

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

An Interview with

LEONARD J. WANG

Conducted by

Gilbert Cohen

October 10, 1991

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GILBERT COHEN: It is Thursday, October 10, 1991. This is Gil Cohen, and I'm meeting with Professor Leonard Wang in the Dana Library. [Break in recording] Again, I'm meeting with Professor Wang who is a professor of romance languages on the Newark campus. Professor Wang has been on the campus since 1958. And if you could give us a brief bio of your academic career to get us started.

LEONARD J. WANG: I was a graduate of the City College of New York. After that I received my MA at Columbia and subsequently my Ph.D. at Columbia. I began teaching at Columbia while I was working on my Ph.D. And then when I left Columbia some years later, I went to Queens College for a couple of years, and then I came here. The interim I maintained a relationship with Queens College by being an adjunct for a couple of classes at night over a period of years.

COHEN: What years were you at Queens College? That's my alma mater.

WANG: During the day I was there from 1955 to fifty-seven. In the evening it was a number of years until about the mid-seventies.

COHEN: I'm the Class of fifty-one. And then?

WANG: And then—I've been here since, continuously.

COHEN: Since 1958, yes.

WANG: Fifty-eight continuously. That's right.

COHEN: What was the old campus like when you first started in fifty-eight?

WANG: The old campus had many drawbacks. It had buildings which were separated by a number of blocks. And yet there was camaraderie, a feeling of companionship and fellowship, of unity, of being well-knitted with the others that I don't think exists today. In fact I'm sure it doesn't.

COHEN: Why?

WANG: The student body was smaller and more cohesive. The interest, I think, of the students that I knew was more motivated in the directions that they were going. It was not simply job-motivated as I see it too often today. Or without any motivation whatsoever but to get through.

COHEN: Why do you think that has changed over the years? Why were the students motivated in the direction of learning humanities and so on? Which I think was the case then.

WANG: Learning humanities was a tradition that goes back for centuries. It was also possible to get a fairly good job in high school if you wanted to be a teacher, which was the primary reason in most cases for going into the humanities. And also there was the possibility of going into college teaching in those days in the humanities, which hardly exists today in most respects. When I went for my Ph.D. there, for example, there were, I don't know, dozens of people working on different things and getting degrees every year. Just this week I received a yearly report from the Columbia French Department in which I think there were five degrees granted last year all together—at least Ph.D.'s. Maybe a few master's as well.

COHEN: So, the change on this campus...?

WANG: The change on this campus has been just as drastic, of course, and that has been aided and abetted by the interest in business, the lack of interest of the administration in the humanities, of course the elimination of language requirements. I think only—I don't know if I'm right—but only what was Douglass College kept the language requirement consistently over the years. We did have a chance a few years ago of reinstating the language requirement, but it was overturned, in a manner I would rather not go into, at faculty meetings. And now people go into it more rarely—very rarely. We have a couple of people whom I am supervising in schools for teaching, but it's very, very rare. Used to have a whole classroom full of people going out to teach in Spanish and everything else. It's very rare now.

COHEN: Well, how has this affected the foreign language faculty on the campus?

WANG: Well, for the most important the faculty language faculty, of course, was eliminated to a certain extent. And then after a period of years, it came down to the bare bones of people who had tenure. And then it was a matter of waiting 'til they retired, which has already begun in certain instances. But the entire department is—well, almost the entire department—is tenured. So that it kind of does the best it can.

COHEN: Was anyone tenured during the period of the late sixties and through the seventies?

WANG: Oh, sure.

COHEN: So there were people.

WANG: Oh, absolutely, including myself.

COHEN: Oh.

WANG: Absolutely. In fact everybody, with the exception of the original people who were here, Jewel [sp] and Stamm [sp].

COHEN: Was there anyone who didn't have tenure, let's say, in the late sixties who continued on?

WANG: Continued on with what?

COHEN: Was that person—were people tenured, actually achieve tenure, during the seventies?

WANG: Few, few. Many went or were let go for one reason or another. Incomplete Ph.D.'s, work that was not satisfactory or other reasons.

COHEN: Do you feel that if there had been a demand for foreign language professors that there would have been more tenuring going on?

WANG: I'm sure of that. Because people were taken out of the department as a result of inflated numbers in terms of the numbers of students who were being serviced at that time. We lost the language requirement in 1972 or seventy-three; I don't remember exactly when. We started out...when I was chair of this department, we had thirty-four people; we have about thirteen now.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Yes.

WANG: Thirty-four.

COHEN: How fair do you think that the whole process, the whole tenuring process, is, well, throughout the university?

WANG: It's hard to say. It's extremely rigorous. I think that that committee that met—I forget the name—in New Brunswick recently published a report in which they said that this was one of the most difficult universities in the country as far as getting tenure is concerned. The tenure track is enormously long. The scrutiny is terribly detailed. There are too many steps. I think some of that has been eliminated now because we don't have sections anymore for example.

COHEN: Yes. And the criteria of the group changed from five to three, and that's not good.

WANG: That's right. That's right.

COHEN: During the period of the sixties.... Well, in the years that you've been there, through the sixties and seventies and into the eighties, how has the teaching...well, how has the curriculum changed in foreign languages—if at all?

WANG: In many respects it has maintained a certain consistency that it has always had. Grammar, civilization, literature. Some courses have been added in certain areas, like I think Business Spanish, where there was a call for it or a need for it. We tried to—I tried to—get a course like that through the business school at one time so that they would bring us students, for their own purposes, not ours. And nothing came of it. The students or the administration were

not interested, so nothing came of it. Actually had a business course on the books for teaching during a particular summer, and nothing came of it.

COHEN: So was there any development in teaching methods, let's say, during the seventies or into the eighties—or during this whole period that you've been here?

WANG: That depended on the individual. You'd have to ask them. But the standards have remained just as high as they always were. And our methods have always improved to the extent they could under the circumstances, using the laboratory for example, when it was required, it was better. We can't do that anymore. We don't have computers. Maybe that would do better, too. They say in the schools where they are used things do improve, but I couldn't say.

COHEN: So pretty much the same methods and course content.

WANG: I would say so. I would say so except that there is.... Well, the course content is varied to meet the needs of a particular era or group of students. But I would say that there has been since the time I've been here, a significant increase in the use of the language in each part of the department. The emphasis is made squarely on learning how to speak the language. In the old days when I went to school, for example, when I first began to teach, it was a matter of learning your grammar, doing your translation, writing on the board, and going home.

COHEN: Why this shift?

WANG: Some of that came as a result of the Second World War where books were prepared for soldiers or for those who were going to be in the theaters of war, and where conversation would be necessary. In French, for example, books were prepared, which are still being used in subsequent editions, for soldiers who would be going to the French Theater or to the European Theater. And it was seen that this was very helpful in learning the language to begin with, and they simply continued doing it. The conversational approach preceded the grammatical one; it still does. You go over conversations. You speak with the students. And then you explain what they have been doing. And they very often understand it in that light better.

COHEN: So there has been a change.

WANG: Of course it also depends on the instructor.

COHEN: The instructor, yes.

WANG: Of course. My classes, to the extent possible, I mean the elementary classes, we speak as much as we can before we even start the lesson of the day.

COHEN: When you mentioned that part of the course content is civilization, how much—what part of the course would be?

WANG: The whole course.

COHEN: You mean the whole course.

WANG: Well, every course that deals with literature has to develop the civilization of that period to the extent that it is necessary around the works that you are reading. But we have courses in every part of the department dealing with civilization pretty much exclusively, in which literature then would become the secondary part. In other words you're talking about art and sculpture and music and painting and all kinds of things like that. And the whole course was devoted to it.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Well, if you were let's say teaching Balzac, how much time would you spend on the social, economic conditions in France.

WANG: Only what is necessary to understand Balzac.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

WANG: And that would have to be a pretty good frame, otherwise you wouldn't understand the author too well. But you wouldn't go much beyond that because you're interested in literary values there, and the other stuff fits into it rather than the other way around.

COHEN: Yes. Could you spend a whole period, let's say, on the background?

WANG: We could spend many periods, it depends on what comes up at a particular time. We'd probably start out with discussing the period and its economic and political implications and then how Balzac fits into it. And then the rest would come along in pieces as you go along.

COHEN: Yes. They should have done that when I was taking languages.

WANG: Really?

COHEN: Mm-hmm. When I studied...never. It was just into the text, read it. Nothing like you're describing. [Laughs] At least I don't remember.

WANG: I remember very distinctly at City College seeing instructors, professors, full professors, as a matter of fact, go into their classrooms, take their book out of the desk, open it, translate whatever it was, call on the students, goodbye. That's the day.

COHEN: That's pretty much what was my experience. So your approach sounds.... Would you say your approach, relating the literature to the civilization, is typical of the way languages are taught in this department on this campus?

WANG: Oh, it's a very important part of it. But the most important part of it is not really that, but those things are really adjuncts. The most important part is the development of the ability to analyze and to become sensitive to certain values and to acquire them so that you can apply them to other works later on.

COHEN: I see. What can you say about the level of preparation of the students you taught in the years you've been here?

WANG: It was much better years ago. Much, much better because most of the high schools had much higher standards. Today many of our students come to us in the elementary classes simply as a result of changes in college regulations, simply to satisfy a high school deficiency without any particular interest or bent.

COHEN: In your classes, what's the ethnic composition of the students that you're getting now compared to students you were teaching in the sixties or seventies—late sixties and seventies?

WANG: Well, Newark was differently organized in those days demographically of course. Someone told me once—I can't be sure of that, but I imagine from my own experience that there was some truth to it—that the school was fairly well divided between a certain amount of Jewish students coming from the Weequahic area, and a certain number of Catholic or Protestant students coming from different areas. And of course that has changed completely as a result of demographic changes in Newark and in the environs. Today I would say a large number of my students are Haitian. They used to be Cuban. The Cuban students were very motivated; and as they explained to me, they had a feeling that French was a kind of elitist language. Therefore, at that time, they studied French rather than Spanish.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Oh!

WANG: Mm-hmm. But very little of that today.

COHEN: Very little.

WANG: There are things like that in other areas, too. We used to have a very large Ukrainian program. And though I assume there are still many Ukrainian people in this area, we have very few students. Unless they take Russian; that's it.

COHEN: There are changes there. The students—do you have any feel for the students who've been coming through the Academic Foundations program here, who require some remediation before entering the college.

WANG: Nothing in particular.

COHEN: Anything there?

WANG: Nothing in particular. Sometimes they have presented problems, and I have tried on my own to help them in the office or through our tutorial services. And sometimes it works out, and sometimes they don't because it's not really their fault. They were ill-prepared in high school.

COHEN: Going back again to the faculty, do you have any perceptions at all of the role of the AAUP in faculty negotiations or....

WANG: Well, that's...

COHEN: Over a period of time. As a faculty member here. The effectiveness of AAUP in...

WANG: I have never been very much involved in that in a very active way. But from reading and from participating at meetings and things like that, I think that it has done a very good job.

COHEN: How about their involvement in defending faculty in their grievances?

WANG: That they have done very well because I have participated as a member of these meetings in which I represented the AAUP and not the administration.

COHEN: And did you feel that they were justified in most of these cases, had strong cases in their hands or what? Or they're just going through the motions?

WANG: That would depend.

COHEN: Yes.

WANG: That would depend on the case. But I think that the most important aspect of that from the AAUP point of view is that just as in a court of law a lawyer has to defend a person who almost certainly killed somebody, you must see that the individual on our level who has been dismissed or not renewed or whatever, receives a complete hearing and everything that person's entitled to.

COHEN: What have you seen as far as faculty participation in AAUP is concerned? What changes have you seen in faculty involvement?

WANG: Less and less.

COHEN: Why has that been the case?

WANG: I don't know. Perhaps less interest. I don't know. I really don't know. But I remember when there was agitation years ago for a strike, which came to nothing, as I remember. You filled up the whole room at a meeting. At least there was a lot of smoke if not a lot of fire. And I don't know if you have that today or could have that today.

COHEN: Yes.

WANG: Maybe it was because of the leadership. People like the late Professor Washburn and others were very, very aggressive in getting things across. I don't know.

COHEN: What can you say about the perceived conflict between teaching and research on the campus, especially since the growth of graduate work here? Is there a conflict? Has teaching suffered?

WANG: I wouldn't say that teaching suffered. But I would say that teaching has not been rewarded sufficiently. We are an undergraduate college in which our primary objective is to teach students. And while certainly the other aspects are important as well, if I'm to be cynical, I would say that I have rarely seen teaching rewarded for its own sake, aside from the token awards that we give to the best teacher of the year; and even that has received a kind of uncomplimentary description as "the kiss of death."

COHEN: Uh-huh. [Laughs] I think I've heard that. I think I've heard that before [Laughter] from other people.

WANG: It used to be said that if a fellow who was not—or a person who was non-tenured—got that award, he'd never get tenure. [Laughter] I don't know if it's true or not.

COHEN: It's been said. I think it's on tape too.

WANG: Well, teaching to me has always been a very, very important thing. And I have always deplored the lack of standards, of interest, of dedication, of motivation that I have seen in college teachers throughout my career, which goes back some forty years. So it's not just a matter of a snap judgment.

COHEN: Yes, yes. And this has been the result of the emphasis on research? What was happening?

WANG: No, I wouldn't say it's the result of the emphasis on research...although that may have been some contributing factor in some individuals. But I would say that college teachers are often chosen because of their potential as researchers rather than as their potential as teachers. That is to say, what are the credentials of an individual who is chosen as a teacher? It's very hard to say. Very often, in my own case included, you are promising. You have never taught a class. Go in there and jump into the water. Some people jump into the water, and they manage to stay. And it does not mean that they become outstanding or even very good teachers. In other words, there's always been a kind of muddy area about qualifications of a college teacher as a teacher. I'm not speaking about a researcher now. He may be Nobel Prize quality, but I'm talking about him as a teacher.

COHEN: Have you seen any changes in the past twenty years, fifteen years, that you can—better, indifferent?

WANG: Hard to say, hard to say. Because outside of my own area, I don't see very much. So I can't judge. I know that my department is a very, very dedicated department on the whole.

COHEN: I'm going to touch on some of the events that occurred on campus in the late sixties and the seventies, if you have any perception of their influence on the college: the Newark riots in 1967. Any vivid recollections of that?

WANG: Oh, yes! I almost got shot!

COHEN: Okay. Well, that's good. Oral history likes to get these vivid recollections. [Laughter]
You almost got shot?

WANG: Well, that's probably an exaggeration, but not probably too much because I was here in that summer, during that summer, when the riots were going on. And then the very streets, our classrooms were on the very streets where snipers would find themselves on buildings and things like that. And while I must say in all honesty, I did not hear either gunfire or see anybody shooting. They told me it was going on all around. And I came here every day.

COHEN: In that summer?

WANG: In that summer. And I myself was not affected by it.

COHEN: And your classes were held?

WANG: And my classes were held.

COHEN: Students came...?

WANG: It was just as if nothing were happening at that time. But of course all around in that particular area. That was the time a good part of the city was burned and shot up and everything. I remember that very well. But we were not affected by it here.

COHEN: When you came back in the fall, what were things like then?

WANG: I think that, if I can remember anything, that there was a kind of probably tension, anxiety. Heightened awareness of things. Probably—what's the best word? Unhappiness or despair or frustration or something like that that the whole situation had evolved this way.

COHEN: What were your feelings and thoughts about the reasons for this thing, for this disruption?

WANG: Well, I don't know if I'd probe too much the reasons of it. But it was certainly due to anger, frustration. And many of those things were—I don't know if they were subsequently satisfied either.

COHEN: What do you think of the long-term effects on the development of the campus of the riots of sixty-seven, your perception?

WANG: I don't think they had too many long-term effects because the riots were in sixty-seven, and this campus opened up about two years later. So it was going up at that time, these buildings, these very buildings.

COHEN: Well, the Dana Library opened in July of sixty-seven.

WANG: Well, Conklin Hall must have been a year or two later.

COHEN: Were you teaching—oh, you weren't teaching in Conklin?

WANG: I taught in Conklin the very first year it opened. That I'm sure.

COHEN: So that was the fall of sixty-seven.

WANG: Was it sixty-seven or seventy?

COHEN: Well, the campus was dedicated in sixty-eight. So if you were in Conklin.... Oh, you might have been....

WANG: Before we were in Conklin, we were on Broad Street and where else? Warren Place and various places of the college that have long since disappeared from this earth.

COHEN: Another big event, public event, was the takeover of Conklin Hall in February of 1969. And what recollections do you have? What was the grievance?

WANG: Hard to go back to details because I was chair at the time. And all I can remember is that Conklin Hall was not the first place to be taken over.

COHEN: What?!

WANG: No, I don't think so.

COHEN: You mean on this campus?

WANG: As I remember—and my memory may be faulty—the whole thing was started or inflamed or exacerbated or whatever by some events that took place in the Department of Sociology. I'm not going to mention any names.

COHEN: Yes.

WANG: But the students were exacerbated—irritated, whatever you want to say—by some procedures that were going on at that time. I don't remember what they were. And they took over that building. I think they took over the building of the offices of those individuals first.

COHEN: Yes. That wouldn't have been Hill because Hill was not built yet.

WANG: No, no, I think it was one of the small buildings like—I don't know.

COHEN: Yes, sure.

WANG: We had a lot of offices on James Street and other places like that. I don't remember exactly where these were. And I was called to a meeting by the dean—Blumenthal at that time—on a Friday morning, with all the other department chairmen to discuss the situation. Not too

much came of it because within a short period of time other buildings like Conklin were taken over. And not much happened. I mean we were locked out.

COHEN: Yes.

WANG: And we sat in the law building across the street watching things going on. And we had to wait until we could go back. The worst part of it came later on because, oh, for at least a year, there would be bomb scares. And the bells of the building would ring, I don't know, sometimes a number of times during the day for evacuation, and you couldn't do your work.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Yes.

WANG: And of course I think every single one of them was a hoax. But the dean told me he couldn't take a chance. He thought they were hoaxes, too, but he couldn't take a chance. So he would evacuate the building every time something was called in. So there was a certain amount of pandemonium and disorganization in the work.

COHEN: Well, what did people think that the genesis of the bomb scares was?

WANG: Well, I don't know... maybe that was with the dissatisfaction with the administration. But I think after a while people got the idea also that they could get out of work and exams and everything else by disrupting things.

COHEN: Did people perceive these bomb scares as a part of the anti-Vietnam War movement, or whether there was any linkage?

WANG: I don't know whether there was any linkage. It's possible, but I don't remember that specifically.

COHEN: Yes, yes.

WANG: That came to a head in, I think, 1972.

COHEN: Do you have any recollection of the faculty discussions on the demands of the students for admissions?

WANG: No, none of that. Admissions in what respect?

COHEN: Well, I think one of the admissions things was a question of, if I recollect, the students in the top fifty percent of their class in the local schools should be either admitted or considered for admission.

WANG: You mean like the open admission in New York?

COHEN: Well, it was compared to that. But I think the discussion was around either admitting or considering to admit students in the upper fifty percent of their class.

WANG: Did that go on for a long time?

COHEN: Well, let's see, the takeover was in February of sixty-nine. I think that discussion was in March of sixty-nine, if I'm not mistaken; I don't have my notes in front of me.

WANG: The main thing that came out of all this was the reorganization of the curriculum.

COHEN: Okay. Oh, oh!

WANG: That was important.

COHEN: Okay. That's one of the things.

WANG: That was important. Because requirements were dropped and the old system of putting things together fell apart, including languages.

COHEN: Okay. That's going back to the curriculum question. What was going on then? You said that was the main effect.

WANG: The idea that there should be more emphasis on the independence of the student for his ability to choose his own core courses, his own major, and to put other things either out entirely....

[Break in recording]

COHEN: Dr. Wang, and we're talking about curriculum change. And you were saying before....

WANG: Well, I'd have to only from my point of view—

COHEN: Yes. Sure.

WANG: That the most significant and most damaging thing that happened to this college in my recollection and from my purview would be the elimination of the language requirement. Students had to have language when they came here; either depending on their ability or where they were, they took a placement examination when they came into the school. Everyone took a placement examination. And either took elementary or intermediate or advanced language and literature, depending on how much they had had in high school. But everyone did! We had upon the average of, oh, I would say, over two thousand students in language every year. That's why we had thirty-odd people on the faculty. And the requirement was dropped. It has never been reinstated. In this respect, this university—I should say this college, but I'm sure other parts of the university as well—this college is well behind other parts of the country where languages have been reinstated and are flourishing. Or at least being taught. And accounts for the fact that big corporations in this country are not able to get foreign-language speakers for either their international areas or for their people here who have to use foreign language. Pan Am needed

some years ago a few people—for whatever reason I don't know; they interviewed I don't know how many hundreds, and they had difficulty getting three or four.

COHEN: And you're saying that the curriculum reform that was instituted in the seventies, you feel was an outgrowth of the takeover of Conklin Hall and the demands that were made then? Is that your perception?

WANG: I wouldn't know if they go together; whether those demands and the Conklin Hall takeover and all that stuff will go together in a cause-and-effect relationship, I can't be sure about that. But I can certainly say that because of all of the agitation and throughout the country, the desire to revise curricula, whether it was because of Vietnam or because of this, because of that, it still was a fact that the curriculum here went through drastic changes. And the elimination of languages, I think, has had a far-reaching effect throughout the country on many things going on in this country: the ability to communicate being the most important one. Now, to say that one is grinding one's own axe in the matter of things where you're talking about communicating with people and understanding them better in an ever-shrinking world I think is false reasoning.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. What was happening in the other parts of the curriculum?

WANG: Well, I don't remember all of the changes that took place. But they were very, very drastic, as I do remember. I mean when I went to college, there was a well-rounded curriculum in the sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities and so on. We had to take government, we had to take economics, we had to take music, we had to take art. All those things went by the board! Now you have to take a social science, and you have your choice. You could take something in the humanities for a period of a year. Now even that has gone. That has gone all together; there's no humanities requirement anymore. So all along the line the whole thing has been shrinking. And the thing that's been shrinking most is the things dealing with human beings and human values. Because after a while, some people—perceptive, sensitive people—suddenly discover a gap in their lives. And this may be even though they are very successful. Proof? I teach a graduate course in the humanities in the liberal arts curriculum. And most of the students in there are people who are in their thirties or forties, sometimes beyond, who have achieved success in their various careers: nursing, law, teaching, whatever it is; and feel a very deep hole for the things they have not had, and they come back to it.

COHEN: What gaps do you feel you have filled? Maybe you can make it more specific: What outstanding students or what notable, memorable teaching experiences have you had along these lines? You know where you have really felt that you filled....

WANG: I wouldn't say any particular memorable teaching experiences because then I would have to say I produced somebody who won a Pulitzer Prize or something like that, and I haven't. Not as far as I know. But I will say that it was the satisfaction of having people come out who were satisfied that they had acquired something. And I did have people who went on, say, to Yale to get a Ph.D. in Medieval French because there'd been a Medieval French class here. You don't have that today.

COHEN: Let's say, again, what is the nature of this gap?

WANG: What do you mean by the nature of....

COHEN: You say you teach a course, you're teaching....

WANG: The gap is that these people have not had the training in the humanities and the arts, in music, and other things which are outside of accounting or nursing or other things which are professions, but which do not fill certain needs which people suddenly, as I said before, become sensitive to that they have not received over the years, either because they didn't have to or because they didn't want to. And so they come back to them now.

COHEN: Okay. What are those certain needs?

WANG: Those certain needs? Exactly what I have just mentioned before: the desire to read a good book and to understand it, to hear a good piece of music and understand it, perhaps in lines that cross the book or with art. All of these things that are concerned with things we call values that cannot be put on a scale and weighed. That have nothing to do necessarily with finite numbers or how to dissect something in the human body.

COHEN: What's been the effect of the growth of the business programs on this campus, on the curriculum, teaching?

WANG: Well, that's the effect of society on the college, the pressures on the college to produce students who will get a job and succeed. Some of us have said over the years that the school has become, well, resembles in some respects more of a trade school than a school for liberal arts.

COHEN: What has been its effect, that is the business program, on the curriculum requirements?

WANG: Well, it's hard to say. Well, it's not hard to say because the business school would have sixty-odd credits that are required for a major in something, in accounting or in something else, which would naturally put the squeeze on other things. Now that it's being severed from the main part of the college, I don't know what the effects will be. We'll go back probably to what we were some years ago as a much smaller school.

COHEN: The College of Arts and Sciences.

WANG: Yes, yes, of Arts and Sciences with an emphasis on science or arts. That's right.

COHEN: Yes.

WANG: The City College of New York always had a separate business school. You got a BBA or you got a BS or you got a BA. But here you get a BA after taking all these courses in the business area.

COHEN: Do you think this is a benefit as far as the college is concerned, this.... Has it actually been carried out, the actual removal of the business program?

WANG: I think they're in the process of it.

COHEN: The process of it. Well, do you think this is a benefit as far as....

WANG: It's hard for me to say. I mean I haven't got the proper perspective. From my point of view, of course, if the students would come back to some of the humanities, that would help.

COHEN: Yes.

WANG: I had nursing experiences who were not allowed to take the second part of an elementary class. They would take the first part. They would get say, and A or a B. And they'd come to me at the end of the semester at Christmastime and say, "I'm sorry. I won't be here next semester." I'd say, "What do you mean you won't be here next semester?" In those days the language classes were what we call "comma courses." They were made into comma courses in the early seventies, so that students could take one course or the other. Then later on they reintroduced the hyphen course in the catalog which means they had to take a whole year to get credit. The whole year, six credits, not three.

COHEN: That was a more rigorous requirement.

WANG: Well, the idea was that from outside evaluating committees and our own meetings and so on, the idea was that you could really only teach something worthwhile if you had the whole year rather than simply three months. But this is not my point. My point is that I was sickened very often by—I have to use that word because it's true. I'd have good students who would take the course with me, elementary French class, and I thought they'd be back. They wanted to be back! That's the emphasis. They wanted to be back. But their dean or their whatever you call it again there, the person who's making out their program—program advisor—said no. You have no room in your nursing program in the nursing school, at the nursing school. We can't let you do this. Sorry, forget it. And that was that. Three months of language. Three credits, goodbye. was. And that is called education.

COHEN: I wanted to ask you before I forget. This is my bailiwick. Your experiences with the Dana Library in the years you've been here. What changes? First the collections. What can you say about the collections?

WANG: When?

COHEN: The sixties, seventies, into the eighties.

WANG: During the sixties and the seventies they were much more than later on, in the languages anyway.

COHEN: Okay.

WANG: I think I'll leave it that.

COHEN: Okay. Services. Let's say reference, interlibrary loan, circulation.

WANG: Given the present company, I will say acceptable— [Laughter] I never had anything—truly—to complain about anybody who was in the regular library services. I might complain about somebody behind the desk there stamping out a book or something. But I've always found that the people working in the library were very, very competent. They knew their stuff. They were helpful. And I have absolutely never had any complaints about them, personally.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Okay.

WANG: Personally.

COHEN: Personally, yes. But?

WANG: Oh, maybe a director here or there.

COHEN: Administrations. You've served under...well, the presidents, you served under Mason Gross...you've been here; I don't know if you served under him. [Laughs] What can you say about his tenure and contributions to the university as a whole and particularly to Newark?

WANG: It's hard to say. It's hard to say. Well, we grew up under him. It would be unfair to dig him or knock him or anything like that. But I think that in those days we grew up—how shall I put it?—in a more leisurely and civilized way than later times have allowed. Today everything is geared towards programs and grants or this or that or the other thing. At that time the university there was planned and plotted and thought up in terms of olden times, I guess. Let's say that this was an absence of what you would call pressures.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. What was your perception of Mason Gross's concern for the Newark campus?

WANG: There were always complaints about New Brunswick and I don't think that will ever change. So my perceptions are really not important in that respect. [Laughter] But I think that...I rarely heard too many things that were said against Mason Gross. Let's say in comparison with Bloustein and his stormy administration some years ago, Mason Gross's was a little something like a paradise.

COHEN: Why do you characterize Ed Bloustein's administration as stormy?

WANG: Well, because of his relations with the faculty, you remember.

COHEN: Okay. Could you go into that in some detail? What—

WANG: I think it's much more for AAUP than for me, isn't it?

COHEN: But as a faculty member here. I mean you have—whatever recollections that you have of his....

WANG: I haven't got terrible recollections of President Bloustein. As a matter of fact, he was very helpful to this department in the capacity that he had as president at the time, which was within the legal constraints of the contracts and things like that. He was very helpful to our department in adjudicating situations which were sometimes difficult. And I personally did not have anything, that I could say, of negative value. What I heard and what I read was on a larger basis of the faculty as a whole. Apparently he had some pretty poor ratings from the faculty at different times, if I remember correctly. But nothing came of that either.

COHEN: On this campus, Malcolm Talbott, who was appointed vice president in 1965, and served in that capacity to seventy-two, I guess.

WANG: I had some very nice relationships with Malcolm Talbott on an administrative level when I was the chair of the department, for example. Of course when he was acting dean, I think it was, I'd just become chair. He was very helpful, and we had a very cordial relationship. I did not find things—other people found him overbearing—or anything like that. Again, I say, as with the case of Dr. Bloustein, I have only favorable personal memories.

COHEN: What recollections do you have of Malcolm Talbott's role in the Conklin Hall negotiations? Any at all?

WANG: A very, very red-faced Malcolm Talbott, who was walking up and down very angrily across the front of the room there, taking his section to....

COHEN: What room?

WANG: The meetings in Conklin Hall.

COHEN: The meetings. Yes, okay.

WANG: Very angry at some of the things that were being said, perhaps correctly so, I don't remember. But it was a very, very difficult time for him.

COHEN: Yes. Do you recall what he was angry at?

WANG: No, not particularly. But I think that people said certain things about meetings that they had had. And he said these things were not true or whatever. I don't remember. But he was a very, very angry man at times. But the most distressing moment that I can remember took place in 1972 at a meeting over which Henry Blumenthal presided. Because at that time there were terrible...there was terrible agitation on the part of the students, perhaps in terms of these requirements we were talking about because language was affected. I'm pretty sure of that. And a meeting was held. And it was a fateful meeting; there's no doubt about it because it sticks in my mind that way. The faculty got together for one of its meetings, a regularly scheduled

meeting, in one hundred Conklin Hall. And they were going to take very, very significant votes, including whether language should be kept.

COHEN: This is while Blumenthal was dean?

WANG: Blumenthal was dean.

COHEN: Okay.

WANG: And of course he was agitated also. Henry was a very, very fine, civilized, cultured human being, who came into the deanship at the wrong time in history. Such agitation, I'm sure, contributed to his illnesses which came subsequently. But in any case, it was just at that time, as the vote was about to be taken, that all hell broke out in the room. That was the time of the Kent State massacre.

COHEN: Nineteen seventy we're talking about.

WANG: In 1970.

COHEN: May of 1970 when the meeting was held.

WANG: I beg your pardon, 1970.

COHEN: Yes, yes.

WANG: Were you there?

COHEN: I don't think I was at the meeting, but I've read some of the records. So the discussions....

WANG: Seventy-two was when the language requirement was actually dropped. So in 1970—you're right, because Kent State was 1970—and all hell broke loose.

COHEN: While the discussion on the curriculum was going on?

WANG: I don't think it got off the floor. I don't believe we even got started.

COHEN: Okay, okay.

WANG: Just as things were about to start, people from both points of view, whatever they were, got up and started screaming at each other.

COHEN: Faculty.

WANG: Faculty!

COHEN: Not students.

WANG: Students were, strangely enough, as I can see in my mind's memory now, really were around the room, standing around the room, all sides of the room except the front. Whole lines of them expecting something, I guess...curriculum changes they were waiting for. And all hell broke loose. This was precisely the time of the Kent State massacre. And Blumenthal went up and tried to quiet people down. Personally went up, this row, that row. He didn't get anywhere. I think within ten minutes he adjourned the meeting, that was it. And that had a fateful effect. You never know how to explain things that will happen to you or to the society or to mankind in general. But because of that, the language requirement was not dropped that year.

COHEN: It was not dropped that year.

WANG: There was no vote. [Laughter] There was no vote. It most assuredly would have been taken to task with everything else that day. But it was not dropped. It stayed another year at least.

COHEN: So there was still a language requirement.

WANG: That's right.

COHEN: And it's still, with some modifications, still in effect today, right?

WANG: No, there's no language requirement now, except for people who have deficiencies from high school.

COHEN: Oh, that's right. Okay. When was the language requirement dropped then?

WANG: In seventy-two, I think.

COHEN: Oh, I see. Two years later.

WANG: Two or three years ago there was a vote to reinstate it. But then it was overturned. And I'm not going into that.

COHEN: Anything further you can say about Henry Blumenthal's tenure?

WANG: As I said before, Henry Blumenthal was a man whom I admired and respected. He was a scholar. He was a fine teacher. He was the first one to win the teacher's award here. He was a man of high ideals. And, as I said before, he was probably an ineffective dean because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

COHEN: So back a few years. What can you say about Dean Gilliland's tenure?

WANG: Better not to speak about it...or anybody else except Woodward.

COHEN: Woodward. What can you say about Woodward?

WANG: Well, at least Woodward presided over the development of the school. He did his best, to the extent that I knew that he was doing it, developing the school and this campus. I think Gilliland was the first dean over this whole campus, wasn't he? This new campus.

COHEN: Well, he was here in sixty-eight, sixty-five?

WANG: Talbott was just before.

COHEN: A little before the new campus. I think it was sixty-six. I should have that list in front of me of the dates.

WANG: He was only.... I had an interview with him over on Rector Street one Sunday, so I know he was there.

COHEN: Jumping ahead, Gil Panson was the acting dean for a year. Any feelings for that period?

WANG: No, no. I really haven't any feelings one way or the other. He was helpful to the extent that he could be. But he also, unfortunately, presided over the demolition of this department because it was during his pro tem relationship here that...if not just the abandonment of the language requirement; there were many lines lost.

COHEN: Yes, during that time.

WANG: Yes.

COHEN: And then after Panson, Richard Robey was the next regular appointment. What can you say about that?

WANG: Well, the department did not...there were no significant changes under Robey one way or the other really. Some people had a good relationships with him, others didn't have any relationship like myself with him whatsoever. But not much happened. Couple of people got on to tenure. That's about it.

COHEN: But it's pretty much documented that he was forced out more or less. And I guess more than less. Why was he forced out?

WANG: Hard to remember why. I don't remember exactly the circumstances. Of course I do remember that, on the whole, he was aggressively overbearing to the faculty as a whole. And I'm not speaking about our department. But he did not get along with the faculty as a whole, and I guess he—perhaps you remember better than I do—that he took certain steps which finally—what shall I say?—did him in. I don't know the right term. He didn't live too much longer after that if I remember.

COHEN: Yes, yes. It was tragic, he was young.

WANG: He was in his early forties, wasn't he?

COHEN: I believe so, yes. A great shock for everybody, no matter what side they were on, I guess. Anything we've talked about that you'd like to go back to to footnote, expand upon?

WANG: No, I don't think so. The most significant thing that happened to us, I told you, was the loss of the requirement which we felt in many, many ways.... It was not just a question of losing teachers and losing lines. That's important enough, of course. But it's also selfish in its own way because you're not looking at it beyond a certain thing. But it was the loss of something that was important to us in terms of education. A significant part of education had gone down the tube.

COHEN: Talking about that, to what extent do you think the conflict between turf and principle has been a major issue on this campus? More so than other universities where pretty much the faculty and the administration have capitulated to the bottom line, the demand for numbers and so on, the demand for enrollment, students, numbers?

WANG: Okay.

COHEN: As opposed to a principled position of what an education in the university should include in its curriculum.

WANG: I will sum it up, at the bottom line, Gil, as you put it, it would seem to me that more and more, here and abroad, even in such hallowed places as Oxford where other things like language and so on are not doing well either, as I understand it, colleges have become more businesses than hallowed institutions of learning.

COHEN: So this is not unique.

WANG: Oh, no! It certainly isn't.

COHEN: Anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to address for posterity?

WANG: For posterity, for the time capsule? Not really. Not really. I just hope that the college will flourish again as it had in earlier periods. And what can I say?

COHEN: Well, thank you very much.

[Break in recording]

COHEN: Postscript!

WANG: Going back to that meeting in 1970, which was so violent and so full of potent meaning for us, I believe that this was a meeting of different events at the same time. It was not only the Kent State thing—that was 1970 wasn't it?

COHEN: ‘Seventy, yes, May of seventy.

WANG: Because you know my memory could be failing.

COHEN: Mine, too.

WANG: I think also that this was the same time that the exacerbation took place because of the beginning of the bombing of Cambodia.

COHEN: Cambodia, right.

WANG: Right. And all of this stuff came together to inflame people at the same time at this particular meeting. In addition to the feelings that people had for and against violent changes in the curriculum. And the anxieties because those curriculum changes would have very great significance for some of us more than for others.

COHEN: Curriculum changes.

WANG: You know the dropping of the language requirement and things like that. And some people felt that there was too much emphasis being placed on the sciences, the natural sciences. I think there were fourteen credits they were getting at that particular time.

COHEN: But how did they mix up curriculum changes with the bombing in Cambodia and the killing of the students at Kent State?

WANG: You just answered it. It was a very bad brew that boiled over together and coalesced together, which should never have been together, which had no place being there at all.

COHEN: Yes, I see.

WANG: It was a faculty meeting. We were supposed to discuss curriculum.

COHEN: And everything....

WANG: And everything there was on people’s minds: the bombing.... Now, I may be wrong, and I may be looking at things and seeing things all together that didn’t belong together. But I seem to remember that the bombing of Cambodia—I seem to remember signs with pictures of a bloody face of Nixon, calling him a murderer and things like that, in the hall. I may be wrong. Maybe I’m imagining it. I don’t think so. And people were talking about all these different things. We were sitting there and wondering what was going on. And then Henry said, “Meeting is adjourned.” Meeting’s adjourned. We looked at each other and said, Look, in such an unforeseen, unsuspected, impossible manner the language requirement has been spared for a year. [Laughter] But it was true. We didn’t lose it for another year at least, maybe two; I don’t remember. But that was a tough.... I would say that was one of *the*—perhaps *the* most powerful memory that I have of almost anything around this campus because of the explosive mixture that

took place at that time. Anything could have happened. Anything could have happened that day. People could have come to blows, if not more.

COHEN: People were shouting at each other?

WANG: People were shouting at each other.

COHEN: And what was Henry Blumenthal doing?

WANG: Henry Blumenthal was trying to regain the composure of the place and keep everybody at peace and to start the meeting in a dignified fashion. Henry was a gentleman. He couldn't cope with things like that.

COHEN: Were the students doing anything other than standing there?

WANG: No. To the best of my knowledge. Now that may be false. I simply see students standing around the room waiting to see what would happen.

COHEN: And they were there for curriculum reform, you think.

WANG: Hopefully, they were hoping that there would be the kinds of reforms that they would want. Now, I suppose at a certain time if things had gone their way and had they not received what they wanted, they would have become very vocal and said, Hey! We don't want that! We want it this way! Or throw this out and bring this in! But we never got to that.

COHEN: Well, at this meeting, wasn't there a vote on the question of a moratorium on campus?

WANG: I don't remember.

COHEN: Was it at this meeting?

WANG: Moratorium on what?

COHEN: To cancel classes because of the killing of the Kent State students. Was that an issue at that meeting?

WANG: Could be. I don't know. I don't remember it at all.

COHEN: I'll have to check the archives.

WANG: Did people tell you?

COHEN: Yes. Sure. Right. Of course at this point I don't know myself. But that was a pretty dramatic description.

WANG: It was, it was, it was. It's foremost in my mind among the events that I can remember since I'm here because of the violence. It was not just the meeting. It was a conflation of all kinds of things at the same time which had nothing to do with the meeting. But as in high tragedy, things happen which you do not expect.

COHEN: But your recollection of the student turnout was to do with curriculum matters.

WANG: Absolutely.

COHEN: And not to....

WANG: That is my recollection.

COHEN: Yes.

WANG: Maybe it was something else. But I recollect that they were doing it for that purpose.

COHEN: Thank you very much.

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

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