Ward, when the project was initially proposed. His engagement with the state and the active involvement of people like Junius Williams and Gustav Heningburg and Bob Curvin and a few others, those are the names that are most prominent in my mind, in this regard; it resulted in a footprint that was substantially smaller and that also obligated the state to make a commitment to the support of the health care centers that Ken wanted built. It also focused attention on health care disparities in a much more aggressive way than would have been the case in the absence of Ken's advocacy of such. I think that's as much as I could say.

One must remember that Ken was indicted, along with the president of the City Council, Earl Harris, in Gibson's--I want to say his third term. He was not convicted. He and Earl were acquitted, and then he was reelected for a fourth term. What more can I say? [Editor's Note: In 1982, an Essex County grand jury indicted Newark Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson, City Council President Earl Harris and Michael Bontempo, a former security supervisor for the city, on charges of theft by deception, neglect of duty and misconduct for placing Bontempo in a no-show job. This occurred at the end of Gibson's third term as mayor, as he was campaigning for a fourth term. Later, in 2002, Gibson pleaded guilty to federal income tax evasion as part of an agreement that spared him a jail sentence and a retrial on fraud and bribery charges. He was sentenced to three years of probation.]

SI: What ...

RR: Quite a bit. [laughter]

SI: For the record, what is the title of the book?

RR: The book is *A Mayor for All the People: Ken Gibson's Newark*. The centerpiece is a collection of reflections by individuals who worked in the administration or were critics of the administration, were disinterested observers of the administration, friends of Ken and Ken's family, about forty-five reflections.

SI: In 1978, you left Newark for a position in the federal government in the Department of Commerce.

RR: Indeed, I did.

SI: Yes. How did that come about?

RR: That came about because the guy for whom I had worked as a special assistant in the Division of Youth and Family Services had been recruited to the Commerce Department to Juanita Kreps' leadership--she was the first and only female Secretary of the Department of Commerce--as a deputy secretary of the department. He recruited me to her staff as a special assistant. It was like the previous call I received, when I was working for DYFS, someone called and said, "Would you be interested in a position with the Carter administration in the Department of Commerce?" I said, "Doing what?" They said, "Special assistant to the secretary." I said, "Yes, sure." [laughter] I went down, I was interviewed, and the next thing I knew I was packing up my bags and moving to Washington, D.C. I wanted to do it, but I hated leaving Newark because I thought there was so much more that needed to be done that had not been accomplished. I was happy and still I was sad, but I made the transition. [Editor's Note: Juanita M. Kreps was the first woman to be appointed as the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, serving in the position from 1977 to 1979, during the presidency of Jimmy Carter. Since her tenure, three women have served as Commerce Secretary, Barbara Franklin, Penny Pritzker and Gina Raimondo.]

As soon as I got there, they put me on a project looking at the location of the National Fire Academy. I had to do this fact-based research to determine where it might most appropriately be located. I'm forgetting the context in which that issue was finally resolved, but I do recall that the recommendation I made, I think it had to do with a location somewhere in Maryland, was accepted. So, I assume the National Fire Academy is in Maryland. I was in that position for one year. That was a success. [Editor's Note: The National Fire Academy is located in Emmitsburg, Maryland. It is operated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).]

I also worked on this initiative that Carter launched to engage governors, state governors, in the formulation of an agenda for American trade policy. I was on the working group, as the representative of the Secretary of Commerce, that formulated a plan for there to be a series of trade sessions, not seminars, not conferences, but gatherings in three different regions of the country, at which governors and their chief policy staff people were invited to help shape a trade agenda for the nation, and they were scheduled at three different times over the course of the year.

I remember being involved in the discussions leading up to the first trade session and having meetings at the White House, I'm not sure what wing the meetings were in, in the White House. We formulated a plan for the session, presented it to the Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Relations, and his name will come to me in a minute, but I can't think of it right now. The plan was implemented. [Editor's Note: Jack Watson served as Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Affairs and later as White House Chief of Staff.]

The first of these was held in Seattle. The policy working group did not go with the senior members of the administration. They were the Secretary of Treasury, the Secretary of Commerce, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, OMB, and two or three other senior level officials, Assistant Secretary of Treasury, Agriculture, and a couple of others, whose positions escape me. Anyhow, it was a mess. The secretary came back from the meeting, and her immediate staff responsible for our liaison with the working group had to convene in her office. There were four of us, and she told us how disappointed they all were with how this had turned out. [laughter] We were told that she was not well served and that the president was not well served, but she said the next one had to be better.

Notwithstanding that, shortly thereafter, I was promoted to the directorship of the Office of State and Local Government Assistance, interacting on behalf of the secretary with governors and mayors across the country. I got to go to Juneau, Alaska to give a speech. I got to go to San Juan, Puerto Rico to give a speech. I got to go to Colorado, places I had never been and never envisioned carrying the Department of Commerce's message. Those were important for me. I recovered from the trade session fiasco reasonably well.

I was involved in the preparation for the 1980 decennial census. The census is located in the [Department of Commerce]. I had to help prepare the secretary's speech, laying out the conditions that would be guiding the preparation of the plan for the census, so that was important too. I got to go with her on that.

SI: What is involved in that? Obviously, at this time, we just went through a very public controversy regarding that, but at that time, was it more pro forma, or were there things that they were going to change that you were involved with?

RR: There have always been issues related to racial and ethnic identification, so that was an issue then as it is today. There were no issues about immigrants and how they would be treated. There were issues of, as there had been prior to this, of a complete count and how you ensure that as many individuals who should be counted are counted. People who live in apartments, people who are grouped in locations where there are more residents than regulations would suggest are appropriate had to be addressed. Those were the kinds of issues. They weren't hot-button issues like they are today, but they were issues that emerged from previous decennial censuses and they were becoming front-burner issues. It was almost pro forma. These issues had to be addressed because they had been identified as problems impacting the completion of a complete count, and the secretary wanted to be responsive to them as best she could. There were no concerns about who the director of the census would be, but there had been some controversy leading up to the selection of that person, if I recall. I'm not sure about that. Anyhow, that's as much as I remember.

SI: Was sampling an issue?

RR: As a matter of fact, it was, but it was rejected. Yes, it was. How do you know about that?

SI: I have heard a little bit about it.

RR: Yes.

SI: I do not want to claim I know too much about sampling.

RR: All right.

SI: But it would be a more progressive form of counting.

RR: That's been rejected several times.

SI: Yes. When you were going to these different cities to bring this message, what were the main points that you were trying to get across?

RR: It was about the role that the Department of Commerce could play in advancing the agenda of the locality. The resources available through the Department of Commerce, particularly EDA, Economic Development Administration, were highlighted. I also promoted some benefits of research available through the Bureau of the Census. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's ability to provide technical support for issues related to air quality and atmospheric considerations, concerns, was also on the list of benefits. I was marketing the resources available to the state and local government entities that Commerce wanted to make sure they were aware of and that might benefit them. I did that on a regular basis, monthly basis.

SI: Do you have any other memories before we turn to Princeton?

RR: That's it.

SI: There was an administrative change, but do you think you would have continued at the federal level if that had not been?

RR: No, because my wife and I had determined after she came to Washington one weekend during my first year there, early in my first year there, to look at houses because we considered relocating to D.C. Had we, then I probably would have stayed in federal government. We had a big house in Maplewood, New Jersey at this time, and what we saw in Washington that was comparable to what we had in New Jersey was just out of reach financially. We just couldn't do it, and what we could afford, we didn't want. We looked around the region. It wasn't just in D.C. that our attention was focused, and I didn't want to have to commute a long distance to get to work. We decided, after thinking it over, that I would rent while I was in D.C. and that I would commute, which I did for two years. I would fly into D.C. on Monday morning. Interestingly enough, I flew in on the same flight every Monday that Senator Bill Bradley was

on. He, too, was commuting. I didn't get to interact with him because he was up front, I was in the back. I would take the train home on Friday afternoons, spend the weekends at home, and then Monday morning [return to Washington, D.C.].

Then, in my second year at Commerce, nearing the end of my second year there, I got a call from a guy named Richard Nathan at the Brookings Institution who said he wanted to talk to me about a program called the Center for New Jersey Affairs at the Woodrow Wilson School. He had accepted a professorship at the Wilson School and would also be the director of the Princeton Urban and Regional Research Center, of which the center, new-named the Program for New Jersey Affairs, would be a component. He wanted to get my thoughts about what it should be doing and how it should go about doing whatever it was going to do. Apparently, Mike Danielson, one of my professors at the Wilson School, recommended me to Dick Nathan, because Nathan didn't know who the heck I was. Anyhow, I went to Brookings, interviewed with Dick about what he was planning to do and talked to him about the Program for New Jersey Affairs, and then he said, "Well, would you be interested in directing it?" I said, "Well, I need to think about that." I didn't think about it very long. [laughter] It was another exciting opportunity.

When I graduated from the Wilson School, I think I said this in my last session, the then dean of the Wilson School had offered me a job as Director of Urban Affairs for the school, and I turned it down on the advice of Ralph Dungan, who was then the Chancellor of Higher Education. He asked me if that's what I really wanted to do after having spent two years finetuning my policy analytic skills and I said, "Not really." He said, "Well, then don't do it." But this was different. This was directing an entity that was focused on not just New Jersey but Philadelphia and New York and their policy development issues, which were similar to New Jersey's. To be able to convene conferences, seminars, workshops and to teach a workshop that was provided to all of the graduate student interns working in state, local and community development organizations around the state, in New York and in Philadelphia was exciting stuff.

In January of 1980, I became the director of the Program for New Jersey Affairs, working on the issues that I just mentioned, designing, in consultation with Dick and other faculty, policy seminars, policy conferences, conducting workshops on issues impacting cities, addressing issues of transportation and the environment, even education. The Wilson School didn't have a secondary school educational orientation, so the kind of education issues we looked at, like computers in the classroom, were less pedagogical and more administrative and operational, if you will. Transportation, of course, was an obvious issue for our attention. That's how I got to interact with the people at the Port Authority initially and the New Jersey Department of Transportation, the Department of Environmental Protection. The School of Engineering, the School of Architecture allowed the program to address housing policy, affordable housing issues and the like. All of these things were ripe for the attention of the program because New Jerseyans, in the policy arena, were eager to have their views discussed, analyzed, criticized, if you will, in an environment like the Woodrow Wilson School. It was easy to pull that stuff together. It was great fun, great fun.

I stayed much longer than I thought I would. I was there for twelve years. In the last four years, Dean Donald Stokes asked if I would take on responsibility for overseeing the placement office

of the graduate student activities and to continue my role as director of the Program for New Jersey Affairs, and the executive director of something called the Council on New Jersey Affairs, which was established two or three years after I had returned to the Wilson School. The council was a panel of leading New Jerseyans drawn from government, industry, the academy, the faith-based community who met on a regular basis, I think quarterly, at the Wilson School and either reacted to the issues that were central to the program or brought additional issues to the program based on their involvement in New Jersey. The first chairman of the council was Bob Van Fossan, then the Chairman and CEO of Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company, a business that no longer exists. The second chairman of the Council on New Jersey Affairs was Brendan Byrne, the former governor of the State of New Jersey. I can't remember, who was the third chair? I can't remember. The council lasted until--I left '92--so it must have been 1988. So, it was about six or seven years of regular quarterly meetings of the council, where these individuals, prominent New Jerseyans--former governors, CEOs of major corporations, the president of the National Council of Churches, the Director of Rutgers' Urban Policy Research Center, George Sternlieb, and others like that and some community activists as well. It met for at least six or seven years and informed what the program was doing and the program informed the issues it discussed. We brought before the council leading policy decisionmakers in New Jersey to explore these issues. Students were invited to attend the council meetings. The meetings ended with a terrific dinner at Prospect House, the Princeton faculty club. It was heady stuff.

One of the events, and I'll always remember this, one of the events that the program hosted at the Wilson School involved a presentation by Bill Clinton, who was then the governor of Arkansas but was also, I want to say, the chairman of the Education Policy Council established by Jimmy Carter, and his wife [Hillary Clinton], who was a member of the board of the Children's Defense Fund. Both were at the school at the same time, each talking about a different aspect of education policy, and the program was asked to host a dinner, following their presentations, at Prospect House. That was great stuff, the conversation that these students had with the governor of Arkansas and a member of the board of the Children's Defense Fund was just great.

SI: Your organization was putting out these white papers essentially.

RR: Correct.

SI: Were you involved trying to get those before the policymakers, or was there another approach?

RR: I did some of that. On occasion, depending on what the issue was, we'd do a press conference with the chairman of the Council on New Jersey Affairs. The program didn't do press conferences, but the council did. That was because the council had all these luminaries as front men, if you will, for what we were putting out. I think we did at least six press conferences over the course of my tenure there, but we would distribute the white papers broadly across the state. We had a mailing list of maybe three hundred people to whom these items were sent and with whom they were shared. That was the principle means of communicating the results of our work and then having events at the school around a policy paper, a white paper, that we thought was particularly relevant at the time.

SI: Can you talk about some of them, ones that you were maybe particularly passionate about?

RR: Well, we did one on urban revitalization focused on, let me think now, by this time, Sharpe James was the mayor of Newark, so we did a policy paper identifying some of the key issues confronting urban places. The other places aside from Newark were Trenton, Camden, Elizabeth and Paterson. We convened a panel that had representatives from those four cities, if I'm not mistaken. I'm trying to think, we did another one for computers in the classroom, and that involved one of the senior faculty members in the history department. The history of science, that was his area of expertise. He wrote the introduction to the piece, and then two undergraduates and I were the co-authors of "Computers in the Classroom." I can't remember all of them; I can't remember enough of them.

SI: Well, the computer initiative comes up quite often in the news articles.

RR: Oh, does it really? That's good. [laughter]

SI: What stands out about that? Why do you think it was picked up so much by the press?

RR: Yes, because it was a novelty. Computers were, at the time, just being introduced in some places, and there was uncertainty as to whether or not this was a waste of money. In fact, the guy who had been my research director at the Education Reform Project in Newark at the Urban Coalition had indicated that when this project was being researched by me and the two students that he didn't think it was worth consideration, that in a few years computers like televisions would be forgotten items as classroom resources. I didn't believe it because it appeared to me that computers offer too much in the area of easy and quick access to information that simply wasn't available except if you went to the library and had to sit and wait for the information to be brought to you in the form of a book, when you could sit at a computer. This was the early stage of computer use in general and especially computer use in the classroom, and I saw it as a resource that would be available first to teachers as a means of instruction but also as something that could be used to allow students to access information in a quick and easy way.

SI: You also began your involvement with the New Jersey Child Life Protection Commission.

RR: Oh, yes, I served many years on that. I was invited to serve on that by Tom Kean, who was then governor. I saw that as a civic responsibility. The issue of child abuse and child neglect related back to my days as a staff member at the Division of Youth and Family Services. So, there was a link between DYFS and being asked to serve as a member of the Child Life Protection Commission. Ultimately, I served as chair of the commission for several years. I was committed to helping to raise the level of awareness about child abuse in the state, to help bring resources into New Jersey from the federal government that were focused on child abuse and neglect prevention. I took great pride in it. I don't know what more I can say about it. It was an opportunity to give back in a way that had statewide significance and addressed a set of issues that were, I thought, important not only to me and my family but families across the state.

SI: It is interesting seeing how these issues ...

RR: Link.

SI: Yes. In terms of the public policy you were helping to craft at Princeton, for much of your tenure there, we had a Republican administration in Trenton and also in Washington, D.C., but very different sides of the party.

RR: Correct.

SI: Was the Kean administration receptive to a lot of the things that were being put out by the program?

RR: I don't think that the Kean administration was hostile to what we were doing, but I don't think there was a run to embrace much of our work, quite frankly. That would happen when Kean left office and Governor Florio was in office. Indeed, the Florio administration was very receptive to the work we were doing. In fact, Governor Florio considered me as a candidate for the position of Commissioner of what was then called the Department of Institutions and Agencies. No, maybe it was Human Resources by the time he was governor. I can't remember exactly, but I was one of the people he had checked out, if you will, for that position. I didn't get it. Frankly, I'm not sure I would have taken it if it was offered because I thought the job was an impossible one.

Yes, I think the Kean administration was not hostile to our work, but it didn't aggressively embrace what we were doing either. We were not at odds with the administration in any sense. I always thought that the Kean administration was very laid back on progressive policy and didn't stand out like previous administrations had on controversial issues like environmental protection, housing policy, education policy. He was a feel-good governor. What was the motto for the state then? "I like New Jersey." I think that was it. That was it, "I like New Jersey." He liked to be liked. He appointed a couple of Black people to his cabinet though. I remember Lenny Coleman functioning as Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs and then the Department of Energy separately.

During the Kean administration, my son participated in the Martin Luther King Jr. Commission Essay Contest and came in second in this contest, and he, along with his parents, were invited to the governor's office, where he received the second-place award. Kean remembered me both as a former aide to Ken and as the director of the Program for New Jersey Affairs when we got there. "Oh, you're here. It's your son." "Yes." [laughter]

SI: Wow. During this period, you were involved in a lot of boards. Some of them focused on children's issues ...

RR: Correct.

SI: ... Like the Governor's Task Force on Child Abuse. Do any of them stand out in your memory for the work you did there?

RR: Not really.

SI: How about the Association for Children of New Jersey?

RR: Yes, well, that was another of my proud associations. When I was director of the Office of Newark Studies, I was asked by the executive director of, I think, by this time it was called the Fund for New Jersey, Gordon McGuinness, if I would participate with him in helping children's oriented organizations merge, so that one of the organizations, which had a very strong policy focus, and the other, which had an endowment, might maximize their assets through one entity. I'm not going to get this right, but the organizations were called Advocates for Children, and the other one was CCCNJ, Citizens Committee for Children of New Jersey. The idea was to get their boards to agree to come together and to form a new entity called the Association for Children of New Jersey. Gordon and I worked together to make the case for this merger. The boards, with the Fund for New Jersey's support, agreed to do this. [Editor's Note: In 1978, the Citizens Committee for Children and the Child Service Association merged to form the Association for Children of New Jersey. It was renamed Advocates for Children of New Jersey in 2010.]

Subsequent to that, I was asked to join the board of the Association for Children of New Jersey, which I did. I think this was in '77-'78, around there, and I served on the board for a number of years. For four years, I think I was chairman of the board. I was also, by then, working at Princeton. Was I working at Princeton? Yes, because I hosted the board at a couple of meetings at the Woodrow Wilson School. That was especially rewarding because it focused on issues of child welfare, aside from abuse and neglect. It was a much broader agenda, and the people who comprised the board of the association were real child advocates drawn from across the state, a board that was composed primarily of white people, quite frankly, but there were some prominent African Americans, one of whom, Margaret McLeod. Yes, there were very serious child advocates who worked on policy development and policy implementation that got treated at the state level. The work that the association did impacted the behavior of the Division of Youth and Family Services and the behavior of the Department of Human Services. Yes, we were pretty impactful on a host of issues. [Editor's Note: Margaret McLeod is one of the founding board members of the Advocates for Children of New Jersey and serves as a member emeritus of the organization's Board of Trustees.]

SI: During your time at the Woodrow Wilson School, were you also teaching?

RR: I conducted a workshop. The workshop was for those graduate students who were doing internships in state and local government agencies and nonprofit organizations. My title was lecturer in public and international affairs but really was focused on state and domestic policy.

SI: And your students were the people in the program?

RR: No, these were grad students at the Woodrow Wilson School, whether they were active with the Program for New Jersey Affairs or not. Some of them actually worked in New York for the Finance Department. Others worked in Philadelphia for the mayor's office. Some worked, of course, in the governor's office in New Jersey, in the cabinet offices in New Jersey, in local

governments in the City of Newark and in Trenton, all over, domestic policy assignments, and they were for academic credit, three credits initially and then one credit by the time I left.

SI: You left in 1992.

RR: 1992. But before I left, I have to tell you this, it's history-making. I don't know if I brought this up before, but one of the things I did on an annual basis throughout my tenure, especially the last six years I was there--I think I also did it a little bit before that--was to serve as an advisor for senior thesis preparations. The policy areas that I was chosen to be advisory for were the areas that were relevant to the domestic policy role I had at the Wilson School. One of the students for whom I was an advisor--I wasn't the thesis advisor, but I supported her in the research that she conducted was done by Michelle Robinson, now Michelle Obama. I can validate that because she mentions two people in the acknowledgement section of her thesis and I'm one of them. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

RR: Yes. The reason I was asked to help her with her thesis was that she wrote her thesis on her experience at Princeton, what it was like being an African American student at Princeton, and she sought me out because of my having spent two years at the Wilson School, a very personal level.

SI: Does anything else stand out from those years at Princeton before we move on to your next position?

RR: I have to say something about serving as the Assistant Dean for Graduate Career Services and Government Relations. I enjoyed that to a great extent because it gave me an opportunity to share with grad students, as they were preparing to depart the program and get their master's degree, my sense of how to approach career development going forward. I developed a model for advising students, suggesting that early on in their career, they should try to identify opportunities that would allow them to grow in their field of work, to work for someone from whom they can learn something, and to work in an environment that was conducive to learning, that if you could find jobs that offer those three things, it's a job you should take, regardless of the policy area that is involved. If you can get two of those things, that's a serious offer to consider, but if you can only get one, that's something you should probably let fly. You should do that early on in your career, stay in your job for at least a couple of years but no more than three. Move on to something else. It may be within the same agency but doing something else that interests you to get a better feel for what it is you really want to do. Then, after you've done that for, say, nine years of your early career, find something that really turns you on that you're really willing to make a commitment to and stay in it for a sustained period of time. The likelihood is if you approach your career development that way, you'll have a successful career. You'll be happy and you'll do things that you enjoy doing.

SI: It seems like some of this came from personal experience.

RR: Yes. [laughter]

SI: Were you also relying on research?

RR: Yes, yes. In the international affairs field, advisors would probably say that staying in a position for two years is not sufficient. If you work in the State Department, for example, staying in a job for two years is probably something that you should not do. You probably should stay longer in order to become proficient at whatever it is you're into. Besides, if you're a State Department employee, you're going to get deployed every two years somewhere, so that might be considered staying only two years in a position. But in the domestic arena, you've got to move and you've got to move frequently and you've got to move to establish both credentials as able to move effectively in an area, to produce successful outcomes, and to build a reputation, if you will, that would allow you to get those phone calls that I used to get asking if I'm interested in another job. If you don't prove yourself, don't worry about the next job coming. If you demonstrate competence, if you demonstrate an ability to get things done, you will be able to make the move to the next item, but you may not know where it's coming from.

SI: In your tenure at Princeton, the program to diversify and bring more women in, was that unfolding well, from your perspective?

RR: Well, I think Princeton made a commitment in the mid-'70s to admit women to the undergraduate program in significant numbers, and I think they had been consistent in terms of advancing that. I don't think women are a majority, although they may be close to a majority of undergraduate students. At the graduate level, I don't think it's ever been an issue that has been a matter of concern.

I think the matriculation of African Americans at Princeton, at both the undergraduate and at the graduate level, has been positive. I think undergraduate student enrollment at Princeton is something like between five and seven percent. At the graduate school, it may be a little bit better than that, quite frankly. When I was a graduate student at Wilson, there were two classes, eight African Americans in each class and a total of thirty-five students in each class, so we occupied a goodly number of spaces, sixteen students out of, what, sixty-two, sixty-four. It's not as many today, unfortunately, but that was a good experience for me.

SI: In some of the articles I was reading, when you made this transition from Princeton to the Port Authority, the person who hired you talked about going after you before that for a couple of years. Can you tell me a little bit about that and how it led to the job?

RR: That's Stanley Brezenoff. I think that's who you're talking about. I had been offered a job a couple of months earlier as secretary to the board of the Port Authority, and that's a big job. That's similar to the secretary to the Board of Governors here at the University, being responsible for having to frame the agenda and organizing the meetings and facilitating the flow of information between the administration and the commissioners. I didn't think that was what I wanted to do. I was offered the job largely because my name had been presented to Stanley Brezenoff by Richard Leone, who was then the chairman of the Board of Commissioners and had been the Treasurer of the State of New Jersey and had been an advisor to me when I was

considering going to the Woodrow Wilson School. I actually wasn't considering it, I was attempting to get in to the Woodrow Wilson School.

Let me back up for a minute and talk about something at the Woodrow Wilson School. One of the highlights of my career at Princeton was being involved in the Princeton Urban and Regional Research Center's work in monitoring federalism. That is, Dick Nathan asked me to be responsible for the research and analysis associated with New Jersey's participation in U.S. federalism. The project in which I was asked to participate, to my surprise, was the rollout of Reagan's New Federalism. Was it that? Was it Reagan's New Federalism? I think it was. I was one of thirty research directors across the country. Wisconsin, New York, Florida, each state had a research team, and I was responsible for the New Jersey team. On my team for the Reagan stuff were Nancy Beer, who was my associate in the Program for New Jersey Affairs, and I recruited Marty Bierbaum, a faculty member of Rutgers-Newark as the second member of my team. We produced the New Jersey portion of the Urban and Regional Research Center volume on New Federalism. I think it was called New Federalism. We subsequently worked on welfare reform. That was President Clinton's contribution. That was in--no, I had left by then. I had left by then. [That was in] 1998, because I worked on the Reagan piece while at Princeton. I worked on the Clinton piece after I had left and had established my consulting firm. So, I was involved in two of the Urban and Regional [Research] Center's two federalism projects, the one on Reagan and the one on Clinton. The thing that I'll always remember was having my name mentioned in John Herbers' piece on the Reagan project in *The New York Times*.

SI: I have a piece on the welfare report.

RR: But there should be one before that. It was front page of *The New York Times*.

SI: I probably have it.

RR: Anyhow. How could I have forgotten that? That was the highlight of my intellectual engagement at the Woodrow Wilson School beyond New Jersey. That was working with that team of researchers. That's also what ultimately led me to becoming a senior fellow at the Rockefeller Institute of Government at SUNY. Dick Nathan became Director of the Rockefeller Institute in 1990, I think, and recruited me to assist in his continuing federalism studies.

SI: Do you have any memories of the results of these reports?

RR: The Reagan stuff?

SI: Yes.

RR: How did those things impact policy? I know that Dick Nathan testified before Congress on the findings of the Reagan research. He testified before Congress, and then he testified before any number of state legislative bodies as the director of the total project. I think some of the research directors in some states also did that locally. Those states in which there were not dramatic changes as a result of the policy initiatives of the Reagan administration, there was just information, and New Jersey was one of those states. There were no major changes that took

place in the state. We understood better how those policy changes were intended to play out, revenue sharings, modification and the like, the creation of the block grants and things of that nature, but there were no dramatic changes in New Jersey, as I recall. [There were] dramatic changes with welfare reform, but that's at a later time.

SI: Let me pause for a second.

RR: Okay.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: During the break, you remembered the title of the report.

RR: Yes, "Reagan's New Federalism" is the name of the report. As I recall, John Herbers wrote a piece that was front page of *The New York Times*, and when I saw it, I was just amazed and overwhelmed. He also, I think, wrote a piece about the work that was done after I left Princeton but in which I was involved, having to do with President Clinton's welfare reform, the impact of the welfare reform initiative. Then, Joe Sullivan wrote the first front page article about my leaving Princeton to join the staff at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

SI: Let's talk about that for a little bit. You joined first the Office of Economic and Policy Analysis.

RR: Yes, it was initially the Office of Business Development, I think it was, but it didn't reflect what the staff of that office were responsible for. It was made up of about seventy individuals, who were economists, statisticians, business analysts, market researchers and policy analysts. We decided, with the encouragement of the executive director, to recast the office, and it actually began to play a much more centralized planning function for the agency. The name we came up with, a little awkward, was the Office of Economic and Policy Analysis because that's what we did. I was there for almost five years, and our principle responsibility was to do research and analysis for the corporate office, that is, for the executive director, to identify issues that had regional, national or international impact, where the Port Authority was involved or central. Our research looked at things that were occurring in the region that impacted the Port Authority, economic issues that were taking place at a national level that impacted the Port Authority, and anything that we could identify at an international level that was relevant for the Port Authority. We convened for the executive a series of policy forums, to which academics from Rutgers, Princeton, Columbia and NYU were invited, to discuss the position and prospects of the New York Metropolitan Region, of which the Port Authority is a part. We had a series of three of these and published these thick volume documents that highlighted what those critical issues were and how the Port Authority should position itself to address them. We did a major economic impact study of the arts in the region. It was a high-profile attempt to determine, on behalf of the arts industry in the region, how that industry was contributing to the economic well-being of New York and New Jersey. It got big play in the press, both in New York and New Jersey. The regional forums were more intended for the internal health of the agency, so there was no big PR associated with them. But senior staff of the agency were all expected to attend

and to learn from the research that we were making available. Those are the two things I remember most vividly about that stint with the Port Authority.

SI: I wanted to ask, the '93 bombing of the World Trade Center was during that time?

RR: It surely was. My office was on the 53rd floor. The executive director's office was on the 64th floor. When the bombing occurred, the intercom came on telling us to not use the elevators but to take the stairs to evacuate the building. That's One World Trade Center; I was in that building. Instead of going downstairs with my staff, I sent them downstairs, and I went up to the 64th floor to the executive office to find out what we, the executive staff, should be doing. We were told to help guide some of the senior staff, who were remaining in the building, down to the cafeteria where we would be evacuated separately from the rest of the staff, primarily because some of them were handicapped. One of the assistant executive directors was the woman in charge of government affairs who was wheelchair bound, so we had to help her get out. But it took us four hours to get out of the building. We were helping evacuate the rest of the building. We weren't leaving ourselves; we were evacuating people out. When we got out, everybody else was out of the building.

It was scary but exciting. Stupid. We had no idea how serious the problem was until we got out. Some of us assumed there was a fire somewhere in the building. Others assumed there was some structural problem that had cropped up, but none of us knew that there had been a vehicle driven into the basement, the sub-basement, of the Port Authority, and that it had exploded with detonators. I'll always remember my wife was, she told me subsequently, horrified at the prospect that something had happened to me in the building. But eight or nine people were killed in that event. We were immediately relocated, that is, within the next several days, to office space on the New Jersey side, in Jersey City, from which my office operated. Other offices were around the region; not everybody was in Jersey City. We stayed there six months or more before we were returned to One World Trade Center. One World Trade Center, yes, right, we went back after they fixed it up, fixed up the basement. [Editor's Note: Six people were killed on February 26, 1993, when a truck bomb detonated below the One World Trade Center, the North Tower of the Twin Towers.]

SI: Did your office do a study on the impact of that event?

RR: Nobody wanted to deal with that. No, we left that alone.

SI: What other events or policy problems stand out from that first time?

RR: Nothing major. Those were the three big events. The policy roundtables, the economic impact study, and the bombing. We did an analysis of the impact of fare increases at the bridges and tunnels that served as the basis for an increase in tolls. I can't remember which year though. That's all internal. That didn't get out. We also did an analysis--I'm trying to make sure it wasn't the second time I was there--an analysis of the port departments, the commerce and port departments, the fees charged, the shipping companies. I don't remember enough to talk about it. I knew we did it, but I don't know. That's it. I can't think of anything else.

SI: I am just looking through your resume. There was something called the Black Employees Organization.

RR: Yes, the Port Authority of New York-New Jersey Network of Black Employees. I was a member of that but only a couple of years, the last couple of years I was there the first time, and I don't think it was in operation or if it was, I wasn't active in it the second time I went to the Port Authority. Or was I? I think I may have gone to some events, but that was about the extent of it, the second time.

SI: Well, I was curious what the atmosphere was in terms of welcoming or not welcoming African American employees or underrepresented groups in general.

RR: The agency had a pretty good record, quite frankly, in terms of minority engagement. I was not the only member of the executive team, the Director of Bridges and Tunnels was also African American. I want to say the Deputy Budget Director was African American. So, there were about four or five of us who were high-ranking officials of the agency at that time. When I went back, there were even more. Yes, it had a pretty good record, given its status as the premiere public authority in the country. That includes the TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority]. The Port Authority is top notch. The jobs I've had in my career, those two, the two jobs at the Port Authority, rank as one and two, and the job at Princeton is three.

SI: Given that, why did you decide to leave in 1996?

RR: Oh, there was a change in leadership. The guy who became executive director had run for mayor of New York City on the conservative ticket. He had been an investment banker--oh, God, his name [George J. Marlin]. It'll come to me, I'm sure. He wanted to privatize as much of the Port Authority as he possibly could, and one of the functions he wanted to privatize was work of the Office of Economic and Policy Analysis. When that occurred, I moved from Economic and Policy Analysis to the Office of Business and Job Opportunity, which provided contracts and access to contracts to underrepresented groups, small businesses, women, and minorities. I said, "This is not what I want to do." I stayed a year and left. That's why I left.

I decided that I should try my hand in the private sector and decided the way to do that was go out on my own. I had established a pretty solid reputation as a policy analyst, as a planner, as an economic analyst, et cetera, and there was no reason not to since my oldest son had finished college in '95, and my younger son had two years left of college. My wife and I had already decided that we would use Pell Grants to finance his last two years at Cornell. We didn't have any other expenses, so I said, "I'll give it a shot." When I told the executive director that I was leaving, he said, "Well, where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to set up a consulting firm." He said, "You're going to do what?" because I was making a pretty good salary for a public employee. I started out at 102,000 dollars. At Princeton, I was making in the seventies or eighties, so that was a substantial increase in my income. When I left, I was making close to 150,000 dollars. I was taking a risk, but the risk I felt was worth taking, since I had not worked in the private sector and I thought setting up my own business and seeing how it might float made sense. I did that.

I opened an office, after the first four years working from my home, in downtown Newark. I did policy research. I did program evaluation. I did strategic planning, and I did economic impact studies. The economic impact studies were projects that I worked on with some of my former staff, who had been at the Port Authority, who were out on their own. The planning stuff I did because that was an area of expertise. I had clients that ranged from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, Pew Charitable Trust, the Bloustein School, Heldrich Center, the Rockefeller Institute of Government at SUNY Albany, WBGO FM. I had a client list that was pretty impressive over the course of the eleven years that I did that.

Two instances--at one point, in 1998, I took on, as a consultant, the executive directorship of something called Newark in the 21st Century, a task force that was established to begin framing the set of issues that the new decade would bring to the attention of Newark's leadership. I did that for a couple of years, in addition to my consulting work with other clients. Then, in 2005, I was asked to step away from the board of the New Jersey Institute of Social Justice, a board on which I had served as a founding trustee, to serve as the interim executive director, as a search was launched, which I managed, to identify the successor to Ken Zimmerman, who was the first executive director. I did that for a year and a half and managed the process that led to the hiring of Cornell William Brooks as the second executive director of the [Institute for Social Justice].

In the process of doing that, a friend of mine named Tony Shorris, who had been the deputy executive director of the Port Authority when I was hired initially, became the executive director of the Port Authority and asked me, when I went to see him to talk about funding of a project that the institute was conducting--something that they had funded the year before and I wanted to make sure it was continued into the next year--asked if I would help him identify someone to help reestablish the agency's corporate planning function. I said, "I'd be happy to do that. I'd be eager to do it." The conversation ended with him saying, "Would you consider coming back in that position?" I had been doing private consulting for eleven years at that time. It was getting a little tough, and I said, "You betcha," because I enjoyed it the first time.

I went back and stayed for another three years, heading up the Planning Department, supervising a smaller staff, much smaller. Initially, I had seventy-seven staff people. When I came back, there were maybe nineteen people, and I increased it to twenty-six over the course of the three years I was there. We were actively involved in planning the ARC, in helping to implement the Access to the Region's Core project. We were involved in helping to design a planning process for the Commerce and Port Department to implement a new fee structure for--it was the second time I was there--a fee structure for the shipping companies that they hosted. We were involved in the development of the implementation of working with the aviation department in the incorporation of Stewart Airport in Upstate New York. Oh, that was something else. We began the process, the planning process, for the rehabilitation of the bus terminal in Midtown New York. That project was put in storage for a while and was reactivated only recently in the last couple of years. Those were the things I did when I went back.

I retired in 2010. I was sixty-five years old. I began to have a little shake, a tremor, in my hands. I did not want to continue working in the highly-charged intellectual community and not function at peak capacity. The new executive director was someone I did not know, and by that time, the governor of New Jersey had installed Bill Baroni. He went to jail; he's in jail now, as

the deputy executive director, and I was not getting any support from him because they assumed I was an appointee of the Democratic governor. [Editor's Note: Former Deputy Executive Director of the Port Authority William Baroni was sentenced to eighteen months in prison for his involvement in the Bridgegate scandal in 2013. From September 9 to 13, two out of three bridge entrances that served Fort Lee local lanes were closed on the George Washington Bridge, causing gridlock in Fort Lee. It was ordered to punish the mayor of Fort Lee, who did not endorse Governor Chris Christie.]

SI: Corzine?

RR: Jon Corzine. I had not been appointed by Corzine. I was employed, hired directly by Tony Shorris, who knew that I knew Corzine, but when I got the Port Authority, Susan Bass Levin, was the deputy executive director, appointed by Jon Corzine. She asked Tony if my appointment had been cleared with Corzine, and he said he had not cleared it because he didn't think he had to. She said, "Oh, yes, he's got to be cleared." I met with Susan and she said, "Well, you know you've got to get an appointment with Jon to talk about your role here." I said, "Okay." I set up an appointment with Governor Corzine. By the way, I had been active in the initial planning, volunteer planning group, for the Corzine campaign for governor, working with Dick Leone and Gordon McGuinness's wife, whose name escapes me right now. I was one of five people on that little planning group. I made my appointment to see Jon. I didn't think I needed to see him, but if he wanted to see me, and that appointment was set up, but it never happened. When Bill Baroni, who replaced Susan Bass Levin, showed no interest in meeting with me, and then when the guy [David Wildstein], who implemented the closing of the access to the ...

RR: The bridge, yes.

SI: Bridgegate.

RR: Bridgegate.

SI: Yes.

RR: ... Came to see me, to chat with me about what the office was doing, what its role was and what agenda items we had, he said that he had heard about me and that I was famous. I said, "Well, you know more than I do." Anyhow, he came and spent an hour with me, if not an hour and a half, chatting with me, and then I introduced him to my staff. I never heard from him again, and then a year later, I was out of there.

SI: Yes, let me pause.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Bill Baroni and David Wildstein are the people you were talking about.

RR: Baroni was the deputy executive director, and Wildstein was his henchman. Baroni did not return my calls, when I set up appointments to meet with him, and Wildstein came to see me. It

was a very pleasant conversation that we had and I knew that he was a henchman, but I didn't hear another word about him or from him.

When I left the Port Authority, several years later, I wrote an op-ed that appeared in the *Star-Ledger* calling into question the leadership structure of the agency and recommending that the position of deputy executive director be abolished, because as it existed, and I'll tell you how it came to be, as it existed, all executives hired from New Jersey were expected to be responsive to the deputy executive director, who was appointed by the governor of New Jersey. All executive staff hired from New York were expected to be responsive to the executive director of the Port Authority. But New Jersey hirees also had to be responsive to the executive director. In both instances, my first report was to the executive director, but the deputy executive director expected me to confer with him. During the first instance, it was Tony Shorris, so it was no problem. Both of them were New Yorkers. But when I got back, there was Susan Bass Levin, who was very political, and I was expected to meet with her on a weekly basis to let her know what projects I was working on and whether they had relevance to New Jersey. The ARC project, of course, did; the renovation of the bus terminal had New Jersey implications, as did the fee structure at the Commerce and Port Department. They were of interest to New Jersey and there was a desire for them, especially the ARC and the bus terminal renovation, to move forward, but control of that really rests with the commissioners, not with the staff. I was doing what I was expected to do as a staff member and that was to conduct the research and to do the analysis associated with those projects, but the decision making about how they would be carried forward was all in the hands of [the commissioners], as Governor Corzine reminded me at a recent meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Fund for New Jersey, where he now sits with me, that those issues were above my pay grade.

SI: Above your head. Had you seen this political system in place the first time you had been at the Port Authority? Did it affect you then?

RR: It only affected me in the latter part of my tenure there, when the new executive director came on, and that was for about a year. That was for about a year. The executive director [George J. Marlin], I was going to tell you how this happened, when that guy, whose name I cannot recall, but I'm going to try and remember it in a minute, when he was hired at the direction of Governor--the Republican governor after [Mario] Cuomo.

SI: Pataki?

RR: ... By Governor Pataki. I told you he had been a Republican who had run on a conservative ticket for governor of New York, and when it was clear that he was not going to be the nominee, the Republican nominee, he threw his support to Pataki. When Pataki was elected, his gift to Marlin was the Port Authority to this guy, who was a former low-level investment banker. He knew nothing about infrastructure and he knew nothing about transportation. He knew nothing about the economic underpinnings of the region. [He was] an investment banker who could make phone calls to get people to invest. But he was made the Port Authority's executive director. Governor Whitman, bless her heart, knew that. The Chairman of the Port Authority Board of Commissioners was still Dick Leone. She kept Dick Leone on. She and Dick determined that she would support Pataki's appointment only if she could name the deputy

executive director. That was the first time the Port Authority had an executive director appointed by the governor [of New York] and a deputy executive director appointed by the governor of New Jersey. The intent was to ensure that New Jersey's interests were protected and to ensure that there was some professional transportation expert in the hierarchy, if you will, the executive offices of the agency. The executive director had no transportation experience, no infrastructure experience, and no economic training. The person that Whitman sent over, they agreed, the person she sent over had been a Commissioner of Transportation in New Jersey, and he became deputy executive director and presided over the plan to privatize as much of the agency as it could. That was a politicization that I experienced, having to deal with this new structure and an executive director who wanted to [privatize the Port Authority]. I would assume he was doing this at the direction of Pataki.

SI: Now, in general, you had been involved in a lot of these transition teams for these governors.

RR: Almost all of them, with the exception of Whitman--I was not involved in her transition--going back to Florio.

SI: It kind of surprised me that the Christie people treated you like you were an unknown entity.

RR: Yes, yes. It's strange. I don't think what was going on at the Port Authority was of sufficient interest to the people in Trenton at my level. The issues that led to Bridgegate had nothing to do with the policy apparatus at the agency. Your point about my having visibility in the governor's office as a result of my participation in transition seemed, I think, initially to the leadership of the agency to suggest, "Eh, leave him alone. Leave him alone." But, then, I think the deputy executive director probably had a plan for replacement of some people and therefore ignored me. I can't explain it.

SI: Yes. Before we get further, there are other things I want to go back and talk about. We went past this quickly, but I wanted to see if there was anything else to talk about regarding the Rockefeller Institute at SUNY. You talked about how you got involved in that, but do you have anything to say about your involvement there?

RR: It was through that vehicle that I continued to stay involved in the federalism studies as the New Jersey field research director. In addition to the Clinton welfare reform initiative, I also worked on the Bush faith-based initiative. That was a federalism study focused on how that initiative was rolling out or being rolled out and the implications it held for the several states. Those were the two principal projects on which I worked while a senior fellow at the Rockefeller Institute.

Then, when I left the Port Authority the second time, there was another project on which, I'm having a hard time remembering the last one, that carried into 2012-'13, and then I stepped away from the institute. I helped make the connection between the Rockefeller Institute and the Eagleton Institute here at Rutgers. I don't think any projects emerged from that, but there was a sharing of ideas about how joint research might be conducted on issues that had regional implications. That's it.

SI: Is there anything else to say about your work on the Clinton welfare reform? That was welfare to work?

RR: Yes, that was welfare to work, putting AFDC [Aid to Families with Dependent Children] recipients back to work. The research highlighted both the strengths and the weaknesses of the proposal. I happened to conclude, after a couple of years of looking at this issue, that the short-term benefits were probably positive. The long-term benefits were negligible, because it made it more difficult for people who were economically challenged, who were poor, to gain access to welfare TANF [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families] assistance, especially if they had children who required daycare services. The daycare component of the TANF program was inadequate and made it much more difficult for families in need of those services to gain access to them. Welfare reform, in my view, was a short-term benefit to the people then enrolled but a long-term burden for those people who still needed financial assistance, especially with respect to childcare. That was true in New Jersey. My role was to look at New Jersey, and that's what the New Jersey research proved without a doubt.

SI: I also wanted to ask about the Institute for Social Justice. You had been part of the founding group there.

RR: Indeed, I was. When Alan Lowenstein began to think about his legacy, he convened a group of thought leaders from Northern New Jersey at [the law firm] Lowenstein-Sandler to talk about what he might do with resources he would commit to contribute in a meaningful way to New Jersey. Ideas discussed included setting up something similar to the Brennan Institute at NYU, if I'm not mistaken, or the Vera Institute of Justice or something else. After extensive conversation over three successive meetings--there must have been at least thirty-five people in the first two convenings in this group--and then in the last convening, that led to the decision, I think we were down to about ten, but I participated in all of those sessions, along with people like Ted Wells, Doug Eakeley, Roger Lowenstein, John Lowenstein, oh, goodness, the guy who was the U.S. Justice Department official who met George Wallace on the steps of the University of Alabama, when he denied access to the students who were to be enrolled. He lived in Princeton. He was the first president of the institute, and he is regarded now as president emeritus. He is deceased. He died about five years ago, but anyhow, he was involved in the discussions as well. [Editor's Note: Mr. Roper is referring to Nicholas Katzenbach.] It's on the tip of my tongue. It was decided that what should be created was a center that focused on public policy that did policy research, policy analysis, public education, advocacy, that was it. Those were the things. It was patterned more after the Association for Children of New Jersey than either Vera or the Brennan Institute, because Brennan is all lawyers and while the people who created and were funding the proposed new entity were lawyers for the most part, they didn't want it to be a law-focused center. They wanted it to be a public policy-oriented entity that included litigation as a component but not central to its mission. The Association for Children of New Jersey was engaged in the kind of policy work that Lowenstein decided he wanted his center to be. His first proposal, by the way, his initial plan was to have it housed at Rutgers Law School. The negotiations between Lowenstein, the firm, and Rutgers Law School collapsed, and Lowenstein then decided to create it as a free-standing entity. I was one of the founding trustees.

SI: You were also the interim director, as you mentioned earlier.

RP: Correct.

SI: During that time, what were your responsibilities besides looking for a replacement?

RR: Maintaining the operation of the program, sustaining our relationship with the Department of Corrections, because we had launched a new initiative focused on prisoner reentry, trying to get individuals who had been released from prison access to jobs, housing and other services. We had focused on license renewal for ex-offenders. Zimmerman had begun a project focused on predatory lending and was involved in trying to design a piece of legislation that would allow New Jersey to tighten the reigns on predatory lending, which had been introduced in the legislature. I'm not sure it had been signed into law yet, but I was expected to keep that momentum moving. We had launched, under Zimmerman, a program to provide construction job training for young people primarily but minorities who were unable to engage with unions through any other means. We were operating that as a centerpiece of the institute. Those three things were the principle pieces of our work. There were some other things that were tangential, but those were the three things that were most important, which I was expected to keep on track. I was not expected to do any new initiatives but to keep those things on track. There was a fourth area, juvenile justice reform. We had been very active in that arena and had established a pretty good reputation with the Department of Human Resources, as a result of that. Those four things were on my plate to keep going, as well as to oversee managing the firm that was hired to assist us in identifying the successor to Ken Zimmerman, the same firm that had helped us hire--and I served on both search committees--Ken Zimmerman in the first place.

SI: I want to tie that into some of your community work. I know Bethany Baptist Church in Newark was very involved in reintegrating people coming out of the justice system, that type of work.

RR: Yes, we had a safe surrender program, and that was a one-time shot, where we worked with the prosecutor's office and the courts in Essex County to structure a day-long program that allowed people with civil--what do you call them?

SI: Warrants?

RR: ... Warrants, to get relief. They were processed by the courts on site at Bethany and at New Community Corporation, which is across the street from the church. I think we were the second community to do a program of that type. The first was in Camden, and our initiative was modeled on what the courts in Camden had done. I think we helped some three or four thousand people in that one-day activity. We also maintained, for three or four years, a program called Youth Turn that was targeted at young people who were housed at a correctional housing complex in Newark, providing mentorship opportunities for them. That is, members of our congregation mentored these young men over the course of some period of time, and then we, as a congregation, would have them come to [church]. They could come to church if they wanted to. We'd have meals for them and special events, et cetera. What else did we do for those guys? We bought them clothes, and we got them jobs. One or two of them became involved in our summer academic program called the Freedom School, and a couple of them served as junior

staff members, one of whom, if not a couple of them, ended up getting their associate's degrees at Essex County College. That, too, we did.

SI: When did you first become involved with the Bethany congregation?

RR: I became a member in 1984. I became a deacon in 1994. I became chairman of the deacon board in 2003, and I stepped away from the chairmanship fifteen years later in 2018. I still serve on the Board of Deacons, however. I was active in the establishment of Bethany Christian Academy, which lasted for three years and then folded because the church couldn't continue to finance it, since the families that wanted their kids to attend school there couldn't afford it. The financial burden on the church was excessive. We closed the school and got a charter and established University Heights Charter School. I served as the chairman of the board of University Heights Charter School for five years and then stepped away. I am still close to the school but not in direct contact with it. I serve as the vice chair of something called University Heights Educational Partners, which raises money for the school and provides other services as required.

SI: In your work with the deacons, does that coincide with the period when women began being ordained?

RR: Yes, it does. I served as chair of the deacon board when Reverend M. William Howard led the effort to ordain deaconesses as deaconesses, that is, as opposed to having deaconesses determined by the fact that they were married to a deacon. He said that all of them who were serving then as deaconesses would be grandfathered as ordained deaconesses. Their functions didn't change. They remained deaconesses in title and in function, separate from the deacons, who made all the decisions beneath the pastor or with the pastor, if you will. I was deacon board chair when that happened. [Editor's Note: Dr. Rev. M. William Howard, Jr. served as the pastor of Bethany Baptist Church from 2000 to 2015.]

The new pastor arrived in 2015. He's been there three years, going on four years, a young man, Timothy Levi Jones, who is now Timothy Levi Adkins-Jones, after he married a woman with the last name Adkins. He said that this structure wasn't legitimate, that if you're going to have females functioning in a serious way, doing things that are central to the church, they should be deacons just like the guys. He presided over the elimination of the concept of deaconesses and the creation of female deacons. I was still chairman of the Board of Deacons when that happened. He and I facilitated this transition over the course of a year or two. [Editor's Note: Reverend Timothy Levi Adkins-Jones became pastor of Bethany Baptist Church in 2016.]

SI: Wow.

RR: How did you know about this? Did Reverend Howard tell you?

SI: Yes, it just came up in the interview. Not being as familiar with the ...

RR: The structure.

SI: ... The structure and the rights, it was interesting to me that women had been ordained as clergy before but not as deacons.

RR: As deacons.

SI: Yes.

RR: That's correct.

SI: You were also very involved with Bethany Cares. I am not sure about how many of these things that we have talked about were under the Bethany Cares umbrella.

RR: The Freedom School. The Freedom School is under Bethany Cares. I served as chair of Bethany Cares in the initial couple of years that it was established, right after Reverend Howard got there and he said we should do this. At that time, I was not chair of the Board of Deacons, I don't think. Anyhow, Bethany Cares is the umbrella community development arm of the church, and what it does is receive funds so that the contributors of those funds can claim tax exemptions for those funds to support things like literacy training project, the Freedom School, Youth Turn was under that as well, but that's no longer operational. What is the other thing? There's something else that falls under that heading that will come to me in a minute. My principal involvement with Bethany Cares, aside from just being on the board, is that I co-chair, along with another member of the BCI Board, a young woman by the name of Kimaada Sills, who works at Rutgers and is on staff at the Cornwall Center, the Joseph A. Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies. She is a member of another church, but she is on the Bethany Cares Board and she and I co-chair the golf outing, the annual Bethany golf outing, which is now in its seventeenth year going into its eighteenth year. She and I have been co-chairs for the last four or five years, managing an activity that generates about twenty thousand or more dollars per event for the Freedom School, which flows through Bethany Cares.

SI: I am curious, were you involved in either the search committee for Reverend Howard or Reverend Adkins-Jones?

RR: Both. In the first search, the committee consisted of Reverend Scott and myself. [Editor's Note: Dr. Rev. James Arthur Scott was the pastor of Bethany Baptist Church from 1962 to 2000.] In the second instance, the congregation created, under my leadership, a committee of appropriate members of the congregation, three of whom were deacons, three of whom were deaconesses, two of whom were trustees. Trustees handle the corporate aspects of the church. They handle the finances, the building, you name it, if it's corporate. If it's spiritual, religious or anything else, the deacons are responsible for, including what the trustees do. And other lay representatives of the congregation. So, officers plus lay members of the congregation. We ensured we had a person who was under twenty, somebody who was in the mid-forties, fifties age range, somebody who was involved in the music program, somebody who was involved in the mission side of the congregation, et cetera. I think there were a total of seventeen of us, sixteen or seventeen of us. The chairman of the committee was, at the time, a lay member of the church. He did not have a title. He is now a former trustee. He served one term as a trustee, a three-year term, but he couldn't serve more because he is a superior court judge and was

stationed, for a period of time, at Guantanamo, hearing cases at Guantanamo. Anyhow, he served as chair of the search committee, and he and I worked closely to guide the work of the committee to its conclusion. We ended up in a happy place, and he and I are close today as a result of the work we did there.

SI: In general, what do you look for in somebody to lead the congregation?

RR: We wanted someone who is obviously spiritually grounded. We're Baptist. We wanted someone who was under fifty. We wanted someone who could help bring young people into the congregation. We wanted someone who was progressive, who could embrace a congregation that had jazz vespers on a regular basis from June to October. We wanted someone who was socially conscious, more than just progressive, but socially conscious and wanted to be active. We wanted someone who was embracing of the other, that is, sexual, the whole ball of wax. We wanted someone who could preach, and the preaching had to be a step above Reverend Howard. Reverend Howard was very intellectual and very staid, if you will. We wanted somebody with a little bit more energy, and we got everything that we were looking for plus. [laughter] I think the congregation is very happy with the selection. In fact, the committee has been praised to high heaven for the work it did in bringing this young man. He's thirty-seven. He was thirty-four when we hired him. [Editor's Note: Since 2000, the Bethany Baptist Church has hosted the Jazz Vespers program, which unites worship with jazz.]

SI: Another entity I want to talk about was La Casa de Don Pedro, so tell me a little bit about that organization you worked with. [Editor's Note: La Casa de Don Pedro is a community organization that was founded in 1972. It is named for Puerto Rican nationalist Don Pedro Albizu Campos.]

RR: Yes, I have been of the view, from the days when I worked for Ken Gibson, that the African American community has been dismissive of the Puerto Rican community, notwithstanding the extent to which the Puerto Rican community participated in Ken's election in 1970. They didn't have enough votes to make a substantial difference, but they collaborated and gave the impression that it was a bi-community activity that got him elected. But after Ken became mayor, he did little or not enough, in my view, to say he appreciated what the Latinx community had attempted to do on his behalf, and my sense was that they were being almost ignored. I felt an obligation to not participate in ignoring them, and I became active with La Casa in a volunteer way while I was still working at the Office of Newark Studies. I didn't become a part of the board until, I'd say, twenty, fifteen, sixteen years ago, thereabouts. I have remained active. For six years, up to last year, I was president of the board. La Casa is a community development corporation that has a Latinx founding and orientation but provides services to individuals who approach it seeking services, and they can be white, they can be Black, they can be Asian, but they typically are Latinx. Those services range from parenting services, immigration assistance services, childcare services, workforce development services, legal services, you name it, housing services. It's a full community development corporation. Transportation services.

SI: I want to go back to some of the transition teams you were on for the governors. Going back to 1990, you were part of Jim Florio's transition team for economic development.

RR: Correct.

SI: First, how do you get tapped to do something like that, and what does it consist of?

RR: In most instances, it's a result of having gained some visibility during the campaign for being responsive, receptive to the campaign. I was never politically active in anyone's campaign, even Ken Gibson's several campaigns. It's always been policy assistance or policy analytic assistance, and I've done that for any number of gubernatorial campaigns. I did not do that for ...

SI: Christie?

RR: For Governor Christie, but I did it for all of the others, quite frankly. The staff who are responsible for setting up the transitions identify the people that the governor should consider. Those names are presented to the governor and then he signs off on them and you get invited based on the staff's recommendations. In each instance, I can say with a degree of confidence that it's window dressing. The policy recommendations that flow from those transition teams may or may not get factored into the governor's agenda, and if they get factored in, it's not obvious that that's what happens. What you are able to do in those instances is raise your visibility with the administration, so that as things unfold, they confer with you on occasion about something that you might have said or something that you did say. I did economic development, I think, for Florio. The next one was McGreevey. Was it McGreevey? I think I was on his budget transition.

SI: Yes, the Best Commission, or was that different?

RR: No, that's it, the Best.

SI: The Best Commission.

RR: Then, the next was Corzine and I was on the higher education, I think, transition team. Then, the last was Governor Christie and I was on the economic development--no, was it the economic development?

SI: Yes, economic development and growth.

RR: Yes, economic development and growth. The reason I was there, notwithstanding not having anything to do with Christie, is that someone who was very important to Christie, a guy by the name of Al Koeppe, who had been the president of New Jersey Bell, had been the president of PSE&G, and was, at the time, the president of the Newark Alliance, recommended me to the transition team for that position. Why not? What the heck? I worked closely with the group, and we produced some recommendations, like the others did. It may or may not have had an impact, no way of knowing.

SI: Did you consciously make an effort to not get too politically involved?

RR: Absolutely. Yes. I've always felt my best way of being in service in the public sector is to be available, and if I am politically aligned, then I may not be available to some people. I'm sure had I been politically active in the most recent instance, I would not have been asked by Christie's people to serve on his transition team. Not that my service on the transition team was going to be that impactful, but at least it gave me some visibility in the administration.

SI: When did your work with the Fund for New Jersey begin?

RR: Oh, boy, 2009 maybe, thereabouts, yes. This is very important philanthropy in New Jersey because it supports policy. It's not service-delivery oriented, as are most of the philanthropic organizations in the state. The Victoria Foundation is environment and education. The Schumann Fund is environment, for the most part. The Nielsen Foundation is social welfare. The Turrell is more capital with some education but not public policy. The grants it gives, the fund gives, are of sufficient moment to matter in the policy arena. They might not be in the service-delivery arena because they tend to be between fifty and 150,000 dollars per grant, per grantee. They could be smaller than that if the need does not require any more than that. It's had an impact. I mean, the work of the *New Jersey Reporter*, which no longer exists but was funded by the Fund for New Jersey for years. The Association for Children of New Jersey, which has its own endowment but the gap that's filled by the fund I'm sure is important. The Housing and Community Development Network. The Institute for Social Justice. I could go on and name organizations that have--the Hyacinth Foundation. The environmental organizations that it funds are just too numerous to mention in one sitting. Yes, it's a big player in the policy arena in the state; it's an important player in the policy arena.

SI: Let me take a break real quick.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You have been a resident of Maplewood for many years.

RR: Forty years.

SI: You have been very active in local institutions.

RR: Interestingly, not as active as I've been in Newark, but active nonetheless and episodic activity. Early on when I was at the Port Authority, I was asked by the mayor of Maplewood if I would facilitate a conversation about the arts in Maplewood based in large part on the work I had done at the Port Authority on the economic impact of the arts. I agreed to do that and, over the course of several months, facilitated a community conversation to which residents of the township were invited to give their thoughts about what an arts program, a cultural affairs program, might look like in Maplewood. As a result of that series of conversations, an organization called Arts Maplewood was created and still exists. I think its housed at the Burgdorff Center, and the Burgdorff Center is considered the arts venue now.

Later, I was asked to serve on the city's planning council. I'm trying to remember what for. I think this was leading to the decision to build out the area where the post office was then located and making it available for a higher-rise housing complex, apartment building. I served on the early stages of that planning committee, not on the subsequent planning stages, when the project was finalized. So, that was a brief, one-year tenure on the planning board. I am also on the Maplewood Library Advisory Board, which means I contributed some money every year, and on occasion, I get called on to comment on something that may be taking place at the library that they think I might be able to help that through.

Most recently, I was asked to facilitate the community conversation about the selection of the recently hired new police chief. That was an action that occurred after the former police chief was terminated, following an incident involving Black kids coming out of a Fourth of July celebration at the football field and being forced to go into Irvington, which abuts Maplewood, as opposed to allowing the Maplewood residents, who happened to be in the group, onto the streets of Maplewood. The police chief was fired as a result of this horrific incident, and the process was put in place to identify a new police chief. I was asked to facilitate the conversation allowing residents to question the two finalists.

SI: In general, is there a large African American population in Maplewood?

RR: It's about twelve percent of the population now. Yes, it's declining because housing prices have gone through the roof. When I moved into Maplewood some forty years ago, the African American community was pretty small, but over time, it increased. On the block in which I lived, at that time, there was one other Black family. Over the course of the next twenty years, there got to be as many as five Black families on the block. But during that twenty-year period, the township created something called the Community Coalition on Race with the intent of marketing Maplewood to communities with a high concentration of young white professionals and they chose the community in New York--it'll come to me in a minute. This is what happens when you get to be seventy-four. [laughter] What is the name of this enclave in New York? Not in Bed-Stuy [Bedford-Stuyvesant]. Anyhow, they marketed Maplewood to these young people. Over the course of the next twenty years, especially once the Midtown Connect was established and made it more efficient, the housing values in the area surrounding the train station and the areas moving away from the train station went through the roof. The influx of young white people with two kids was substantial. My neighbors on either side changed, over the course of the twenty-five-year period, three times with the arrival of three different families with two kids and a dog. Those families were white. One Black family moved in on the other side of me, but the other three families that moved in were white with two kids and a dog. When my wife and I sold our house last year, we were the second to last Black family to leave the neighborhood, which is to say there is now one Black family in the neighborhood that I assume is still there. When we bought the house, we bought it at a steal, and when we sold the house, we sold it at ten times what we bought it for.

SI: Wow.

RR: Over ten times what we bought it for. The coalition recruited successfully, and there have been articles in the local newspaper, the Maplewood paper called *The Village Green*, that states

there is an issue now of a reduction in the Black population occasioned, they think, by the cost of the housing, and it's probably true.

SI: It is called the Coalition on Race?

RR: Yes.

SI: They were targeting to bring in young white professionals?

RR: Correct. That's one of the things ...

SI: Yes.

RR: They were also interested in creating an environment for conversations about diversity and inclusion. That was the overarching intent. But the one consistent program they had in place was this marketing of Maplewood to Park Slope. [Editor's Note: Park Slope is a neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York.]

SI: Park Slope, yes.

RR: Every new arrival in our block, in our neighborhood, was from Park Slope. It worked. What the founders of the coalition were concerned about was the possible transition of Maplewood into Irvington or East Orange or Orange, which at one time, fifty years ago, were suburbs of Newark but were majority white suburbs, and over the passage of time, as more Black people moved into those communities, white people moved out. There was a lot of house-busting that took place. The people in Maplewood didn't want that to happen. They asked me to join the coalition, and I said, "I cannot serve on a group whose intent is to close the door on the people that look like me." I declined serving.

SI: It seems like it had the opposite effect.

RR: Oh, no, it had the effect it intended. [laughter]

SI: I mean, if there was a community organization called the Coalition on Race, I would not expect that to be the intent. Are there any other groups you served in? There was the adult school.

RR: Yes. I served on the adult school for about ten years, I think. I didn't do anything of any significance, other than provide support for the concept of an adult school and lending my time and attention to how it functioned.

SI: I wanted to ask, the incident with the young Black men coming out of the Fourth of July celebration, was that an aberration, or is that fairly common?

RR: That was an aberration. But early on, when we arrived in Maplewood, I would imagine a year after we got there, there was a series of house defacings--I think it was the garage of Black

households in Maplewood--that caused a community stir. As a result of that, a lot of families put lights on their garage that would come on when it got dark, so that you could see people who might be doing things like that. I think the young man who was behind that was arrested several years after it began. That was the biggest racial issue that Maplewood had faced up to that time. More recently, there has been a concern on the part of Black residents of the township about tracking in the public schools, especially at Columbia High School, which is a pretty good school offering a wide array of activities/programs that make it a very good high school. But the tracking has tended to keep more Black kids in non-high-performing classes than parents think is appropriate. So, there is a coalition of Black parents who have been actively engaged with the school system, in fact, filed a federal lawsuit alleging discrimination by the school district, and that is ongoing. What else?

SI: Well, that reminded me of something I wanted to ask earlier. I think when you were first starting your own firm, you did some work related to the Mount Laurel issue and housing in general.

RR: No, not Mount Laurel. I didn't do Mount Laurel, I think.

SI: Yes. Not the original cases, but the implementation. No? Okay. Well, is there anything else you want to add to this session?

RR: I can't think of anything. You were pretty thorough.

SI: Okay, well, I do not want to wear you out. [laughter] Next time, we will focus on, you have done a lot in higher education, so I will probably ask about other things you have been involved in at Seton Hall and Kean, but really focus on your time at Rutgers, particularly with the Board of Governors. Thank you very much.

RR: Sure.

SI: I really appreciate it.

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

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