

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

An Interview with

ANTONIO RUFINO

Conducted by

Gilbert Cohen

DECEMBER 21, 1990

INTERVIEW: Antonio Rufino

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GILBERT COHEN: This is December 21, 1990. This is Gil Cohen. I'm meeting with Professor Antonio Rufino, who is professor emeritus of Italian. Professor Rufino was at Rutgers in Newark from 1965 to 1987. And we are meeting in the Dana Library. What I usually try to get is background on the other campus, just to get some people, you know, for some future historian. How would you describe the old Rector Street campus for some future historian, what did it look like, what did it feel like?

ANTONIO RUFINO: We started.... We had classes many places, on Broad Street and all over. So we had to jump from one street to the other before they built the new campus, and we occupied Conklin Hall. Now, before that we were teaching everywhere. So it was rather difficult. It was a difficult system. That was in sixty-five. And then we moved to Conklin, I don't know exactly, but it could have been sixty-seven, sixty-eight, we had a permanent home in Conklin. At that time...this is crucial also. We had a lot of students. We had a lot of students because the foreign languages just were required, later on, I think 1971 they dropped the requirement. We had a lot of classes of students, and also personnel, teachers, instructors.

COHEN: Afterwards these requirements were dropped. Yes. Well, I want to get into that later when we're talking about curriculum. When they were planning the new campus, were you in any way involved in the planning of your department or the facilities? Did they get any input from you or your colleagues?

RUFINO: I guess at that time, the heads of the department were, I don't know how powerful they are now, but at that time they had a lot of power. In hiring and firing of course. They never asked for our input on anything, you know.

COHEN: They never asked what?

RUFINO: Input.

COHEN: Oh, input, from the teaching faculty.

RUFINO: In my opinion, they were all the time, because I've been around for years and years, but as usual when you begin as an instructor, you know, nobody asks for your opinion, ever. You are just waiting for your renewal, it was renewable yearly. It's of course automatic, you know, from instructor to assistant professor. So then we have this.... But we were everywhere, you know, teaching. But we had a lot of students. But this is in sixty-five, at the end of the sixties it got really, there was a lot of movement, the students were organizing, it reflected the national situation.

COHEN: How would you say they were moving? How did you see them moving?

RUFINO: Well, there was the Black Organization of Students, and there were other organizations, socialist groups, the Trotskyists. They were really very politicized, a lot of politics with the students. The black were still...well I still remember, I had a black student, a girl, I guess she's now in the Rutgers admissions office. She asked me about...well, you know, she asked my advice, my opinion. She was in this organization of blacks, black students. They knew what to do, they became independent and had their own organization, they didn't need any advice from anybody. I don't remember exactly, but they occupied Conklin, when was it, sixty-eight?

COHEN: That was February sixty-nine, February of sixty-nine, yes.

RUFINO: Yes, yes.

COHEN: Yes. I'd like to get into that. I'm sorry. You were onto something, and I interrupted you.

RUFINO: Oh, no. Conklin was where we had our classes and offices, it was occupied. And finally Talbott, who was the vice president...

COHEN: He was vice president and acting dean at the time, yes.

RUFINO: He had a compromise, made an agreement with the students. The students abandoned, opened up, it was only Conklin.

COHEN: Yes, what conditions do you think existed at the time to encourage that action?

RUFINO: There was an awakening of, how do you say, race-consciousness among blacks, I guess. And the movement was general, Martin Luther King, he was killed.

COHEN: 1968, yes.

RUFINO: Right. They were really really active. We had a confrontation also. The president who came here, with the blacks.

COHEN: When was that? What was that episode?

RUFINO: I don't remember exactly because...I remember the times, there were really a lot of complaints. Before they created, I guess, the black studies.

COHEN: Afro-American Studies. You said the president of the university?

RUFINO: Yes, there was a meeting when Bloustein came in.

COHEN: Well, Bloustein came in seventy-one, seventy-two. So Gross would have been here.

RUFINO: Well, I, then it is...

COHEN: Okay. So what was—

RUFINO: I remember that there were big discussions. Really, sometimes the politics, it all depended on the students. There was a lot of noise. But I guess the political strength was losing, you know. We are talking about the Nixon years. But the main part really was the center...the main reason was the Vietnam War.

COHEN: Yes, that's what I wanted to ask you.

RUFINO: The draft, a lot of students were objecting to the war. I guess they were sincere. I wouldn't say that the majority of the students were against. I can't say something about the faculty because the faculty was a little...kept their own council, they weren't as open as the students, you know. But there were a lot of faculty people involved in the protests. And there was really, how do you say, connection between the students protesting and the faculty. But there was, you know, a lot of camaraderie. The students were really close to faculty with whom they shared their concerns.

COHEN: How did you feel about the issue? Well, first let me ask, what did you feel was the appropriate role of a faculty member in the national debate?

RUFINO: I always felt the faculty had, I wouldn't say it was a duty, but they couldn't really hide themselves. They had to come out into the open, you know, to express their opinions, to participate. What I used to do, and the students knew that I was, even, the majority of the students were against the war, but there were a lot of conservative students then also.

COHEN: But how did you feel with it in the classroom, out of the classroom? Did you draw any lines? How could you....

RUFINO: I tried to be, as a professor, as professional as possible. I was teaching. But, I never really refused the topics. In actuality, when we had to talk we talked about politics even though my classes, you know, were languages literature. But if we had the chance we would talk openly, you know.

COHEN: Now, you were teaching Italian?

RUFINO: Yes.

COHEN: Any other languages?

RUFINO: Well, Italian...

COHEN: Well, did you teach Italian literature?

RUFINO: Yes.

COHEN: In the original language?

RUFINO: Yes.

COHEN: How would this then come up? How would you relate that in the classroom situation to what was going around us?

RUFINO: Well, it could be done in Italian, our discussion. There was always a way of linking the American situation and the political situation. We'd talk about the culture of the country and the politics part of the culture. Besides, you know they would ask, they were curious about the political system, the Italian parliament. The number of parties. It was also the information that you would give students about the political system in Europe, Italy, France, which is a multi-party system. At the time the communist party was pretty strong in Italy, they were curious why... There was a linkage between the situation here and the situation in Europe. On the other hand, European students were doing the same thing. It started in sixty-eight in Paris and then in Italy for years and years, rebelling or protesting. And then when you talk about literature, contemporary literature, writers, Italian writers were pretty politically committed.

COHEN: Did you feel any constraints not to talk about the war when you were teaching?

RUFINO: Well, never.

COHEN: No?

RUFINO: Well, I was outspoken at the time, whatever I thought I said it. Besides it was encouraged, there was... I think we deluded ourselves, there were actually more possibility for more open debates. And we talked more and more openly. Because we thought that that was the consequence of this turmoil, that you could talk openly. But it didn't last too long, little by little. The openness didn't...

COHEN: It was what?

RUFINO: Well, it was self-restricted.

COHEN: So you were outspoken. And what was your outspoken position at that time?

RUFINO: Well, I was, I would say I was certainly an ultra liberal. I wouldn't say a radical, but I was sympathetic to the left, to the American left, the New Left. And I guess students knew that.

COHEN: Do you think that that position, your public position, had any effect on promotion and tenure decisions along the way, in your career?

RUFINO: Well, really it's hard to tell.... I guess some weight, it carried some weight. But I wasn't really outspoken. It was just, I had my opinions. I expressed them when I had a chance to. I wouldn't call me a rebel.

COHEN: You weren't manning the barricades.

RUFINO: No, no. It was not that. But when I had a chance to state my position, I would. I guess it affected. I guess personally...they knew what I was. But this was 1971, I guess later on when I left, now I'm jumping to when I left I guess. When I was trying to get the full professorship at that time. They knew it, we had a confrontation, it was clear. Even though I wasn't—I never considered myself really a danger to the institutions.

COHEN: You mentioned confrontation.

RUFINO: Well, no, no, no.

COHEN: What was that about?

RUFINO: Well, the full professorship. We had a conflict with what they called the section, the Italian section, of the university. But the head of that section there was a conservative. So he was really...he wasn't too sympathetic to my positions and he said it. But anyway....

COHEN: What year was that?

RUFINO: This was in eighty-five. So because, you know, I had my bibliography and I had been publishing in an Italian newspaper, left-leaning newspaper. My articles had appeared. We ran a discussion on the titles of the articles. Really when you publish an article, you are not responsible for the titles. The editors decide on the titles. So this guy was really wondering about one title. And I said I don't know, read the article, see what's in there, and then we'll talk about it. Which means that sometimes they did only the titles, they don't have time to....

COHEN: Were there any other articles that you have published in your career, articles, books?

RUFINO: Well, I really had, how would you say? Well, rich but... substantial bibliographies. You know, the articles, essays, and the books. But I'm talking about my farewell to the college you know. But at the beginning, it was really exciting. The sixties, and the end of the sixties and the seventies. The students were...you got more satisfaction from this exchange of opinion. They were more left socially and politically. Not that we were talking politics all the time, but the chance we had, we would. And also, out of the classroom because we had clubs—The Italian Club, the Association of the Italian American Students, which was a little bit more conservative. Or worried parties and social parties and so on. But The Italian Club was more interested in cultural things and politics also.

COHEN: What was your involvement with the Italian Association?

RUFINO: Well, we were....

COHEN We you the advisor?

RUFINO: Yes. I advised, but usually they had...they established it themselves. At the end they had the combination of the activities or these parties. They were good occasions to get together, you know.

COHEN: So how did you deal with that relationship? Here we have a liberal, left-leaning professor dealing with conservative students in this club.

RUFINO: The most conservative student would say, Oh, Dr. Rufino, you know, I think my views are different from yours, I disagree with you. But, very well, that's it. They didn't hesitate to state or express...But otherwise there was no clash, ideological clash, no. They would listen but some, I would say the more impressive would say take the floor, and most of the students would sit and listen.

COHEN: Did you have links with the Italian-American community in the area at that time? Either community involvement or...?

RUFINO: I had contact with them occasionally as an associate professor. My promotion was rejected. So we had contact with [unintelligible] some brothers, he was a politician.

COHEN: Yes.

RUFINO: But they are two brothers, one was even a member of the faculty, in what role?

COHEN: [unintelligible]. Well known in the state.

RUFINO: We had some contact, but I don't think that he mobilized anything. But we, we met him. He was a member of the faculty. I don't know what was his function in the college.

COHEN: I'm not sure.

RUFINO: He had a title. So I guess the college had to do something, you know.

COHEN: I wanted to.... we're jumping around. Going back to sort of the big picture of the new campus. How did you feel that the planning and the construction of the new campus, how did it affect the mission or the vision or what this university was about in Newark? How did you feel about that?

RUFINO: Really, I sensed that the college was going in a different direction, the classical liberal arts college was no longer there. Especially at the end of it, before I left, the orientation has changed. The emphasis on business...as a matter of fact I think that the strongest department was the business.

COHEN: How did you see it at the time—let's say 1967, 1966, the first building I think was Conklin are completed; sixty-seven Dana Library opened up. By sixty-eight the campus was dedicated. The move was effected. At that transitional time, what did you see as the new mission of the university?

RUFINO: At that time I agreed with the direction and the objectives of the college, a liberal arts college. I liked the principles. And at that time, really the emphasis on business and administration and all this accounting was not even taken into consideration, you know. It was a minor aspect of the college, that department. But little by little I guess they gained ground. But the humanities, it was perfect, a part of a liberal education. And science of course was a part also, history. These were the essence of the liberal arts education.

COHEN: What was happening to turn this around? What were the pressures working to bring about this transformation, this dominance of the business and professional programs?

RUFINO: I guess the.... Well, I guess it is a reflection of the general political and economic situation. Especially in the eighties, there was complete reversal on what was the practicality of education, you had to be practical, where the jobs are. So then the education, the liberal arts backgrounds became irrelevant to pursuit of accounting, what has it got to do with accounting if you know world history, civilization, languages, literatures.

COHEN: But what was happening economically, politically in the country which made business, management paramount? Why were they not relevant in the late sixties and early seventies? And why did they become the major concern?

RUFINO: Well, I guess it's the fact that we have a Republicans won a series of elections and gave the country a different direction. By the consequence the campus changed. Because it's based on, you know, the market demands, the market demands people in these fields, you know. But it's still.... for instance teaching, it disappeared completely from.... there were no students into teaching because the perspective, the financial perspective, was very bleak. There wasn't money there really. So then the students who went into accounting, business administration because that's where the jobs were.

COHEN: What was open to a liberal arts student in the sixties, middle sixties, late sixties, that wasn't open to the liberal arts students in the late seventies into the early eighties?

RUFINO: They say that really students vote with their feet. They were enrolling in these new...this new courses of studies. Nobody would major anymore in French, Italian, Russian, or even history, but they would in the sixties.

COHEN: But they would in the sixties?

RUFINO: Yes, they would.

COHEN: Why would they accept a liberal arts curriculum earlier and not accept a liberal arts curriculum in the eighties?

RUFINO: Well, there was an open-mindedness. They were more open-minded, they knew that they had to learn about the world. They weren't too concerned about getting rich, the initial starting salaries, they never talked about that. But no, at least when I left, they lost their heads. They thought they could start with fifty or sixty thousand a year. At that time this was entering into the picture, the student was taught to learn and so see...

COHEN: Weren't the students in the sixties also concerned about jobs? They must have had to be concerned about what they were going to do with that degree in Italian or English Literature or History or whatever the case may be.

RUFINO: Well, I suppose they were concerned about the job market. But to me, they didn't seem to worry. They knew that the country would have places for them. They were teaching also. People went into teaching. They knew that teaching wasn't as rewarding as any other job in business. So I guess there was, but generally, it wasn't a concern. The students weren't too concerned with that. I mean they knew that they'd have to look for a job after school. But they knew they would find something.

COHEN: In the seventies and the eighties, what kinds of opportunities, job opportunities, were opening up that were available to students in the later years compared to what was available to the students in their earlier years? In your perception.

RUFINO: There was.... as usual there was no sudden change. But little by little the students were, I would say, pragmatic. They knew what the cost would be to pay for getting themselves a future. But there were students going into medicine also. So this also was part of...the possibilities in the medical profession were enormous, there was rich prospective wealth there.

COHEN: How would you compare the degree of concern of the students on the Newark campus about getting a job with students in other universities, comparable universities? Was there more concern here, less concern? Can you make any generalization?

RUFINO: Well, if you consider the background, the social background of the students, the students who are coming here to get an education, they knew that they would improve. Knew that they were opening up possibilities. In relation to their parents, they would do better than their parents because they would be getting this education regardless of the major they had. They knew that.... I'm talking about the students of Italian origin, working-class parents. The students they knew that they would have... I would say that there was this drive also in the families to...but education I guess was their immediate concern. Their immediate goal was getting an education and then later on finding a job. But later on, getting a job it became more important—as in the premise was getting a job. So to get a job you have to go into this course of studies. I guess this was the difference that I saw.

COHEN: Again, getting back to the campus, conditions on the campus, how was faculty recruitment affected by the perception of crime and disorder? Do you have any feeling for that? Any difficulty recruiting faculty during that period because of....

RUFINO: Oh, no. I don't think.... We hired people coming from everywhere. I was and am still living in New York. Newark never.... There was never, we'll let's say, a risky job, you know. Having a job didn't imply you know danger. I mean, the faculty was... As a matter of fact, the faculty has always been good, we've always had well prepared people here. But sometimes I would say they're better prepared than they should be. Sometimes the students, the level of the students, educational level of students we get. But, in my opinion, there has always been a possibility that students could learn whatever they wanted here. I never sensed this fear on the part of the faculty, they would come to Newark.

COHEN: How about the students? I mean generally, how did it affect the conditions, this perception, affect student recruitment generally?

RUFINO: Well, I think the students were more concerned than the faculty. But then they are...this was, I would say, a commuters' college. They would come in by car and leave. I guess they had activities here in the evening, at night, at the campus center. But most students would come in cars. They wouldn't stop here to.... So in that case, you know, some parents expressed fear about their children coming to Newark. But I guess that Newark has still remained...it has really kept a lot of students away from Newark.

COHEN: Did many of the students, or some of the students, that go to some of the surrounding colleges, state colleges, Montclair, private schools....

RUFINO: A few. I remember a few students I know of that went to state college. They knew that Rutgers had a name that carried value. A Rutgers diploma is better than a state college diploma. But not too many students, they knew that Rutgers was a good place to be.

COHEN: Do you recall the 1973, when the acting provost, Horace dePodwin, made a statement to the board of governors about declining enrollments, the need for development on the Newark campus, and its effect on the board of governors? Do you have any recollection of that episode? He was acting provost then.

RUFINO: Oh, when was that?

COHEN: It created headlines when he gave some statements to the effect that...he painted a rather negative picture of how the campus was developing and the need for more enrollment and more development. And that created headlines.

RUFINO: Well, I remember this. I guess there were really creating...this was self-defeating, because they said Newark was losing students because of the name of the place, where the campus is. And a lot of people would not believe that. But it was wrong to and say that. Really, my opinion is that Rutgers has always been an asset to the city.

COHEN: Yes.

RUFINO: It's hard to read people's minds. Because, you know, there's something political about it. Dealing with the numbers, the decline in the enrollments, putting pressure on New Brunswick, and vise-versa, New Brunswick would take advantage of the decline to cut funds.

COHEN: You were in the city at the time that the Newark riots occurred. At least you were teaching at that time.

RUFINO: Yes.

COHEN: That occurred in July of sixty-seven. So you probably weren't here at the time that the riots occurred. But after you came back to the campus in September for the fall semester, what effect did it have on the environment, the mood, if you can recall?

RUFINO: Well, you know, I was really shocked by what happened here. But it didn't really effect...really, when I came back, it was, how do you say? Routine. The college hadn't been...it observed but it wasn't affected by it. Even though it was Newark. It was if nothing had happened when I came back. I know it was in the summer. Teachers were here, instructors.

COHEN: Were you here?

RUFINO: No, I wasn't. But some teachers were teaching summer courses.

COHEN: So what was going on when you got back? Any conversations?

RUFINO: Yes.

COHEN: What were people saying?

RUFINO: That was.... the interest in the social things, the social situation was cooling off. Our job is to teach, to keep the school operating. But nothing was expressed, no sympathy for this loss of human lives here. It was as if it happened miles and miles away from here. So the campus didn't react to this.

COHEN: So you're saying there was no—

RUFINO: There was a fear. But a few months later it just...life continued, you know. So sometimes at faculty meetings we mentioned this. But didn't find the courage to express our opinion or sympathy for the victims. That was just...It was a flash, an explosion. And then by and by back to normal.

COHEN: After that period, did you and your colleagues have any thoughts about how that would affect the future of the campus? Sort of make any predictions to yourself about how you felt this was going to affect it?

RUFINO: If there was fear, it was that this danger or fear of risk would keep students away from the campus. And it happened. There's always a minority of people who would, you know,

attribute importance to these things. But, the students kept coming here. Because it really is a commuting college, they'd come by car.

COHEN: How do you think the campus would have developed if the riots had never occurred?

RUFINO: I don't know if it affected the development, Rutgers College expanded here. Rutgers College, also the New Jersey Institute of Technology and the other colleges, community colleges, the school of medicine and dentistry.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Yes.

RUFINO: They have created here a new city. I remember really when it was from slums. Those people are gone, they have disappeared because they built the school. The school is really...who knows what happened to the people who were living here. Who knows?

COHEN: Sometimes they come by and remind you of the fact that they have had that experience. They come back: I used to live here.

RUFINO: Oh, yes.

COHEN: In 1969, so less than two years after the Newark riots, we were talking before about the takeover of Conklin Hall. What conditions existed at the time to lead to that kind of action? What was going on in the black community, among black students, to lead to that action?

[Break in recording]

RUFINO: Well, to me, it's always been a defect...the school, the college, should have been more interested in things happening in Newark. We have the urban department, I guess they know more about this connection between the college and the community, probably they know much more than I would know about these things. Also the School of Architecture, they should know more than we do because...building a new city, that's really what they should have done, no?

COHEN: Now after the takeover, there was considerable discussion. One of the central, *the* central demand, perhaps, of the demands of the black students was admission standards. And do you remember, do you recall, the discussions in the faculty around the admissions demands? What the differences were among the faculty at that time?

RUFINO: The students wanted more, I think, black students generally wanted more black instructors. The percentage of blacks on the faculty was minimal. They made concessions to black students. But I thought that it is really a question...I'm not saying anything original here...but they had a survival problem. So college is not a priority in a black family. This is the real point because this should be in this city; it is a black city, and we have a white college. This is what they were saying. There should be more black students, is what they were saying. And in this sense they were right. But finding students was a little bit difficult. There was remedial work for them, but it's what you get here from the high schools, it was frightening. The instructional

level was very low. I guess the black students were aware of that. They were uncomfortable...not that there was tremendous competition for grades, but still to sit in class, a lot of them felt uncomfortable I guess.

COHEN: Talking about remediation, when the Academic Foundations Center was established—and then became the Academic Foundations Department—what did you see as its role? Well, number one, it's role. Okay.

RUFINO: I think it was a good idea. This was successful. They accomplished much, to offer young people a possibility to catch up. What they didn't get was that sometimes it requires a lot of time. Catching up is not easy. But the principle is good, it's fair that they should be offered this possibility, a remedy that they never got. I don't know how this is...sometimes you don't know how successful they are. But I suppose they are honest and objective, I suppose they would say if the program was successful or not. I guess it is.

COHEN: On the admissions question, there was considerable discussion in the faculty about lowering standards, raising standards, letting more in, this sort of thing. How did you feel about that?

RUFINO: Well, really my opinion is that you have to take even, I'd say, weaker students. A college is not a high school or a junior high school, you know. The level would sink. In a college, weaker students wouldn't be a drag.

COHEN: Would be? Would not be.

RUFINO: Would not be a drag. As a matter of fact...

COHEN: So why weren't some faculty members aware of that very thing? That's a point you often hear. You're saying that it would not be a drag. Other people would say that...

RUFINO: This is mathematical. The average, you know, would go down. But this is not a mathematical question. We're talking about minds. If you let students who are less prepared sit with better prepared students, if you can animate the classroom, they will benefit from the contribution. You create complexes in the weaker students. To me, college at that level, it shouldn't be an obstacle. You keep the door wide open, and if you keep the door open enough to let people by coming here make progress, why not?

COHEN: How much student advisement was going on during that period? How important is it in retaining students?

RUFINO: It is important. But the point is that the students, in my experience you have to force students to get advised. Otherwise they will ignore you. Seniors and juniors, experienced, they tell each other you know, rather than go to an advisor; they get this advice from their peers often, from the older students. But if you can force students in college to see advisors it would be good. But in general that was my experience. They don't see faculty people too willingly. There is always...it changes really. There isn't much exchange between the students and the faculty. To

me there is a kind of separation...they are not enemy camps. [Laughter] They are different camps.

COHEN: Back to students. What recollections do you have of some of your outstanding students?

RUFINO: Well, really you can be scientific about this. How many? What's the percentage of students, the ratio? But some students are very good, you know. As good as students at the Ivy colleges. It is really a tremendous pleasure to know there are successful careers.

COHEN: Do you have any specific recollections of individuals? Not necessarily naming names.

RUFINO: There was a student, really he was of Italian origin from an Italian-speaking family. That's why he took Italian. He was a biology major; Italian was not his major. Really he was a pre-med. Pre-vet, but he changed and went into research. But he was good in everything he did: languages, literature, arts, science, everything because he was endowed with a fine mind. But I would say ten or twenty percent of the student would be ideal, good students.

COHEN: What did this one student—what was his eventual career choice?

RUFINO: He went into research, he got a Ph.D. at Wisconsin. But he was doing research for Rutgers in New Brunswick. But he was very young, he really didn't waste any time. As a matter of fact, he wanted to go to Europe to become a vet. But then he changed his mind. But now a lot of students are successful, intelligent students, they're a pleasure to deal with. But it has always been my opinion the more intelligent students, the better. Otherwise, you know.... Even though sometimes it's not a question of intelligence, students are calculating. they say alright, they relax, and they do not participate when they have reached their certain number of courses. And the students, since they are taking the course, they do it well. Otherwise, it's another course.

COHEN: What recollections do you have of some of your exciting teaching experiences, exciting teaching moments? Sometimes you have these....

RUFINO: Well, we had the excitement of the student agitation, revolt I guess. But they would come and empty the classrooms, to force the students to abandon, to get out of their classrooms. Some would boycott class. But then they weren't too successful. Because students will leave, some students will leave. They would come to the classroom. They'd say, "Everybody out!"

COHEN: Oh, yes?

RUFINO: Yes.

COHEN: This actually occurred in the middle of one of your classes?

RUFINO: Yes.

COHEN: What was the occasion for that one?

RUFINO: Well, it was part of the general climate of rebellion. You know there was something. They were rebelling. But they would come, and they would say, "Everybody out!" But students, some would go out, some would stay there. But there were times they would sound the alarm, you know pull the fire alarm..

COHEN: Oh, yes! Yes, bomb scares.

RUFINO: And then were times, I remember streaking you know and running around the Dana Library before you built the extension, it was an island and they would run around. I think things were done also with a sense of humor. Even the students, the more rebellious ones were...never lost, you know. So they had sense of humor but also a common sense, they were making a point. But I guess they sensed that they wouldn't change much.

COHEN: Did you witness any of the campus disturbances connected with the antiwar movement in 1968, I believe it was? There was something of a disturbance on the campus, which...there was a police presence on campus, a rally in Military Park, if I'm not mistaken. Do you have any recollection of that?

RUFINO: We had a lot of speech-making here on the campus. There were also some very active faculty members.

COHEN: Yes.

RUFINO: There was one, he was the director of animal research, what was his name?

COHEN: Director of the Institute for Animal Behavior? Daniel Lehrman?

RUFINO: Yes.

COHEN: Yes. Mm-hmm. Yes.

RUFINO: He would always speak to the students. But in general there weren't even too many students. There wasn't mass participation. There wasn't mass participation. It was a minority of them—active students.

COHEN: A minority, yes.

RUFINO: The majority of the students would...Well, I mean they were really different, I would say silent. I think they were a silent majority. The majority were silent.

COHEN: Do you remember the...after the Conklin Hall—talking about campus demonstrations—after the Conklin Hall takeover there had been, there was an incident on campus where there was a bonfire near the Dana Library. And then sometime—I forget the exact date—closed down the by the university. How did that.... Do you recall that incident?

RUFINO: Vaguely. But I suppose this was an incident that didn't last too long.

COHEN: But it was part of the whole scene and dissatisfaction of the black students. How did you see the whole issue of racism on the campus at that time, going back again? How did it manifest itself among students, among faculty?

RUFINO: Really I would say that white students really don't have any rapport with black students, you know, the black students themselves, you know, kept themselves separate. No mixing. I would say there was not a relationship between the two. So, students in groups. Because then you have also the Hispanic students. I don't think they had much relationship with black students either. Now, not in the classroom. I didn't catch a lot. I don't know what they do, but I don't think they did much. I am not too familiar with the student center activities, but they should know more about this.

COHEN: I just wanted to see, you know, what your perception was. Do you have any recollections of any examples of overt racism, either in the classroom, outside the classroom? Anything like that?

RUFINO: I wouldn't say openly. I never saw openly racist students. But really... but every once in a while, you know. Usually a racist student would be ashamed of these expressions. He would sense that there is some coldness towards the blacks. But there is no love there really. I don't think there is hatred, open manifestation. But there is no love either. I remember when.... I was really surprised when Martin Luther King was killed, you know, about the students. I thought this is terrible thing, you know, they closed the school. And the students said, Oh! I was really surprised. They said, We are not upset by it. These things happen, you know. They didn't really see the gravity of it.

COHEN: This is students you were teaching?

RUFINO: One student.

COHEN: Yes.

RUFINO: They didn't seem perturbed by the enormity of it. I remember that really, closing the school.

COHEN: The school was closed?

RUFINO: Yes, I guess one day, the day he was killed.

COHEN: Oh, okay. I can check the record on that.

RUFINO: I remember myself, I came here but I didn't teach, I didn't have classes.

COHEN: Well, I want to move on to curriculum reform. What did you see as the main influences on the curriculum—the changes in the curriculum—in foreign languages during the period that you were here, particularly late sixties and seventies?

RUFINO: There was a loss of requirements, language requirements. It was also a sign that the times were changing. We lost the requirements. But the other departments in the humanities weren't doing that well either. We were affected by it tremendously. The students were no longer there...there was no compulsory taking of courses, so it went back to an elective. So we lost a lot because the majors were...well, the more students you have, the more probability you have that students will continue, take upper-level courses. Because all the elementary courses...they introduced this foreign literature and translation but it is not the same thing, but better than nothing.

COHEN: What were the pressures that were moving the faculty and the students away from the traditional requirement for language study? For years language study was considered an essential element in the liberal arts curriculum.

RUFINO: I think it was a concession made to the students. The students were revolting, as they were revolting—nothing bloody about that. But still they were really making a lot of noise about—they had to get something. I guess we were, the foreign languages and the humanities were the victim of this thing, the concessions to the students. I don't know whether they were happy or unhappy. I don't think the students would consider dropping the requirement a victory. On the other hand, we lost by only one vote. I guess the other departments were better organized than we were. When we voted with the faculty, they won by one vote.

COHEN: To drop the requirement.

RUFINO: Then we had this conflict. We had a conflict of interests here among the departments here. They are strong departments, well-organized. But the History department is, oh, gosh! I'm sure the students are not really that anxious to take History courses, I don't think History is popular at all, you know. Not even English, why English is not popular, it is strange to me in an English-speaking country, [Laughs] they don't want to study English. But History is a well-organized department. So this is what happened. The reflection on the strength of the departments is in the requirements, the curriculum. Now it's getting worse and worse. Eventually, the attitude was this, you know. I remember Dean Robey, he said that he didn't see any purpose of having foreign languages and foreign literatures taught at the college. Openly, you know. He wouldn't say there is no future for you, but once he met with students, the students were questioning his attitude. Well, let's go to philosophy. There is no philosophy there. I would say he was a politician. I thought there was no future for the liberal arts. But the students wanted, you know, the students that cared wanted foreign languages on the campus. I guess now the way things are proceeding, soon they will succeed. Because if you discourage students from taking courses, after all. So I think this is a responsibility of the faculty, this won't be a liberal arts college anymore in any sense.

COHEN: What languages.... What were the comparative enrollments in the different languages?

RUFINO: Spanish of course had, they always had, the highest number of students. Then French and Italian. Even though Italian nationwide is doing pretty well, it's increasing, the number of American students taking Italian. It is kind of a fashionable language. But French traditionally has been the strongest. Now the Spanish. Of course Spanish, also nationally I guess.

COHEN: I guess at this point, yes, considering the large Spanish-speaking population. I want to ask, within the curriculum itself, within the foreign languages curriculum... Aside from the fact of the decline in enrollments and so on. How, if at all, did the actual teaching within, let's say, Italian or whatever, change with the times? How did you change in teaching your course in Italian—either in the original language or in translation? How did that evolve? Or did you just sort of teach throughout the seventies and into the eighties the way you taught in earlier years?

RUFINO: Well, I suppose teachers adapt to the situation also because... now when the advanced courses dry up, then you are forced to teach elementary courses. But the language in translation [courses] are good, because they are challenging. Not as much as they would be if they were taught in the original language. But still it is a challenging course because you have survey of the literature, you have the English version of the masterpieces, it's good. I guess... as a matter of fact, to be frank, you know, if you take an elementary course in Italian or French, the students get more from the foreign literature with translation—fortunately. Because elementary French and elementary Italian, you know, you learn a few sentences. But if you traveled there, you would forget this little you learned in a couple courses.. But when you are in a literature in translation course, it's more useful culturally. But I suppose a lot of students like that fact, foreign countries through translation.

COHEN: Yes.

RUFINO: The courses in civilization also taught in English are useful, Italian civilization, French civilization, Russian civilization.

COHEN: At the time the in terms of, you know, meaningful and relevant were current in talking about what's being taught. What did the students who talked about they wanted, meaningful and relevant courses, what did this mean?

RUFINO: I don't know. The point is that the students don't know much about... as an instructor you have to create the interest, you have to influence the students. Because Italian or French civilization. What do they know about this? And you have to open their eyes, hopefully, to cause some interest, generate interest, in these topics. But I mean this is a liberal arts college. It is not something you can translate into dollars. It is really the cultural acquisition... You can't imagine it practically, but it is there. It makes.... I think it is indispensable in the formation of an individual.

COHEN: What then is the meaningfulness and the relevance of the liberal arts education, while we're on the subject? That's a big one.

RUFINO: There's something impalpable. You can't really—but if you go to college and you have to know a little bit, you don't have to become a specialist. But we have philosophy, history, literatures. That's what makes the—it opens the mind of people. If you are tremendous as a businessman, you are a genius...but still, if you have a cultural background, that makes you a more complete person, more balanced also and simply wiser. This I guess is the purpose of a liberal arts education. It's not just something practical. But I wish that more people had a stronger cultural background. Foreign affairs, you know, you have to know about these people. Even geography, they don't even know where is Saudi Arabia. And even Europe. But I am biased, I think Europe is still important for cultural formation for students. Euro-centered. I probably am Euro-centered because I am European. But Europeans have contributed, Western civilization has contributed. We are part of it. There's the ocean in between. I'm not really part of Europe anymore. There is really no time. Otherwise why not? Let's know about the Japanese, the Asian cultures? Why not? It's a question of time.

COHEN: Yes, I guess that's the problem. How do you weave all this together into a meaningful curriculum?

RUFINO: You can't squeeze everything in. You know nothing is left really with a too general survey of civilizations. I have been talking a lot, haven't I?

[Break in recording]

COHEN: I'm on now.

RUFINO: But I would say it has always been a bone of contention, tenure. But I don't know if it is equitable or fair. It was, if it was, if it is. But from what I understand, you know...the dean has an enormous amount of power. Either implicit or explicit. Because these are the rules. But his weight is in office. My opinion is that there is a policy that is established. New Brunswick and Rutgers, they say let's reduce the number of promotions. And they do. And it got to the point that if they decide not to promote anybody, they don't promote anybody.

COHEN: Yes, yes.

RUFINO: Which is really.... It has nothing to do with the merits of the candidates. A lot of candidates who deserve to be promoted, but now this is the general policy. The budgetary constraints, they say. But still, you know, somebody else got to have to do this job. A hatchet job [Laughter]. I think that guy was, Robey, he was really doing a hatchet job. I guess he was doing, well we have to imagine because we don't know, you know. Since Rutgers University is just like any other community, there are the rules and the ruled also.... So I guess the elite was...the central power is in New Brunswick. We are the branch; there is some power in Newark. So that's what this tenure.... It should be up to the faculty peers. But even though, you know, even there it doesn't assure the fairness of judgment. Because the faculty members, you know, you may have faculty members who are opposed to one's promotion.

COHEN: Faculty members who are...?

RUFINO: Opposed to someone's promotion. Because they are the leaders, the first step is the faculty.

COHEN: Sure. Mm-hmm.

RUFINO: The colleagues. If they, for any reason, decide that the candidate is not, won't get it, you know if he stumbles there, everything else is... As a matter of fact, if a candidate fails the first test in the department... or if say your peers have voted against you, the process would stop right there.

COHEN: We were talking before about the role of students in the evaluation and support of, faculty members in tenure actions. And what are your thoughts about that?

RUFINO: It's very good. They've been evaluating their instructors for years and years. I guess the students, they are good judges. I'm sure that even though they don't know exactly why an instructor isn't as good as others, in comparison, I guess most of the time they are right. They sense—they don't know exactly—but they sense the faults of the instructor. I think that it's good to be evaluated. After all, the students are your own daily judges. They sit there, they know. You can't cheat them really—you can't deceive them. Even though, sometimes the different fields, the scientific fields... But still since teaching is an art, you know, if you can't communicate, that's it, they know, no matter what you teach. So I think that's the evaluation. Do they take students' evaluations into account?

COHEN: Yes.

RUFINO: This is the point. Sometimes the students may judge you're the best teacher in the world, and then it won't help you any. Because teaching, again, teaching and research. This is the point, if you are a good teacher, they will say, oh but your research is terrible. If you are a good researcher, they say oh you're teaching is terrible. Then it won't get you anywhere.
[Laughter]

COHEN: How effective has the AAUP been in these tenure controversies, in your experience?

RUFINO: Well, really, they have a lot of good advice. On the other hand, I guess they are really.... You know when you receive a letter from them, these computers dictated it, you know, this computer printer, you know, it's not a personal letter. So if you are denied promotion, then the AAUP will send a letter regarding the possibility of the grievance procedure. There is nothing personal about it. So many faculty members have been denied promotion, the computer will go into action if you receive a letter. It looks personal but it is not. But anyway, as an organization, you know, the AAUP is as strong as the members of the organization would make it...

COHEN: And how strong is that?

RUFINO: A lot of the faculty are not even members.

COHEN: Yes, that's true.

RUFINO: Besides the fact that they have to pay dues. Now I think it should be more, you know, as usual, those who have the time to devote to the organization are always the same people. But not because they want to take over, a question of power-grabbing. Because nobody does that. It's simply the usual people. But it should be really a stronger organization.

COHEN: One of the complaints you hear about tenure actions is that Newark does not offer research facilities in support to its faculty; and that therefore it's unfair to have the same requirements for promotion for the Newark faculty as for the New Brunswick faculty. Is this a fair complaint?

RUFINO: Well, Newark is, how do you say, the spare wheel in the machine, not as important as New Brunswick. New Brunswick I guess is still the center of power in the decisions made. I guess Newark could do better. But it all depends on the faculty. If Newark were more assertive than New Brunswick. But, even though I don't think we can see much in New Brunswick. They won't divert power or share the power with the branch here, the secondary campus.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. You think it's fair, though, for there to be uniform promotional standards throughout the university with keeping that discrepancy?

RUFINO: No. Because we are pursuing different goals. I guess the Newark college has different aims. It serves a different student population than New Brunswick. They should take that into account. I guess Newark is a pioneer school. It is operating in difficult territory.

COHEN: You say a "pioneer school." What do you—

RUFINO: Yes. It is a frontier school. The frontier is that in New Brunswick, New Brunswick has this attitude that tends to be more of an "Ivy League" campus.

COHEN: Okay.

RUFINO: But Rutgers-Newark is more, you know, a commuters' college. People coming and having jobs also. Most students here have jobs, and they work also. They come to school and work. I mean the college in Newark serves a different population, a different sociological background than the pretensions of New Brunswick. They want to be a Princeton or.... I am no fan of Ivy League colleges. But, you know, there's the quality there. You can't deny that, they're good schools.

COHEN: Administration.

[End of Tape #1]

COHEN: Okay. We were getting on to administration. And I asked you—I started asking you—if you could give me some sense of how you would compare the administrations of Mason Gross and his successor, Edward Bloustein? Do you have any sense of that?

RUFINO: Well, I guess they were years of growth for us, years' worth, good ones. But Bloustein really, he really changed...he gave the university a different direction. His aim was understandable. He wanted to make it one of the best state universities in the country. But Gross was poor, practically. There was a lot of money coming in at that time.

COHEN: Under Gross, you're saying?

RUFINO: Yes. The state was investing money. But I think that Bloustein was more of a, I would say, public relations man. He was very good. He gave a name to—he expanded also, enormously. All in all, I think he was a good man, but the president is the skipper of the ship.

COHEN: Bloustein?

RUFINO: And he had his new [unintelligible] here, taking care of the shores. As a politician he was good. was good. He knew how to use power. He had the choice of his deans and powers, his vice presidents. He would say, all right, everything was up to yourself. The faculty problem was the faculty problem. The faculty has to solve it. Promotion was up to ... because it was easy for him to do it. You have to take a stand, he would let his attendants do it. Because we have the deans, over here we have the provost here...

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yes.

RUFINO: He was a former dean of the school.

COHEN: Yes, talking about provosts and deans, I mean Malcolm Talbott was the first vice president—I think first vice president—in 1965 for the Newark campus. And then he was also acting dean. And of course he was the acting dean and the vice president during critical years, the Conklin Hall takeover and those negotiations. How do you assess Talbott's contribution to the university?

RUFINO: I think he was really a very good man, open-minded who listened to everybody. And he solved in those times of crisis he was really.... his contribution was positive, it was crucial in solving these problems. . And, you know, in laying the foundation for the Newark college as it is now.

COHEN: Yes, that's kind of a two-parter. First, in terms of solving the problems, I mean how did you perceive him as conducting himself? How did he go about solving some of the crisis situations?

RUFINO: He listened to them, when he had the conversations with the blacks, he listened to them. I suppose in this case there was giving and taking; both sides were giving and taking. But he realized that Newark is really a black city. With problems, urban problems, he saw the function of the college in a surrounding like this. I guess he was good. He was a good teacher also. He came in—he was teaching also.

COHEN: In the law school, yes. He was a law professor. You said he laid the foundations for the campus. What was your perception of his contribution there?

RUFINO: That was the beginning, you know. It was really...it was nothing. It was really a conglomeration of departments, even though they unified all the departments. There was no campus really in the beginning. There were just a few...and we talked about this, scattered classrooms. We even had the faculty meetings in a church. Methodist Church by the law school because we didn't have a place to meet. The physical aspects of the campus. They built little by little the labs. I guess he was a man of vision. I would call him an open-minded person. But sometimes we say what you see is only part of what is going on. You don't always know what happens behind the scenes, what appears to be.

COHEN: Did you have any sense of what was going on behind the scenes at the time?

RUFINO: Yes. You have impressions.

COHEN: What were your impressions?

RUFINO: Not just impressions. There was the success of Talbott, who was the...?

COHEN: The first provost, James Young?

RUFINO: Yes. I don't think that was as good as Talbott.

COHEN: Talbott was not appointed provost. Do you think—

RUFINO: He was vice president.

COHEN: He was vice president. And then he went to the Rutgers Foundation. What was your sense about whether Talbott wanted the job of provost?

RUFINO: Well, I guess he was disappointed. I suppose he was disappointed because he was...he didn't get the presidency, you know. He wanted to be the president of Rutgers. I guess he was a candidate also. I'm sure he would have made a good president also. But being vice president, you know, that's the next step.

COHEN: But why, if he had been so effective on the Newark campus, why didn't he get the job as provost do you think?

RUFINO: I don't know. That was the thrust. Again, can you read their minds? They wanted a certain type of man at the helm of the school.. I guess it was the policy-making body, Board of Governors. But, Bloustein didn't want.... Because I remember when we had the ceremony, and at that time, you know, he made a balanced speech. He said we didn't want things to be out of control.

COHEN: What happened then, when he came in because of the revolt? What was going on?

RUFINO: There was a speech that he made here, we had the ceremony. I guess it was in the theater. But he said that he compared the students disruption to [unintelligible], which wasn't true really. He underlined the fact that the students have to keep in control. Then I guess to please, because the board of governors was a conservative body you know, so he pleased them I suppose. And this was my impression. He was chosen.

COHEN: Bloustein.

RUFINO: Yes.

COHEN: But I was wondering, just one final thing, why do you think Talbott wasn't chosen as provost?

RUFINO: Who knows? Probably because he was probably too sympathetic. And he was too progressive for the governors' liking. They say that he was too progressive, being the Board of Governors, a majority of them were conservative in general. You had a clash there. They would rather choose a more accommodating president. I think this is the real part, I mean in general. But you don't have to exaggerate the power of a university, the university is a university but there are limits. This doesn't affect national policy.

COHEN: Let's see, how would you... what can you say about William Gilliland's tenure as dean? He was Woodward's successor.

RUFINO: I don't remember much.

COHEN: Alright. He was a geologist.

RUFINO: Oh, yes, yes, yes. I remember. He didn't last too long.

COHEN: Do you have any recollections of what was going on, what the problems were during his tenure?

RUFINO: He wasn't the kind of man that the Rutgers administration would like to have. But I don't remember much about him. What I remember is that at a certain point he was practically dismissed. In my opinion, he was dismissed. Apart from his merits he was dismissed because he wasn't a New Brunswick man, I guess. He didn't do what he was supposed to do, according to New Brunswick.

COHEN: Gilliland's successor.... Well, Talbott was then the acting vice president. And then following Malcolm Talbott, there was Henry Blumenthal was the dean. How would you assess his—

RUFINO: He was really a gentleman and an old-fashioned scholar. He was very nice, very nice person. He was a listener also. But this is the switching from one generation to another, he was a French scholar, French History scholar. But I don't know. Perhaps we're changing also.

Probably he got himself tired on the job, he had different pursuits, I guess. What he used to say, what he liked to do to read and write, administration of the college wasn't one of his goals. But as a person...

COHEN: Then Gilbert Panson was acting dean for a year. How would you assess him in that job?

RUFINO: He was.... I don't know. They knew what the college...as I said, the passage from one generation to another—a different conception of education. The younger ones are more active, sometimes a lot of motion and no movement. The activist deans came after Blumenthal and Panson.

COHEN: Yes, yes.

RUFINO: It was Robey who came after, and we talked already about him. He had to do something.

COHEN: He had to do something. What pressures was he working under?

RUFINO: Well, really, he was...I don't think he had that much pressure. But I think there was a mentality of the first-class, the best.... So he was doing things to please New Brunswick. But when the crisis came...I don't think he got much support from New Brunswick. When he was dumped, practically New Brunswick...

COHEN: What led up to that crisis. I've been reading the minutes, and I get.... There was a committee report on reorganization....

RUFINO: But really I don't remember the details. But generally speaking, this man created more enemies than he needed. He isolated himself. That's what...he pushed himself into a corner, a minority versus the majority of the faculty.

COHEN: Well, was he pushed to take these positions by New Brunswick or was this more his *modus operandi*?

RUFINO: I think probably he was doing it to please, let's call them his masters. But really he didn't have to do that. Because the point is that he had to get along with the faculty.

COHEN: So what was the basic difference with the faculty? What was the crucial conflict?

RUFINO: I suppose a lack of consultation. You know he would have the faculty facing a *fait accompli*. He wouldn't consult with the senior members of the faculty.

COHEN: Was there any one case or couple of cases?

RUFINO: I remember in my case, there were similar cases. You know what he did really? His politics were pretty clear. Because he created a group of trusted people. What I call a kind of

party, political party. But he didn't have enough. He was picking, well, choosing, the wrong people, people would have advised him, would have helped him. There was no reason to create that conflictual situation. He lacked diplomacy, is what I think.

COHEN: Yes, yes. His successor is—well, now the current provost—Norman Samuels. How would you assess his deanship?

RUFINO: Well, he was more of the faculty and a really practical man. He knew everybody, though. I guess he was pretty...he got along pretty well with the faculty, whereas his predecessor didn't know how to. I think this is the main difference.

COHEN: Yes. Mm-hmm.

RUFINO: And then Samuels got more of what he wanted, but he had a brilliant career, a fast career. He went from the deanship to the....

COHEN: Your perception of Young's provost-ship was—whatever recollections you have of his contribution.

RUFINO: Really, I didn't know that man well. But really I had to talk to him when I was not promoted to associate professor. But since the rejection had followed the required procedure, he found it regular. We had a difference of opinion. They had respect for my rights. But apart from that, I don't think he was...in a college like this, the men you have contact with[unintelligible].

COHEN: Just a couple more questions, if we can wrap it up. I used to see you in the Dana Library fairly regularly. I was wondering what your experiences throughout your career were with the Dana Library? In the early days and throughout the seventies. Well, let's start with the collections.

RUFINO: Oh, yes. You have done a terrific job. You could have done more if the faculty had helped you more in acquisitions and requesting books. I guess it depends a lot on the faculty, you know.

COHEN: Okay.

RUFINO: Even though, as some would say, this is an undergraduate school. The library as a resource is not as important as it could be with the graduate school. The students don't use it as much as they should. But there are resources here. What you've added recently is terrific. But as I said, if the faculty had helped you more, you would have a richer collection than you have.

COHEN: What were your experiences with services in the library: reference services, interlibrary loan?

RUFINO: They're good. Yes. No, really. Because I was after all, we have been overcome by the technology, and now we use computers. But words were much easier in a book.

COHEN: What do you think of this new technology?

RUFINO: I think it's good, but you don't have to [unintelligible]. After all, you know, this has simplified a lot of things. But still, you have to read a book.

COHEN: Yes. Okay.

RUFINO: What I think, you know, if you have to know what book to read, and somebody has to tell you what. But I guess this is something we should be proud of. You've done a lot. I still remember the few librarians, you know, the succession.

COHEN: Okay. Is there anything we've talked about that you'd like to go back to, maybe expand on?

RUFINO: No. I really hope that I've been...my rambling and reminiscences has been useful—would be useful—to the recreation of the picture.

COHEN: I'm sure it will be. Anything we haven't talked about that you'd like to talk about?

RUFINO: I don't have to exaggerate, you know. Because sometimes the danger is, at a certain point of becoming too personal. But, I have always in mind that the campus...I was part of the campus, but I wasn't... what I was concerned with was more to have a modern college, vibrant. But it has been pretty good all in all. But I found it, at the beginning, really it wasn't being born, the college. But when I left, it was a pretty good college. As I say, the possibilities are here. They are here for students if students want to learn. They don't have to go to prison to learn as much in my opinion. Okay and thank you very much.

COHEN: Thank you, Dr. Rufino.

RUFINO: I hope you have a good balance of sabbatical.

[End of Tape #2]

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

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