

PRESERVING MEMORY: NEWARK AND RUTGERS
IN THE 1960'S AND 1970'S

An Interview with

MICHAEL JAYE

Conducted by

Gilbert Cohen

SEPTEMBER 26, 1991

INTERVIEW: Michael Jaye

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GILBERT COHEN: Okay. This is Thursday, September 26, 1991. This is Gil Cohen. I am meeting with Professor Michael Jaye in his office on the Newark campus.

[Break in recording]

Okay. We are back, Professor Jaye. We were talking about possible background, academic or biographical sketch, including some of the big conferences, I think we'll go into that.

MICHAEL JAYE: Right. This is Michael Jaye, professor of English. There are two major projects which I was involved in that came out of the Newark campus. The first was a project called Literature and the Urban Experience, the core of which was to bring...about thirty or forty major literary figures to the Newark campus for a three-day conference to explore the question of how the urban experience, the city, is depicted in literature, how literature in turn affects how we view the city.

COHEN: What year was that?

JAYE: This was in 1980 it took place. But it was a process of over four years putting it together. And it became, in its way, the prototype for that kind of public conference. We brought in the attendance figures; over the three days of the conference in Newark...something like twenty thousand people attended the various sessions. Moreover, it was broadcast live on cable television. And that broadcast won an ACE Award [Award for Cable Excellence], and it was also then serialized on National Public Radio and subsequently we published a volume of essays. And we did some NEH funded [National Endowment for the Humanities] teacher training seminar one summer. We did a teacher's manual. So it became a very large project. But, it was a project that got such large publicity that in a way it helped change...the perception both of the campus and of the City of Newark, which was sort of scarred by the paths of horror, riots, and politics. And [the conference was] one of the things why people came to the campus—and they came from all over the country, and these weren't just academics; the majority of the audience were non-academics actually. We were sold out, so to speak. In fact much of the conference had to be watched on closed-circuit television because there wasn't room in the halls at Robeson Center. But a not untypical response was people saying: "I didn't know Newark could be like this". And part of it was that we did...enormous amounts of preliminary work with my colleagues, especially with our own police force, who were superb. People used to say, "I never met such nice policemen" as our Newark campus policemen. But all of that took a lot of work. But it was a great success. I mean perhaps... people say one of the great, you know, public humanities events in the country. Moreover, we gathered enormous amounts of support from public funding bodies: the New Jersey Committee for the Humanities and National Endowment of the Humanities, hundreds of thousands of dollars were raised. But more than that, I think for

the first time we brought the business community into an involvement on a very serious level with the Newark campus. And it was in fact very much, although we [received] grants from Ford Foundation and almost every other foundation, it was people like Prudential and New Jersey Bell located in Newark that came in and really provided the kind of financial and logistical supports which would make it all possible.

COHEN: How did the idea get started?

JAYE: Well, the idea did get started, because I have a record of it, by a letter which I wrote when I was in London one summer walking around at night. ... I wrote a colleague of mine a letter about walking around in London at night and seeing the ghosts of literature past. And when I got back and started to talk about it and thought, wouldn't this be something to do? Isn't this a subject that's not only of interest to academics, but to the public at large. And at that time the dean of the college was Norman Samuels provost. And I went to him and said, "You know if we do it, we want it to be the biggest and the best thing done. There's no sense doing something, you know, second or third level. This has to be as good as anything in the world." And he gave me some initial support, and we went to the provost, Jim Young, Norman Samuels and I, and we said to Jim, look, this is what we want to do. I forgot what I needed, a couple thousand dollars or something to get started. And we did it and it just kept growing and growing and growing until it became the thing it was.

COHEN: When you were walking in London, what writers were you thinking of?

JAYE: Well, the writers I was thinking of were essentially Dickens. It's London, it's always Dickens's city. There are others that you think of: T.S. Eliot and his description of the Thames, and Chaucer, Wordsworth's description of London as a phenomenon that's almost supernatural.

COHEN: What poem was that?

JAYE: In "The Prelude."

COHEN: In "The Prelude"?

JAYE: In "The Prelude," in Book six of "The Prelude" he enters London and sees it for the first time, and he's overwhelmed by the experience. And then he comes into the midst of the city, and he's overwhelmed most by the grotesquery of things and the poverty. But also by the sheer vibrance of city life. In fact, in a way the city became too much for him to bear. There were too many sensations that didn't allow him, as it were, to retreat into a kind of re-creation of things. He was just overwhelmed by impression. And much the same experience is to be found, I think, today in New York. However you feel about New York or even Newark in certain points of time, the variety of experience and impression is overwhelming, maybe uncomfortable. But it's overwhelming.

COHEN: To what extent did the... July 1967 riots, and of course events on the campus in February of sixty-nine when the students in the Black Organization of Students took over Conklin Hall... figure into the gestation of this idea, if any?

JAYE: I don't think they really did, except that as you went along, the task was made harder by the perception of Newark, [it was] a rather negative perception. So...one of the things one was always fighting and having to overcome was a negative perception of Newark. Now the conference wasn't designed to change that, but I think, in fact, to some degree it did change the image of the campus, as did... subsequent projects which I did. It also showed how successful things could be done here. A couple of years before there was a public conference in New Brunswick, which was organized by the then Provost Ken Wheeler. It was a very nice conference really. But by any stretch of the imagination, it didn't compare to what happened in Newark. And Ken Wheeler actually wrote me and said all of this was possible because of the size of Newark, that it was about the campus, our college. It made it possible to do it. You knew people, you knew who to speak to, people were eager to help. I mean there wasn't a facet of the university that wasn't involved: the Newark Library, the college libraries, the Newark Public Library, the Newark Museum. We had performances. There wasn't an element of the, as it were, the intellectual, academic life of this city that wasn't involved in that. Now, the history of Newark and the history of our campus is a difficult one. I think in one way it's difficult because of the perception it creates in other people than the reality....you had to work extra hard because it was in Newark. But in a way it was better because it was in Newark, it was better because the nature of the college at that time made it such that you could do something like that.

The events that we mentioned like the riots didn't particularly touch the campus. It affected us peripherally and deeply. I remember walking I guess to the train station or driving through Newark during the days of the riots and after, and being deeply affected by seeing the tanks on the campus with the students. Now...that's an image that one doesn't forget: Army tanks, Army tanks rolling through the streets of the city. There was none of us, I think, at the college [who] were affected by those riots directly, [no] buildings were burned or looted that I know of. But in the aftermath of that, seeing those tanks, seeing troops on our streets, that was something that brought back a feeling of a siege mentality which perhaps we've never lost, accepting that one would never forget it, and probably will always influence things. What happened subsequent to that in the college that did affect us deeply, was the actions of an organization of black students. I think it's called BOS, Black Organization of Students, when they took over buildings. And at that time Dean Blumenthal...and I...because I was then chairman of the College Courses and Study Committee, I was involved. I was called into an emergency meetings, which went on over weekends and late at night at all hours, as to how to deal with...the occupation of Hill Hall....

COHEN: Conklin Hall.

JAYE: Conklin Hall. Sorry, Conklin Hall. And problems in certain departments, one of which was the Sociology Department, where in fact there was a another major conflict among the students and junior faculty to have more power in the department. And Blumenthal was a clever man; I don't mean that in any pejorative sense. He weighed opinions; he took opinions. But in fact things weren't really in his hands. It seemed to me the person who was really faced with making decisions on these issues was Malcolm Talbott who was I think provost at that point in time.

COHEN: Vice president.

JAYE: Vice president for Newark .

COHEN: What were the issues?

JAYE: Well, isn't it funny, that I can't remember the specific issues. One can remember them generally: more minority enrollment in the university, more support, more say of the students in how the college was run. In terms of a specific department, Sociology, as I remember it, the demand was for the chairman of that department to be removed as chairman and for the junior faculty to play a greater role in determining the department. There were subsequent, you know, issues about changing the curriculum or having no requirements for students. Giving students longer time to drop out; the demands...ranged from no grades or things like that. But even that actually, I think didn't affect me in my every day work, although there were constant calls for boycotts of classes, etc. I went ahead teaching my classes because it didn't seem to me there was really anything more important in the world than poetry. And so I went ahead. My students went ahead through all this chaos and continued to meet. When we couldn't meet in one building, we met in another. This wasn't so much out of opposition to the movement as the fact that, you know, university is a precious thing. Study and reading is a precious thing. And anything that calls for the abolition of it even temporarily, the cessation of it in the name of some greater good, was to me deeply suspect. So in a way I suppose I might be categorized, I might have been seen in some ways as, I would say, a traditional nineteenth-century liberal figure in the tradition of John Stuart Mill; but perhaps from a twentieth-century, 1960s,[perspective] a conservative.

However...there were certainly other forces at work in the college. The demographic nature of the college, the populations it chose from, it could draw on, that was changing. There was when I first came here, the population which we drew from, from Newark and from the surrounding suburban cities which were quite close in—it was a commuting school—were primarily working-class students. [We] had a large proportion of Jewish and Italian students. There was still a large Jewish community, I think, in the mid-sixties...diminishing, but still there in Weequahic, I guess, and other places. That was soon to change. I would have thought then—and I think now—that at that point the college should have been doing more to recruit minority students. I don't even like that word, minority, students. But, to make the college more accessible. I suppose one of the key choices that faced the Newark college really, at this time, or just preceding this time, was the question of whether we were going to build a campus in Newark, physically. Because the time we're talking about was when I first came here. We didn't have the campus that we now know as the Newark campus. We were in a scattered number of buildings along Broad Street and James Street. But that decision was taken because, as I remember, the college had a choice. There was still the possibility that Newark could have been built out in the suburbs somewhere. But for whatever reason, we went ahead and built the college here. And that has both good and bad things about it. For one thing we couldn't avoid certain realities. Maybe that's a good thing.

COHEN: The realities of?

JAYE: The realities of being in an urban sector that would face tremendous problems in the middle and end of this century in America. On the other hand, we've probably done more good just by being here; that more than anything else.

COHEN: When the new campus was built, how did it affect your expectations about the mission of the college?

JAYE: Well, for me the new campus, I think, wasn't so important. I imagine for some of the scientists it was very important. They needed certain equipment and space. I rather liked the old setup in a way. I liked being in a brownstone building, as it were. One can teach poetry anywhere under any conditions. But as a sign of, as an identity for the institution—we were a bit floating before the campus was built; people were scattered all over, and certainly for the students. The campus made the college a concrete, in literal and metaphorical terms, a reality, whether we would have liked to have other things. But there were things that were done. Professor Greenfield of the Botany Department, you know, put in great efforts at least to see that we had some trees and some grass, which has been a saving grace. But the buildings haven't been particularly distinguished. The buildings are really terrible in many ways. They fail almost every test: inadequate air-conditioning and inadequate heating. Elevators that don't usually work properly. And as I remember—I mean maybe other people were; I was never—I don't remember any consultation with the faculty, about the people who were using it year after year. I just remember at a time when we first—Conklin was one of the earlier buildings. When it was built, and you know, these were traditional square offices. But I don't think the physical buildings have been a great success. They've been a major disappointment. Here we are...twenty years on, and we face the same problems with the buildings over and over again: leaking roofs and elevators that don't work, air-conditioning and heating systems that don't work, making it impossible to work in the office, problems of physical security. So, it hasn't been an entire success. It exists, but not wonderfully successfully. I think we've missed an opportunity to do better.

COHEN: Moving into the area of the English Department curriculum, how has the curriculum been affected by events in the community, changes in student populations, expectations of greater diversity?

JAYE: I don't believe their [the English department's] curriculum, as it were, has been dictated from below, to use a kind of use Marxist language. It was not a revolution...from the streets. I was chairman of the Courses of Study Committee and one year...we were charged with revising the entire college curriculum. But in the English Department the curriculum has been more affected by movements in the study of literature generally and by the nature of new faculty whom we recruited. And I think influenced from below with one obvious exception, and that's things like ethnic literatures, black literature; that perhaps has probably been dictated from below. But, in fact, over the years the English curriculum has—because the English Department does a number of things; it teaches freshman English, it teaches sophomore literature, it teaches its own major, it teaches journalism, it teaches graduate English courses, and it teaches creative writing. As far as the freshman English,...that requirement hasn't changed in the college, or in the department. What has changed is that at one point it was the tradition of the department that every professor, full-time member of the department, taught a section of freshman English. And so that freshman English was largely in the hands of...seasoned full-time faculty, with some

part-time help. And it was usually the role of one person in the department to be the director of freshman English, and this might be anybody. That has changed. It's rare in the department for a full-time member of the department to be teaching freshman English. The department went out specifically and hired a director of freshman English who had, presumably, expertise in this area. And the teaching of freshman English has been, for the last decade, largely in the hands of part-time co-adjutant staff. In my view...I made a point last year, for instance, of volunteering to serve on the freshman committee. I don't think it's been terribly successful. In a way, freshman English is something the college demands to be taught. It is taught, in some fashion or other, by some of the part-time people. [They] are very good at what they do; but some [of them] and [the] teaching assistants...it seems to me, have the faintest idea of what there is to do. And, there's very little training....Here I sound like an old man bemoaning the past—but the standards that used to be reached in freshman English no longer are. And ... I don't think anybody really cares as long as we say they've taken freshman English and that's that.

COHEN: How has the—

JAYE: I can tell you specifically, for instance, it used to be that in a freshman English course, we used to require twelve or fourteen essays a semester. I think it's now down to six. The only way people learn to write is by writing.

COHEN: Yes.

JAYE: So that's...that.

COHEN: Well, why have the expectations of the students been weakened?

JAYE: I think one of the effects of... what I want to call the student revolution, was... movement in education. This movement away from making decisions about what is good and what is best and what is better, but to treat all things sort of uniformly. So, I suspect that if you did a study of the grading patterns in freshman English or any other courses in the English Department or almost any other department between now and twenty years ago, you would find a greater number of As and Bs, for instance, than we had twenty years ago. We might say this is because our student body is better. Well, they're not better when it comes to measurement of SATs, and they may not measure anything. But now, teachers become more self-conscious about wanting to be liked, to be popular. Students want to obviously do as well as they can in terms of grades. There also are subtle things that go on that have influenced—and this is not unique to Newark—I think this is true throughout the country. But...at one time the English Department presided over the one requirement for literature, which was called Literary Masterpieces, which was a traditional study of Greek literature and the Bible in the first semester and from Shakespeare to the modern English novel in the second semester...that changed. So now students can read the literature required in any number of ways, in or out of the English Department. That has changed.

But the largest change, it seems to me, in the English Department; or the faculty that have joined the department have movements in literary studies outside. And that is a greater concern with things that are of the moment critically, new critical theory, new ideas about

multiversity...different kinds of courses, genre courses instead of period courses, more emphasis on what is happening in the twentieth century, more emphasis on types of literature that weren't previously part of the canon: science fiction, Third World literature, women's literature. These have all changed the department's offerings significantly. The other thing that changed is the requirements to be an English major. I had a student come in last year, [she] wanted me to sign a form for her; she was about to graduate soon. And I looked at her. She was an English major, and I looked and saw she only took one course that was a required course: Shakespeare. And that's the only required course, besides the English survey, of English majors, before 1900. I said, "You're not taking any other courses before 1900?"...It didn't matter, she could do that and have an English major. So it is, in effect, possible to be an English major now, take a course in Shakespeare, a course in the survey of English or American literature, and never again read something that was written before 1900 or 1920. So the department has changed its own requirements.

[Break in recording]

COHEN: We're back with Dr. Jaye, and we were talking...about changes in the general curriculum when we were cut off. And you are in Courses of Study...?

JAYE: I was a chairman of the College Courses of Study Committee, charged—this goes back to Dean Blumenthal's time—charged with reviewing and revising the entire curriculum. And that was a mess. It was a good committee, but one was faced with political questions as well as educational questions. There's no one way, one curriculum. I mean there could be many models. But we had one thing in place, and there were vested interests in what was in place.

COHEN: These are the political things you're talking about?

JAYE: These are political things, yes. For instance, if you took the history requirement, the one-year history requirement away, that was no longer a requirement. That would affect the History Department, [it] would affect personnel. What would people who had tenure, what would they then teach? Would they need assistant professors any longer? This, I think, was true with the English requirement, which was in the English Department. If you suddenly made something else a requirement, you were saying we had to go out and hire people to teach it. Where were the resources going to come from? So everyone had a kind of vested interest. And we thought we had come up with a plan that allowed more diversity. It wasn't a revolutionary plan. More diversity for the students, that made more sense for the students in terms of having a liberal education. In fact, that plan wasn't approved. But it was modified. It was modified really on the basis of, from what I understand, some backroom dealing at the last minute between power brokers, as it were. Silly to talk about a university in these terms. But those rules of self-interest apply in the university as well as elsewhere. Between power brokers in a few departments to make sure that certain requirements were kept as requirements in departments. So the final result probably was good. It loosened up the requirements which were somewhat rigid. It allowed for more diversity in what students could choose. For instance, in English, instead of saying they had to take just one course, there were a few courses that they could've taken to fulfill their literature requirement.

But I don't think things changed or have changed all that much. The reality is I think that most students still take a history requirement, they still take a literature requirement, they take a fine arts requirement, they take sciences. In fact, my guess is there hasn't been all that much change. A general loosening up. More important, it seems to me, is that there's been a—now I sound like an old man from over the past—one would say, a certain decline in standards for various reasons, various pressures. . . . When I came here, the senior members of the faculty were essentially people who'd served in the Second World War. Gone on to college—either went to college before or after, and went to graduate school, business schools, under the VA Bill. And they were coming into a job market in which there was great demand. Colleges were booming, were a boom business. And when I came to work here, that was still true. Colleges were booming. In my first ten years here I had a number of other offers. You know, so out of the blue people would call because faculty were needed. That has changed. For over a decade, colleges haven't been booming. We've turned out fewer PhDs. People who were taking PhDs have had to find alternate careers. That's about to change again. But my generation, which is now the senior people in the university, come out of a different background than the people who are coming up behind me, as it were. They come out of the background of the sixties. And I think that probably has influenced attitudes towards teaching, towards standards, towards grading, towards what is taught.

COHEN: Can you characterize that, the change in attitude which is influencing what's being taught or not being taught?

JAYE: Well, I think my generation was still in a way a nineteenth-century generation, [we had] . . . a belief in the liberal arts, a belief in the humanities, a belief in some writers being better than others; some writers being great, some writers shaping the world. And others, you know, enjoyable, delightful, not delightful, but not quite as important. I would suppose that under the movements, critical literary movements of the sixties, seventies, and eighties, there's been more diversity in approaching literature. More concerned, it seems to me, with being in the swim of what is most fashionable. I had a colleague, not in this college but from another place, say to me, "Well, one either has to do research or disseminate or publish." You couldn't do both. Which I thought was [a] very interesting and revealing comment. . . . If you wanted to keep up with what was the latest thing that was being said about literature, or how to go about literature, then you couldn't do any kind of research. You just had to keep up with what was coming out at the moment. And what has happened is that to some degree the text itself of any literary work has become less important than the way in which that text is being viewed. And it's being viewed from all sorts of ways. Interesting, exciting, some of them: deconstructuralism, post-structuralism, postmodernist, feminist, cultural relativism. The mind boggles at the variety of movements. And the thing is that they're all out of date in about three or four years. . . . they get used up very fast.

But there certainly is, especially under the influence of some of the high-powered graduate schools in this country like Yale, Johns Hopkins, a concern with what is the latest thing, and am I on top of it? Am I in the mode? There's also, I think, a great egotism in all academic life. Teachers are used to being up on a stage, standing up in front of the students who are a captive audience and have to listen. They believe in their own [laughs] wonderfulness. They love to hear themselves talk. Just go to any faculty meeting and you'll have a lot of pontification. They take themselves deadly seriously. They don't take the works very seriously, but they take themselves

deadly seriously, we all do. I suppose that's become even more the case.... the generation before mine, who'd been through the Second World War, probably learned through experience that their lives were rather held by a slender thread. Probably nothing they did was that important. But there's a great belief in the importance, not of the works we study, but of what we do. It doesn't matter very much in the long run. I mean [it] matters for education's sake I suppose. But the fact is...that changes pass and the works remain...and some of those works are no longer being studied. It might be better if they were. Students aren't able to differentiate between a comic strip and a tragedy.

COHEN: Talking about keeping up with research and publication in the area of faculty promotions and tenure and so on. The issue of research, publication versus teaching has been a theme at least certainly through the seventies.

JAYE: In this university that has really been set by the central administration in New Brunswick. But what became very clear, now that may change. But under—

COHEN: In the seventies?

JAYE: In the seventies and the eighties there really wasn't much difference. Under the presidency of Bloustein, [and under the] people who follow up his administration, there was a demand for publication. There should be no doubt about this. Nobody's going to get tenure, nobody's going to get promoted without that significant publication. They had to be...before Bloustein died, world-class. The university had to go out and get people from other universities to testify that this person was good enough to be a professor anywhere—at Harvard or Yale. So there was never any doubt, certainly not in English and most other things, as to the fact that publication was the key. You could be a very good teacher, that would get you nowhere. Publication was the key to advancement in this university. And that was as true in Newark as it was in New Brunswick. As true in Camden as it was in New Brunswick. It didn't matter that we were starting out with one hand tied behind our back. We were teaching a different kind of student for the most part. We had less opportunity to teach graduate courses. And when we visited our colleagues in New Brunswick, we found out their teaching load was at least a third to a half less than ours. And yet we were expected to produce the same. And of course the fact was here in Newark there were probably people who were promoted here and got tenure, might not have gotten tenure in New Brunswick. But still the expectation, the reality was one had to publish, and this was enforced by deans and provosts and promotion review committees and sections. And it would be the rare case where anybody without significant...scholarly attainments would be promoted.

That was not true when I came here. When I came here, people would be promoted to the rank of full professor as a matter of course. The result of this, for instance, in my department now, in over twenty years, only two members of the department have been promoted from associate professor to full professor. We have thirteen associate professors; some of them have been here for twenty years. Now, my guess is that the new president, Lawrence, from his statements, that this absurd concern with publication may begin to change. But up until a year or two years ago, it was clearly the preeminent factor.

COHEN: In the seventies, in the middle seventies, though, the question of promotion and tenure seems to have been quite an issue and to be quite to the fore.

JAYE: It was partly on the basis of students. The students started to say they wanted a role in this. This was back in the late sixties. And there would be almost yearly a periodic outbreak because somebody didn't get tenure. The students would protest or rampage. Fortunately, the university calendar is very cleverly constructed. And that is, we send everybody away in May.

COHEN: Send everybody away in May?

JAYE: Right. All the students disappear. So that the news of promotions didn't come out until late April, early May. So there wasn't much time for anybody to do anything about it because nobody was around. It gives administrators great power. They could make the decisions they wanted to make in June, and there's nobody around to object. And I think clever administrators do this.

COHEN: To what extent were budget and programmatic considerations from the top influential in this whole conflict about promotion?

JAYE: Well, those are hard to say because one doesn't have access to the figures. I mean, one knows that one taught more students, more classes than one's colleagues in New Brunswick, which suggests that we had less funding. But unless one had access to the figures, one wouldn't want to—I couldn't judge. I've not seen the actual budget figures. I mean I've never heard an academic yet who hasn't complained that he's not being paid enough, that he's teaching too much, and there aren't enough budget resources. I never heard one say everything's all right.

COHEN: Is it a question [of] lines?

JAYE: There's always a question. In the period of the eighties, we started growing ; we started to retract, recede. And at that point, lines were being taken away from the college, and the college had to find the departments to take them away from. Now this is a very difficult process in the university because once you have a tenured professor, there's nothing you can do about that. So it was the departments that had the decreasing enrollments or even stable enrollments, but faculty who were retiring, or who left, or junior faculty where lines could be taken away. And I suspect in the university some reappointments—and maybe even some promotions to tenure or not, which is a way of rejecting somebody—were decided, those high standards may have influenced, for budgetary reasons, the nod of reappointment or promotion of certain people.

COHEN: What's been your perception of the fairness of the promotion, the tenure procedure?

JAYE: It seems to be entirely capricious.

COHEN: Oh, could you expand on that?

JAYE: Well, because the level of expectation was set so high, the world-class scholar had two famous books published, for promotions and tenure...It was very rare that anybody came up that

we would have said—at least in Newark, at least in the English Department and I think in other departments—“well there’s no doubt about this person.” And over and over again the history of the department has been that we would recommend people, although our department was a particularly faction ridden department. For many years we struggled with a kind of deadlock which I thought affected people over the years. I thought people in my department voted for or against somebody on what I would call political grounds. I pride myself that I never did that. But there would often be split decisions, factionalism of the ugliest kind. But it was rare that you could put somebody forward, that somebody would come forward, with the expectation.... If you look at my department a number of people had been promoted only as a result of the grievance procedure.

COHEN: Yes.

JAYE: I think five people, maybe six, which just shows you how the bloody thing worked. It just didn’t work. First of all, the department’s opinion, even when it wasn’t split, wasn’t taken very seriously at higher levels.

COHEN: What was the factionalism based on?

JAYE: Well, it was partly based on, I suppose, views about what an English major at the university should be. And the bringing in from outside, which is, you know, not something that’s wrong, of people without full departmental support who had very different views about what should be done in the English courses, and the English Department, and the major than a number of people then in the department. As they do tend to harden, personalities tend to clash. Seems nonsensical. Whichever side of the faction you go to and say, “well, you know, the other people are all wrong. They’re horrible.”

COHEN: Well, the questions revolve around the questions of the canon?

JAYE: Partly...around the canon. Yes, certainly. Partly about, you know, what we want, what the department thought people should be studying. And then it turned out to look as if that was being reflected in votes of reappointment and promotion.

COHEN: And other considerations besides the canon that you think influenced it?

JAYE: Probably on the part of some people, political views.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

JAYE: Or radicalism, non-radicalism. Marxism, non-Marxism. Terrible waste of energy, utterly draining honesty, not honesty. Collegiality, non-collegiality. You know. And it has no end. I mean certain things became utterly predictable. You knew such-and-such a candidate was going to come up, such-and-such people would be voting against him. When I came up for promotion to full professor, there wasn’t a person who knew anything about this college who didn’t know that no matter what—I say this because people might say something different—but there would be two people voting against me. And sure enough, there were two people voting against me. In

a sense this is all factored in higher up... I think it's still, in a way, going on. Though there seems to be less and less to fight about. And I don't think this department is weak in that regard.

COHEN: How did the factionalism relate to what is taught?

JAYE: Well, more to do with what courses should qualify as a basic course for our literature requirement. How much of the departmental offerings should be devoted to traditional works in the canon, how much to nontraditional? What kind of...critical or research work is worthwhile and what is less worthwhile? What areas are important to study, what areas are not important, both in terms of people's own research and in terms of course offerings? Very deep, you know. There are people who think Chaucer shouldn't be taught anymore. There are people who think the Romantics course shouldn't be a year course, it should only be a semester course. But you might have a course devoted to Doris Lessing instead of Chaucer. Doris Lessing might be more important than Chaucer. Members of my department actually said that: Doris Lessing is more important than Chaucer. Well maybe, I don't know, it's very difficult...and they're not unique to this department. They're part and parcel of what's going on in most universities. And I take it now we have new things like political correctness. Academics are funny creatures really

COHEN: Well, I wanted to ask a follow up the discussion of curriculum. Why, generally speaking, not necessarily limited to this campus, why has literary studies been a battleground?

JAYE: Well, some of the tools are there to—the weapons are there to make it so. Presumably people enter their areas of study with some facility; although in many cases you wouldn't know it, in language, in discourse, in debate, in rhetoric. So they have a penchant for that. They already have a disposition for that. The second thing is,...we in literature know it's very difficult to find something new to say about Shakespeare or about Milton. So you have to find something new to say. And especially if you're livelihood's tied to it, and you have to feel important. You'd better find something, you know. This is not new, by the way. Literary criticism, which is really literary studies, ...is filled with books that begin by damning everybody else and saying that everybody else has it all wrong but *I* alone have it right. This has always been the case to some degree. It's become more the case. The new has come and said there's no use whatsoever for the old. This is the truth as we see it now. And if you don't go along with it, then you are X, Y or Zed, none of them any good. There's an enormous lack of tolerance. People have to make their living. They have to find something new to say. They have to publish...they have to be in the vanguard. They have to be new, it's not difficult to understand how it comes about. At the same time, standards of research have pretty much disappeared to a large degree.... People who are engaged in critical theory don't have much time for research.

COHEN: They're keeping up with the critical theory. What can you say about the—oh, let's go back before to what you said about the promotion criteria being capricious.

JAYE: No, I think the process is capricious.

COHEN: The process.

JAYE: That is, you never knew, one always suspected that somebody might have been promoted or not promoted because there was a committee meeting. And [the committee] felt towards the end of the day they had already promoted too many people, so [they'd] better crack down. Or that the person who came up just before for discussion was so bad that the person who came up next, who was pretty bad, didn't look so bad next to the one who came up previously. And I suppose, my view would be, that it's probably that promotion decisions should be almost universally a departmental decision process. There may be reasons for overruling it. The business of having to go out and get six famous people to testify that this person is also famous is, if nothing else, it's a testimony to one's own inadequacy.

COHEN: To what extent did the AAUP [American Association of University Professors] and the grievance procedure address that problem, the capriciousness in the procedure?

JAYE: It seems to me that this is one area, and I was president of the AAUP for a while from the Newark campus. I served on the bargaining committee for four years. I was much involved in this. But one of the very good things that the AAUP did was, for almost as long as I can remember, through President Bloustein's administration, the AAUP and the administration had been adversaries, sometimes bitterly so. But that the grievance process was one of the first things put into a contract, and it was much used because anybody who didn't get promoted or reappointed had a way of protesting. And very often the number of people who turned out to be right, that the process was abused in various ways—people didn't like this person, for personal reasons, or political reasons, or other reasons. The kinds of skullduggery that went on in the process were revealed. And one of the responses of the administration was to try to tighten the grievance process all along the line, [to] make it more and more difficult for anyone to argue a case that there was something wrong. And usually the term actually often used was that the process was capricious. It didn't make any sense. Why promote this person and not this person?

[End of Tape #1]

COHEN: We were talking about the grievance procedure.

JAYE: Well, as an example, there were a number of cases—when I say a number, every year there would be two, three, four cases, where somebody who's coming up for promotion would get a unanimous recommendation from the department, from their college, the Appointments and Promotions Committee, from the dean, from their section, and they would get turned down.

COHEN: Yes.

JAYE: And, when you ask the Promotion Review Committee why, they said: "Didn't meet the standards," in one way or another. Something very vague, they'd never name specific reasons. How could they? Because, you know, they weren't qualified to make those judgments. So one just sort of said, well, what do you have to do to get promoted? If everybody says okay, but then the top people say no, on what are they basing their decisions? As I say, almost every year, I think through the late seventies, mid-seventies, late seventies, early eighties, there were two, three, four instances of this, which is a significant number, if you consider it, out of the total number coming up for promotion that were turned down. And there are any number that either

had some mixture of these things.... And it was also found that the process was wrong, tainted or at the department level, perhaps at the dean's level; the dean had it out for somebody. Could anybody get promoted if the dean didn't want him to or her to? The dean had, in effect, a veto, should he have a veto? And the reality has been that...for a while... every campus was involved in the grievance process because it wasn't just the individual, but it's his colleagues, either who were supporting him or who had somehow not supported him but always suspected of doing something wrong. My own sense is that the possibilities for abuse were enormous. And they were revealed to be.

COHEN: Was there ever any sentiment among the faculty to do away with tenure?

JAYE: Never. Never....I mean, it's true that academics are strange creatures and they don't live in the real world. And that's one of the problems is that they're so isolated. I suspect often lost touch with reality. That's why everything we do is so important and self-important. But I don't think I've ever heard anyone put forward the proposition—even in the administration—of doing away with tenure. Tenure is a thing that—you might look at it saying, you know, is it really necessary? It's only when it's necessary that you would know that it was necessary. Most of the time it may not be, but there may come times when it is.

COHEN: Can you expand on that?

JAYE: Well, tenure is the fundamental protection for an idea of freedom. That is, the freedom for someone who's pursuing knowledge, I'm not saying capturing knowledge, pursuing it to formulate, express, say what she or he thinks might be a valid thought. Even if it's a tentative thought, nothing's unthinkable. And there are times when that has to be protected. It happened in this university before I came here with some distinguished faculty members. Was it Moses Finley?

COHEN: Yes.

JAYE: Went on to Cambridge, I think, that the thought process has to be protected. Most of the time there's no need for it. But there could come times, if one hasn't forgotten the past, when it is needed. And in fact it may be that we are approaching again with this idea of political correctness, with charges against people because they somehow have the wrong ideas, where it is absolutely necessary. Absolutely necessary so that an administration can't browbeat the faculty and say: "If you don't do this," explicitly or implicitly say, "we're going to get rid of you." It's [a] vital...ingredient in the idea of a university.

COHEN: I wanted to look into the area of affirmative action hiring, and let's start with minority hiring.

JAYE: I don't think that the department, our department, that I'm aware of, was ever faced with affirmative action because nobody ever came and said, You now have to fulfill these numbers and quotas. Certainly there's always been an awareness in the department that.... no, I'm not sure that there is. First of all, the figures in the department aren't statistically significant; twenty full-time people. We say ten percent of these are Chinese, twelve percent are American Indian,

forty percent black, three percent Jewish. It's a nonsense in terms of those numbers. But certainly there's an attempt by the department, I don't know how overtly, to see that in fact there was a diversity. And I think it was a sense of the times as much as anything else, you know. But ideally, in my mind—this is true of both, I think, blacks and of women. Although, I don't think we.... I don't know how conscious it was. I don't think we ever went out consciously and hired a woman.

COHEN: That's what I want to ask, what mechanisms have been used, especially for the seventies into the eighties?

JAYE: Well, obviously there are fields that you might think that, you know, you would find more black people or women. I don't think it's as big a problem in our discipline. The problem has probably been in the promotion of women. They've always been, I think, more than half of the department. I haven't counted... just looking around a room, half the department are women. But how many are at a higher rank is a problem of why? But I think maybe—probably—there's a general agreement it's a good thing to have that kind of diversity in a department. From my own personal point of view, I wouldn't care if everybody in the department was black, green, blue, male or female. I think that it seems a nonsense as a criterion for being a university member of the faculty. If you're a faculty member, it doesn't seem to me that race or color or gender or religion or something should determine faculties. You have all women, you have all men, you have all blacks, all greens, all whites, all Indians. But generally I suppose it is a good idea to have some diversity. The problem is to find qualified people. If you're looking for that diversity and attract them here as opposed to elsewhere, because it is difficult to attract very, very good people to here, to Newark. Partly on the basis of reputation, partly on the basis of opportunities. Here they have to teach three courses a semester, somewhere else they might teach two one semester and one somewhere else. They might have more secretarial support, more travel support, more of an opportunity to teach PhD-level students. We don't have a PhD program in our department. So it becomes difficult to attract certain people.

COHEN: What can you say about the—

JAYE: We've ended up in our department attracting people who were fired or let go or not appointed elsewhere for nonacademic reasons, what might be called political reasons, or reasons other than their academic work. Some of them with very, very superb credentials, but in fact came here. And one thinks that they came to our department because there weren't places for them elsewhere.

COHEN: You say people left for political reasons?

JAYE: No, left other universities.

COHEN: At other universities.

JAYE: Well, left—were let go.

COHEN: Yes.

JAYE: Were fired or not appointed or reappointed or given tenure at other places came into our department.

COHEN: In the seventies the women faculty filed a class action suit claiming discrimination in promotion. I was wondering what perceptions you had of that?

JAYE: Well, I don't know anything about the class action. But I'll give you kind of anecdotal history. I once did a tally of women candidates who were at one stage in our departmental history. We had lots of assistant professors who had to be reappointed or appointed to associate professor, promoted with tenure. And I became aware that one of the members of our department—she was one of the central figures in the women's movement in the college and the university—had voted against more women candidates than I had. In fact I had voted, I think, against two, and she had voted against six. And I put that down to political reasons. But it turned out that my votes on women were much better than one of the female activists, etc. Because there has to be the right kind of woman I suppose to get that kind of support. I found that an ironic comment from someone who thinks a lot of this stuff is nonsense. What is the reality? Well, the reality in our department, I think—and limited to statistics—is that women in the seventies were reappointed and promoted to associate professors, I would guess, with the same statistical frequency as males. The problem has been that they haven't been appointed to full professor, but neither were men in our department. It's only in the last two years that from the ranks, where this is close to bringing somebody in from the outside, that we had promoted people to full professor: two men and one woman. So in our department I don't know that it's statistically meaningful except that we didn't go around and hire women at the full-professor level, which may be significant, but then, given the standards of the university, it might again be difficult to attract people. But I don't think we search for somebody at that level anyway. So it's very hard to say in our university if that's the case. And if I look through the department, if you ask me, do I think there's great injustice here in the case of race or of gender? I would say, no, generally there isn't. I think there's something wrong with the system because I think there are people who should be promoted to full professor who are eminently deserving of it, and some of them are women. In fact most of them are probably women because there's a large number of women in the department at the associate level. But I can't see, myself, any specific signs of that.

COHEN: I want to go back to....

JAYE: I mean being a good scholar or good teacher doesn't seem to me to have any relationship between either race or gender. So, I don't know. And in my department I can't see incidences of injustice. Those that I have seen, though, seem to be against women, are based more on political grounds in the department, as it were, as opposed to on the basis of gender.

COHEN: I want to go back a bit to the question of the students coming through into the college through the seventies. What can you say about their level of preparation coming through?

JAYE: Well, in my first few years here... My own background is that I came through—I identify with the students who come through our college. I went through much the same process. I went through public schools in New York. I went through City College, a free school, etc. I

think in my first few years here—although, we always complain about our students—the level was probably pretty good. They were not rich students. A lot of them had to work.

COHEN: In the sixties?

JAYE: Yes. But the level was probably pretty high. Whereas I would say that the general level is higher than it is now. Different standards, different temperament, more need to work harder. I think for whatever reason, the SAT figures, if somebody ever goes through them—not that they're the ultimate arbiter of all things—but I think probably reflect this. Certainly verbal abilities [have declined] and the number of transfer students has increased... Whether it's because the schools have gotten—public schools—have gotten worse or not, I don't know. But it certainly has declined. But there are always students in our college, and a reasonable number of really, very good students who are here. There are always a reasonable number of very good students, and that, I think for most teachers, is a great pleasure.

COHEN: Now I want to go back to something we briefly touched on, and that is the effects of the anti-Vietnam War movement on this campus, the effects on teaching let's say.

JAYE: Well, there was a time, and I think we referred to this earlier, the protests we called them. You were supposed to boycott the teaching in protest of this war. It always seemed to me absurd for reasons I stated earlier. So, I never followed those protests. This was never, I think partially because of the nature of the student body, a terribly radical college. All the people went home in the afternoons. People just weren't around enough. I'm not sure the logistics of this college made it possible for there to be a terribly active antiwar movement. But there certainly was some... I never found it disrupting teaching. I think... where it affected people were the number of people who were staying out of the Army by getting deferments. And once in a while you hear the argument, if I don't pass this or that, I'll get drafted. So that put one on the conscience. I imagine most of us were against the war in Vietnam to varying degrees. I myself remember wanting to go in to march. I was with a colleague, and then we didn't actually. So afterwards they were burning the American flag. I mean I was all in favor of protesting against the war in Vietnam. I wasn't particularly in favor of burning the American flag. Nor did I think that the Vietnamese were the paragons of all virtue. I mean it was a... troubled time. And I suppose less trouble for this campus, I suspect, because of the nature of the student body, non-residential, than it was in many other places. I don't know what it would have been like had actions here been more extreme. But they weren't. I mean there were things, you know. Blood was thrown on things. But it didn't compare with what was going on at Berkeley or Stanford or Minnesota.

COHEN: I've heard about the blood incident, what was that?

JAYE: I think—

JAYE: I don't think I saw it. I don't think I saw the action. I became quite friendly with one of the leaders of the radical movement on the campus.

COHEN: Who was that?

JAYE: I don't remember his name. [Laughs] I suppose he's now a lawyer. But when I was chairing the Courses of Study Committee, we had a lot of open hearings, and we had students on the faculty. And this one fellow—and he never really took any courses; I think he once came into my course, and I made him drop it because there was too much work—but we became sort of friendly, though we were often on absolute opposite sides. But I think there were just bags of blood of some kind thrown against a wall in the center of the campus or something, as I vaguely remember. Only vaguely. I'm not sure that that's a high point of the life of the campus.

COHEN: It's a vivid image.

JAYE: Yes. I mean actually it's not so vivid, because I don't really remember it vividly. But anyway, it was a sign of the times. So I guess it's a signifier for the sign of the times.

COHEN: Okay, I want to through your perceptions of the various administrations of the university starting from the university president, Mason Gross. How would you assess his tenure?

JAYE: Well Mason Gross—I mean I was there not even as an assistant professor; I was an instructor. I was working on my Ph.D. I was teaching four courses. That was instructors then. I remember my salary was six thousand six hundred dollars when I started here as an instructor teaching four courses a semester.

[Break in recording]

COHEN: And we were talking about President Gross.

JAYE: Yes, I was an instructor when Gross was president. But it was a very clubbable place the university in those days.

COHEN: Clubbable?

JAYE: Clubbable. And I suppose that Gross was a clubbable man. He came from the faculty. The faculty liked him. He seemed to like the faculty. Everything was done in a clubbable, informal, collegial way. There's probably much to be criticized in the present political environment as an all-male bastion of contacts. Didn't affect me very much. The only people who affected me were the chairmen of my department. But the university grew and Bloustein came on, I think promising to stay only for five years. And staying for nigh on fifteen or twenty. The administration burgeoned. It's amazing what resources the administration managed to garner unto itself. When I came here there was a dean and an assistant dean. Today there are half a dozen deans and about twenty-five thousand associate deans, all with offices and reserved parking spaces. It's probably even worse in New Brunswick. But Bloustein made this a high-powered university. And the result was a burgeoning of administration, some of it wasteful and obviously inefficient, and maybe all universities are inefficient. But Rutgers University has claimed to being among the least efficient administrations in the world. And with it went a certain, I suppose, kind of arrogance towards Newark. As president of the AAUP, I can tell you

that often the people who worked for Bloustein disagreed with him, especially when it came to faculty matters and bargaining issues, etc. The fact was, for instance, that in twenty years now since Bloustein became president, the university had never settled the faculty contract on time—ever, ever! Not once. Even when all the people around Bloustein were telling him to settle, he wouldn't—

COHEN: He wouldn't?

JAYE: He wouldn't. I had worked out agreements privately with people on the other side of the administration, and they came back and said, the president won't buy it.. It was a time, to limit faculty power. As far as the college goes, the college has been reasonably fortunate. Mostly, in my view and in the college's view by its actions, the two mistakes it has made have been bringing people in from the outside; in both those instances, Gilliland and Robey, they were both, as it were, chucked out by the faculty, which took a lot of doing. Those were two people brought in from the outside. The people brought in from the inside, most notably Norman Samuels—and I think under Norman Samuels the college prospered as much as it could in hard times—and Blumenthal before him, have been pretty good for the college. They understood the college and its unique needs.

COHEN: What can you say about Malcolm Talbott's tenure, as vice president from sixty-five to seventy-two, I guess. He was also acting dean after Gilliland...

JAYE: Malcolm was an old-fashioned liberal soul. He lived in Newark. He was a lawyer, and he wanted to be liked. He wanted to be liked by people who were never going to like him. The criticism of him is generally that he wasn't strong enough in protecting the interests of the college.

COHEN: What does that mean?

JAYE: Well, there was a time when the emphasis was on the community as opposed to the college. And Malcolm was somebody who had to mediate between the two. And perhaps nobody in his situation could do better. But there wasn't a sense, I think, that he achieved a great deal; but perhaps by just keeping it going, he achieved a great deal under those circumstances.

COHEN: What's your sense of his role in the negotiations during the takeover of Conklin Hall?

JAYE: My own view—I told you I was on the Emergency Committee at the time—was that he in effect caved in. Doesn't matter. A lot of things that were agreed to, you know, passed by the boards. It's easy to make agreements, it's a little more difficult to fulfill them. And he wasn't to be trusted, I think, the faculty felt. He smiled and smiled and could still be a villain. And still there was a feeling among a large, large section of the faculty, and I think... the faculty didn't have much confidence in him.

COHEN: Because he caved in, too.

JAYE: You know, here it is, what, fifteen, twenty years later and I can hardly remember those issues. At the time we felt he caved in to all the demands being made by the students, that nobody could ever fail a course or whatever the curriculum demands were, that certain things would be done, and money would be paid. It all seemed.... I suppose what the feeling was he caved to was that a university could be held ransom by a physical act of force, of violence. That the university could be governed by physical acts of violence.

COHEN: How would you assess Henry Blumenthal's deanship?

JAYE: I think pretty good. Pretty good. But it was still at a time where the university was growing but not in an enormous—it didn't seem to me at that time that he was so much directing the growth, you know, or pushing behind it. But he was mediating it. He was sort of controlling it in a kind of wise way.

COHEN: And then the acting dean after him for one year was Gil Panson.

JAYE: Right. Gil was very good. I never understood why Gil didn't take the job. Very clever, very smart, very wise politically. He was very able. I don't know why he didn't stay on. As a matter of fact, I vaguely remember, but I can't swear to it, his differences, as anybody in Newark would have, with the New Brunswick administration were probably too great, that he couldn't get enough support from them for Newark to make it worth his while. I think that's right.

[Break in recording]

COHEN: Yes. We were talking....

JAYE: I'm not a really good person to ask about Robey because I had a major battle with him, a really, truly major battle, and I was influential in getting rid of him as dean. I was one of the conspiracy, as it were. [Laughs] Not that it was really secret. Robey was brought in from outside. Young man, too clever, too clever. Anyway, he's dead, and I don't want to speak badly of the dead. So I can just tell you he was not for this place. And the faculty finally decided to get rid of him, and it was a faculty movement. A group of faculty, distinguished faculty, got together and said he has to go. And he went.

COHEN: Some wrap-up questions, anything that we've talked about you'd like to come back to, a footnote or elaborate?

JAYE: No. The nature of this kind of interview is somewhat disjointed. I suppose when you put it all together, somebody will form an impression of the place.

COHEN: I hope so. [Laughter] Anything that we haven't covered that we should have?

JAYE: No, I think we've done a fair reminiscence.

COHEN: Only fair?

JAYE: Well, one can always do better.

COHEN: Thank you. Thank you very much.

[End of Tape #2]

-----[End of Interview]-----

Reviewed and edited by Catherine Carey 9/13/2012