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

An Interview with

IRWIN L. MERKER

Conducted by

Gilbert Cohen

October 8, 1991

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GILBERT COHEN: This is Tuesday, October 8, 1991. This is Gil Cohen. I'm meeting with Professor Irwin Merker in his home in Princeton, New Jersey.

[Break in recording]

We are back with Professor Merker, who is professor of history in the History Department on the Newark campus. And we were talking before—if you could give us a sketch of your academic career before and after coming to Rutgers.

IRWIN L. MERKER: I got my BA from NYU in 1955, my MA in classics from Princeton in fifty-seven, and my Ph.D. from Princeton in fifty-eight. Started teaching at the University of Michigan. And after a couple of months I got drafted and spent my military service mostly at the Historical Office of the Chemical Corps.

COHEN: What year was that—what years?

MERKER: Fifty-nine to sixty. And then I came to Rutgers, and I've been in the History Department ever since.

COHEN: For the record and also maybe for help with the questions, what committees—I forgot to ask you this before—what committees have you served on, on the faculty?

MERKER: I was on the Scholastic Standing Committee, I was on the Admissions Committee. At one point I was the president of the local chapter of the AAUP. That's about it.

COHEN: Okay. Thanks. I've been asking people who've been here in the sixties to describe the old campus, the old Rutgers-Newark campus, 40 Rector Street. What did it look like?

MERKER: Well, the main building, of course, looked like a brewery. And it was right there off of Raymond Boulevard on Rector Street. And to get there from Penn Station, you had to walk. You could either walk sort of into town and then along Military Park, or you could walk sort of between Raymond Boulevard and the railroad, and that was mostly sort of industrial: warehouses and slaughterhouses and various other kinds of buildings like that. But by the time I got there, the place had, as it were, expanded. And there were a number of other buildings that had been taken over. Not only the brewery, but what was the old razor blade factory across the street. We had at least our offices; it was my office, not the department—well, there wasn't a department at that point. There were divisions, Social Science Division was still over on Rector Street with some of the important people in the History Department had their offices across the street in what I guess were originally private homes. But ours was all the way sort of across Washington

Park on James Street. They had recently taken over a couple of buildings where the insurance company is now. And were using it for offices. And so there were a couple of historians and a few other people, all the people sort of stuck over there. And then there was…among the other things: There was the insurance building on Washington Park. I remember teaching in that. The students had to come to the lounge downstairs. And then also at one point they took over 104 Washington Street upstairs where we had a number of classes. And then 154.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

MERKER: Which I think—which is now basically the parking lot.

COHEN: I'm losing track of where the buildings were, yes.

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: And I mean of course they didn't have real air conditioning.

COHEN: No.

MERKER: And when the term began in September, it was quite hot. The one that was the converted garage was just about the worst, because they didn't have any windows.

COHEN: Converted garage?

MERKER: I think it may still—up until fairly recently it was still standing.

COHEN: And where was that located?

MERKER: That was at the corner of Washington and James—no, no, Warren.

COHEN: And Warren.

MERKER: See, I think that was 154.

COHEN: Washington and Warren…. Oh, oh, oh.

MERKER: There was a parking lot on Washington, or at least there was, between Bleeker and—what's the street that runs down, right down and up the steps into the campus between Conklin and….

COHEN: That's New Street.

MERKER: That's New Street.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: There's a parking lot now off New Street and Washington.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: The garage was at the next corner.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

MERKER: From New Street, which is….

COHEN: Well, that's Bleeker.

MERKER: When you're heading north.

COHEN: Yes. A garage.

MERKER: And literally that's what it was. And I think later on the university kept owning it, and it became a garage again. Yes.

COHEN: What was it like teaching in facilities like that? You were used to—you went to NYU and you went to Princeton.

MERKER: Obviously we needed fifteen minutes between classes for each course to get from one to the other. And it was very different. You always had to remember which building you were going to. And of course since I was new, I almost never got to do anything in the main building on Rector Street. The only thing I ever went there for was the library. And very, very occasionally there'd be a class late in the day because all the important people had their classes there. [Laughter] And the less important people sort of got shunted over to all these—

COHEN: To the other places…

MERKER: —outlying.

COHEN: ….outlying.

MERKER: Then of course later on we took over—when we got a little bit bigger and we decided that we would have large classes, the university didn't own an auditorium that was big enough. And so they rented a ballroom of the Military Park Hotel, which was sort of like around the corner from Rector Street. And we would—I'd lecture there twice a week.

COHEN: How many students were you lecturing to typically in that space?

MERKER: Well, in my big one there were a hundred and twenty.

COHEN: Whew!

MERKER: The way it worked, everybody taught four classes.

COHEN: Oh, yes.

MERKER: There was a completely different time slot schedule. Usually it would be Monday, Wednesday, Friday or Monday, Wednesday, Thursday or Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday. Or often there were two classes on Tuesday and one on Thursday, which kept people.

COHEN: So you were teaching four sections, four separate—

MERKER: It was always three separate sections originally.

COHEN: Three separate sections.

MERKER: Plus an advanced course.

COHEN: That was your workload.

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: For each semester.

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: Now how does that compare to what was going on in the seventies? Was it the same workload and the same number of students?

MERKER: The History Department ultimately…. Well, the first change was to combine the three sections. So you met them twice a week in this large section. And then they were broken up into smaller groups often with teaching assistant help. But then the History Department was able to switch over to three.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. While we're on the subject, I mean I was thinking of curriculum a little later on. But I think that we've hit on something with the whole question of the approaching curriculum, so let's maybe move into that.
MERKER: Okay.

COHEN: And what at that time that you were teaching, talking about the hundred and twenty students, what were you teaching?

MERKER: First of all, at that point, Western Civ was required. Everybody theoretically had to take Western Civ. And the impression I get is that pretty much everybody did. Occasionally somebody would be able to work out something, but this was truly unusual. In addition to US history.

COHEN: That was a requirement?

MERKER: It was a requirement.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: And so everybody took Western Civ.

COHEN: Was that a year or semester? I forget.

MERKER: That was a year course.

COHEN: A year. Mm-hmm.

MERKER: They started at the beginning, and it went to the present. When I started it, it was the cavemen to Eisenhower, the full circle. [Laughter]

COHEN: Well, that's a tall order.

MERKER: And of course it was three hours a week, which meant that you got to cover a great deal more than you do today with the eighty-minute classes. You only cover about two thirds of what you covered in three fifty-minute classes. In other words two eighty minute classes is the equivalent of about two thirds of what you….

COHEN: Is that right?

MERKER: This is true to a greater extent in the foreign languages than in history. But by and large history, at least in my history classes, I'm only able to cover about two thirds of what I wanted to. Or what I had done before.

COHEN: Even though the total time is—I mean if you count the minutes.

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: I mean theoretically it's the same.

MERKER: Theoretically it's the same, but obviously it's impossible to stop. Let's say we've covered, you know, fifty minutes, and now we're stopping and we're starting the next thing. And, you know, after you've covered your twenty minutes or so of the lecture, you can't say, well, we're stopping here, and we'll pick up next time and then give your twenty-five minutes. Because the topic sort of expands to cover the period that you're meeting the students.

COHEN: Yes. Well, you're saying you preferred the old method?

MERKER: Yes. But of course the advantage of the new is that everybody has a three-day schedule, and many people have two-day schedules. And of course new classes are geared to that and would have to be completely reworked. But I don't think there's anybody who thinks that educationally and pedagogically two eighty-minute classes is as good as three fifty-minute classes.

COHEN: So why was it done? Just for people's convenience?

MERKER: I don't think it was done for that. I think the administration just decided to do it.

COHEN: Just like that?

MERKER: Originally they made some noise about it fitting in with NJIT. But for God knows how long, they never bothered to equate the two systems…I mean the NJIT and the Rutgers one.

COHEN: About when was that instituted, the eighty minute?

MERKER: I think it was sometime in the middle seventies, when Norman Samuels was the assistant to the dean. I think that may very well be when Henry Blumenthal was dean of the college.

COHEN: Well, sixty-nine to seventy-one.

MERKER: The idea behind it was to get the faculty…. See, they wanted faculty present on campus. In our college, in our system, most people do not live in Newark right nearby. And even if they did, the library facilities are not suitable for real research in most fields. I mean it's a good undergraduate library. And if you want to do any real research, you have to go to New Brunswick, you have to go to New York or come down here to Princeton. So the faculty lives scattered around. I mean the scientists are okay because they have their labs there. I mean that's where they do their research. But most of the people in the humanities and the social sciences—well, not all in social sciences, but many of them in social science—need libraries, and Newark doesn't have them. So the faculty as a whole, well the nonscientific faculty, tends to work elsewhere. So they come into Newark, teach their classes, hold their office hours, attend meetings or whatever, and then go home. And they try to avoid coming in. Even originally when people had to come in four days a week, the fifth day was usually spent somewhere else. The dean wanted to have the faculty present as much as possible. And so at this point most people are already getting the three-day schedules. So the new schedule was made up in such a way to force people to come in and spend four days or even five days.

COHEN: I don't understand. If there were shorter periods, wouldn't that require faculty to be on campus more often than if you have the eighty-minute period?

MERKER: No, no. The way it worked with four classes…. See, by this time they were switching over to three classes.

COHEN: Three classes, right.

MERKER: And with three classes you could have Monday, Wednesday, Friday schedules, and a lot of people did that.

COHEN: Okay.

MERKER: This way if you have, the way it's set up—you don't have to deal with this because you're in the library.

COHEN: No. That's right. Yes.

MERKER: But if you want a three-day schedule, you have to teach three eighty-minute classes back to back. There is no possible way, given the schedules, for a three-day schedule without three classes back to back.

COHEN: In one day.

MERKER: In one day.

COHEN: In the day that you come in.

MERKER: Yes. And you don't have a break between classes. Ordinarily it's three in a row.

COHEN: Three in a row. Let's see, Monday, Wednesday, Friday or something like that?

MERKER: Yes. You have to have three in a row.

COHEN: That's the present situation.

MERKER: Yes. If you come in Monday, Wednesday, Friday, you have to have three classes from eight-thirty to one o'clock. And I'm exhausted when I get through with that. And I know many other people are exhausted as well.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: If you…. The idea was that it was going to be so terrible that people would say, the hell with this! I'm going to take a four-day schedule, and I won't have this terrible thing.

COHEN: Ah!

MERKER: But most people said, you know, no matter how bad it is, no matter how awful I teach at the end of this, I'm not going to come in for four days.

COHEN: The theory was it would bring more people.

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: It would keep the people on campus. But actually it had the opposite effect, is that what you're saying?

MERKER: Well, I don't think it had the opposite effect. The people did what they had done before.

COHEN: Oh, I see.

MERKER: But the thing is that the teaching suffers from it. Because if you're teaching three classes in a row, three eighty-minute classes, you're just utterly exhausted by the time it's over. And even now when I come home after one of these days, I cannot do anything for the rest of the day. And even at night I can watch a little television or do some reading. But I really can't start preparing for classes again until the next day.

COHEN: Not to mention do research.

MERKER: Oh, yes. [Laughter] After one of those days it's impossible to do any sort of research.

COHEN: Oh, my God. What was happening in the, oh, shall we say, curriculum development in the history—well, let's start with the History Department—in the period in the late sixties, let's say after the move to the new campus? If you could sort of compare and contrast if you can what it was like before the new campus and what it was developing through the seventies.

MERKER: In terms of curriculum?

COHEN: In terms of curriculum. Let's start with history.

MERKER: Okay. Well, the one thing to remember is that the college was growing all during the sixties and on into the beginning of the seventies. By the early seventies, Bruce Robinson was projecting an undergraduate enrollment of seven to eight thousand.

COHEN: Bruce Robinson at that time is—he was the associate dean?

MERKER: He was the associate dean….

COHEN: For the college.

MERKER: For the college. He'd been in the History Department, and then he'd gone on to…. Maybe he was assistant dean, originally for Gilliland.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: And then for Talbott and for Henry.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. I'm sorry you were saying that he was thinking of expanding the….

MERKER: Yes. And so that's what the History Department was doing. I was hired because they didn't have an ancient historian. After that, you know, they began…they were hiring. Other new hires were for Latin American history and…. In other words, they were trying to cover more and more of the historical areas… I mean they were doing the same thing in the United States history. So that ultimately there were well over twenty people in the department. And basically that was what was happening. There was a growing expansion of the number of different courses. Then of course since the early seventies, Bruce Robinson's projections never worked out. And instead the History Department has been declining. And of course we have, for whatever reason, we don't have any large number of history majors. In most places—well, I shouldn't say most places—in many places, like for example at Princeton and a number of other places, history is the largest or one of the largest of the departments in terms of majors. And at Newark we're one of the smaller ones. I think this is largely because of the background of our students and the way in which the college is organized.

COHEN: Well, why can Princeton students use history, and why can Rutgers-Newark students not see the usefulness of history? Obviously the Princeton students see something in history that the Rutgers students don't see in history into the late seventies and into the eighties. Why is that?

MERKER: I think the Rutgers students believe—obviously it's their parents because our students tend to live at home whereas Princeton students are mostly living on campus—but our students live at home, they're controlled or they're dominated by their parents. And the parents feel that they have to have something useful like accounting or business, as if doing business is going to prepare you for getting a job. And so they all take—they all major in things like that. I mean also at one point large numbers of people wanted to go into teaching, and history was a good subject for teaching. But apparently that also has sort of died—dried up—as there are fewer people who want to go into teaching nowadays.

COHEN: Aside from the people that wanted to go into teaching in the earlier years, late sixties and so on, we're talking about a substantial enrollment in the history major.

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: Okay. Why was history, quote, "desirable" then compared to now? What's been changing, late sixties through the seventies? It was certainly as useful or not as useful then, theoretically, as now.

MERKER: Well, in the sixties there was no business program. I mean if you wanted to do anything like that, you'd have to major in economics, which was a relatively serious department.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: And business was a very, very small part of the Economics Department. In the seventies, the Business Department was separated from economics, and they set up their own program completely independent of the Economics Department.

COHEN: I'm sorry—

MERKER: No, no. That's fine.

COHEN: In your perception, how effective was the business program in recruiting students, and was this a factor?

MERKER: I don't think it was a matter of effectiveness. The students, as soon as they saw that there was a business program and that the demands of the business program were relatively nonexistent, went into it. It reached the point that we began to hear that some of the businesses—for example Bamberger's—wouldn't hire anybody who came out of the Business Department of Newark. [Laughter] However if you came out of the History Department and wanted to go there, they'd take you. But if you came out of the business, they wouldn't. Don't ask me why.

COHEN: Okay.

MERKER: But…. And also there are several other things, though, that were happening as well. The major change in the curriculum in sixty-nine, seventy, whenever it was, basically changed the college-wide requirement for history. It used to be everybody had to take Western Civ. And anybody who wanted to major in history had to take US history. But the new requirement was any history course instead of Western Civ. So originally the department was geared to provide large numbers of sections of Western Civ to all the students in the college. In fact it was one of the few courses, other than English Comp, that everybody in the college had to take. And when it was finished, a course designed for non-history majors really, you know, to give everybody an overall perspective of Western Civ. Some of the students decided to stay on and major in history. Now the students are allowed to take any course. And although some of them do take Western Civ, large numbers of them appear in any one of the other courses that are taught: ancient history, medieval history….

COHEN: You're saying instead of—

MERKER: Instead of Western Civ.

COHEN: Instead of Western Civ they're taking other courses.

MERKER: Any of the other courses.

COHEN: Well, what were the pressures working at the time to bring about these changes? Why this change, this move away from history and the movement towards business programs? What was the genesis of the movement?

MERKER: I think it's in the kind of students that we got. Well, first of all I think that since the sixties, the percentage of people who are going to college has increased. And many of the people who would have gone to college previously are not coming to Newark anymore. I mean we always got a very large proportion of people who were first generation in their families who were

going to college. But now the people who would've gone to college let's say in the fifties or the sixties, even though they were first generation, had a certain background and a feeling for what they wanted in a liberal education. And now everybody goes to college not because they want or get a liberal education, but because they're told that during the course of a lifetime, if you get a college degree, you'll be making two hundred thousand, three hundred thousand dollars more than the guy who only has a high school degree. And so for many people it's just putting in their time to get a degree.

COHEN: Well, why was the liberal education accepted in the late fifties, early sixties, when you started out at Rutgers in Newark then, when still the students were for the most part the sons and daughters of people who hadn't been to college, right?

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: Same thing applies for the student body today more or less: the sons and daughters of people who haven't been to college. And yet the liberal arts education was valued then; and as we're moving through the seventies into the eighties, it isn't valued to the extent that it was in the old days. Why? What is your interpretation of that trend as far as the Newark campus is concerned?

MERKER: I think it's that originally people valued education for its own sake. And now it's valued because it's a ticket to more money.

COHEN: Why do they value that?

MERKER: I think that in the fifties and so forth, people thought that the liberal education would make them better. And obviously if they were better, they'd be making more money. But the purpose was to make them better.

[Break in recording]

COHEN: We were talking about the…Okay. You were on a roll. Why the liberal education, liberal arts, valued let's say thirty years ago, and why in the seventies it changed, moved away from it? What's happening, in your perception?

MERKER: I think it's the growth of materialism, the desire to get a college education to make more money, rather than to get a college education to become better, and obviously by being better, making more money.

COHEN: When did this change come about, do you think?

MERKER: I really don't know. I mean I think it's not something that started and then stopped. I think it's a continuing process. Originally college educations were for the few, the well-to-do. Then as more and more people wanted it, it became more broadly based and ultimately, as in the present, most people were expected to go to college. And somehow if your kids don't go to

college, you or they—or maybe the both of you—are somehow failures, which is not the way it used to be. You know, in the forties if your kids went to college, well, that was pretty good. But if they didn't, it was no stigma on anybody.

COHEN: And as a result of this transition, the liberal arts somehow lost out.

MERKER: Yes. I mean they weren't immediately useful. Of course what I constantly point out to my students, that the liberal education is basically designed to teach you how to learn and how to think. Whereas the vocational programs teach you a specific job. But the thing is that most people nowadays are supposed to go through seven-point-four different jobs in their lifetime. And if you learn how to be one thing, it may not last. Of course the most interesting thing of all is accounting. In order to be an accountant, you have to be relatively intelligent and you have to learn a whole lot of rules and how to deal with them in mathematics and so forth. And for as long as I've been teaching, you knew that if you went through the accounting program and you succeeded in getting out, you could get yourself a nice job, and there would always be a need for you. And apparently this past year the accountants found out that they were in deep trouble, because they weren't hiring accountants anymore. The current recession obviously played a role in that. But even more than that now is the fact that there are computers. And whereas before small businessmen and just anybody needed accountants and would have to go to them; now if you're bright and obviously if you own your own business you have to be reasonably bright, you can get yourself a computer program which will do most of the accounting for you. Yes, if you're going to have a big company with all sorts of takeovers and whatnot, you probably will do well to have your own accountants. But if you're just running a small business out of a little store or something like that, you can probably get almost all of your accounting from a computer. And obviously technological change is overtaking the accountants. And if you know how to write programs, you're probably in great demand. But if you're actually doing the accounting, you're in trouble. I never thought it would happen to the accountants, and I suppose the recession is playing an important part in what has happened. But it never happened before; even before in recessions, the accountants were able to get their jobs, you know, start off with good salaries and everything. So I mean for this reason the liberal arts are very, very important. But certainly the new curriculum is doing nothing to promote liberal arts.

COHEN: You're talking about the one that was recently instituted a few years ago.

MERKER: And even the previous one. See, I've been through two major curriculums.

COHEN: Yes, could you go through that? What was the first step? You said there were two. Going through the earlier curriculum, what changes were instituted then?

MERKER: Well, originally there was a relatively rigid system. You had to take two years of English and by and large it was pretty well fixed. English Composition and the Masterpieces which taught you about literature. The history requirement was fixed: You had to take Western Civ. And then of course the other thing was distribution in the three original divisions when I came: There were the social sciences, the natural sciences, and the humanities.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: And you had to take distribution requirements in them. The new curriculum, the first change, diluted that to a certain extent, making a number of different literatures the equal of Literary Masterpieces. And making any history course available to replace Western Civ. Obviously some people continued to take Western Civ. But there were a number of other history courses that would take that requirement. But the new one, the new program, was specifically designed to deal with some of the problems that had come up. For example, if you—

COHEN: The new program, you mean the one recently phased in?

MERKER: The recent one, yes. We had a number of problems. One of them was that if you…. My advice to anybody who came to me as a senior and said that they wanted to go to Rutgers, would be don't go to Rutgers. Go to your local community college for two years. It's cheaper, and would probably be easier. And then when you finish, you take— You make sure you take all the requirements that Rutgers is going to demand of you. And then you transfer to Rutgers. You come with an absolutely clean slate except for the courses that you have taken which you won't have to take. Your grades that you've already had—and obviously if you're taking, you know, various distribution requirements, you're going to be taking courses in areas where you're not too familiar or where you're not too interested and where you don't do too well. Take your sciences and everything else. And then you come in with an absolutely clean slate, and you just take your courses in your major and the courses you want to take and that you enjoy taking and where you're going to get your high grades. So it encourages people and rewards them to take their courses, required courses, the hard courses elsewhere, because their grade point average is only going to count on the courses they actually take at Rutgers. And the system, at least the new program, is designed to try this out. But of course that has been squelched completely. And now all you have to do is just take a history course, a literature course, just about anywhere.

The other thing that has happened is that there are a limited number of multidisciplinary courses or interdisciplinary courses. And huge numbers of people pour into them because everybody has to take them. Many of them are not interested in the course at all, and the level of the teaching and the learning of these courses is reduced because of that obviously. But at the same time the humanities requirement has been dropped. As a result there is less teaching available in those areas.

COHEN: And going back to the first curriculum, maybe I asked this question before, but what were the influences operating at that time to change things in the early seventies?

MERKER: It was a feeling that students should have more freedom. That obviously the students knew best for themselves what they wanted. That was the main purpose of it, to open up, to do away with…like, for example, there was a language requirement that was killed, by one vote. They wanted to do away with the history requirement, but Elliot Rosen worked out a deal with the scientists to keep some sort of a history requirement. But the main purpose was to give people as much freedom as possible. And about the same time we also changed the grading. It used to be that if you took a course and you failed it, the failure was always on your record. Now if you take the course and fail it and then you take it again and pass it, the failure is removed. This was to make things easier for students. But I mean it all seems…also the cutoff point where

if you've started a course, after a few weeks even if you dropped it, it would always appear on your record. Now it's not until quite late in the term that you can drop the course if you did that. And now of course what people do is instead of failing a student, you encourage the student to drop the course.

COHEN: To what extent—

MERKER: But you know this is all part of sort of a change in society. It used to be that if Junior didn't do well, parents would encourage him to try harder, do more work, and so forth. And instead they replaced this with trying to find something else to do that you do well. I mean obviously this works: If Junior is no good at football and you say, well, you'll do well in baseball or soccer or something like that. But if you Junior doesn't do well in math, and you say, oh, well, forget about math, do basket weaving or whatever it is that you want.

COHEN: Not a Rutgers style.

MERKER: No. But I mean there are other things. But, no, this is not Rutgers; this is general throughout our society. And the schools and…I mean—

COHEN: That's exactly what I was going to ask, yes. To what extent was it societal generally and to what extent was it specific to Rutgers in Newark, these changes?

MERKER: I think the basic changes were induced by what was happening in the society around it. But the specific ways in which Rutgers responded to these pressures is purely the way things happened to have worked out in the faculty from time to time. I mean like for example, with a change in one vote, there would have been a language requirement.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: And apparently at least two people in the Foreign Languages Department—one felt that he didn't want to have people forced into his classes; so he was in favor of doing away with the requirement. And another one, who wasn't quite sure what was going on, but voted the way the people around were voting.

[Laughter]

COHEN: That's hard to believe!

MERKER: So, yes. I mean obviously there were these pressures from society. But the exact way in which Rutgers responded was purely a matter of faculty desires and of accident. I mean you know if the guy who didn't quite understand what the vote was about had understood, it would have been different. I mean literally one vote was involved in the language requirement.

COHEN: To what extent was the change in the level of preparation of the student body a factor in these curriculum changes in the seventies?

MERKER: I don't think they were very much of a factor. Now it is true that…I remember large numbers of my students, some really good students, from the sixties; but we were still getting substantial numbers of good students in the seventies. And Gloria, I remember as—she came, I think, in seventy-six, seventy-seven—she remembers good students. But we both sort of feel that the real collapse has occurred fairly recently over the past five or maybe six years. And there is a real collapse. You still get the occasional good student, but they're very few and they're very far between. But it really is about five years, maybe six—four, five, six—years that this real collapse has happened, and we really can't see it. I mean there may have been a sort of slow decline before, but I wasn't noticing it until recently. Yes, it is true I was probably getting more students who were less prepared than the…. But the real change has been in the past five years or something—from about the mid-eighties.

COHEN: I was going to ask, going back to the seventies, I mean after the takeover of Conklin Hall and the whole controversy around admissions and so on and the pressure to admit students, many students, who—or some students who needed remediation—what was your perception of the level of preparation of students during that period, sixty-nine, late sixty-nine, seventy, seventy-one, seventy-two?

MERKER: Well, I was sheltered in ancient history. But I mean I was able to cut back more and more on teaching Western Civ. At that point I was able to teach more ancient history courses, and I was able to put together a course in, you know, a combination of ancient and medieval course.

COHEN: When were you on the Scholastic Standing Committee? In the seventies?

MERKER: No. I was very, very recently—about a year or two ago. But originally it was in the very early sixties.

COHEN: Early sixties! Oh, I see. So it was back a bit.

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: How about when you were on admissions?

MERKER: I was the chairman during sixty-eight to seventy.

COHEN: Chairman of the Admissions Committee?

MERKER: Of the Admissions Committee.

COHEN: So sixty-eight to seventy.

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: And what was happening during that period, let's say seventy as far as, in terms of preparation?

MERKER: Literally absolutely nothing.

COHEN: What do you mean, absolutely nothing?

MERKER: In the late sixties, of course, our admissions were running pretty much the same as before. We were taking…. The way it operated, we always used the class standing rather than anything like SAT scores. And we knew that if you were, say, in the top ten percent of your class, no matter what school you came from, you would do well—or at least you would get out of Rutgers with a degree. Even the worse schools around would—if you came from one of these schools, we would take you if you were in the top part of your class. SAT scores were sort of a help. But, you know, the SAT scores were basically…. Well, we've got to go all the way back.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: Up until about the 1920's, American schools operated their own admissions tests. If you wanted to go to any of the colleges, you took the admissions tests. And it included such subjects as Latin, History, Science, and so forth. If you passed the test, this was you were in. If you didn't pass the test, you weren't. And that was it. The vast majority of students were reasonably well-to-do. But beginning about the turn of the century and continuing up to that point, there were large numbers of Jewish students who wanted to go to college. Before the 1880's, there had been a migration from Germany; and at the beginning of the 1880's, there was a growing number of people from Russia and Poland and so forth. And Jews as a group valued education. So they would be accepted, just as everybody else, on the basis of the test. And of course they tended to work harder than people who were just satisfied with gentlemanly types of grades. And so beginning with the teens and continuing on into the twenties, in order to do something about this growing number of Jewish students, most of the good schools—Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Cornell, all these schools—they decided to try to appeal not just to people from the East who were the natural market for these schools—but to try to become national. They tried to encourage people from all sorts of places.

Now, in order to do this, they originally, of course, had had this test. But by this time the test was no longer working. And besides, these people from different parts of the country didn't take the same kinds of courses that they gave in the Northeast. And so they created the SAT. The Educational Testing Service was designed so that the admissions officer at Princeton could see that if the kid came from Beaver Falls, Montana, and he was number one in his class, that it really meant something and not just showing up every day made you the first person in the class because everybody else normally worked on the ranches. So this is what the purpose of the SAT was, to enable people from one part of the country to understand that the school that the guy came through—in other words, if he was number one there and he had a four hundred and fifty SAT in math and in English, that this was one thing. Whereas if he had a seven hundred or six hundred, than it was something else. So you had to combine the two.

But for our admissions officers, what we knew of the State of New Jersey is that obviously we normally do not get people applying from Texas or Louisiana. Most of our students—almost all of them—come from New Jersey. And so the admissions officers were able to work

out…because they knew the schools and what the students were. For example, there's a place in Elizabeth which is a Jewish high school. It's a small thing—I'm not sure of the name anymore. But people came from all over the state. They had a senior class of twenty-six. We knew that anybody in that senior class would be able to make it at Rutgers. So in other words we didn't do anything with the SATs. They were only a confirmation. If somebody came from a school with a lower class standing than we normally liked from that school, we would look at the SAT. And if the SAT was high enough, you would say obviously he's not working up to his potential. He probably won't do it at Newark, but we'll give him the chance anyway. Whereas if the SAT confirmed the class standing, you know, that he was at the bottom of his class, we'd probably turn him down. Anyway, that's the way our system worked. But for a number of years after the takeover, there were really no changes. For example, before—

COHEN: There were no changes in the admissions requirements?

MERKER: Well, for example, in sixty-eight, after I became chairman of the Admissions Committee, we saw that there were relatively few or almost no black students in our admissions classes. We were trying to get some. I turned to Gloria's uncle who was the chairman of the Board of Ed at New Brunswick. And I went to him, and I said, "Look, we're trying to get black students to the college, and it's only a thirty-minute ride on the train. Are there any black students from New Brunswick who we could take?" And he laughed and said, "Anyone who is even remotely college material has already been accepted, and absolutely none of them is available at this time." That was the main problem. Anybody who was black was wanted—and who would come to Newark when they could go to a better place? I mean the Ivy League schools tried to get anybody they could. And if they were remotely able to do the work at the place, they would be taken. Before that we would normally get a few black students, and they would normally be—obviously if they were going to college, they were reasonably good. And of course since they were black and not as well prepared as somebody who might have come out of a suburban place, they wouldn't be taken by the private schools, by the Harvards and the Yales and the Wesleyans, they'd come to us, we'd get a few of them. But once the late sixties opened up this idea that you should have cultural diversity, all the good ones, all the ones who possibly could go to college, normally were snatched off to just about everywhere else.

COHEN: Yes, yes.

MERKER: The only black students that we were able to get were those who for one reason or another did not want to leave the immediate area. Their family situation was such that they couldn't go away, although they normally could get scholarships and fellowships. And the formula after sixty-nine, that Mason Gross came up with, was designed to dump all the black students in Newark and in Camden. Because the original thing was that anybody who was black from Camden, would have to be accepted at Camden.

COHEN: Anybody?

MERKER: Any black.

COHEN: At any level of achievement?

MERKER: Any level of achievement. Anybody from New Brunswick had to be accepted at Rutgers or Douglass, because at that time they were still—Rutgers was all male, and Douglass was all female. And anybody from Newark had to be accepted at Newark. Well, I had just talked to my uncle. And I knew that there was nobody in New Brunswick, who wanted to go to college, that was available. And I don't know. I think New Brunswick had at that time thirty or forty thousand people. And there may have been ten or fifteen percent black; I'm not really sure. Newark was majority black at that point, it had a population between three hundred thousand and four hundred thousand.

COHEN: Yes. Was there anyone or anyone in the top fifty percent of the class that you recall?

MERKER: I'm not sure now.

COHEN: Okay.

MERKER: But even so, the top fifty percent from a place like Central High.

COHEN: Sure, sure.

MERKER: Would have been very, very different from the top fifty percent of New Brunswick High School.

COHEN: So what was the impact of the Conklin Hall takeover on admissions and the composition of the student body—in your perception?

MERKER: I'm not really sure how many people actually were taken. My guess is there were very, very few because there wasn't a real demand for people who were not interested in school to go to college.

[End of Tape #1]

COHEN: We're back with Professor Merker, and we're on the subject of admissions in the early seventies after the takeover of Conklin Hall. So what do you think was the long-term…..

MERKER: Let me just finish what we were….

COHEN: I'm sorry.

MERKER: And then of course because of the general climate in the country, anybody who was any good was accepted at schools with more reputation than Newark. And obviously if somebody wanted you to go to Connecticut Wesleyan or wherever, they were offering, you know, room and board and all the rest of that in the form of scholarships and fellowships and so forth, which we couldn't do. I mean obviously we could help out with a certain amount of tuition rebates and all that. But we were not really able to give large fellowships. So certainly at the beginning we got almost—we got very, very few black students. And of course I was sort of

insulated in the History Department. And also being in ancient history; ordinarily one would not expect to get too many black students, and I didn't. So I mean the composition of the classes tended not to change.

COHEN: Your classes?

MERKER: Yes. And certainly for a number of years, we continued to get relatively few black students. I think that what tended to change over the years was a growing realization among the black population, not only in Newark but in the growing black communities around Newark, that one could get an education at Rutgers. And so obviously the number of black students increased over the years. But again, certainly for a while you got very few of traditional students who happened to be black. You tended to get older people who were going back to school. Various other things like that, rather than somebody who had just come out of high school and wanted to go on to college. I think that's…. Well, of course the whole student body tends to be more like that. But I think the blacks in the college as a group tend to have had more of these, quote "nontraditional" students.

COHEN: Age groups and career and so on.

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: That's very fascinating. We've been talking about the effects of the Conklin Hall takeover. I want to go back to what recollections you had of those events. I mean where are you at that time? What recollections do you have of the actual takeover itself?

MERKER: During the takeover the college basically closed down. Attempts were made to run classes in places other than in Conklin Hall. But the main problem—and I still remember that—I think it was…. You know we have a program to enable people who are housebound to take courses and even get a degree at Rutgers. There's some sort of an apparatus for them to—

COHEN: Oh, yes. Yes, I remember you plug in and listen to the lectures.

MERKER: Yes. And at that point I think I had a teaching assistant who would on occasion go out and visit the student, help them out, give tests, various things like that. And of course the only facilities for that were in Conklin Hall.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

MERKER: And he was the only student who was debarred from classes because obviously he couldn't come in. And none of the other substitute classrooms was geared for that.

COHEN: And when it occurred, what was your recollection of the main grievances of the students?

MERKER: Basically they wanted more blacks around the college. But it was apparent from my point of view that given the situation, that we really had done everything that we possibly could.

We had tried to get as many blacks as possible. But the situation I mean just wasn't conducive for them to come to Newark.

COHEN: Well, what had been done saying everything possible had been done? What programs had been instituted other than what you talked about before, about trying to recruit top students from New Brunswick? What was being done or had been done to increase the number of black students on the campus, that you recall, in the college?

MERKER: I know we had tried to get as many black students as possible. I mean already at the beginning of the year, we— And of course this occurred in the second semester, as I remember it.

COHEN: Second—

MERKER: Second half of the academic year.

COHEN: Sixty-eight, sixty-nine?

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: Well, the takeover was in February of sixty-nine

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: I was wondering what was going on, that you can recollect, was going on before that in terms of organized or formal efforts to increase the admission of black students?

MERKER: I don't think anything had been done formally.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

MERKER: I do remember the director of the faculty committee had asked the director of admissions about the number of black students. And his response was that they were trying to get as many as possible, that the largest number of black students were in the schools at Central. He said that he had almost no…. and at Weequahic. Weequahic was probably the best school in the Newark system at that time. But he said most of the ones who were at Weequahic wanted to go elsewhere. And most of the black students at Central didn't want to go to college. Even after that the central administration's response, I mean, was that each campus would take care of all the black students in the host city.

COHEN: When the building was occupied—or liberated as the people involved at the time would say—how did you feel about what should be done at that time?

MERKER: Well, I felt that the administration had to do something to open up the building, because I was particularly upset over my disabled student who was debarred from class for the entire period.

COHEN: How was faculty opinion generally running, people that you talked to? What were they thinking?

MERKER: I think the real split was between the people who wanted the administration to use civil power to get them out, and others who wanted to talk to them and convince them that the school was doing what could be done given the constraints of money and the way the school systems worked.

COHEN: And what was your perception of the division in the faculty? Was it evenly split down the middle or—

MERKER: I don't know. I just remember that there were huge fights no matter what group of people you ended up in.

COHEN: How were you leaning at that time?

MERKER: I was sort of right in the middle. And obviously, as I remember it, the thing that bothered me more than anything else was the student stuck in his bed who couldn't go to class. I mean with my other students it didn't really matter where I taught. And I mean I didn't go to my office, but that was a minor inconvenience. I mean I didn't work there. It was just a place where I hung my hat between classes and before classes.

COHEN: What did you think of Malcolm Talbott's role in the negotiations?

MERKER: I thought he was an utter idiot. I mean obviously what he…. and ultimately to come up with a solution which if it worked the way it was supposed to, would have filled Newark with large numbers of people who were not qualified, and allow New Brunswick to walk away with no students. I mean obviously from my knowledge at that point, I knew that given the formula that he had worked out….

COHEN: What formula was that again? I don't remember what that was….

MERKER: That each campus would take students.

COHEN: All students who were black?

MERKER: I thought—that was the original….

COHEN: That was your perception then?

MERKER: All students from their host community. So City of New Brunswick with forty thousand people maybe, which was ten or fifteen percent black, and where I knew that I had tried to get people who wanted to go to college, any college, but there weren't any, they'd go to New Brunswick. And Newark which at that point had three hundred and fifty, three hundred and seventy people, the majority of them black, would take care of people from there. Anybody who

wanted to would be able to go to Newark. But this was all of a piece of the central administration. The Sussman Report.

COHEN: What was that again?

MERKER: This was one about what Rutgers was supposed to be like over the next, I don't know, decade or so, that Warren Sussman came up with around the early seventies. That basically said that the men's college would continue to be the men's college, and Douglass would continue to be Douglass, and they started creating Livingston at that point. And that Livingston was supposed to take all the black students.

COHEN: That was in the Sussman Report?

MERKER: To all intents and purposes, yes.

COHEN: Is that right? To all intents and purposes.

MERKER: And that they could do whatever they wanted in Livingston and create a black experience or whatever. That basically was my perception of what the administration was doing. I really didn't know very much about Camden. But from what I have learned recently, that certainly Camden itself is in a much worse way than Newark is, the City of Camden.

COHEN: The City of Camden?

MERKER: Yes. I mean I really didn't know anything about Camden at that point. But I assumed it was a slightly smaller version of Newark, both as a city and as a campus.

COHEN: Do you have any recollection of the faculty discussion around the wording of a resolution whether to accept or consider for acceptance students in I think it was the top fifty percent of the class?

MERKER: Yes. Well, that was the response of the Admissions Committee.

COHEN: Consider versus accept, I think was the discussion on it. Do you have any recollections of that discussion?

MERKER: I remember that the Admissions Committee was just appalled at the idea that the administration had accepted of taking anybody who applied. And it was—our response was the fifty percent, as opposed to anybody in the top hundred percent of his class.

COHEN: Is that what was finally settled on, the fifty percent?

MERKER: Fifty percent.

COHEN: Fifty percent, yes.

MERKER: But that was the faculty's response to the administration's acceptance. But the administration had already accepted it. And at that point I think the takeover was already over.

COHEN: Well, by the time of this meeting it was March...

MERKER: It was over.

COHEN: I know it was March sixth.

MERKER: It was over.

COHEN: Yes, the takeover was the twenty-third, twenty-fourth, twenty-fifth —I forget the exact dates.

MERKER: But at that point it was over. But it was over because the administration had already accepted a hundred percent. And this was the faculty's refusal of accepting a hundred percent and taking only fifty percent.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: But you see even with that, we were taking…anybody in the top part of his class was already being accepted.

COHEN: Yes, yes. So what do you think is…. Oh, do you have any other recollections of the negotiations that were conducted between Talbott and the students and the episodes that you knew of which the historical record should show?

MERKER: Well, no I mean….

COHEN: Confrontations, negotiations?

MERKER: No. I never was there when Malcolm was dealing with the students as such.

COHEN: Do you have any recollections of any of the other chief players in negotiations? What they were doing and how—

MERKER: No, Marvin Greenberg was trying to keep everybody happy. I mean I do remember a whole series of appearances. I had to drive up to Newark God knows how many times in the evening and over the weekend, including a couple of meetings at Malcolm's apartment.

COHEN: Yes, what was that like?

MERKER: That was mostly, you know, trying to deal with the faculty who obviously refused the idea of taking anybody who applied from Newark. Obviously at that point we didn't know what the future was going to bring. But if it did what it was supposed to, I mean this would mean

that there would be literally thousands of people in the college. And at that point we had a student body of about five thousand maybe, four thousand five hundred or something.

COHEN: Closer to four.

MERKER: Closer to four. But anyway, here we were supposed to take anybody who graduated from high school in Newark.

COHEN: And that was what being put forward?

MERKER: That was it. That we were to take anybody who graduated from Newark. And New Brunswick was going to take anybody who graduated from New Brunswick.

COHEN: Was there any support for that proposal from among the faculty?

MERKER: No. It was unanimous, as I remember. And of course the Rutgers PR people were parroting, you know, what Mason Gross was saying, and he of course was blaming the faculty for all this.

COHEN: What were the main lines of—if there was division among the faculty, were the lines ideological or pedagogical?

MERKER: As I remember it, it was unanimous, that we were opposed to what the administration was proposing. I mean their proposal was anybody who graduated from a Camden High School, had the right to go to Camden. Anybody who graduated from a New Brunswick high school—there was only one high school in New Brunswick, New Brunswick High—had the right to go to one of the colleges in New Brunswick. And apparently at that point, North Brunswick, you know, the suburban community—township—immediately south of New Brunswick, was a sending district. And their high school seniors were also going to New Brunswick High. But I think they were not allowed to participate in this. So the majority of students from New Brunswick High School were supposed to go to both Douglass and the men's college. And of course at that point, between the two of them, they had about three times as many students as Newark did. And then everybody from…I think there were four high schools in Newark at that point. Anyway, anyone from those were supposed to be accepted by Newark College.

COHEN: Any student at all or—

MERKER: Any student at all.

COHEN: Any student, and that was your understanding, yes.

MERKER: That was the way it was worked out. Any student from Newark, any one of the Newark high schools, I think four high schools, I'm not sure.

COHEN: I can't remember.

MERKER: Anyone who graduated was to be accepted if you wanted to accepted if he wanted at Newark. Anyone from New Brunswick was to be accepted at New Brunswick. And anybody from Camden was to be accepted at the Camden campus.

COHEN: I want to ask, what, in retrospect, what do you think the long-term significance of the Conklin Hall action?

MERKER: Absolutely none.

COHEN: Is that right?

MERKER: Yes. I mean I think that obviously we would have had—and we would've in any case….. I mean we already had accepted qualified people, and we were going to continue to do that. We were trying to get more black students, and obviously as a result of that and the experience that we had gotten, our admissions officers had worked out a formula. Obviously you did not want to take in somebody who would fail out in a year or two. And you wanted to get people who would be able to make it through. And they had a formula based in large part on class standing. We found that if somebody was in the top ten percent of his class in a Newark high school, that no matter what his SATs were, he would probably make it.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

MERKER: And obviously as you went down, then, you know, to the bottom half , you had to look more closely at the SAT scores to see whether there was potential in the student or not. But I mean the same sort of thing. And for a number of years after that, there were relatively few black students; and those there were were concentrated more in Academic Foundations, rather than in the rest of the college.

COHEN: But these students then, once they were—were brought into the regular program, right? Do you have any recollections of what was happening there?

MERKER: Well, I got almost none of them.

COHEN: I want to go back a couple of years to the Newark riots in July of 1967.

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: What recollections do you have of that—of those events?

MERKER: Well, I got up at…. we were living in New Brunswick. I got up, walked over to the train station, took the train into Newark, got the subway, went to the campus which was utterly deserted, and found out that school was closed.

COHEN: You were teaching that summer?

MERKER: Yes. I think I had gone up for some—I had some errand to do.

COHEN: Oh. Mm-hmm. Not necessarily teaching.

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: So when you came on campus the following September of sixty-seven, what discussion was going on, if any, that you were aware of?

MERKER: Almost none. Of course we were all, you know, very, very excited at that point about the new campus.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: I mean I think that was the year it….

COHEN: The first classes, I guess.

MERKER: Yes. And we had moved off into the new buildings at that point.

COHEN: Yes, Conklin, Boyden.

MERKER: And the library.

COHEN: The library. I remember that very well. [Laughter] I remember that one. You say you were excited.

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: I mean maybe this is a naïve question, but what were you excited about?

MERKER: I mean having a real campus for a change.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: I mean it used to be that the offices and the department—obviously the lab people were all concentrated around Rector. But many of the classrooms and the offices were just all over. James Street, Washington Street from about where the subway station is now, there was one building that was used. It's now part of the parking lot. And, you know, you would…. We had classes on what was then Plain Street—it's now University—where the old Ballantine Brewery, which was the Music Department and a couple of classrooms. I remember teaching a class in there.

COHEN: The Ballantine Brewery?

MERKER: The Ballantine House.

COHEN: Yes, yes.

MERKER: Yes, out in the back there was sort of a stable.

COHEN: Yes. Right.

MERKER: And that was used as the Music Department. And there were some classes that some of the other departments used from time to time. In order to get anywhere, many of our students would cut through Hahne's, the department store, to get from one class to another. I mean I still remember walking down the streets between James Street and where the campus is now and on beyond; and, you know, there were the brothels with the girls sitting in the window.

COHEN: Were there?!

MERKER: Yes!

COHEN: On what street was that again? [Laughs]

MERKER: I'm not sure whether this was on Washington or Plain, you know. And I guess our students could have popped in for a little bit of recreation between classes. And then here was this wonderful new campus. Of course the architecture was just terrible.

COHEN: The new one.

MERKER: I mean Conklin and Boyden are the most depressing buildings on the inside that you can imagine.

COHEN: And what can you say about the campus, the design of the campus, as a whole?

MERKER: I thought it was pretty nice. And of course Sydney Greenfield had had all those wonderful plants and everything out. And originally it was. There was certainly much more grass than there is now, as apparently more and more was being taken up by new buildings.

COHEN: Like the library.

MERKER: Yes. I thought it was pretty nice on the outside. Once you got in, though, the concrete I don't know what…. The material they used is just so utterly depressing. Gloria, who had never, you know—we've been married, you know, all during most of my time at Rutgers. Before she got her job, you know, she said she never really understood how depressed I was when I came home and why until one time I took her up to the campus and showed her my office and she walked through the halls and everything. She said it was the most depressing place you'd ever want to…. And of course what's even worse is Hill Hall, you know, because that long corridor, I mean the thing that I think of immediately is these old movies of Sing-Sing, you know, with the cell blocks and the people up on the higher levels of the…. I mean whoever did that just….

COHEN: So how did the physical facilities of the new campus, would you say, compare to the physical facilities—the aesthetics if you will—of the facilities on the old campus in terms of its effect on you?

MERKER: Well, I mean by and large many of the classrooms were just as terrible on the old campus. I mean on Rector Street, there wasn't very much you could do in the old Ballantine Brewery. I mean you just had the cubicles and so forth. On James Street my offices—we were in several buildings. You know some of the rooms were relatively nice, you know, the remains of old fireplaces. And so it looked a little bit nicer. But the really nice thing about the new campus was that everybody in the department was on the same hall. You could see your students, your classes, you know. I mean obviously you might have to go upstairs to the fourth floor or something to teach a class. But by and large you didn't have to go out of the building. So it worked out fairly well. But then the new class schedule sort of pretty much put an end to that; there's now a Tuesday and a Thursday faculty, and a Monday, Wednesday, Friday faculty. So you only see the people who have the same schedule as you do.

COHEN: So how would you compare the level of collegiality from the old campus to the level of collegiality…. [Break in recording] Talking about collegiality: old campus, new campus.

MERKER: Okay. Well, originally the new people in our building and all the important people had their offices back on Rector Street where all the old boys were. And so I got to know all the younger people much better because we were all right on this little place. And it was really very nice. But then…. and then of course occasionally we'd go back the visit the old boys on Rector Street. And occasionally we would go to the diner across Raymond Boulevard down on Rector Street. Len's.

COHEN: Len's Diner, yes.

MERKER: But that would be very, very occasional. We hardly saw the senior members of the department. But then after a number of years, they were kicked out, and we got a new building on James Street, further towards Plain Street, what is now University. And then the whole department was pretty much in the same building. And that was very nice because you—again you got to see everybody. But I think it's not so much the campus itself as the schedule which has changed the way people respond. There really is a Monday, Wednesday, Friday faculty and a Tuesday and Thursday faculty. And never the 'twain meet.

COHEN: Don't they meet at department meetings?

MERKER: The History Department has department meetings on Monday, you know, in the free period. And some of the older people, you know, make a point of coming into these things, but some people don't. Obviously if there is an important meeting. But in foreign languages—I'm half in foreign languages. I'm really in the History Department. But they hold their meetings late on Thursdays, on Thursdays at five o'clock because some of the senior people are on a Tuesday, Thursday, and they won't come in on another day. And the other people refuse to come in on Thursdays because they're on a Monday, Wednesday, Friday schedule. Although I think there

are a few people who are on a Monday, Wednesday, Thursday schedule. But there really is this thing, and people just refuse.

COHEN: How about the degree of collegiality or participation in faculty meetings?

MERKER: That has changed. Originally everybody went. Now it's almost impossible to get a quorum and many people refuse to go. Obviously the Tuesday, Thursday people never go. But even people who are around, many of them just refuse to show up. Ordinarily I appear if I'm in on a day that the faculty meeting takes place. But if I'm not in, I mean if it's a day I happen to be off, I refuse to come in just for that.

COHEN: How important are the faculty meetings?

MERKER: Not very.

COHEN: How important were the faculty meetings in the seventies, let's say—late sixties, seventies?

MERKER: I don't know. We felt they were important, and people would regularly come. Obviously an occasional faculty meeting is important. But now the dean will stack faculty meetings; and if you want, you can…. Like, for example, the new curriculum. After it was approved….it would have required a certain amount of work, especially by the English Department, but also to a lesser extent by the American historians. And they refused to do it. And the dean agreed with them. And so one day when nobody was expecting it, they just changed the curriculum.

COHEN: But wasn't this subject to approval by the—

MERKER: No, just the people who happened to be there.

COHEN: Oh, at the meeting.

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: So in a sense there wasn't—was there a quorum?

MERKER: There's always a quorum. The dean always claims there's a quorum.

COHEN: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

MERKER: I mean I don't know whether there was or not, I didn't bother to go. So I mean nowadays the faculty meetings don't mean anything.

COHEN: How then—if the faculty meetings don't mean anything, how is the business of the college conducted?

MERKER: By the dean and the faculty whom he's coopted.

COHEN: Whereas…I mean twenty years ago, fifteen years ago, seventies, what was happening?

MERKER: Well, ultimately the dean would be disposed of by the faculty. You know we've had three revolutions since I've been here: Gilliland and Henry—Henry Blumenthal—and…. Henry, several of the senior people went to him and told him that it was time for him to quit, and he did. But the other two times the faculty organized itself and got rid of the dean.

COHEN: Well, since we're on the subject, let's go back then, if we can, to…well, let me just ask before I get into that question, why did the faculty of those days feel it could take these actions? And nowadays, moving into the eighties, late eighties, it no longer feels that it has that power.

MERKER: I don't know whether it doesn't anymore. It just hasn't happened. Well, all these things have happened suddenly. I mean one day the faculty gets fed up. I mean the last one, after a faculty meeting, I took the train home with Peter Goldin, and I said, "Do you think it's time for a faculty revolt?" And he said—we all agreed that it was sort of too late in the semester for anything to happen. And the next time I was in Newark, the revolt had already begun.

COHEN: What issue was that in?

MERKER: I'm not sure exactly. I mean I don't think it's any one thing. I mean….

COHEN: Are you talking about the late eighties? Oh, I'm sorry….

MERKER: This was when we got rid of our dean—oh, God, the name! See how—I couldn't stand him anyway.

COHEN: You're talking about the seventies, late seventies?

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: I mean after Henry?

MERKER: Yes, after Henry.

COHEN: You mean Robey?

MERKER: Robey, yes.

COHEN: Richard Robey?

MERKER: I mean that was the…. I mean he was the kind of person who liked to kick over an anthill and see the ants scurrying around. And he constantly did that with the faculty until one day they banded together and got rid of him. This happens quickly.

COHEN: I want to get into the various deanships and revolts and so on. But again, my question was why the faculty felt it could…. Does the faculty feel they can no longer exercise its will now compared to the seventies?

MERKER: I think for whatever reason, they've accepted it. I mean I think certainly with Norman Samuels when he was dean. Everybody was relatively pleased with what he was doing, and what he was doing was not in any way outrageous. And the same continued with the current dean, although I am beginning to hear words that there is a lack of leadership. But I don't know what's going to happen. And someday the faculty might do something or might not, depending on how exactly it feels. But certainly with Gilliland and Henry—Henry Blumenthal—and Robey, it was the same sort of thing. A series of things and ultimately the faculty, at least some members of the faculty, decided to act.

COHEN: Let's go back now. You mentioned Gilliland. I mean you also worked under Woodward.

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: Now what was happening under Woodward.

MERKER: Woodward ran the place. Obviously the place was much smaller then than it is now, and he'd been there since it had become part of Rutgers. There were no departments; there were just the sections originally for much of the sixties when I came there. So he ran the place and did pretty much what he wanted.

COHEN: The sections or the divisions?

MERKER: Yes, the divisions. Yes. Social Science, Natural Science, and Humanities. Although by and large he was very, very responsive to the faculty. I mean he was a nice man. I remember I was working on the coins of Paonia at that point and was interested in the geography of the Balkans. And he had a wonderful collection of old maps of the Balkans which he let me use and copy. But basically, you know, the decisions were his own. I mean at one time one of the members of the History Department, a chap named Bob Middleton whom you may or may not remember.

COHEN: My recollection….

MERKER: He died in the seventies as the result of kidney failure.

COHEN: I have a recollection.

MERKER: But he had said something in the Western Civ class that upset the bishop of Newark. And the bishop wanted to get rid of him. And then to top things off, the son of one of the officers of the central administration in New Brunswick was taking—had come to Newark and he was taking Western Civ. Bob had given him a low grade. But anyway, Woodward wanted Bob fired.

COHEN: Did he have tenure at that time?

MERKER: No, he didn't have tenure. He wanted Bob fired. And he called up Henry Blumenthal, who at that point was the head of the Social Sciences, and wanted Henry to fire him. But when it got down to the department, Ziebel, who I think at that point was the chairman…. They always had, the departments always had chairmen, but they didn't do anything when the divisions were in existence. Henry said—Sidney said that that wasn't right. And convinced the rest of the people in the department to tell Henry that they couldn't do it. And Woodward just accepted that. I mean, you know, so…. If the department had gone along with him, alright, the department didn't go along with Woodward, so he accepted that. And I mean basically that was the way he worked. And by and large the impression I got—and remember at that point I was very very junior—was that he ran the college. He may not have gotten everything he wanted out of it, but he never got people upset.

COHEN: What happened during the Gilliland tenure?

MERKER: Gilliland had come from someplace like Nebraska, and it was a very, very different kind of college and he tried to replicate it in Newark. And it just didn't work, until ultimately a group of people on the faculty—including Bruce Robertson, who was I think the assistant dean—organized a program to get rid of him. Basically the faculty just called upon him to resign.

COHEN: What was he trying to do that was so different from what the faculty expected?

MERKER: I'm not sure. I think he was trying to create a Midwestern school in Newark. [Laughter] And you just couldn't do that.

COHEN: Got the geographical problem.

MERKER: Yes. And the college was much more diversified than what one would find in a state school in the Middle West. I think that was the main problem. Again, also with the faculty, it's always a matter of resources. And they felt he was putting resources into things that wouldn't benefit what they conceived of as the college as a whole.

COHEN: Like what? What did he want to put resources into?

MERKER: I'm not really sure among all the things. I mean I just…. What I mean is that—I think one of the things that he wanted to do was to emphasize Newark as a residential college. And I think at that point it was too…and everybody really wanted to see Newark as having some sort of residence. He wanted to put college resources into it. And even now college resources don't go into that kind of thing.

COHEN: Except for the dorms.

MERKER: Yes, yes. But those are not really college resources because the money comes from the central administration out of the bond issues and…yes. But he wanted to put, you know, real resources into these things.

COHEN: Now after Gilliland left the office, then Malcolm Talbott took over as acting dean in 1969 I guess. How did that work out during his deanship while he at the same time was the vice president of the Newark campus.

MERKER: Basically he left everything to Henry, Henry Blumenthal.

COHEN: Uh-huh.

MERKER: I mean he may have been the titular acting dean, but I think it was Henry who was the real acting dean. Because obviously Talbott was much more interested in the law school. And he was acting dean during the takeover.

COHEN: Yes, yes.

MERKER: And I often had the feeling that the takeover was his.

COHEN: What do you mean his?

MERKER: In the sense that he always was ahead of the people who were doing the actual takeover. In other words, he wanted the things that they afterwards said they wanted. So maybe…. But I just—

COHEN: That's your perception.

MERKER: Yes, it was…. And all during this, and certainly in the fight in the faculty after, he…. It may have been that because he was involved in the actual negotiations with them. Now he got to support and fight for the whole package, even the most outrageous parts of it. I mean including what is still an impossibility: taking anybody who graduates from a Newark high school. And apparently it was anybody, not just college preparation program. It was anybody.

COHEN: And yet after the initial agreement, if you will, there was a confrontation with some of the students who were in the hall. Do you have any recollection of what was responsible for that?

MERKER: No.

COHEN: That confrontation?

MERKER: No.

COHEN: Students in his office?

MERKER: Yes, the one with them on a table? Or on his desk?

COHEN: One report which I've heard, yes, it's hard to say.

MERKEL: Yes. I mean we had a number of run-ins, and I told him off once.

COHEN: What did you tell him?

MERKEL: Well, basically I told him to his face that he wasn't interested in the college. That all he was interested in was in maintaining peace, rather than in providing an education. And everybody just looked when I told him that.

COHEN: Was that one of those meetings?

MERKEL: This was another meeting. I mean, they went on, there were a number of them. I remember at least three. One was a four- or five-hour meeting at night on a weekday. And almost all day Saturday meeting. I remember another whole-day meeting, although this one I think was about Talbott; this was on a Sunday, at Charlie Pine's house. He was on the Admissions Committee at that point.

COHEN: This was after the building was vacated.

MERKER: Yes. And then finally one on the campus in one of the empty classrooms late in the afternoon or at night.

COHEN: What was happening during Henry Blumenthal's deanship?

MERKER: Basically he allowed the students to do whatever they wanted. And whenever they wanted anything, he allowed them to do it.

COHEN: Like what did he give? Can you give an example? Can you recall?

MERKER: When was Kent State, do you remember?

COHEN: Nineteen seventy.

MERKER: Nineteen seventy.

COHEN: May seventy. Well, I mean the actual moratorium that followed that was May of seventy.

MERKER: A group of students wanted to take off, and faculty went along with it. I mean as I see it, at that point what I said, I still think, hey, that Newark was the only, the people who ran Newark were the only people who felt that what they were doing was so unimportant that they could cancel to protest what they wanted to protest. I mean I wasn't opposed to protesting. You don't go around shooting students on a campus—or you're not supposed to. But closing down the college does nothing but dilute, weaken, the education you're giving your students. If you

don't think that what they're getting is important…. I always felt that it was important, and that they should finish the term.

COHEN: What was happening during that time, now that we're on the subject of the war in Vietnam, what was happening? Well, in your classes, was there any opportunity in your subject to discuss the war? Did students bring it up or anything like that?

MERKER: Not in my classes did the students bring it up. If you wanted to bring it up, then you would get some response probably. But I never remember the students bringing it up voluntarily. Unless it entailed cutting down the class to go and attend some sort of meeting or demonstration on campus. Then they asked if I would close the class down, to get out of class.

COHEN: What would you do in those cases?

MERKER: Then I always refused. I felt that if you wanted to protest, this was fine. And protests should be organized in the free periods or at a time when there were relatively few students in classes. But that closing down the campus or a class for the purpose of protest was a no-no.

COHEN: In your classes were you able or did you have any time to draw analogies between what was happening then and antiquity, let's say?

MERKER: Personally I didn't see any analogies.

COHEN: What did the anti-Vietnamese War controversy, what did that do for faculty relations?

MERKER: I think it did almost nothing…. I mean if you…. The first time I heard anybody talk about it I guess must have been around sixty-four. Bruce Robertson and Bob Middleton and I were somewhere. We were having a glass of wine or something. Must have been some function and we talked about it. And Bruce indicated that he was opposed to the idea because we wouldn't get anything out of it. I wasn't quite sure. But I think in sixty-four it had barely started. I wasn't sure. But that was it. And over the years people would indicate what their opinions were. But I don't think there was any real problem within the faculty, certainly around people in the History Department and the other liberal arts.

COHEN: To what extent since that period, if any, ideology affected faculty appointments or discussions about promotions.

MERKER: Almost—none at all. I mean the History Department, the only thing they're interested in is the kind of scholarship you produced. Recently now they've been talking about what kind of teacher they are. But that's—but basically it's the quality of the research that's most important.

COHEN: How about appointments generally in the faculty? I guess the case that was in the newspapers publicized the appointment of Bruce Franklin in the English Department.

MERKER: Well, I mean Bruce Franklin is the only person that I now of who has been

de-tenured by a faculty for urging the student body to burn the card catalog of the Stanford Library. And, you know, all that says is the quality of our dean. This was Robey who liked to see what happens when he kicks over the anthill. But that's that.

COHEN: Was there a real split in the faculty as far as—

MERKER: There couldn't be a split. I mean, you know, this was a decision made by Robey.

COHEN: Wasn't there an Appointments and Promotions Committee operating at that time?

MERKER: It didn't mean anything because the decision was the dean's. He was hired as some sort of special….

COHEN: What was your perception of faculty—general faculty—thinking on the appointment? Because it was so widely publicized.

MERKER: Well, obviously the main thing presented was that he had bypassed all the safeguards to enable faculty to oversee the hiring and so forth. Because as I remember it, it was just done by the dean.

COHEN: Go back again to Henry Blumenthal's tenure. What precipitated his resignation?

MERKER: Three faculty members, senior people that he respected, went to him. I think it was Panson; and I don't remember who the other people were. But I think Panson was one of them.

COHEN: What was the—

MERKER: And they pointed out to him that he was losing the respect of the rest of the faculty, and that the faculty resented what he was doing. And obviously he was a relatively sensitive person, and he wouldn't stay in that situation; whereas Robey and Gilliland were not.

COHEN: You mentioned before that the main complaint about his tenure was that he gave the students what they wanted.

MERKER: If you went in and screamed and hollered at him, he would….

[End of Tape #2]

COHEN: …Professor Merker. We were talking about Henry Blumenthal's deanship and why he resigned and what the main complaint was with his administration.

MERKER: Henry himself always—I shouldn't say always. But he had a tendency to do what he was told. So, for example, in the affair with Middleton, Woodward told him to get rid of Middleton, and Henry proceeded to do that until Sidney Ziebel and some of the other people in the department refused to go along with it. I think he didn't really think about what he was doing. But that Woodward wanted it, and so he was going to do it. And I think the same sort of thing

was happening with his administration. The central administration in New Brunswick wanted something, and he then proceeded to do it. I mean I think that was one aspect of why the faculty was upset with him. But the other thing was that—again, when the students wanted something, they got it from him. Now some of these things were things that the faculty wanted, too. Henry was able to organize and get a large contingent of people, both faculty and students, to protest in New Brunswick to get more resources for the college. And that sort of thing, the faculty by and large backed him on it.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

MERKER: But when it came to things that the students themselves wanted, again I think, for example, closing the college down after Kent State, I think the overwhelming majority of the faculty were opposed to that idea but were unwilling to fight for it. And everybody looked to Henry, and he just wanted to close the place—he wanted to do what the students wanted to do, which was to close the place down. And for most of our students, I think they tended to be—my guess is they still are—relatively apolitical. And if the school was open, they would have been there. Obviously they would rather have the school closed so that they wouldn't have to be there, but…. I think that in many ways the faculty was apolitical in the same way….unwilling to fight to keep the place open. And it was Henry's decision by and large that closed the place down.

COHEN: So that was a major consideration.

MERKER: Yes. I gather there were a number of other things as well. If there was someone who the students felt was popular, you know, was not going to be reconsidered for tenure, Henry would put pressure on to consider the person for tenure and vice versa.

COHEN: After he resigned, Gil Panson took over as acting dean for a year, seventy-one to seventy-two. And how was that brief administration?

MERKER: I think everything sort of went along. I mean many of Henry's ideas were still followed. Panson didn't introduce any new, you know, radical new changes or anything. He just more or less accepted what was going on. He realized and everybody else I guess did, too, that he was just holding the place warm for the next dean. And as a result, when you have that kind of a dean, nothing much happens. So Panson's tenure was relatively uneventful. That's the way I remember it.

COHEN: And then came Richard Robey's appointment as dean. What happened during his administration?

MERKER: I really think his administration was devoted to kicking over the anthill to see how the faculty would respond.

COHEN: Kicking over the anthill in what way? An example?

MERKER: I applied for a FASP [sp]. I think it must have been—gee, I'm not really sure now, but sometime during his administration. I applied for the FASP. And as we know, the FASP is a

relatively ordinary sort of thing. I mean if you apply and if you are eligible, you should get it. The only—theoretically the administration does have the right to refuse. But the idea is that it would only be done…if there's a required course that can only be taught by two people in the department and the two people decide that they want to take their FASPs at the same time, obviously the dean could say, no, only one of you can do it. Or if there's only one person and he wants to take his FASP and the dean can't find a replacement that year but he will be able to do it next year, I guess the dean can make the person postpone the FASP for a year. But ordinarily the dean is not supposed to do anything. Anyway, he did it to me. He said, "No, I've decided that you can't have the FASP."

COHEN: What was the rationale?

MERKER: I don't even remember anymore it was so inane. [Laughter] At which point I started to scream. I went in, and I—had a big blowup. Threatened to call on the AAUP with lawyers and everything. And the next, I don't know, the next day I got a letter saying that he'd agreed to my FASP. I mean there was no reason for it. He just wanted to see how I would scream and get upset. And he kept on doing this in a number of other things for the faculty.

COHEN: Like what? If you can recall.

MERKER: Well, I mean obviously there's the Bruce Franklin thing. But as I remember, there were a number of other things. Trying to see how the faculty would react and how they would run around and scream and holler. And he kept on until one day they got rid of him after one of these faculty meetings.

COHEN: How was that engineered?

MERKER: After the meeting I spoke to Peter Goldin about it, and we both agreed that it was too late in the term. It was probably April at that point. So we left it at that. And I think that was a Wednesday. Or maybe that was a Monday. But then when I came in on Wednesday, the wheels had already been put in motion. People like Manspeizer, Gil Panson, and a number of other people had already organized it. And called a—then at the very next faculty meeting, the resolution was introduced to put together two committees.

COHEN: That was the spring of seventy-six?

MERKER: Seventy-six.

COHEN: Yes. Mm-hmm. Yes.

MERKER: One of them was to investigate the organization of the college. Apparently the way it was done was there were two committees. One was a real committee designed for the long-term organization of the administration. And the other one was the committee to build up particulars on the dean. And at that very next faculty meeting, they both—they passed. Basically there was nothing that the dean could do about it. Of course the whole thing dragged on over the summer because the central administration wouldn't get rid of him.

COHEN: But what other than— What I'm getting at is his style did not endear him to members of the faculty. What was their—other than…. Well, I shouldn't say that.

MERKER: Obviously it's more than just style.

COHEN: Yes, that's what I'm trying to get at.

MERKER: Denying a FASP to a faculty member, who really should have gotten it, with no real reason. Appointing people using his own power without considering the department that was involved. I mean that's more than just style.

COHEN: Yes, yes. Of course. Yes.

MERKER: And then I mean his affairs with various students and faculty—that would be style, I think. But, you know, this is more—this is the way in which the man operated.

COHEN: Well, the affairs, was that a factor in the consideration?

MERKER: I don't think so.

COHEN: And deliberations?

MERKER: I don't think so. I mean it just showed the kind of person he was. But I mean the real thing was the way in which he was trying to ride roughshod over the faculty and the prerogatives of the faculty. I think that's what got everybody upset.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Well, after he left the position of dean and Norman Samuels was then dean…dean from seventy-six to I guess the fall of seventy-six, I guess, how did things change?

MERKER: Obviously Norman was a much more collegial person. People who had complaints could go and talk to him. And sometimes even get what they wanted done. I think that was the main change. But at least, you know, you got the feeling that he was somebody who was honest and who was trying to do his best and would consider your opinion. Rather than somebody who was like a little child playing with his toys and that you were one of the toys. I think that's very, very important in any sort of administration, to give the faculty the feeling that they are participating, and at least what they say has some importance.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

MERKER: And with Robey you got the feeling—it was more than just you got the feeling; you knew that no matter what you said, it didn't matter.

COHEN: To what extent with Robey was the mandate from the university to cut back in faculty, which I understand was operating during that period, a factor in the worsening of the relationship with the faculty?

MERKER: Well, obviously with a person like that, you know, with that kind of a personality, a situation where you have to cut back faculty would be a disaster because it would give him all the opportunities to make the cuts that he wanted. And by and large he did it on the basis of what would make the biggest splash, you know, how upset he could get people. He got rid of the Classics Department although the faculty voted to keep it. But nobody seemed to care very much about that. That was just one of the things. But I mean if he'd been…. I think under Norman there was the same sort of thing as well, the same continuing process of cutting back faculty.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: But you never got the same kinds of upsets that you did with Robey.

COHEN: You mentioned his affairs with students. You're talking about love affairs?

MERKER: Oh, yes.

COHEN: I mean was this just rumor or people who actually….

MERKER: Well, obviously when it comes to me, it's rumor because I'm not plugged in.

COHEN: But there were people who were plugged in who were telling it to you and therefore it was widespread among the faculty?

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: We've pretty much covered the deanships during the period we're trying to cover here. Let's see. I want to go back to the top administrations now, your perceptions. Let's go back now—we're going to take a leap of about at least seventeen, sixteen years to the presidency of Mason Gross. You came on board in 1960. And what was your perception—is your perception—of his administration? What did he do for us?

MERKER: I had very little to knowledge about the central administration when I first came on board in 1960. And it wasn't until the end of the sixties that I began to get a feel for what he was doing. By and large he wasn't interested in Newark at all. He didn't care about Newark. His main interest was in New Brunswick, where he wanted to create a new Oxford on the Raritan. He was going to create a series of small residential colleges to replicate the Oxford experience. And both Newark and Camden were utterly peripheral. I mean obviously he had to provide resources to the largest city in the state and certainly the center of population. But he wasn't going to give anything that he didn't have to. And that's basically the way it was up until the end of the sixties. And again, as I think I pointed out, his response to the takeover and the pressures to get more black students into Rutgers was to dump as many as possible into Newark and Camden so that he could keep New Brunswick fairly pure. And that even if he had to take them in New Brunswick, he was going to dump them across the river in Livingston and leave the men's college and Douglass pretty much the way they were.

COHEN: Do you think this perception was shared by your colleagues?

MERKER: I do believe. I think most of them felt that. There was always the continuing dispute between the people who wanted to have a University of Northern New Jersey and those who wanted to be part of Rutgers. And the usual argument was that as the University of Northern New Jersey, we'd be able to get more resources in proportion to the voting population of northern New Jersey.

COHEN: What camp were you in?

MERKER: I was sort of in the middle. But I really think it would have made very little difference. Obviously the farther away from—I think this was Henry Blumenthal who said that—the farther away from New Jersey you go, the better the name of Rutgers sounds.

COHEN: Rutgers, yes. Mm-hmm. How did things change under Edward Bloustein?

MERKER: Bloustein was much more interested in research. That was what his main goal was. But he then built himself a central administration that was incredibly abrasive and unresponsive to everybody who wasn't part of the president and his entourage. In some ways I think that we got more in the way of resources under Bloustein than we were getting under Mason Gross. But again, I think that part of the problem was that we were declining in size. And, as a result, the actual amounts were probably not growing except, you know, through inflation.

COHEN: And going back again to the campus, Jim Young was the provost from seventy-three through eighty-two. And actually the first provost was—he followed Malcolm Talbott who actually never had the title of provost. Well, before I get into Jim, why do you think Talbott didn't get the appointment as provost?

MERKER: I don't know.

COHEN: He was vice president, and I'm assuming since the vice president actually was—I guess the position was basically vice president. Then when Bloustein came on board, it was changed to provost. He was the presumed candidate for the position. Do you have any perception of that at all?

MERKER: The only thing that I could think of is that both of them were lawyers and had developed some sort of animosity in the past when Bloustein was…. I know for a number of years he'd been at Cornell. And at that point my stepbrother—he'd been one of his teachers. And I can only just…. perceive that there had been something in the past. I haven't the vaguest idea, and I really don't know. I was sort of pleased that that happened because by that time I did not like Malcolm Talbott.

COHEN: For reasons indicated before?

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: Okay. Jim Young's administration as the first provost. What can you say about that?

MERKER: Basically he tried to do it as little as possible. Most of what, as far as the college was concerned, went on in the dean's office. And the relationship with the provost was basically trying to get resources out of the provost's office. The provost never really tried to lead in any way. And so by and large everybody on the campus normally turned to Norman.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

MERKER: And in turn Norman would try to get the resources wherever he could.

COHEN: And how successful—or how would you assess overall Norman's tenure as dean?

MERKER: I thought it was reasonably successful. He was able to work well with the faculty. Everybody believed that he was honest and trying to do the best that he could. And although, again, I suppose this is probably pretty natural, everybody thought that maybe he—I shouldn't say everybody—many people thought that he wasn't getting as much as he should have. But who is to say about that? Or whether he was screaming loudly enough or not. [Laughter]

COHEN: I want to discuss faculty, the whole question of in the seventies, I guess maybe the discussion around at least the perceived conflict between teaching and research seems to come to the fore. That the university, as you mentioned before, under Bloustein in particular expected more and more research. I mean was this a legitimate complaint as you see it? How do you assess that?

MERKER: Well, I personally feel, and I think that many of the people in the History Department feel, that you can't teach well unless you're doing research. And I think that by and large this was the general feeling in the History Department. That research was very, very important. And that, you know, by doing research, you would in turn be able to teach your students. That if you didn't do research, that what you're teaching your students was not as good because it wasn't as current. And you were not able to assess what was current if you didn't do research.

COHEN: How fair did you think then—do you think now—is the promotional process?

MERKER: I never really thought about it in terms of fairness. You just went through the motions, and that was that.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

MERKER: I thought that within the department it was relatively fair.

COHEN: What did you think about the criteria for promotion? Well, now it's three categories, but then it was five and then…. teaching, research, scholarship.

MERKER: Which I couldn't differentiate between research…. What's the difference between research and scholarship?

COHEN: Now they've lumped it together.

MERKER: Or community.

COHEN: Community…

MERKER: I thought, you know, that it really should have been just one whole thing because that—I mean they all go together. And I can't see how you can do research without scholarship and vice versa.

COHEN: Your experience in the AAUP. You were president of the Newark chapter?

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: Well, if things were okay, as far as the promotional process is concerned, why did AAUP have to be brought into it at times?

MERKER: Because of money. I mean this was the—I was president when we started negotiating with the administration. When we first were recognized as the bargaining agent for the faculty, the major reason, the major problem, was that within the faculty there were two major groups who felt that…. One group felt that unions were connected with the working class. And that they were professionals and were not members of the working class. And these people tended to be the older members of the faculty. And then there was another group that felt that we were getting salaries form the university, and that we were working for the university, and that we should be bargaining with them. And I mean the great thing that we got—I mean literally the first thing that we got was the FASP program.

COHEN: Oh!

MERKER: I mean before that there was no sabbatical. If you had some research project that you wanted, you could apply for a Faculty Fellowship, and then you would get—if they agreed that was worth doing. And it was apparently very competitive. And if they felt it was worth doing and so forth, then they would provide you with a certain amount of money. And I was hired in sixty. Got married in the summer of sixty-three. And then we went to Greece for the year in sixty-three, sixty-four. And I got a Faculty Fellowship from the university for one semester. And I had applied, and I'd gotten it. And I then took a semester's leave-of-absence from the university.

COHEN: Without pay?

MERKER: Without pay. Not only that, I think I remember I had to pay for Blue Cross Blue Shield coverage and some other things in connection with a pension.

COHEN: Oh, that really hit you.

MERKER: So I was off for the year. But I was only paid for the first semester.

COHEN: It's a real bitter pill.

MERKER: And then I'd gotten another fellowship in sixty-six to sixty-seven, a traveling fellowship from the Archaeological Institute of America. And I then took another leave from the university. The fellowship was a little bit less than my salary. But this was the good old days, you know, when the salary figures were in four digits. [Laughter] Although, this time, as I remember, I think the chairman managed to cover my Blue Cross Blue Shield contribution out of the savings that the department got. But it wasn't until after— You know at that point I said why can't we have some sort of a sabbatical program? And everybody said, No, it's impossible. We'd have to get it from the legislature. And apparently the first contract that we got from the….

[Break in recording]

COHEN: And the FASP was a major issue.

MERKER: Yes.

COHEN: Yes. Mm-hmm.

MERKER: I mean everybody of course was amazed at how easily the thing was done. When you look at it, it seems to be a reasonably good one. At least I think it is.

COHEN: Yes. How would you assess the AAUP's role in the grievance process?

MERKER: Again, faculty is divided into two groups of people: one of whom trusts the departments and the other does not. From my experience with the History Department, I think the History Department is reasonably fair about it. So I do not know what the other departments do. On the other hand, I don't think that the AAUP has upset anything in the History Department by its representation of people who have not been given tenure. So I mean, it's a good sort of thing to give extra protection to people. Now as I say, I just do not know what goes on in other departments.

COHEN: Yes. What can you say about the movement towards, oh, affirmative action for women faculty in the seventies, there was I understand a class action that was filed in the seventies. What is your perception of the justification of their claims of discrimination?

MERKER: I suppose that there are large numbers of people who feel that women, you know, belong in the home. I don't. [Laughter] But in a society where you have that, then probably affirmative action of this sort is reasonable. On the other hand, if…. And I think that over the years there has been much less of this, especially in the faculty. I don't know about the rest of society.

COHEN: Do you have any perception of the merits of the case presented in the class action in the seventies? Do you have anything….

MERKER: No, I really had no feeling about that. I mean, again, one of the real problems is what exactly is affirmative action. If it means being or trying to be absolutely fair—advertising places where minority candidates might be found—I'm all for it. But does it mean when there's a minority person, no matter what the qualifications, do you have to hire that person or not? Then you begin to get into all sorts of other problems.

COHEN: The issue then, I was addressing, would be the class action specifically concerned with salary. Did you have any, at that time, did you have any perception of the merits of that case?

MERKER: I thought that most of…. Well, you know, here you're dealing with statistics. And when you're dealing with statistics, you always have to remember that there are lies, damn lies, and statistics. And I always thought that much of that was due to the fact that there were very…let's say the early sixties and in the fifties, there were really very, very few women in the academic ranks. And that it wasn't until well on in the sixties and in the seventies that you began to get large numbers of women in the academic ranks. And they were moving up. And they tended to concentrate in the lower ranks rather than in the higher ranks. My guess is that that has probably changed a great deal now because we're talking about twenty, thirty years ago. And by now people who were coming in in the sixties are up on the higher levels.

COHEN: In terms of seniority?

MERKER: Yes, seniority, salaries and so forth.

COHEN: These senior members, yes. The graduate school was established in seventy-three or thereabouts. What effect did the—I realize that graduate courses were being given all along back into the sixties—but what effect did the establishment of the graduate school itself have on the university in Newark, that you can see?

MERKER: Well, the History Department only has a master's program. But the creation of the graduate school produced a kind of a framework on which the graduate teaching, the courses and so forth, were overlaid. And I think it's been a tremendous improvement, I mean, of the quality of the teaching. And the kind of students we have has changed over the years. At least that is my impression.

COHEN: You don't think it's exacerbated the tug between research and teaching which frequently comes up in discussion?

MERKER: This may be true in the sciences, chemistry especially. But I don't think that's true in history or in English, in large part because it's mostly a master's program.

COHEN: I see.

MERKER: In that it's more…I mean teaching, it's not doing research the way it would be with a Ph.D. program.

COHEN: Yes, I see. Yes, sure, of course.

MERKER: Now, as I said, you know, in those departments where there is a Ph.D. program, it might. I just do not know. I don't think it's done so much in terms of history.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: The new deal that's been worked out in the history program, with some people teaching in the New Brunswick program, might. I haven't lived with that long enough to see what that's doing. The advantage we're getting now out of that is the use of teaching assistants.

COHEN: Yes. I've heard that said, too.

MERKER: But as I say, I don't know whether there was an advantage or not. But I mean it's changed. And it is true that most state universities use teaching assistants on a large scale for much of their undergraduate education. Whether that's good or not is….

COHEN: That's what I was going to…. [Laughter]

MERKER: We're moving to a certain extent in that direction. Again, ancient courses are never that large that I need teaching assistants. [Laughter]

COHEN: I have a couple of windup…. Is there anything that we've talked about that you'd like to get back to, elaborate on? Footnote?

MERKER: No, no, not….

COHEN: Alright. Anything I haven't asked and maybe should have asked, a topic that you want to get into that we missed?

MERKER: No, I don't know what I could have said. I mean after we finish, when you go home, I'll think of about a dozen things, you know.

COHEN: After I shut the machine off, yes. Then something comes to the fore. Very frequently that happens. Any summary statements about, retrospect on the development of the campus in the past fifteen years or so, let's say through the seventies or late sixties—seventies.

MERKER: No.

COHEN: No grand synthesis yet?

MERKER: No, no. Although when Gloria started teaching in the seventies, she coined the nickname for the college—Killer College.

COHEN: Killer College!

MERKER: Killer College.

COHEN: Why?

MERKER: Because it took so much out of you, and there were constant…. I mean you were interested in it, you kept working at it, and then always something seemed to go wrong which sort of…. If the university could do something the hard way, it would.

COHEN: Could you expand upon that just a little bit?

MERKER: No, it's just one, you know…. This is like the memo that we got, I guess this must have been in the seventies, saying that from here on in, all papers and things, rosters, reports and so forth that came from the administration would be done on microfiche. And that they were going over completely to microfiche. And that any department that didn't have a microfiche reader, should order one, by the way. And of course nobody had a microfiche reader. I think the library may have had one.

COHEN: Oh, yes, we've always had one.

MERKER: But nobody else did. And so once they realized that nobody else would have one, then they…. What happened to these microfiche readers, they ultimately gave it up. And I often wondered how exactly they expected someone to mark a roster, you know, cross out the guys who weren't showing up.

COHEN: Oh, class roster.

MERKER; Yes, the class roster.

COHEN: Yes, yes, yes.

MERKER: On microfiche.

COHEN: [Laughs] Oh, so that's one element that….

MERKER: And then of course, you know, the depressed feeling you get from the architecture of the place. And then little memos from the central administration by—oh, God, I forget the guy's name; he's gone a long time since. But it was—

[someone in background says name]

MERKER: Yes, yes, that's it.

COHEN: Wayne?

MERKER: Wayne Kerlinsky.

COHEN: Wayne Kerlinsky. And what was his position?

MERKER: I don't know. He was something in the central administration. But this was one on how to save paper. [Laughter] Which included such gems as leave small margins at top and bottom and on the sides. Use single space rather than double space.

COHEN: This is late seventies?

MERKER: Sometime in the seventies.

COHEN: After Gloria came.

MERKER: Write on both sides of the paper. I mean there was a page-and-a-half-, two-page memo on how to save paper with really important things like that. Anyway, that's what makes it Killer College. You know because if there's any way to do it—there's an easy way to do it, and then there's the Rutgers way to do it. And the Rutgers way always takes huge amounts out of you.

COHEN: Compared to most other institutions that you're, both of you are familiar with?

MERKER: Right, right, right. The common sense way.

COHEN: Why? I mean why does this state of affairs exist?

MERKER: Don't ask me. I think in large part it's this top-heavy administration which is still clinging to what they did back in the fifties. I mean like for example we now have this requirement of a literature course that every student passing through has to have. And it turns out that most of the students take Literary Masterpieces. But there are a number of courses in foreign languages that could also apply to the literature requirement: Greek and Roman Literature, French Literature in Translation, German Literature…. There's a whole list of them. And the request was made that on the bulletin that is sent out every semester listing the courses, that those courses that fulfill the literature requirement have an L in parenthesis next to them; so the student could see right away whether the course fulfills the literature requirement. And the same would be true of the history requirement and the interdisciplinary requirement; a course that fits that would have an I for interdisciplinary or an L for literature or an H for history or whatever the thing was. And they were told, no, it can't be done. [Laughter]

And they're still fighting this thing because the registrar's office won't do it. And the dean's office claims they can't or won't somehow. But I mean the stuff is done on a computer, you know that list of all the classes that are being given. And you know somebody, after they've gotten the thing can just go over and say, these courses should have the L in front of them. I mean it would literally take an hour with a list of what courses fulfill what requirement. And then the student would know right away, and you don't get the seniors who suddenly appear claiming

that they don't have their literature requirement or their interdisciplinary requirement because they never knew which was which. But this is the kind of thing that Rutgers does to you. They make things difficult.

COHEN: Is it Rutgers overall, the Rutgers administration based in New Brunswick that you feel is responsible for this? Or is there something in the Newark administration?

MERKER: I think it's both.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: I mean I think that somehow the infection has gotten in; and whether it started in New Brunswick—it probably did start in New Brunswick. Though certainly Newark is just as badly infected by it. And it's not only the college, but it's the whole campus.

COHEN: And one final question, which I should have asked before, and that is your assessment of the Dana Library. Let's start with collections. Through the whole period, if you can think in terms of the sixties into the seventies, what kind of progression, if any, did you see in terms of collections?

MERKER: Well, when I first came, there was a relatively nice ancient collection with a goodly amount of history. Of course it was all in English. Almost nothing—and still there's nothing—in the foreign languages. I shouldn't say nothing, but very, very little in the foreign languages. And it's more or less been preserved up to the present. A good basic collection. Of course the unfortunate thing is that it is done on the Library of Congress system, and there is very little opportunity, especially now, of making, you know, little modifications of it. For example, Herodotus is kept somewhere in the D's because Herodotus is a universal history. Whereas much of the Greek historians are in the PA section as a part of Greek literature. But some other parts, like for example the Thucydides, I think is in the DF, which is the Greek history section.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: And Herodotus is in the Universal History section, which is in D.

COHEN: They're all split up.

MERKER: And originally there was a small amount of the library being able to take a book and putting it in the section that it really belonged in.

COHEN: Yes.

MERKER: But they don't do this anymore.

COHEN: No, it's very difficult.

MERKER: Yes, it's impossible now.

COHEN: Very, very difficult.

MERKER: Yes. The other thing I'm sort of a little bit annoyed about is that the *Cambridge Ancient History* has been put on the open shelves rather than in the reference section.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Well, maybe you can get a duplicate set..

MERKER: No, no, originally it was in reference. And then they decided that there wasn't room in reference for the *Cambridge* as is. The same is true with the *Cambridge Medievalist*, but I use that less. I mean I have my own copy, but the thing is, of course, the bibliographies.

COHEN: Sure.

MERKER: The students should be using it constantly but can't. But apart from minor things like that, the collection is pretty good, and the library buys whatever we ask now.

COHEN: What can you say about services? I mean before when we were talking, you mentioned the interlibrary loan.

MERKER: Interlibrary loan has always been just about the best.

COHEN: From going back to what period would you say?

MERKER: Even in the sixties.

COHEN: Even in the sixties.

MERKER: You could just go over, and they would be able to get things for you. I think we mentioned a dissertation from South Africa from fifty-nine. German dissertations from the twenties. And so they were always able to do things. There was even one book, the only copy that I knew of was in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence. And somehow they managed to get me a microfilm of that.

COHEN: What year was that, do you recall roughly?

MERKER: I think it must have been the late sixties.

COHEN: Late sixties. How about the general services, reference, circulation, some of your experience there, other than interlibrary loan?

MERKER: The one major problem has been the theft of books from the library.

COHEN: Oh, universal problem.

MERKER: No, but I thought it was pretty bad. I mean there was one stage in the late seventies and the eighties where I knew that if there was any book that I wanted, it would be missing, and it was.

COHEN: Well, it's a tribute to the taste of our public. [Laughter]

MERKER: Yes, yes. But since then I think that's been cut down to a certain extent.

COHEN: Well, the electronic security systems and so on.

MERKER: But I mean for a while it was pretty bad. But they're pretty good about just about anything one can think of.

COHEN: Well, I want to thank you very, very much.

[End of Tape #3]

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

Reviewed and Edited by Catherine Carey 4/23/2013