

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROY L. JONES

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

AUGUST 16, 2021

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Roy L. Jones, on August 16, 2021, with Shaun Illingworth, and I am also joined by ...

Kendra Boyd: Dr. Kendra Boyd.

Jesse Bayker: Dr. Jesse Bayker.

SI: Okay. Thank you very much for joining us today, Mr. Jones.

Roy L. Jones: Okay.

SI: To begin, can you tell us where and when you were born?

RJ: All right, I was born on July 25, 1946, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

SI: What were your parents' names?

RJ: My father's name was Clyde Jones, and my mother, her name was Flora Jones.

SI: Starting with your mother's side of the family, do you know anything about her family background and how the family got to that area, for example?

RJ: Yes, my mother's family, their names were Woodbury and McWhite. They were born in South Carolina, and then they migrated to Florida. My father's side, they all are from Arkansas, Little Rock, Arkansas. So, he ended up moving to Fort Lauderdale as well to work. That's essentially how he met my mother.

SI: What was it in Florida that drew him, what kind of work?

RJ: Okay, in the 1940s, late '40s, of course Fort Lauderdale was very segregated, so basically the choices were very few. My father was a porter on the Northeast Extension Railroad system between Florida and New York, Boston. He was a porter.

SI: Do you know if he was part of a union?

RJ: Oh, no, there was no such thing in the South at that time.

SI: Okay.

RJ: No such thing.

SI: Did he work on Pullman cars?

RJ: Yes, the Pullman cars, yes.

SI: Okay, all right.

RJ: Your sound sort of breaks up.

SI: Yes, that could just be that we have a number of people on.

RJ: Oh, okay, I got you.

SI: Let's see, maybe we should turn off our video when we are not talking. Do you want to try that?

RJ: No, I'm fine.

SI: Okay.

RJ: I get the gist of it.

SI: Dr. Boyd, I know you have some questions about the family background and how they moved around. Do you want to ask any now?

KB: Yes. You said that your family moved to Florida in the 1940s. I am wondering how long they stayed there, and when did they move to New Jersey?

SI: Were you able to hear that, Mr. Jones? I am going to pause for one second.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

KB: You mentioned that your family moved to Florida in the early 1940s.

RJ: Right.

KB: How long were they there? What was your life like in Florida for you and your family? Did you attend school in Florida, and when did you then leave to move to New Jersey?

RJ: Okay. Yes, my family moved there in the early 1940s. Actually, I think my grandmother [Rosa McWhite] moved there first. We had this pretty huge house in Florida. It had about seven bedrooms, a big, gigantic yard. In the South at the time, multiple families lived together. Multigenerational, that's basically what it was. So, my grandmother basically took care of business, you know, making the meals and all. My mother would go to work. [Editor's Note: The 1950 census lists Rosie McWhite as "Head" of household, Clyde Jones as "Son-in-law," Flora Jones as "daughter," and Roy and his siblings as "grandson." Although she is listed as Rosie in the 1950 census, most other records refer to her as Rosa, including her obituary from 1968.]

Fort Lauderdale was highly segregated, super segregated. It was still an era of lynching in the South, in that area. There were essentially two Fort Lauderdales, an all-white and an all-Black Fort Lauderdale. It was an all-white downtown, hospitals, theaters, and then there was an all-

Black downtown, where you had a lot of stores, different stores. You didn't have a hospital. That was the only thing I think that was different; you didn't have a hospital in the Black community in that part of Fort Lauderdale. So, you had pretty much two doctors, house doctors, to service probably thirty to forty thousand people. All of my brothers, all of us were born in our family home. We couldn't get admitted to a hospital to be born. One of the issues that came up during that period of time was polio. One of my brothers caught polio probably because he could not get the kind of medical attention he needed in a hospital. Anyway, of course, he manages, his life went well, but he still had a severe limp. We had to go every month to Miami to this children's hospital orthopedic center and get his legs fitted for braces and all kinds of stuff. So, that was traditional. The community for Fort Lauderdale was actually two places, one all white and one all Black. You had an all-Black cemetery, an all-white cemetery, an all-Black school system. I went to school from the first grade through the sixth grade.

We left Florida somewhere probably in 1957, '56, but our family split up. All the children went with my mother, and we all came with her to her sister's property in Atlantic City, New Jersey. My father went to Chicago. That's how we ended up in the North. It wasn't by choice. It was like, hey, you had to go with the mother. So, my mother took care of all five boys. She worked two jobs. We ended up, like I said, in Atlantic City in probably about 1957-'58, something like that.

KB: You mentioned five boys, so was it just you and four brothers in terms of the number of siblings that you had?

RJ: Yes, absolutely, four brothers and myself. I was the second oldest.

KB: Once you got to Atlantic City, can you talk a little bit about the experience of settling there, what type of work your mom did, and just your memories of arriving in Atlantic City and then growing up there?

RJ: Okay. Well, even though my father was a porter, in Fort Lauderdale, my mother was literally the chief nutritionist and chef at one of the junior high schools. I can tell you, we never went without a meal. Also, it was a situation where in the South, they had a complete staff of people that would cook home-cooked meals for the children, maybe over a thousand kids. You never got pre-packaged meals. You got a home-cooked meal every single day. It was honestly a beautiful experience. When my mother would come home, we'd just have trays of food. It was just awesome.

When we moved to Atlantic City, essentially Atlantic City was segregated, kind of the later stages of segregation in Atlantic City. Pretty much, my mom was relegated to housework, working for doctors or lawyers cleaning. So, she was pretty much a domestic; that's basically what you'd call it at that time. When we got there, of course, no Blacks could work on the boardwalk at all, at that period in time. That was probably going into the early '60s then. We ended up, as young men, we worked in the kitchen, cleaning, dishwashers. Essentially, everybody from the South, a lot of the guys, they moved there to work in the hotels in Atlantic City. As young people, teenagers, you could still work. We were old enough to work. At sixteen, we went to work. We started out as dishwashers and then ended up as busboys and then

ended up as a waiter. That was essentially all my employment in the high school. We worked every summer, made decent money. My mother never had to purchase our clothes or books or anything; we made enough money to help her out during that period of time.

SI: Do you know how your aunt's family came to Atlantic City? Was it also for the tourist trade?

RK: Well, honestly, it was the Great Migration of the Blacks from the South. The word in the South was, hey, if you wanted a better life, move north. If you wanted to not experience the same level of segregation and brutality, move north. So, my aunt was the first one to leave. She probably got there in 1940, maybe 1938. She had a business. She was one of the first hair salons in Atlantic City, but it was a part of the house. [laughter] It wasn't like you had a business in a major district. You had to pretty much become an entrepreneur and set up whatever you could do in your own home. She had a separate section of the house that was her salon, so she made a living that way, a pretty decent living as well. Frankly, all five of us, my mother and her lived in this property in Atlantic City. Then, eventually, we moved out and got our own properties, but that was the first effort to be able to move from the South to the North and have living arrangements in Atlantic City.

Just to answer that question about what was growing up in Atlantic City like, well, when we first moved there, of course, we were considered outcasts, even within the Black community, because we were from the South. We had this very extreme drawl, and of course, we dressed differently. We would say the guys in Atlantic City were very fashion-conscious, that was the scene. So, we came just basically looking like farmers. We had to endure some ridicule, but we worked through it because we ended up being able to take care of [ourselves]. We weren't afraid of people if people confronted us. We just took care of business. So, we ended up fitting in because we were not someone that you could just kick around, even though we looked like you could kick us around. We were athletes in the South, even in junior high school. My brother was a track star. We were both playing track and football actually in the eighth grade. So, we grew up as a bunch of athletic types. Atlantic City was at first not hospitable, because we were definitely from the South, with a very different accent. Ultimately, we ended up fitting in because of my athletic ability and that sort of thing.

Atlantic City had a kind of social segregation-type system. On the Westside, which is the west side of Atlantic City, you had the more middle class. Doctors and the kids of doctors lived on the Westside. They lived in single-family homes, beautiful homes. Today, it's beautiful. Then, we lived in what they called Uptown, and we were considered working class or lower-middle class. So, there was some tension between the Blacks and Blacks in Atlantic City, not so heavy that it was outrageous and we ended up in violent confrontations, but there was always competition and certain things you didn't get invited to because you not were from the Westside and that sort of thing.

It was a very interesting time, a beautiful time. Now, Atlantic City was a thriving city. It was called the "Playground of the World," and Atlantic City was that way because you could have twenty-four-hour bars open all night long. There was music all the time. You could walk the streets at three o'clock in the morning and see three or four thousand people just hanging out,

going from music venue to music venue, eating food, just having a great time. I loved Atlantic City, and I loved the idea that it was still the entertaining place. I actually went from a resort to a resort because Fort Lauderdale was a resort town too.

KB: I wondered if you could talk more about the demographics of Atlantic City, if the Black population was a large percentage of the city or if it was a smaller group. You mentioned businesses. Your aunt had a business.

RJ: Right.

KB: Do you remember any other types of Black-owned businesses when you were growing up?

RJ: Okay, so I'll go to that first. Multiple Black businesses in Atlantic City. Essentially, Atlantic City was segregated, so there was an all-white section of Atlantic City, mostly Italians and Jews. Then, there was an all-Black section, which consisted of the Westside with more affluent Blacks and lower-working-class people in that section, but multiple businesses, I mean, just thriving businesses. I think they had about nine different music venues that you had a choice to go to, to see jazz, blues, R&B, all of that. You had all kinds of multiple restaurant owners, very dynamic food, just awesome food. Pool houses. I didn't realize it at the time too, Atlantic City was famous for having brothels, multiple brothels. I think there were several in the Black community as well as the white community. It was a thriving Black business district in Atlantic City. Like I said, my aunt was the owner of a Black business. My aunt made a chasm in early Black hair salons in Atlantic City. She did quite well.

Again, Atlantic City was still segregated. It started to change in the 1960s. Around 1963, that's when Atlantic City started to change. Now, the population, to go to your point, Dr. Boyd, when we first got to Atlantic City, the Black population was maybe thirty-five to forty percent, and the white population pretty much was sixty percent, maybe a little bit more. Not many Asians, no Hispanics. It was mostly all Black and all white, Jewish and Italian and maybe Irish, a little bit of Irish--definitely Irish. Now, that changed later on after Dr. King and the riots and all that; many whites and businesses left Atlantic City. For a long period of time, up until the casinos, Atlantic City became like a desert, almost a business desert. There were a lot of empty properties. A lot of the properties, even apartment buildings that whites owned, were abandoned. It was a major dry spell in Atlantic City between probably 1964 and up until the casinos came in probably in the 1970s. [Editor's Note: On November 2, 1976, New Jersey voters decided to authorize casino gambling in Atlantic City. The first casino, Resorts Casino Hotel, opened in 1978.]

Then, it exploded again as a business district and as a boardwalk. The boardwalk was always active, but the interior of Atlantic City, from a color standpoint, completely changed. Today, Atlantic City is about fifty-five percent Black, twenty-five percent Hispanic, and maybe twenty percent white, pretty much. There was a major shift of whites out of Atlantic City during that period of time. So, it changed dramatically, racially and economically.

JB: Mr. Jones, I have a follow-up question. You mentioned that you were an athlete in the South, and then when you came to Atlantic City, that was something that helped you.

RJ: Right.

JB: In your life there, as a young man, can you talk a little bit about playing sports, and where did you play? Was it at school, or were there other places where you could play these sports?

RJ: Okay. Of course, in the South at that time, as young people, you didn't have gaming, you didn't have computers. Everything you did was born of a natural kind of environment. As boys, basically all day long, we'd just play sports. We might start out in the morning, literally after breakfast, and play softball. Then, we would go to a major park and pool, swim. Then, in the late afternoon, there would be a major kind of congregation of people for what they called Little League football. So, we ended up in junior high school on the football team and the track team.

When we moved to Atlantic City, the first thing that happened was very dramatic. I think we were in the eighth grade, somewhere around there, seventh or eighth, so the first thing they said was, "Well, first, you cannot move from the eighth grade to the ninth grade," which would have been normal for us. So, they said, "You have to go back a grade, go back into the eighth grade in Atlantic City," because they felt southern education was inferior to northern education. We were put back, and so anyway, we made it through that. I ended up getting on the senior football team, track team, did a little wrestling, and of course, in the summers, we had AAU [Amateur Athletic Union] boxing. So, it was always everything natural around sports that we were attracted to. By being good at that, that helped us to kind of mix in better in Atlantic City because we were considered pretty star athletes. That's what kind of got us entry into certain parties and dances that you would normally not get invited to, if you were not the son or daughter of a middle-income person. Yes, so I did track, fall, a little wrestling, and some basketball. That was our life, sports.

KB: I just wanted to ask one more question about the Great Migration.

RJ: Okay.

KB: Did you ever go back periodically to the South to visit your family, either in Florida or in the other areas that your family came, and/or did any of your other family members eventually move to New Jersey?

RJ: Well, essentially, the move, the split up in our family makeup was traumatic for us as young people. Essentially, one day, my grandmother and mother came to us and said, "Listen, your father has to leave. There's some extreme stuff going on. He can't stay here with us, and you guys are going to move north." We were like, "Oh, man." It was super traumatic. All our friends were there. Our church relationships were there. We didn't think we could fit it in. Then, everything to us was foreign; moving to the North was like foreign. Even though every now and then, some summers we would go to New York to work with our uncles in restaurants, it was all foreign to us. I was always confronted in New York as a southerner, even in the Black community. They would just laugh at you, the tone of your voice, the style of your voice. "Oh, lord," they used to get a big joke out of that stuff. Anyway, the transition was super traumatic.

To go to your point, for, seriously, twenty-five years, we never went back, never. I don't know what happened. It was so traumatic to us, we just didn't want to go back. Of course, being teenagers, you didn't have the authority to just go on your own. Eventually, we went back, twenty-something years later, to a family reunion. We're going back every now and then to family reunions, but we never tried to move back. It was pretty much, hey, once we left Fort Lauderdale, that was it. It was so traumatic. It ended up being etched in our minds that we had lost all kinds of connections with them. When we got to Atlantic City, we had to make new friends. It was a hostile environment, a different environment. Culturally, it was different. Everything was different. We never went back. It was weird. Mostly because my mother and father were not together, we didn't see a reason to leave and go back to Florida for whatever reason. It was just so traumatic as young people being separated. It's almost hard to explain why we never went back. It was like we just couldn't get over that, that we were torn apart as a family, we had separated, so you never went back.

KB: In terms of Atlantic City, one thing we were wondering is if you remember the 1964 Democratic National Convention that took place in Atlantic City.

RJ: Right.

KB: Do you have any memories about that?

RJ: Yes. That was a very interesting time. I knew young people that were a part of the very aggressive Atlantic City NAACP at the time, and they were a part of the demonstration. It was the talk of the town. It was the talk of the region, and it was very dramatic for Atlantic City. But it also helped set in motion a lot of energy around further involvement in civil rights because as young people, we got introduced to what was happening nationally and why were certain people not being seated in the Democratic Convention. It was an education in real life to us. Atlantic City, at the time, had one of the--and still does today--has the most aggressive youth NAACP in the State of New Jersey, very involved. They have their own radio program. They're a very interesting group of people, and they've always kept up the Atlantic City NAACP tradition of activism since that 1964 episode. It was one year before I graduated [from high school]. That was the next stage in my life then. Once I graduated in 1965, that was another part to my life. [Editor's Note: In 1964, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) was formed as an alternative to the all-white Democratic Party in Mississippi. In anticipation of the Democratic National Convention to be held in Atlantic City in August 1964, the MFDP challenged the seating of the all-white Mississippi Democratic delegation. The MFDP mobilized members statewide and held a convention to select delegates to go to the Democratic Convention. Sixty-eight MFDP delegates arrived in Atlantic City, where they encountered opposition from the Democratic Party. A compromise was reached, without involvement of the MFDP, to offer two at-large seats to MFDP delegates. The MFDP rejected the compromise and went unseated at the convention.]

SI: I just have a quick follow up. Were you a member of the youth NAACP?

RJ: No, I wasn't, and actually the NAACP was kind of like the Westside group folk. You follow me? To people in Atlantic City, I had almost three personalities. I was a jock, a corner boy--not

thug but corner boy--and then I was a nerd. People couldn't quite figure me out. No, I had four personalities, because on Sundays, I was a church boy. So, I would have four different personalities. Nobody quite got any of that. So, yes, I was not a part of that group. I was locked out of that basically because I lived on the other side of the town in the Black community. [laughter] It was very interesting. I've got friends today that are involved in that.

JB: Mr. Jones, I have a couple of follow-up questions about what you just said. My first question is, you mentioned that on Sundays, you were a church boy.

RJ: Yes.

JB: Could you talk more about church, your experience at church in Atlantic City and in Florida? How was that transition from one community to another?

RJ: Well, the first being part of history of southern Blacks--in the South, there are two religions, church and cooking. That's how it goes. My mother and grandmother were fabulous cooks. I had uncles that were chefs. It's a religion in the South. Church, in the South, you didn't have a choice about, "Okay, I'm not going to church." That was not your choice as a child. You definitely, from birth, went to church. I remember even church in my mother's arms as a toddler. By the way, church was serious. You had early morning Sunday School. Then, there was eleven o'clock service. Then, there was a three o'clock service called the BTU or the Bible Training Union. Then, there was a night service. People in the South were almost like Pentecostals, so religion was very serious. Sundays was about church, religion and food. In between services, we would have this huge southern dinner. Anything and everything you could imagine was on the table then. It was never one meat. It was never just this or that. You may have four different desserts, two or three kinds of meat. It was a wonderful experience. Even today, I can cook well. I cook for my church. I've actually done catering. Our tradition was church from birth, period.

Of course, as we got a little bit older, say, eleven, we would do this. On the way to Sunday School, because the parents weren't going, we would stop at the ballpark and play basketball, so we would skip Sunday school. [laughter] We knew our parents would be there at eleven o'clock, so we were there in our Sunday best after we had been playing basketball in the morning without Sunday School. Now, we generally went to Sunday School, but sometimes we would hooky Sunday School. There was always a store, a little convenience store, you could buy all kinds of candy and goodies. That was our thing. We'd go basketball play, eat some hot dogs or whatever at the corner store. Eleven o'clock, you were definitely in church.

When I came to Atlantic City, the tradition kept up, at least with me, not with all my brothers, but it was with me. I was the escort to my grandmother, and my grandmother was super religious. I would escort her to church every Sunday. She was in the fourth row on the left side of this Community Baptist Church every Sunday. My role was to make sure that nobody took her seat. [laughter] Even today in Black communities in church, certain people won't sit in certain places, so that's just what I did for my grandmother. I had that personality, and I had that experience.

At about fourteen, I actually thought I wanted to become a priest. That's how deep I was into the church and religion. I went to a library, and I took out this huge book on catechisms. It was like five hundred pages. So, it had all of these things that you couldn't do, period, five hundred pages of stuff you couldn't do, from how you talked to people, how you sit. I forgot I wanted to go into the Catholic Church, period. I said, "Man, that's impossible. How could you adhere to all of that?" Then, when it got to the point about marriage, I said, "Oh, no, definitely not me. No, I cannot be celibate." I knew at fourteen and fifteen, no, I'm going to fail on that end.

Anyway, then, I went to a little smaller church, and the guy was going to groom me to become a [youth] minister. So, he said, "Come to Wednesday Bible studies and we're going to start teaching you." I would go, and it would just be him and me, nobody else in Bible study--I mean, prayer meeting. So, I said, "Wait a minute, what kind of church is that? On Sunday, it's full, but at prayer meeting, it's just me and the pastor." I became disappointed about the church. So, I started to separate myself a little bit from the church, not completely, but I separated myself from becoming a youth minister or going into the ministry up until really ten years ago. Having experience in the South with the church, every child in the neighborhood basically had to go to Sunday School or church. It's just a part of it.

JB: You mentioned going to a Baptist Church in Atlantic City. Were you always going to a Baptist Church in the South as well?

RJ: Right, exactly. In the South, it was Baptist, and in the North, it was Baptist. I don't even think in the South there were Pentecostals yet. It was mostly the Baptist Church. I'm not even certain of other denominations; it was mostly Baptists. The churches in the South tended to be huge churches, very dynamic. Even today, you go down South, there's huge churches. Again, in the South, there's two religions, the church and cooking and food.

JB: My other follow-up question that I had was we talked a little bit about the Democratic National Convention.

RJ: Right.

JB: That was towards the end of your high school years.

RJ: Right.

JB: Throughout your childhood and your years in school, what do you recall seeing about the civil rights movement nationally? Also in your community, did you see people engage in protests and activism? How did that influence you?

RJ: Well, of course, in the South, activism was not a part of, in the early '40s, that was not the case because the Klan was super active. So, that was a huge issue. When I moved to Atlantic City, I began to become more aware of it. Then, I shared with you guys before, my transformation happened in 1965, before I graduated, and I was asked to do a paper on lynching. I was asked to do a final paper. I decided I would do it on lynching. I'm in the study hall. I started looking through books. I just started crying. I started hollering and screaming. People

said, "What's wrong with you?" I said, "Man, I have to do this [report] on lynching. I never physically saw what it was like." It set in motion my inclinations and my affinity for the civil rights movement, in 1965. Of course, the civil rights movement was going on. We knew about sit-ins and all of that. I studied it.

When I went to my high school counselor to go to college, I wanted to go to a northern school. They said, "No, there's no such thing. You can try." So, I applied to Rutgers, Montclair, a couple schools, Rowan University or Glassboro. They all turned me down and said, "We have a quota." I never knew what that meant. In high school, every child, every graduate, or anybody interested in college, had to put their picture in the admissions application. So, some Blacks ended up in college because they had, I'm just going to use the word, European-sounding names, and so they ended up getting in certain schools. But with your picture, that stopped all that, so they could screen you quite well.

I go to my counselor, who said, "Well, you have two choices. You can go into the military to Vietnam." I said, "Oh, no, absolutely not Vietnam." [The counselor] said, "Well, you can go to vocational school." "No, I'm not interested in that." "If you want to go to college, you've got to go to a Black college." "A Black college?" I knew about Black colleges, I knew about Florida A&M, and I said, "Well, okay." So, I had a track scholarship to Hampton University and a football scholarship to West Virginia State. When I applied, I was rejected by all of the white schools, and I ended up getting scholarships to Black schools.

I ended up going to Hampton. When I went to Hampton, the same way I was startled when I went to Atlantic City, Hampton, at the time, was like exclusively a university for middle-income doctors' kids and lawyers' kids and nurses and all that. I went there, all the young men and women, they had suits and ties on. They had cars. I thought, "Oh, man, they're eighteen, seventeen years old? They have cars, man." I felt completely dislocated.

I got on the bus, and I got there in the morning, and I went to West Virginia State. So, I get to West Virginia State. It was more welcoming because it was basically all working class. So, it was a dramatic change from a middle-income university, Howard and Hampton, to a working-class Black college at [West Virginia State]. I said, "Okay, this is me." So, I stayed there for a year, did college work.

Then, I applied back to Rutgers, and they told me, "Okay, well, we'll accept you, except the condition is you have to go to the University College." I said, "Well, what is the University College?" The University College was a separate part of the Rutgers School and University, but it was for Blacks and older students and you had to take remedial courses. If you passed all the remedial courses, then you could apply and matriculate to the day school. That's basically what happened. Rutgers, when I even got to Camden at Rutgers, it was segregated. It was weird. [Editor's Note: This refers to University College at Rutgers University-Camden. The "day school" refers to the Camden College of Arts and Sciences.]

JB: Would you say a little bit more about the University College at Rutgers? I think if we look at the official papers that describe what University College is, the official record says, "Well, this is the night school."

RJ: Right, exactly.

JB: It does not say it the school for the Black students. [laughter]

RJ: Right, exactly, right.

JB: Was there an understanding, was it implicit or was it an explicit thing that people said, "Well, this is where we put all the Black students and everybody knows and understands that." How would you describe the situation?

RJ: Well, it was disguised. When they said, "Okay," I literally got a conditional admittance to Rutgers University, which is if you think about that, what is a conditional admittance? The condition was that I enter the night school or University College and then prove that I could do standard day college work and then I can matriculate and that's essentially what happened. It was very disguised. Now, the University College is today a real "night school" essentially. It's for working-class people, it's real, but in the 1960s, it was definitely a place to segregate Black students. You still had to prove yourself even at the University College level to get to the day school. So, that's essentially what happened. The lines were drawn, and essentially, that was the system. It wasn't broadcast loud, but when you went to the night school, that's what you saw, mostly Blacks and older adults.

JB: Now, we are getting to the time when you are coming to Rutgers and you're seeing these other students that are also in the University College.

RJ: Right.

JB: You say a lot of them are Black students. Do you think a lot of the other people were following a similar trajectory? We know you went on to day school at Rutgers. Were other people on a similar path, or what was happening once they were done at the University College?

RJ: Well, that was weird--well, not weird--but the thing was a lot of people got screened out at the University College level. They never made it to the day school. If you could not get past the University College, you were not going to matriculate to the day school, period. People were weeded out at that level. Some people decided, "Well, I'm just going to another college." Or, "I'm going to Howard." Or, "I'm going to another Black college. I'm not going to stay in the Rutgers system." So, that's why, when we finally matriculated in the day school, there were seven of us from the night school out of thousands. Now, some of those folk could've went to New Brunswick or they could've went to Newark. I would say this too. I actually think my experiences may be different from some of the people who were Black that I met ultimately in the day school. Some of them, I'm not sure how they got to Rutgers, I mean, seriously. To this day, I'm not certain how they got there.

When I got there, out of seven people, two were from Atlantic City, a friend of mine today, I think you guys are going to interview him, Malik Chaka, or Michael Edwards, brilliant guy. This guy was so brilliant, he was teaching in the sociology department as a student. Today, he's

multilingual. He can speak about eleven African languages, Portuguese. This guy's amazing. Anyway, of the seven students, two were from Atlantic City, this was the goofy part, two were from Atlantic City, one or two from Camden, one from like Glassboro and another one was from like mid-Jersey. That's like, "Wait a minute. Well, first of all, we're in Camden. Where are the Camden kids? Where are all the Camden kids?" We were not from Camden. There was only, I would say, one or two that year when we finally matriculated to the day school, 1968, around that, it's like, "Where are the Camden kids?" That's when it became even more obvious that Rutgers itself was segregated. They had a particular problem with Camden schools and graduates of Camden High School, which was more predominantly Black. I came from a high school that was very mixed but more predominantly white. So, the predominantly Black schools, Camden High and Woodrow Wilson, those kids, by the way, most of them or a lot who did go to college, they went to Black schools. They did not go to Rutgers. They did not stay in their hometown to go to school. We thought that was odd, and that's when it started to kind of germinate with us, like, "What is this about?"

Then, of course, as we became activists, the city was segregated. Then, we're like, "Wait a minute, here it is, 1967-'68." Camden was segregated. More specifically, Rutgers was considered an ivory tower, completely disjointed from the community. Rutgers did not consider it a part of Camden. It was in Camden, but the university, for all intents and purposes, did not consider itself a Camden university-based school. It was, "No, we are Rutgers, and essentially we identify with New Brunswick. We're just going to be in the southern part of New Jersey." Even today, the Camden Campus is treated very differently than all the other campuses, in terms of money and allocations and all of that. It's like a stepchild. Notice now, I never said I was admitted to the New Brunswick Campus or the Newark Campus. I was admitted to the Camden Campus. Very interesting.

JB: Did you apply to the New Brunswick Campus?

RJ: Well, I applied generally to Rutgers and ended up in Camden. I'm not saying you could make a lot. [laughter] If you go to New Brunswick during that period of time, there was a--what was that, it was a woman's college?

SI: Douglass.

RJ: What was it called?

SI: Douglass, Douglass College.

RJ: Right, Douglass. We never ended up in the New Brunswick system. The people I knew ended up in the Camden system. Most of the Camden [city] graduates went to Black colleges until 1969, when we did what we did, but that was normal for Camden high school graduates. They would not go to Rutgers or would not get admitted to Rutgers.

JB: For the record, can you establish the timeline here? What year did you start the college, what year did you come to the University College at Rutgers, and when did you start and graduate?

RJ: I left high school in 1965. I spent two years in Black colleges. I actually went to two different Black colleges. I go to the first one, and I thought, "This is too easy." So, I go to West Virginia State, and it was right on point. As a young person, eighteen, nineteen, it's like, "I'm in West Virginia, man." I felt isolated again. Even when I was in West Virginia, there was a thing about, "Where are you from?" Kids would always ask, "Where are you from?" If you were from the North, you were isolated from southern kids. I had to grow a different set of friendships in the southern Black college, the same way I had to grow a set of friends at Rutgers that were not from Camden. So, it was very interesting. The timeline, '65 through '67, I'm in Black colleges. In '68, I matriculate to the University College. In '69, I ended up on the main campus, the day school [Rutgers Camden College of Arts and Sciences]. That's pretty much the timeline.

JB: When you got to Rutgers, can you talk a little bit about what the academic life was like for you? What was it like in classes? What were your relationships with professors or administrators like, anything that sticks out to you?

RJ: Well, you had some very progressive professors. Then, of course, the students were the more obnoxious types, you know, the suburban kids, like, "How did you get here?" that kind of attitude. "How did you actually get here?" You had to get past that. That was in the atmosphere. That was in the environment. Some professors too, I don't think they used affirmative action at the time, but it was the same concept, "You must've got here because of some special admissions program, right?" That was hardly the case because there were no special admissions program, not in '69, until we did what we did. We got there the hard way. We had to go left, right and then down the middle to get to Rutgers. [laughter]

The environment, the key word is isolation. Although I was in a city, I was isolated from the city. Then, on campus, all summer, the seven of us just always hung together. We really didn't have white friends. People would not befriend us either. We ultimately ended up making friends with radical whites, only radical whites, or, I'll use the term, progressive whites. But it was the radical whites that started supporting what we were doing in the Black Student Unity [Movement]. By the way, that was not the case for ninety-eight percent of the campus, and seventy-eight percent of the faculty was not supportive. We were still outsiders. The question always was, and you could feel the tension around, "Well, how did you get here? You don't really belong here, so how did you get here? It had to be something special that got you here, but you don't really belong here." We didn't make friends. We couldn't make friends. People would not befriend you. By the way, being nineteen, we still had to find a way in terms of making friends and that sort of thing. All seven of us became super friends.

The other thing was, I'm from Atlantic City. I just came from West Virginia. I had to work. I was literally working full time at night from, say, eight to about four in the morning. Then, I would go to school. So, you had to pay your way through school. I had to literally pay my way through college. My mother could not afford it. In fact, if my going to college was based on my mother being able to afford it, it would have never happened. Actually, probably, the rest of my brothers, that's exactly why they never went to college. I was able to get through to go on scholarships, athletic scholarships, and then I always worked as a teenager, I worked all through college and was able to make things work for me.

It was pretty isolating. I'm living in the YMCA. It was the downtown YMCA on Federal Street, right where McDonald's is today. I lived there. I did not like the idea of communal bathrooms, goofy. Essentially, the room consisted of about a ten-by-ten room, that was your room, technically your little hotel room, whatever you call it. I had to pay my way through school, pay for my own room and board, and eventually we got loans to pay for things too. It was very isolating, and it's almost a miracle that we were able to pay our way through, work our way through, and then succeed at it.

Academically, we all were pretty much decent enough to be able to do college work, and we proved that we could. Honestly, my motivation in going to college was not to just get a degree for a degree's sake, but it was to make a difference in the world. Especially from my experience with the paper that I did on lynching, I evolved to [realize] I have to be a change agent. What's the point of living if you're not a change agent?

Then, even at the Rutgers Law School, one of the deans, I wrote a note or article in maybe *The Gleaner*, and I challenged the university, "What's the point of you being in Camden if you can't transform Camden? What is the point of a university if all of this knowledge and expertise isn't transforming Camden?" This dean, Professor Fairbanks, he was the dean of the law school. He came to me, he said, "Listen, Roy, very fascinating piece. Professors are talking about that, 'Well, what is our purpose? We're in this city. What are we doing? What are we doing to support this city?'" The action in February of 1969 set in motion other professors and administrators thinking about, "Well, we could do better. We need to do more. We're in this town. Why can't we do more?" He came to me, and we had a really good conversation then. It was a very interesting time, and things at Rutgers started to change. So, there were some professors and administrators who were very welcoming, but most were not. It's like, "You're not welcome here." We had to get past that. At the same time, we're doing academic work and being young people. [Editor's Note: *The Gleaner* is the name of the student newspaper at Rutgers-Camden. Russell N. Fairbanks (1919-2000) served as the dean of the Rutgers Law School-Camden from 1967 to 1981. From 1974 to 1981, he was also the provost of Rutgers-Camden.]

JB: Mr. Jones, you mentioned a couple of times the things that you did in February of 1969, so I am wondering if we can get into that a little bit more and talk about the BSUM, the Black Student Unity Movement.

RJ: Okay.

JB: How did the organization come about, and how did you plan this protest action?

RJ: Well, the protest action, it was planned, but it was also spontaneous. Prior to the protest, there was a young man, the same fellow you're going to interview, Malik Chaka, he was the vice chair of a civil rights group in Camden called the Black People's Unity Movement. They were very active doing demonstrations, super active, very dynamic people. They settled one of the largest civil rights lawsuits that opened up and desegregated the city of Camden, from housing to everything. He was the vice chair. We were thinking about, "Well, we need to form some kind

of student group." Here we are on campus, and we couldn't get anything done. We decided to form a student group. We were kind of a parody off the Black People's Unity Movement by calling ourselves the Black Students Unity Movement. We formed; we created that name.

Then, we met a couple times and said, "Well, man, we have to do something very dramatic." All over the country, what inspired us was the students at Cornell and all these radical things going on on the college campuses. At the same time, we said, "Okay, let's be a part of this. Let's do something dramatic." We toiled around with, "What could we do that would be dramatic?" That's what I'm saying, the spontaneous part came in like, "Okay, well, let's take over the university and try to shut it down to get this conversation going," but we didn't want to just shut it down. We thought, "What do you want?" We created twenty-nine demands about what we wanted to see and create, how we wanted to see a more inclusive university. So, that's how the twenty-nine demands came about, and that's the background to the Black Student Unity Movement, as it was called, the BSUM. [Editor's Note: On April 18, 1969, members of the Afro-American Society (AAS) took over the student union, Willard Straight Hall, at Cornell to protest racism at the university. The occupation lasted for thirty-six hours. The Black Student Unity Movement (BSUM) presented twenty-four demands to Rutgers University on February 10, 1969. More information can be found at "Black Student Unity Movement (BSUM), 'Black Student Unity Movement demands at Rutgers-Camden,' Rutgers Scarlet and Black Project, accessed November 8, 2021, <https://scarletandblack.rutgers.edu/archive/items/show/940> The takeover of the College Center at Rutgers-Camden by the BSUM occurred on February 26-27, 1969.]

JB: Do you recall any of the demands specifically that stick out to you right now as important ones? What were you really asking the university to do?

RJ: Well, the main thing was admissions. Of course, rather than ignoring that, how hard it was to do, to go through college and work full time, we said, "Now, that's going to be impossible for some people who may not have that ethic." We said, first, that we needed a more liberal, more progressive [admissions program]; we actually called it open admissions. Then, it morphed into the EOF program, where it was an admissions program for people of color, working-class people, poorer students, who could not afford to go to [college], because that was a primary thing. You might be college level in terms of your academics, but you may not be able to afford college. So, our thing was, "What do we need to put in place that would help a young student to be able to afford college?" We talked about scholarships and grants. That's how the EOF program came about. Those were the key things: to open up Rutgers admissions to all people and then to provide financial incentives to young people that couldn't afford to go to college, because most kids in Camden could not have afforded to go to Rutgers. I was able to go to a Black college because I worked even in college there; I worked all my way through college at the Black college and Rutgers as well because we didn't have grants and scholarships. There was no such thing for us. You were on your own to raise the money, find living quarters to live, and make things happen, as well as do academic work at the same time and do activism. We had that energy and enthusiasm that we could balance all of those things at the same time. [Editor's Note: Established in 1967 in the aftermath of the Newark rebellion, the New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) provides financial assistance and services to students from

educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds who attend universities in New Jersey.]

JB: Now, I know that you also had a couple of more symbolic demands with naming some spaces and doing some things on campus like that.

RJ: Right.

JB: Can you talk a little bit about Paul Robeson and the idea to name a library addition after Paul Robeson? That was one of the demands that you presented.

RJ: Yes, right. Well, all seven of us were quite aware, when we started researching the history of Blacks at Rutgers, that Paul Robeson was the outstanding example of what we all needed to strive to be like. Actually, we thought it was going to be an easy sell to get the library named after Paul Robeson. But believe it or not, people became hostile out there, and so we thought, "What was that about?" The more we studied Paul Robeson, a lot of people, academic people, thought that Paul Robeson was a Communist. [laughter] We wanted to name a Rutgers University library after Paul Robeson, a Communist. [laughter] People said, "Oh, no, we can't do that." We didn't understand that. We thought it was the perfect name, you know, star student, star athlete, why not Paul Robeson, until you got into the minutia of what other people thought about Paul Robeson. Even in academia, they would say, "Oh, hell no, not Paul Robeson." We actually ran into a lot of hassles about that, naming the university library after Paul Robeson, and it was because all of these professors are like, "Do you understand the guy was a Communist? We can't raise money from our patrons if we named the library after Paul Robeson." But it eventually happened.

JB: Were you around when the library was finally renamed for him twenty-two years later?

RJ: Yes. In fact, when you think about it, that was one of the major assumptions, "No, no, this cannot be associated with Communists." That's what the academics and the administrators felt about him. Most of them felt, "Hey, the guy's a Communist, we can't do that." Even though he was an outstanding Rutgers alumni, they said, "No, we just can't do that." That was the struggle about renaming the library. [Editor's Note: In 1991, the Rutgers-Camden library was renamed the Paul Robeson Library in honor of the actor, singer, activist and Rutgers alumnus of the Class of 1919.]

SI: You may have mentioned this in conversations that you had with Dr. Bayker and Dr. Boyd, but I was just curious if you recall any memories from the actual building takeover. What was that like?

RJ: Well, of the seven of us that went in, we had a young fellow that was pretty tall. We decided to--very late afternoon, evening, going into the evening--just to run everybody out of the student center. We went to a couple of white kids and said, "Hey, man, you've got to leave." They said, "Why? Why?" We said, "We're going to take it over." "Take it over?" Of course, there's a big guy standing with us, and they said, "Okay, we're leaving." But it was not much of a hassle. There was no physical confrontation. This guy was intimidating. He said, "Listen,

man, you've got to leave." They looked at him, "Okay, we'll leave." [laughter] Fortunately, there were not a lot of students there because had there been a lot of [students], let's say, two or three hundred white students, that takeover would not have happened, I don't think. I don't think it was like twelve people in the whole student center, so it was easier to get that done. We brought these super locks and chains and bolted the doors and everything. Once we got the last person out, we just locked everything down. We locked down.

Some people in the community heard about it. People from the Black People's Unity Movement heard about it; they came around. They were organizing other people. Then, the word got out to students, and they were like furious, like, "First we can't go into our student center that we paid money for and X, Y, Z. Oh, this is horrible." It became a very tense situation. It was a struggle, a slight struggle, to get people out, but nothing physical, overt, something damaging to someone. We never physically put our hands on anyone or hurt anyone. It ultimately worked out. On a different day, it may not have worked out. [Editor's Note: The takeover of the College Center at Rutgers-Camden occurred on February 26-27, 1969.]

JB: Can you talk about how long did you stay at the building and how did you make the decision to end the takeover?

RJ: Okay, so it actually lasted about two-and-a-half days, and I think I got that right. For some reason, I want to say three days, but I think it's more like two-and-a-half days. The media caught wind of it, and they did articles about it, "Negros take over the university." [laughter] It was headlines. Now the community's aware, white students, they were hot, "How could these students do that?" They knew it couldn't have been that many of us because we were totally outnumbered, "How could the university allow that?" Thank God the university never physically tried to dislodge us. They physically never did that because they had the capacity to do it. They could have brought in the police, military, whatever they wanted to do, but, honestly, it would have been a riot because the Black People's Unity Movement people in the city and people in the community were there on the campus, around. It was like a hot time, a very volatile time. So, I think the university made the decision, "Let's not aggravate this any further." By us having our set of demands, we had a go-between, a fellow named Jim Ricks, and he was a very interesting guy, a very charismatic guy. He was able to get our demands to the university president. So, I think the university board of directors met and the University President Mason Gross decided, "Let's meet these demands. What's on here that's not something that we can't do?" Some things we said, "Get rid of racist professors," they said, "Well, how do you do that? How do you identify them and then how do you get rid of them? We can't. That'll take too much energy." [Editor's Note: Mason Gross served as the president of Rutgers University from 1959 to 1971.]

Anyhow, the president of the university comes down in a limousine. The press is there, he notifies the press. He drives up--I think you could drive right up to Penn Street and Fourth, Fourth and Penn--he drove the limousine up. He had a press conference and he basically said, "Hey, we're going to meet these demands, as much of it as possible," but the condition was that we leave the building, that a lot of what we said made sense, but we could not completely keep the takeover [going] for another week. It was like, "No, we can't have that." The compromise was like, "Okay, we'll meet the demands if you leave the building." We decided, "Okay, great, no problem." That's essentially how the matter was resolved.

JB: This action in Camden took place at the same time when there was also a building takeover at Rutgers-Newark. [Editor's Note: On February 24, 1969, members of the Black Organization of Students (BOS) occupied Conklin Hall on the Rutgers-Newark Campus.]

RJ: Right.

JB: Students at Rutgers-New Brunswick were also protesting. Can you say a little bit about that and any kind of interactions that you had with the students there?

RJ: The young man, his name is Kaleem Shabazz. He's the president of the NAACP in Atlantic City, and he was a part of the civil rights effort in Atlantic City during that '64 Democratic Convention. That's a guy you want to talk to too. He went to the Livingston Campus. Weird, it would be interesting to see how he got there versus coming to Camden. I ended up in Camden. The two of us ended up in Camden, several went to New Brunswick. It would be interesting, "How did you guys make the decision to get there? How did you get there?" Anyway, there was always an internal communication of the campuses, and when New Brunswick had demonstrations prior to the takeovers, we went up. We spoke. We never got to Newark. The Newark, New Brunswick and Camden people would always meet in New Brunswick for demonstrations. We got to know each other. We interacted with each other. There was always kind of a collaboration, but it was a distinct collaboration. Every campus was very distinct in terms of what they were asking for and how they approached it and that sort of thing.

SI: I have a question on a different subject.

RJ: Yes.

SI: You mentioned Vietnam was an issue as well. Did you have to worry about the draft lottery? How did that affect your life?

RJ: Well, that was a very interesting episode too. I was obstinate about going to Vietnam to fight an enemy that I felt had never enslaved our people. No, that was a part of my radical tendencies and flavor. I said, "No." I was kind of a part of the anti-war movement as well. I was even prepared to move to Canada to avoid the draft, seriously. Believe it or not, thank God for student deferments because that's why I never ended up in the military.

Something did happen; I was a minute from going to Vietnam. When I ended up at Rowan University, Glassboro, I worked in a program called the University Year for Action, part of the VISTA [Volunteers in Service to America] program. Anyhow, the security guard at the Glassboro campus said, "Roy, they have an FBI agent here and he needs to talk to you." I said, "An FBI agent?" He said, "He has a warrant for your arrest." I said, "Oh, man." Before I phone hung up, the FBI agent was in my office, that quick. He didn't say, "Come over to the security." He said, "The guy wants to speak to you," and the guy was there. As he was talking to [me], he was in my office. He said, "Listen, man, I have a warrant for your arrest." I said, "An arrest for what?" He said, "You're a draft dodger." I said, "Wow, wait a minute, so are you telling me that you couldn't find me since 1965, and here it is about 1972, and you couldn't find me?" I said,

"Now, I went to the colleges in West Virginia. I went to Rutgers. Now, I'm working at Rowan. What part of my filing income taxes that you didn't see my address?" He said, "Well, that's very interesting, but we have a warrant for your arrest." I said, "No, I've always had student visas [student deferments]." So, he said, "Okay, so this is the deal. I have to enforce this warrant." He said, "Tomorrow morning at seven a.m., you must report to the Atlantic City recruiting station to be drafted into the military." [laughter] I said, "What?" I said, "Man, how am I going to tell my family?" I'm married at the time. "How is that going to work?" He said, "You can either do that or be in prison for five years." "Oh," I said, "how am I going to make this adjustment?" I have a family. He said, "Listen, you'd better be there because I'm going to be there. If you're not there, you will be arrested. We will hunt you down. We're going to arrest you."

I go there at seven o'clock. He's there. They drive me from Atlantic City to Philly; that was main jump-off point to go to Fort Dix. Then, you had eight weeks of training. You would be in Vietnam within three months. That's how quick they were preparing people to get to Vietnam--well, not Vietnam, but into the military. So, I go there, and I get to Philly. They do all the tests, and I pass everything. He said, "Well, there's one more test you've got to take." I said, "What's that?" "You've got to take a health test." I said, "Okay, cool." I take the test. They find out that I was an asthmatic, so that saved me from being drafted. I was declared some medical discharge or something. They were prepared to arrest me if I didn't sign up for the military. I was declared a draft dodger, and for seven years, they couldn't find me.

Anyhow, I was intent not to go into the military. I actually didn't think I would survive the military living-wise because of going to a war and not surviving. I had nightmares about going to war. So, I was intent, no, I'm not going to go and fight in any war, I'm not going into the military. That was my story with the draft.

KB: Did you know other people that you grew up with or Black people in your community who went to Vietnam?

RJ: Absolutely, Dr. Boyd. In fact, most of my friends went into the military, even my brothers. They all went into the military. They didn't see college as viable, or they didn't look at it that they could get accepted into a college. That was my motivation. One of the reasons I wanted to go to college was because in the South, so few Blacks went to college and graduated, and the only college that you could go to was a Black college. So, my mother went one year to Florida A&M, and then she dropped out because she was having kids. Nobody in my family ever graduated from college. I was the first one. In my whole generation of the Joneses, I was the first one to graduate from college. That was a goal of mine, "You need to set this example," and that was the case.

Dr. Boyd, many of those guys went from high school straight to Vietnam. My middle brother, he goes to Vietnam, and he came back completely and totally a messed up person, just totally. It was horrible. He went to Vietnam when he was like eighteen. He even explained to me what happened that took him out of himself. He experienced a whole command of people dying, being bombed. They had let, say, a hundred people go into town that night to celebrate Christmas. When they came back, the whole camp was just blown up. The military based was

completely blown apart. Hundreds of those guys were killed. From that point, he ended up with a syndrome and regrets; he just drifted into a really bad mental state. Yes, that was his really bad experience with Vietnam. Dr. Boyd, many young people that I graduated with, they went into the military, the Navy, Army, whatever. They definitely went into the military.

KB: I did want to ask, sort of in line with your more radical politics, I know that you established a co-op.

RJ: Right.

KB: I wanted to know if you could talk a little more about the co-op that you established in Camden, how it got started, how did you finance that, and just general information about your co-op?

RJ: Okay. Well, one of the things about students in the 1960s, they were super well read and very well read around radical philosophies. Honestly, we read anything out of Mao Zedong's book, Marx, Lenin, I mean, we read Communist stuff, Socialist stuff, Chinese radicals. We were distinct into radical literature and radical practices. To get right to the point, I was very interested in what Jews were doing around cooperatives. It fascinated me. I read up on how the Jewish community were locked out of banking practices or were locked out of not participating with mainstream banks because they were Jews. So, the Jewish community decided, "Well, we'll create savings and loans associations." Out of that, I'm like, "That's fascinating, you create your own bank."

The other thing they did also that was fascinating to me was that they created co-ops, housing co-ops, food co-ops, all kinds. That was a fascinating structural way to survive, so I studied co-ops. I was steeped into cooperative economics, all that kind of stuff. I loved it. I said, "Well, here we are on campus. Most of us are from out of town, and we have to live in different places. Why not create a co-op, a housing co-op, or student dormitory, for Black students?" At that point, it was only a few of us anyway, so, hey, let's create a layer where we can actually survive and get through college and all that.

We were so steeped into community empowerment, we not only created that co-op, but we also created a daycare center. Literally, while we were going to college and doing radical work, we were running a daycare center, and we were running a food co-op as well. We would give away food. Some of the students who had kids were in our daycare center. We were able to get it financed because welfare would pay for indigent care for low-income kids, and we made it work. We ended up getting these two massive buildings. They were mansions. They were at the corner of Second and Penn, huge buildings. Both had eight bedrooms a piece. That's how big it was, and they were attached. So, I think we got both buildings for like 30,000 dollars. Today, it would have been worth like a million dollars plus. We took out a mortgage; we paid the mortgage. We kept the mortgage up. We set up the daycare. It was a financing way to help the mortgage. Also, most of us ended up never having to pay rent in an outside, external source. You could work in the daycare center and not pay, or you could do both. You could contribute however you wanted to. That was the instance of the student co-op, the Black student co-op

anyway. [Editor's Note: The Black Cooperative Association, or Black Co-op, was located at 303 N. 2nd Street in Camden.]

KB: Do you remember, besides the daycare center and the food co-op, any other activities or events that you would have at the co-op building?

RJ: The thing about our interest in community involvement and engagement, at Rutgers part of the demands was to create a university community center. Rutgers actually funded that, and this guy Jim Ricks that we were talking about--he was the liaison between us and the university president--they made him the director [of the Bureau of Community Services]. That was our connection in trying to help move forward in the community with community engagement.

One of the things we were all interested in was culture and African culture and African art and African music. We started the first city-wide African fest or cultural festival, funded by Rutgers. One of our first festivals was at the Camden Convention Center. Now, we literally had five thousand people show up. We had all kinds of jazz artists, African artists. We had this major African artist named [Babatunde] Olatunji and his troupe, world famous, come and participate. We were doing this as students. So, we kept up the tradition of doing festivals as a part of our community engagement work.

One of the very important things that we did as well was we lived near the Rutgers campus, but we were in a neighborhood called Cooper-Grant. So, Rutgers decided it was going to completely take all that neighborhood and gentrify it and basically build its future campuses on that community. People in the community would say, "Oh, this is horrible. We're lower income. Where are we going to go?" So, we helped organize and build the Cooper-Grant Neighborhood Association. I was one of its first vice presidents. An older white woman was the president. There were a couple of other Hispanics and Blacks who were older folks that lived in the neighborhood, so we created that.

We decided to fight against Rutgers' gentrification efforts and eminent domain efforts really. We went to South Jersey Regional Legal Services. We got involved in a case against Rutgers. We lost the legal battle, but we won the preservation of Cooper-Grant battle. It was too much drama around Rutgers fighting that neighborhood. One of the decisions Rutgers made was--the day that they came to bulldoze this neighborhood, all of these older women, students and us stood in front of the bulldozers and stopped the bulldozers from knocking down properties in the neighborhood. It got so much publicity that Rutgers decided, "Just leave that alone." Rutgers literally made a pact with the community that it would preserve at least two blocks, two to three blocks, of Cooper-Grant, that the rest of the part where the ballfield is now and the tennis court, that was deeded over to Rutgers, so Rutgers basically took it. I think they own the land all the way up to the Delaware River, where the baseball field is, Rutgers literally owned that as well. But we were able to preserve the interior core of this neighborhood called Cooper-Grant. So, that was a major community engagement effort that we engaged in, apart from some of the activism we were doing at Rutgers.

KB: Do you remember what year it was when you were involved with this and stood in front of the bulldozer?

RJ: I am going to say it was in the '70s and it might have been after I left Rutgers, but I was still living in Cooper-Grant. I'm not certain about the timeframe. I would definitely have to get that for you. There was a lawsuit, and then there was a settlement. I never forgot when we went to court, Rutgers had the former Attorney General [George F.] Kugler representing Rutgers. So, we go into the New Jersey Superior Court, and the former attorney general was there. We had about a thirty-five-page brief. We had Legal Services lawyers and all kinds of evidence, everybody willing to testify. The Rutgers attorney, his brief was literally five pages. That was his response [laughter] to our thirty-five-page brief was five pages. The whole time we're testifying and making our case, the judge is looking at his hands. He would sit up and he would just look at his hands like this. We're looking at this judge and we're like, "You know what? We've lost this case." He was like not listening to us. He was just like looking at his fingernails. He was basically like, "Whenever you guys are finished, I'm ready to rule," and that's what he did within like twenty minutes. After us presenting our case, a very dramatic case--this is a poor neighborhood, "Leave us alone. Let us grow. Let us coexist," in twenty minutes, he ruled. Rutgers won that battle, but they lost the community communications battle in the media. They lost that. That was not a good deal for Rutgers, so they ended up settling and making some concessions to us. [Editor's Note: In 1973, the Rutgers University Master Plan called for expansion into the Cooper-Grant Community in Camden. These expansion efforts were countered by the organization the People of the Cooper-Grant Community (PCGC), led by Carthina Davis. In 1975, after the PCGC organized picket lines to halt the demolition of several properties, Rutgers agreed to work with the City of Camden and the PCGC to rehabilitate the Cooper-Grant neighborhood. (William P. Barrett, "Camden Vs. Rutgers: Expansion Fought," from *The New York Times*, March 24, 1974; William P. Barrett, "Rutgers to Help Improve Camden Area," *The New York Times*, November 30, 1975)]

KB: One more thing about the co-op. I saw in a newspaper article from 1972 that you guys were going to open a healthcare center at the co-op.

RJ: Right.

KB: Can you talk about that a little bit?

RJ: Well, actually what we did, it was the rudiments of a health care center. Essentially, we had gotten Cooper Hospital folk to come over, and we would do testing. It was that the basic thing we can do is just offer basic exams to people in the neighborhood, set up a clinic where people can come there and get exams and get tested. So, we did that for a while. It didn't last that long, but it was an idea that we wanted to try to put in place to help the community.

KB: What type of testing were you doing, if you remember?

RJ: Oh, just basically blood testing, high blood pressure, diabetes--that was a major issue and still is in the Black community--high blood pressure and diabetes, overweight issues and all that stuff. We also were concerned--well, part of diabetes is the person's diet. So, we would have classes. There's a book by the Nation of Islam leader, and it was a very interesting book. It was a book about, they said, how to eat to live, and we would teach classes on that. It was a

fascinating book because it talked about not eating pork. Do you know what it was? It was actually a complete replication of the Jewish dietary principles in the word of God. It was like don't eat pork and certain other things. To keep people healthy, we taught that message, "Listen, stay away from pork. Stay away from salt." It was just something interesting, we taught nutrition through that clinic as well.

KB: Did you know of many people in the Camden community who were a part of the Nation of Islam?

RJ: Well, actually, the Nation of Islam has never been very popular in terms of members. They get a lot of publicity. They had a mosque in Camden. I would say the population of Camden during that time was close to 100,000 people. There wasn't a thousand Muslims, I'd say. I wouldn't even say a thousand, I would say maybe three hundred. You follow me? They just happened to come through the Black Power Movement and the radical rhetoric. That was just part of that. But they never grew as an organization, and then when Elijah Muhammad died, there was a big split between the sons. One son, Warith Deen, formed a more liberal progressive arm--they don't even call it the Nation of Islam. They were more mainstream Muslims because they accepted whites into the organization, whereas the Nation of Islam was like, "No, no whites." It was split when Elijah Muhammad died. Today, it's just basically a shell, honestly. But there were people that we knew in the Nation of Islam. It was a part of the SDS radical anti-war movement; the Nation of Islam was just another element in that group. [Editor's Note: After the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975, his son Warith Deen Mohammed initially took over leadership of the Nation of Islam and then renounced his father's Black nationalist teachings in favor of mainstream Islam. Minister Louis Farrakhan split from Mohammed and revived the Nation of Islam in the late 1970s.]

KB: Mr. Jones, we've been talking about both the co-op and then the students who worked together with you in the Black Student Unity Movement. I wanted to see if you recall some of the people who you were working with. If some of them are still around, we can interview some of them. I just want to establish for the record, who else was involved in that?

RJ: Okay. Well, I think you guys are going to interview Malik Chaka, right? Yes. Well, he was a key not only in the city civil rights movement but in the university movement too. His other name was Michael Edwards. He was from Atlantic City. Then, there was another young lady that I actually married, her name was Fredia Bodie, and she's still around. There's two other women. One became a doctor. Her husband was that tall guy I talked about. Their names escape me right now, seriously. I remember Fredia, Malik. The other names, just give me a pass. There was a girl, she became a doctor, a psychiatrist. [Editor's Note: The person being referred to is likely Myrna B. Williams, Ph.D.] Another one who was a linguist, she became a librarian. You can refer to her as, her nickname was Tiny. [laughter] Oh, her name was Spearman, Marie Spearman. Are you guys going to interview her?

JB: If we can get her to come in, yes.

RJ: Yes.

JB: Right.

RJ: She's still around. She's still around. The church I go to now, we've had interactions with a church that she goes to, so I know she's still around. The other two people went and moved to Atlanta, and they married, the big, tall guy and then the young lady that became a doctor. Oh, man, I can't think of their names right now. Anyhow, then there was another young lady, Cheryl Edwards, and she married Malik Chaka.

JB: One of the things that I think was connected maybe with the Black Co-op were some publications that you were making. We have seen a few copies of the *Khuluma* newsletter or magazine and also *The Black Observer* newspaper.

RJ: Yes.

JB: We have a couple of issues of that in our archive [Scarlet and Black Digital Archive], and I noticed the Black Co-op address was on these publications.

RJ: Right.

JB: I just wanted to see if you remember anything about putting together these publications, how they came about, who was involved, and what was your memory of that?

RJ: Well, the young lady Marie Spearman was our key editor. This paper, the Camden [*Black*] *Observer* newspaper, came about because here as students, we wanted to communicate progressive news to the community versus just reading the *Courier-Post*. We wanted to provide a free paper to people about current events, about festivals that we were doing, just current events, that we produced on our own, at our own cost. It was basically a mimeograph, the old mimeograph machine, it was not easy to produce it. We would crank that thing out on the machine and then have to change the plate and crank out another hundred, fascinating. It was a way of us, as students, communicating to the community. Then, we decided we were going to do kind of a poetry publication, the *Amani* booklet. It was a combination of our interest in Black art because we were super interested in--there was always a Harlem Renaissance movement, the Black Arts movement, and we were always sensitive to the arts and culture as a part of our radical framework. Most of us were into jazz, gospel, all kinds of different genres of music and performing arts. So, we experimented with that, just tried to do some poems and photographs, it was a pretty colorful piece, but very rudimentary. We never had any editing experience of publications. We just did it. It's like all the other stuff, we were like, "Hey, we're committed to it. Let's just do it. We won't wait for the funding, just what we can do on our own." But it was a way to communicate to the Camden community.

JB: Mr. Jones, I think we are at about two hours of our interview now and we have finished talking about Rutgers-Camden, but we have a lot more to talk about of your life after Rutgers. We are hoping that we can schedule another session, where we can talk about that. I will look up the names that I have from the records about the people who were in the organization, and maybe that will jog some memories for you and you can let me know what you think about those names.

SI: I just have a quick question. Well, actually, I will save it for next time.

RJ: Yes, let me marinate on it.

SI: Okay. I was just going to ask--I know you had a long career in environmental-related issues and activism.

RJ: Yes.

SI: Did you start any of that during your time at Rutgers, anything campus related?

RJ: No, actually, I went through the civil rights phase and radical activism, and then I ended up really in the late '70s in environmental justice work. There was an issue of building an incinerator in Camden, a regional incinerator. Some white ladies from the Fairview section of Camden knew about me. They came to me and said, "Listen, Roy, out of all our meetings, we're trying to educate the community, we have no Blacks interested in environmental work. Would you get involved?" So, I said, "Okay, well, talk to me about what this is." She said, "Well, here's what the incinerator impact would have health-wise in the community. Would you be interested?" I said, "Oh, heck yeah, that's right within my framework of social and environmental justice." Yes, but it came after Rutgers. We were honestly too busy to even think about the environment then. Think about working full time, creating the co-op, getting involved in the community, doing academic work, and raising a family. I actually don't know how we did it, but we had plenty energy though. [laughter]

SI: All right. Well, thank you very much. We really appreciate all your time today.

RJ: Okay, I appreciate you guys, thank you.

SI: All right. I am going to stop the recoding.

RJ: Okay.

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

Transcribed by Jesse Braddell 10/21/2021
Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 11/12/2021
Reviewed by Roy Jones 5/10/2022
Reviewed by Kendra Boyd 5/24/2022