

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL AARON ROCKLAND

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

JESSICA ONDUSKO

Michael Rockland: *Día de Colón*, Columbus Day. [laughter]

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Professor Michael Aaron Rockland on October 12, 2009, with Shaun Illingworth ...

Dan Ruggiero: ... Dan Ruggiero ...

Kristie Thomas: ... Kristie Thomas ...

Lindsey Bernstein: ... Lindsey Bernstein.

SI: Okay, Professor Rockland, thank you very much for coming in again.

MR: Thank you, guys.

SI: To begin, towards the end of the last interview, you had mentioned that you were starting your family. I think you said that your first child was born when you came back from Japan. Would you like to tell us a little bit about your children and your family?

MR: Sure. Well, I was married at the tender age of twenty, [laughter] [the] first time, and I was a father by twenty-two. I didn't know what I was doing, but my son, David, was born when I was about twenty-two-and-a-half, and then, Jeffrey came along a couple years after that. Jeffrey is famous for having been in the movie *Doctor Zhivago*, as the little boy in *Doctor Zhivago*. That was an interesting chapter in my life, when I was with the Embassy in Spain. So, he is Sasha in *Zhivago*, for anyone listening to this who wants to [know], who sees the movie, the son of Zhivago, played by Omar Sharif, and Geraldine Chaplin plays his mother. [Editor's Note: The film *Doctor Zhivago*, released in 1965, was based on the novel of the same name by Boris Pasternak, first published in 1957. It won a total of five Oscars.] ... They were both born while I was in grad school in Minnesota. David was conceived, I think, on the way there, as I was coming out of the Navy, and then, Keren was born in Madrid, while I was with the Embassy there. So, she was a *madrileña* at least, a *madrileña* meaning a person from Madrid, when she was a little girl, and then, I remarried, divorced and remarried, in '78, and my wife, Patricia [Ard], I actually met here at Rutgers. So, we really are a Rutgers family. Four of my children went to Rutgers and graduated from here, and Jeffrey, the only one who didn't go, got a full-time ballet scholarship. Male ballet dancers are [rare], aren't too many of them. He told me that he really wanted to be a ballet dancer because he was about the only straight ballet dancer and this was a place to get all the good-looking girls. I think that's the main reason he became a ballet dancer. Anyway, so, I remarried in '78, and then, Patricia and I have two children, Kate, who is twenty-eight, and got married this past spring, and Joshua, who was a Mason Gross student and graduated last year from Mason Gross. So, that's really my personal life, ... and I care deeply about all five of those children and about my wife, and I am actually a happily married man. [laughter]

SI: You said your wife also received her PhD from Rutgers.

MR: Yes, she came here as an undergraduate, then, she went to law school, became a lawyer, practiced law a little bit, and realized that I was having much more fun than she was. ... So, she said, "How come you have all the fun?" and I said, "Yes, I'm not sure why they pay me to do this, but, if they want to, that's just fine." So, she came back to Rutgers, years later, got her PhD, and is a Professor of English at Ramapo College, which is up at the very northern tip of New Jersey, just before you cross into Suffern, New York, and, you know, they're all very close to me, obviously. ...

SI: Do they all live in New Jersey?

MR: No. ... My eldest, David, lives in New York, ... in Manhattan, so, it's easy to see him. Kate lives in Hoboken, just got married, as I said, lived in Hoboken, and Josh [is] still at home with us. My daughter, Keren, is a post-doc at the University of Michigan. I'm going to fly out there this weekend, spend some time, in Ann Arbor, with her and her child, and my son, Jeffrey, lives in Tucson, Arizona, and I'll be flying out there in January to spend some time with him. So, they're spread out, but I get to see them, pretty good, yes.

SI: At any time, if you want to add more about your children, please do so.

MR: Sure, yes, things come up.

SI: It is good to have it all on the record.

MR: Oh, yes, one other thing I might mention is, my two daughters have followed me into literature. My daughter, Keren [R. McGinity], got her PhD from Brown and had a book come out with NYU Press, just this past year, called *Still Jewish* [(2009)], which is about intermarriage, ... especially about ... Jewish women intermarrying with non-Jewish men, and my daughter, Kate, the one who's twenty-eight, from my second marriage, has a novel coming out this next spring. So, it's really something that you're the father of two young women who both will have published books within the same year as I have published a book, and, now, the new novel coming out. I published one before them and I'll publish the other one after them, and then, I'm writing this book also about Spain now. So, we're very much a literary [family], and Patricia, my wife, teaches English and writes as well. ... In fact, she did a book with me [*The Jews of New Jersey: A Pictorial History* (Rutgers University Press, 2001)]. ... I often say to people, "Never do a book with somebody who's close to you. It's a recipe for disaster," but I'm very proud to say that I think my diplomatic skills really worked, because ... the project didn't divide us, even though, when you're doing a book with somebody else, anybody else, it's like two horses hitched to the same wagon and, you know, each one wants to go in a different direction. I've done two books with [people close to me], one with my closest friend, Angus Gillespie, the book *Looking for America on the New Jersey Turnpike* [(Rutgers University Press, 1989)], and one with my wife, Patricia, and I'm happy and proud to report that both relationships are not only intact, but I think even enhanced, and I take great pride in that, because maybe I finally did become a diplomat, at least in the writing of those books. It certainly was more challenging than anything I had to do while I was in the Diplomatic Service.

SI: Did you encourage your children to go into the arts or literature, or was it just something they were drawn towards?

MR: No, not really. Jeffrey, the one who was in *Doctor Zhivago* as a child, he was four-and-a-half, became a ballet dancer, as I mentioned, a very good ballet dancer, and is still involved in the dance world a little bit. Joshua, my youngest, is a Mason Gross graduate. He's a painter. No, I don't know that I consciously encouraged them to, but it's kind of nice that they did, yes.

SI: Before we get into your time in Madrid with the Diplomatic Service, I have one more question about your time in Buenos Aires.

MR: Sure.

SI: You kind of summed up what the mission of your office, the US Information Agency, was, to win the hearts and minds of people all over the world.

MR: Sure.

SI: Did you have any idea, from your own perspective, how well that was going in Buenos Aires? Could you sense that people were receptive to Americans or the message you were trying to put out, or were they hostile towards the US at that time?

MR: Well, I was in the Diplomatic Service at a very nice time, the Kennedy-Johnson years. During the Kennedy years and during the beginning of the Johnson years, until we were immensely involved in Vietnam, mistakenly, I think, the United States was very popular. People liked us. It's interesting that President [Barack] Obama's gotten the Nobel Peace Prize [in 2009], and much as I love the guy, I, like most people in the world, are wondering why. Certainly, most Americans are wondering why that he's [been awarded it], and it was a period where the whole world thought that John Kennedy was America's gift to the world, and so, we were quite popular. ... During my years in the Foreign Service, I never felt under any kind of danger. Embassies were kind of like, almost like, public libraries. People just wandered in, they were free and open kind of buildings, much like buildings in Washington used to be. After 9/11 [the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks], and even before that, embassies around the world began to become, ... you know, immensely security conscious, and to go to an embassy today is like going to an armed fortress. ... As I said, when I was in [the] Diplomatic Service, and especially in Madrid, where I was director of the *Casa Americana*, I was a cultural attaché and I hung out with writers and artists and musicians, Spanish writers and intellectuals, and it was like being a professor, only you were with the government. I think people with USIA [United States Information Agency]; well, USIA was absorbed into State, after I left it. ... It started out in the State Department, came out, became a separate agency, and then, it was absorbed back in again. ... You know, whenever I travel overseas, which I do a great deal, lecturing overseas, it's really weird to get inside an embassy. I mean, they're just surrounded by walls and barricades and the security stuff you have to go through to get inside the embassy. I mean, ... you know, especially since I used to work in some of those embassies, [laughter] it's very strange, and sad, really, because the extent to which we didn't have to be so security conscious, that would improve our image. As it is, American embassies are scary places, now, and I think this certainly accelerated

during the George W. Bush years. [Editor's Note: George W. Bush served as President of the United States from January 20, 2001 to January 20, 2009.] I mean, I think it's very clear that the United States is loved right now, in part, because it was hated during the last eight years. That was my experience. I lecture a good deal overseas, ... as I say, and, when I visit other countries, boy, the anti-Americanism has been tremendous, but, when Obama was elected, all of sudden, that changed, and all you have to do is go somewhere and say, "Barack Obama," people practically want to kiss you. [Editor's Note: President Barack Obama assumed office on January 20, 2009.] I mean, it's amazing how he has changed the world's image of us and people are starting to like us again. It's a nice feeling.

SI: At the end of the last interview, we discussed how you had briefly come back to the United States and that was when the Kennedy assassination took place.

MR: Yes, yes.

SI: Then, you were headed directly over to Madrid.

MR: Right.

SI: What were your initial duties when you joined the Embassy staff there?

MR: Well, the first thing that happened is, I walked into the Embassy, as an assistant cultural attaché, and the guy who was the cultural attaché yelled at me. It was before we even shook hands. He was my new boss, he yelled at me, and he said, "Where's your tie?" I said, "I have a tie [on]," and he says, "Where's your black tie?" I said, "What black tie?" He says, "We're all wearing black ties because of the assassination of the President. Go out and get yourself a black tie, and then, we'll talk." So, I walked out, ran out into the streets of Madrid, looking for a black tie, and I did find one, eventually, and came on back in. ... The good feeling about the United States was still there, I think, during Johnson's first two years or so. It was only when Vietnam really heated up that the world began to turn against us, and it got worse and worse. Indeed, just after I left Madrid, just after I left Madrid, and my job as director of the American Cultural Center in Madrid, somebody put a bomb in my old cultural center, the *Casa Americana*, and half blew the whole thing up. I like to joke that they did it because they missed me, [laughter] but, no, I don't think that was the case, and my old librarian, ... a whole shelf of books, metal shelf with books, just fell right on top of her, nearly crushed her. She did survive, but can you imagine if you're a librarian and you die because books fall on you? a fitting way to die, I guess. ... I immediately kind of fell in love with Spain, and the Spaniards. I mean, I had every reason not to love the Spaniards. First of all, the [Francisco] Franco Dictatorship was still there. [Editor's Note: Francisco Franco Bahamonde was a military general and leader of the Nationalist forces that overthrew the Spanish democratic republic in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). He was the head of the Spanish Government until 1973 and head of state until his death in 1975.] Second of all, as a Jewish person, I was very mindful of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, and 1492, which I guess, this is Columbus Day, [laughter] 1492 is [the year both the expulsion and Columbus' voyage took place]. It's funny how we [celebrate it]; it certainly wasn't a day that indigenous people in America would want to celebrate. In fact, as you perhaps know, people are thinking, "Let's change the name to 'Indigenous People's Day,' or something like that." ... One

of the things I found most interesting, I think, because, ... when I grew up in New York City, I always thought Columbus Day was an Italian thing, because there were lots of Italians around in New York City. Very few Latinos lived in New York City then, when I was a boy, growing up, and even as a young man, and I hadn't become half a Latino myself, after those six years in Spanish-speaking countries, and I speak Spanish, as I think I may have mentioned, about as well as I do English, and so, one of the things that struck me when I got to Spain is that Columbus wasn't Italian, he was Spanish, from their point of view. Of course, he was both. ... In fact, Columbus Day, I couldn't believe it, it was called *Día de la Raza*, meaning "Day of the Race," or *Día de la Hispanidad*, "Day of Spanishness." ... That's not good English, but that's what it means, and I thought, "Wow, no Italians need apply." [laughter] There was no Italian mentioned whatsoever. Now, Columbus came from Genoa, where his family had moved, more on that in a moment, and then, he got the ships from Spain, and that's all they were concerned about, Columbus as Spaniard. Italians in New York, ... Columbus Day was a day that ... all politicians, whether Italian or anything else, were Italian for a day in the Columbus Day Parade in New York, and then, ... the funny thing is that, in recent years, there's been three different books arguing that Columbus was actually Jewish, okay. He was really all three. [laughter] That's the funny thing about it, and I think ... what I learned, when I got to Spain, and I've learned more about it since, is that, you know, whoever's in charge, or whoever wins, writes the history. If there were more Jews, Columbus would be Jewish. There were more Italians in the Bronx and a heck of a lot more Spaniards in Spain, [laughter] and that was one of the first lessons I learned about the slippery sands of history, that no less a figure than Simon Wiesenthal, the famous Nazi hunter, survivor of the Holocaust and concentration camps, wrote a book about how Columbus was Jewish [*Sails of Hope: The Secret Mission of Christopher Columbus* (MacMillan Publishing Company, 1973)]. Columbus, apparently, was somebody who was from a *Marrano* family. *Marrano* means a secret Jew, although, in Spanish, it means "swine," as in swine flu. So, it's not a positive word. ... A Spanish-Jewish family that escaped the Inquisition, went to Genoa, Italy, to get away from the Spaniards, and then, later, he came back there. So, he was sort of like a mixture of ethnicities and whatnot, which is nice, that the guy who, "discovered America," let me put that in quotes. The Indians discovered America; Indians, why do we call them Indians? Columbus knew perfectly well ... that he had not arrived in India. He also knew that the world was round, not flat. People had known that for fifteen hundred years. This nonsense we learned in elementary school, George Washington and the cherry tree and all those stupid things that we were taught as real, you know, aren't. So, that was one of the first things that struck me. ... My work ... in Madrid was kind of tricky, in a way, because we had an unholy alliance with the Franco Dictatorship, because we had these three major bases in Spain, which I think I mentioned last time, and we felt we needed those bases. This was the height of the Cold War, and so, we had two airbases and a nuclear submarine base in Spain. So, while the Embassy officially cozied up to Franco, I was one of the main guys working the other side of the street, so-to-speak, working with the universities, where you tended to find more liberal elements, and, basically, trying to encourage democratic ideas and democratic values, and, indeed, specifically, the democratic leaders of the Spain of tomorrow is really what my biggest job was. I think the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] guys were doing that sort of thing, too, although I was doing it ... above ground, they were doing it underground. So, in some senses, the CIA, in those days in Spain, I think, was actually doing the good work, more than the State Department was.

SI: How clearly was that spelled out? Were you told by your superiors, "We want you to go and cultivate contacts with potential democratic leaders or anti-Franco groups?"

MR: Yes, I literally went about recruiting young, smart students and getting them sent to the States, and another thing I did very much, which was really up my alley, was to encourage the study of the United States in Spain. Nobody studied the United States then. So, here I am, a Professor of American Studies now, forty years later, and, in a sense, I was doing that in Spain as well, so much so that there's a very thriving Spanish American studies association [Spanish Association for American Studies] in Spain today, and I'm a very enthusiastic member of it and, every two years, they have a convention and I never miss it. I have much more fun than at the American studies convention here in the States. It's a small group; it's about a hundred people. You go to the American Studies [Association] convention here in the States and it's just boring. There's thousands of people. You go to the Spanish one, everybody knows everybody else, we all eat together, get drunk together. It's a wonderful time, every time, so, yes, ... in a way, as I think I might have mentioned, I was sort of like a professor in the Foreign Service. I was the liaison with the Spanish universities, and then, later, I was the director of the *Casa Americana*, or the America House, which was wonderful, because it was outside the Embassy. I was able to escape from the bureaucracy. I should say something about how I got to be director of the *Casa Americana*, because I think that's extremely important, and then, I think maybe I should talk about my assignment to Vietnam and how that came about, and a lot of other things may come along as well. ... On January 17, 1966, I know the exact date because I just wrote an essay on it for this book I'm writing on those four years in Spain, a B-52[G] bomber, on its way back from the Soviet Union; ... we would send squadrons of bombers towards the Soviet Union, twenty-four/seven, 365. A different squadron would take off every few hours from the Eastern United States. When I first arrived in Spain, by the way, this was not true. ... At Torrejón Air Base, right outside of Madrid, we had B-49 bombers, which had a smaller range, and they would take off like that, with hydrogen bombs. These bombs were seventy-five times more powerful than the bomb that hit Hiroshima and the other one that hit Nagasaki, and ... the whole idea was mutual deterrence. We would try to scare the Russians, they would try to scare us, and the whole idea was nobody'll drop an H-bomb on somebody else, but it was a very scary time. ... So, now that we had the B-52s taking off, and they had a longer range, they would take off from the Eastern United States, this particular squadron from [Seymour] Johnson Air Force Base, in North Carolina, fly over, and they would be refueled right off the coast of Spain, and partly over that coast, by KC-135 tankers taking off either from Torrejón Air Base or Morón [Air Base], would refuel them in the air. The way you refuel is, the KC-135 tanker's above and the B-52 comes underneath it, ... sends down a kind of a snorkel device into the gas tank and fills it, and then, they break off contact, and then, the plane would continue to Russia, fly around, not over the Soviet Union, just at the border of it, usually around Turkey, around there somewhere, fly around in circles, and then, when it was relieved by the next squadron coming over, it would head back to the States, limp back to the States, because it had to be refueled again off this town of Palomares, this little town of six hundred people in a very rural part of Spain. ... Those people knew about it, because they'd watch this a few times a day, going on in the sky. They didn't know what it was, until January 17, 1966, when a B-52 on the way back from Russia and a KC-135 tanker collided, and it was this huge explosion and ball of fire, and fire rained, as one person from Palomares put it, fire rained down from the sky. ... All four crewmen on the tanker were incinerated. Of the seven crewmen in the B-52, three managed to eject and did survive, one of

them just barely, but the other four never came down, were just killed, but the real problem, the real problem, aside from these deaths, was four hydrogen bombs came down. Now, luckily, these hydrogen bombs were not armed. Hydrogen bombs, ... at least then, they were about ten feet long, about twenty inches wide, and these four bombs were set up in such a way that if such a thing happened, they would be ejected from the plane, they would come down by parachute, and they came down. Three of them landed on this little, tiny town of Palomares, [laughter] and one of them ... actually landed at sea, but we didn't learn that until much later. So, this was a catastrophe, an absolute catastrophe, in world opinion, in Spanish opinion, but the Russians ... had an absolute field day with it, as they well might have. The bombs that came down on Palomares, one came down with its parachute intact, and, therefore, it landed and it didn't break open, it didn't explode. Hydrogen bombs, at least, what I learned about them then, had a charge of TNT, or regular, conventional explosives, around them, which would begin the fusion process that created ... an explosion, a nuclear explosion. However, they had to be armed, and armed meant that five or six different processes had to happen. Different things had to be engaged in the bomb, by two airmen, minimum, on direct orders of the President of the United States. Obviously, this had not happened, and, I mean, they had made thousands of flights like this, but, now, this one hadn't worked. ... Two of the bombs, their parachutes were burned and they came down faster, and, because they came down faster, when they hit the ground, the conventional explosives went off and the danger there was, when they went off, the bombs cracked open, those two bombs cracked open, and all the plutonium came out, in black clouds. So, although we couldn't find the fourth bomb, initially, the real problem is, "What about this radiation?" and a tiny bit of plutonium, if you inhale it, you're dead in twenty-four hours. ... Eventually, we did find the fourth. So, first, we had this cleanup about the radiation, ... and the town of Palomares was basically scooped up and put in fifty-five-gallon drums and brought over to a quarry in South Carolina. [laughter] So, Palomares, the original Palomares, is actually in South Carolina; it sounds like kind of a Mark Twain thing. There's a thing like that in Mark Twain's *Roughing It* [(1872)], which is very similar, but, before that happened, we had to take care of the people of Palomares, and, luckily, the wind had been blowing that day from a direction it almost never blew from and the radiation was essentially blown out to sea. ... They would just continue to do urinalysis of those people, and they do them to this day, by the way, and, eventually, we got the one at sea. It had landed five-and-a-half miles out to sea and there was a Spanish fisherman out there and he said, "I know exactly where the bomb landed," the one out at sea. Nobody listened to him, because they thought, "How could you know where you are at sea?" but, of course, if anybody knows anything about the ocean, people [who] go to sea all the time know exactly where they are. They know where they are as well as you and I know where we are at Rutgers at a particular time. He knew exactly where he was, and he kept insisting, "Look, I know where the bomb is." Well, we brought fifteen warships over there, minesweepers and everything else, and [were] just combing 120 square miles of the Mediterranean and couldn't find it, and, finally, they decided to listen to him and it was exactly where he said it was. ... It's just absolutely ridiculous. [laughter] I tell you all this because I was the most junior guy in the Embassy and I wanted to be director of the *Casa Americana*, because, for six months, we had bought this (*palazzo*?) on the other side of Madrid's main drag, the (*Castellana*?), ... a block or so away from the Embassy, and I wanted this job. I had, in a sense, built it, supervised the construction of it, but some guy had been brought in over me who was superior to me and he had announced that he was going to be the director of the *Casa Americana*. ... I was really angry and I felt like I had earned it, and he was going to [control me], you know, I was going to be his slave, rather than running this, my

own cultural center, and being independent, being able to not be in the bureaucracy, pushing paper, but have a real cultural job. Well, when the bombs fell, nobody cared one bit about culture and everybody in the Embassy was pressed into either finding the bombs, [laughter] doing something about them or making the Spaniards happy or dealing with world opinion, and so, the last thing on their minds ... was this new *Casa Americana*. So, they said, "Well, you can do the *Casa Americana*, you do the *Casa Americana*." I said, "Yes, aye-aye." So, I did the *Casa Americana*, and it was a great job, until I got my next assignment, and, again, unless I've said this before, it was the, quote, "wisdom," unquote, of the US Government [to] take a guy who had spent months in Latin American area studies in Washington, two years in Argentina and four years in Spain, and who spoke Spanish now almost perfectly, ... had almost finished his doctoral dissertation on Argentina and the United States, and where would you send such a guy, in the "wisdom" of the US Government? Vietnam, of course, and, by this time, I had grave doubts about the war. It seemed a dubious cause, at best, but, also, I had three little children. ... When the Tet Offensive happened [beginning in January 1968], diplomats couldn't bring their families there anymore, and I had done, as you know, two years of military service, ... not that this was going to be military service, but, funny, I was going to be a cultural attaché who carried a sidearm and a carbine. [laughter] What kind of a [message does that send]? "Hey, you don't love us? We're going to shoot you," which is pretty well what we did. [laughter] So, there was the personal thing, with the children, there was my own commitment to the Spanish-speaking world, I said, "I'd go anywhere in Latin American. Send me to the toughest post, anywhere," and then, also, I would have had to spend thirteen months learning Vietnamese, full-time Vietnamese, to get my Vietnamese up to the same level that my Spanish was up to after sixteen weeks, with full immersion, and I didn't want to do any of these three things and it was painful, a little bit. I felt a little bit like I was letting my country down. Of course, later, ... I learned it was the best decision I'd ever made, especially when I came to Rutgers and people'd try to make a hero out of me. They said, "Wow, this is the guy who didn't go to Vietnam," ... at every rally here on campus, which I attended in my earliest years, as a dean, half there to stir up the troops and half there to keep the lid on them. [laughter] I was like a double agent during those years as a dean. That shows you what deans are worth, that I'd never been on campus before, except as a student, and I went from student to dean [laughter] without passing go or collecting my two hundred dollars. So, it's funny, you know. So, when I got that Vietnam assignment, ... and that was another thing, it was just right out of Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22* [(1961)], if you wanted to go to Vietnam, they didn't send you, because they knew you were crazy. If you didn't want to go to Vietnam, they knew you weren't crazy, so, they would send you. I mean, it was absolutely ridiculous, but that's the way it was.

SI: How did the other people in your same situation view that assignment? It seems like they could think like you thought, but, also, others could have seen that as the place where you cut your teeth.

MR: Oh, yes.

SI: Were people chomping at the bit for it?

MR: Oh, yes, yes. There were a lot of people who knew that this was where the action was. Look, our biggest embassy in the entire world today is in Iraq, and our biggest embassy in the

world, in those days, was in Vietnam, and whenever anybody left anywhere for their next posting, [they] pretty well went to Vietnam. We had skeleton crews in many of our embassies, because of this obsession with Vietnam, which was insane, and Iraq is even more insane, and we've built this gigantic embassy in the Green Zone in Baghdad and it's just so shortsighted. I mean, it's just ridiculous. You know, we are a country, we're a knee-jerk country; we get an itch, we scratch it, you know. We don't try to figure out where the itch comes from, you know. So, yes, a lot of people in my position welcomed going to Vietnam as diplomats, because, number one, they were going to get paid a whole lot extra to be there, and, number two, they saw this as what would make their careers. ... They'd be in this hotspot, and, again, we're talking about diplomats, now, not soldiers, yes. So, most of the other people who went there were glad to go there.

SI: Did you vocalize any of your dissent against the war when you were at the Embassy?

MR: I don't think; I wish I could say that I had a crystal ball and I knew that this was a bad idea early in the game, but ... I didn't, and, partly, that's part of the culture you're in. You reflect the culture you're in. I was in the culture of the US Government, and I also had come into that government believing that we were the good guys in the world. I think we sometimes have been, but I don't think anymore than anybody else has been, and we look out for our interests, and even though we screw ourselves often, looking out for our, quote, "interests," because they're not our interests. So, I forget the question; I'm sorry. [laughter] I get off the subject.

SI: It was just if you had vocalized your dissent to Vietnam.

MR: Oh, I didn't, because I don't know that I felt it so much. I felt much more strongly that I wasn't going to leave these three little babies of mine and that being a father was more important than going off to a cause I saw as dubious at best. No, I simply asked, I said, "I'll go anywhere in Latin America; send me to Cochabamba, Bolivia; send me to Guayaquil, Ecuador," which were both places then, they've both improved immensely, but they were both places then which were pretty rough. ... It's interesting, because, in those years, you had [Ernesto] "Che" Guevara, who had left Cuba and was up in the Bolivian Altiplano, up in the Andes, and Che was saying, ... "You Americans are going to have two, three, many Vietnams in South America," and, again, this obsession with one country, Vietnam, to the exclusion of all the other countries, the stupidity of that, and I was saying, "Look, I have a vocation in Latin America. I can really do something. You can send me anywhere." [Editor's Note: Ernest Guevara de la Serna was an Argentine-Cuban revolutionary, author and intellectual, as well as major figure in the Cuban Revolution (1956-59) and guerrilla leader in South America.] That was all I really did, and they said, "You should be honored that we assigned you to Vietnam. We only send the best people there." [laughter] Well, maybe so, ... but I think what they were really saying is, "We only send the people there who don't want to go," you know, as I said before. So, I don't think I vocalized it as such. I don't think I felt completely strongly about it until I was out of the Foreign Service, and, again, we reflect our cultures. While you're in the Foreign Service and everybody else thinks the Vietnam War is the best thing since sliced bread, it's difficult to think otherwise. You're not getting information. When I got to Rutgers, everybody hated the Vietnam War and, as I said before, they'd try to make a hero out of me, which I definitely did not want to be. I wasn't, first of all, and, second, I felt a little guilty about having left the Diplomatic Service. Even though I

had perfectly good reasons, I felt, somehow, I'd let my country down, or something like that, vague feelings like that. ... I got to Rutgers and, again, I was very much in a controlling, or an administrative, position and my job was, basically, I was the "Dean of Hassles," because I'd come out of political life, and, by the way, I had one year in state government between the Diplomatic Service and Rutgers, and so, I'd had many years of political, and sort of practical, if you will, life, and so, when I came here, that wasn't my title, but I was the one who dealt with the radicals. I was the one who tried to keep the lid on as much as possible, while maintaining the First Amendment, freedom of expression, at the same time, saying, "Hey, guys, look, they're going to close down the University." I mean, the Legislature didn't take kindly to what was going on around here, you know, firebombing buildings, ... students chaining themselves in the President's office, violence. It was a tough time, ... and a very interesting time, and, for me, it was like going from the frying pan into the fire. I think I saw more action here at Rutgers ... in those years than I would have seen in Vietnam anyway. [laughter]

SI: I wanted to ask a few more questions about Spain before we move on.

MR: Sure.

SI: One of your main jobs was to cultivate these ties with the student groups. How did Franco's repression and censorship affect that? Were people afraid to talk to you? Did you know anybody who then disappeared? Was there any of that?

MR: There was a guy I knew who was an artist who got arrested, and we were very worried about him, and, eventually, he got out and he said he'd been beaten up in jail. I think the most interesting story I could actually tell would be, and this is the title of a story in my upcoming Spain book, called, "How I Managed Not to Shake Hands with Francisco Franco," and I would like to tell that story, because it's really funny. The Ambassador had received an invitation to the Spanish national art show, which ... then was in a place called the Crystal Palace in Retiro Park, which is the central park of Madrid, and he said, "Oh, why would I go to the Spanish national [art show]?" So, he passed it on to the minister, who passed it on to the public affairs officer, who passed it on to the cultural attaché, who passed it on to his most junior assistant cultural attaché, who was me, and since there was nobody I could pass it on to, I went. ... I went to the Spanish [national art show], you know, and you went there and most of the people there were ambassadors, and that was cool. I was hanging out with all these ambassadors, although some countries, the whole embassy consisted of an ambassador and secretary and that was it. ... We diplomats were kind of milling about and having some wine, and there were very fancy-dressed waiters coming around with wine and whatever and we were pretending to look at the pictures and all, and that sort of thing. ... I also went because so many of my best friends in Spain were artists, but none of them were there. It's very interesting. This was the Spanish national art show, they had pictures on the wall, this was the inauguration of the show, and they weren't there. Whether it was because they weren't invited or because they didn't want to be in the same place with Franco, or maybe a little of both, I don't know, and so, we were milling around. ... All of a sudden, some guy, I guess he must have been chief of protocol, made an announcement that all we diplomats were to get into a single line, side by side, and we got into this line, and I had the Guatemalan ambassador on one side of me and an ambassador from some African country I'd never heard of on the other side of me and we're standing there. ... I looked down the

line to the beginning of the line and I thought, forgive my French, "Holy shit, here comes Franco. Oh, man, what am I going to do?" because he was greeting each diplomat, who was announcing which embassy he was from, and shaking hands with him, and they'd have a few words, and then, he'd move to the next one. ... I can't remember a time where I was more conflicted, let's say. "Now, what am I supposed to do? I'm the official representative of the American Embassy. We've got these three bases here. I was sent to do this, but I ain't shaking hands with that guy. I don't know what to do," and I was just practically shaking with indecision, and then, I realized, to my great delight, that just behind me was a free standing wall with paintings on it, like a panel or a screen. I don't know what word to use for it, whether in English or Spanish, and there were a couple of paintings on it, but it was just behind where I was, and I realized, "If I could only sort of ooze back behind that thing, Franco would go by," and that's what I did. I just backed up behind the screen and stood there, hoping nobody saw me, and then, I looked to the left and I saw Franco go by, and, when he went by, I kind of oozed out between these two guys again. I don't think they even noticed I was missing, but I was anxious for some time that somebody would have reported this to the Embassy. ... Better that I did that than that I said something to Franco, because I didn't know how I was going to do it without saying something to Franco, if I did it, like, "You son of a bitch," or something like that, you know. ... [laughter] That was a great adventure, and nobody ever saw it, nobody ever said anything, I never got in any trouble. I was asked the next day to write a little report ... on my representing the Embassy at the Spanish national art show. I said, "Great paintings and terrific, great art," and stuff like that. So, that was a great adventure, great adventure, yes.

SI: How did the impact of Franco's regime affect your other work? Did it impact what you could teach about American history or what you could disseminate to the Spanish citizens?

MR: No, I think I could say whatever I wanted to about the United States, which is what my main job was. I think what I could not do is make invidious distinctions between the United States and Spain, especially invidious distinctions between the United States and the Franco Dictatorship. That, I didn't do, although, ... in my work cultivating democratic forces, let's say, in Spain, I would often have people over my house and one of the things that I did, I had this old collection of records, some of which had been recorded in Barcelona during the bombardment of Barcelona, during the Spanish Civil War, and you could even hear the explosions on these "seventy-eight" RPM records. ... These were all Republican discs, that is, things that ... the Republic had recorded and they all made fun of Franco, and this was during the war; the Fascists had not yet taken over the county, or Nationalists, as they preferred to call themselves, and these Spanish young people, they loved hearing this stuff. It was great, although I was a little apprehensive somebody might turn me in. I mean, ... these were absolutely forbidden in Spain. They just happened to be things that I had, that I'd gotten from an uncle at one point, and then, another thing is that I loved Spain. I mean, that was the funniest thing. I didn't love the administration, but I loved Spain, I loved Spanish food, I loved the Spanish people. ... I was somebody who grew up and never drank. I mean, you know, kids go to college, they drink beer. I just didn't drink going to college. It was partly because I was a jock, but, partly, I just didn't care about it. First time I ever got drunk in my life was in Spain, and that was a delightful experience. I'd never had that feeling before. So, in addition to the fact that there was Franco, there was also bullfighting, and I became a big aficionado of bullfighting. ... In this book I'm writing on Spain, I'm writing about some of my bullfighting experiences, including the time I

jumped into the ring as an amateur and got knocked over and thrown through the air about twenty-five feet, by a little calf, not a bull, a little calf. [laughter] I think it was even a female calf, but, anyway, I had tried with ... my little red rag and it came right for me, right for me, right for me, right for me, and it wasn't paying attention to the rag at all, it just hit me and knocked me. I was lucky I didn't ... break every bone in my body. So, there were so many elements of Spain, and Spain's very beautiful, and, to me, it's still my favorite country. I went to Spain last, during the past academic year, twice during the year, for a week of lectures. So, my connections with Spain are very strong and intimate as much as they ever have been, and it's funny, because the old Embassy, where I once worked, often invites me to go around Spain and give lectures, which is what I did when I was a cultural attaché anyway. It's a funny situation, but it's a great richness in my life.

SI: Do any of you guys have questions?

DR: Yes.

MR: Yes, one other thing I might mention about Spain, two people that I ... had the great privilege of spending time with, one was [Senator Edward M.] Teddy Kennedy, who has, of course, just died of brain cancer [on August 25, 2009], and I spent the whole day with Teddy Kennedy and set up something for him at the University of Madrid and we got to be great pals. You know, it was "Michael and Teddy," he was calling me, he invited me to call him "Teddy." ... In fact, he said to me, he said, "If you ever leave the Foreign Service, I'd love for you to come and join my staff," ... and there was already talk about him being President one day, and then, Chappaquiddick happened. That was the end of that, where he was responsible for the death of this young woman, and the lies he told about the whole thing. [Editor's Note: On the night of July 18, 1969, Senator Edward Kennedy claimed to have taken a wrong turn while returning home from a party on Chappaquiddick Island, Massachusetts, subsequently driving his car off a bridge and into the water. He swam to safety, leaving his passenger Mary Jo Kopechne. Her body was found in his submerged car the next day and Senator Kennedy pleaded guilty to leaving the scene of an accident after causing injury.] ... The guy I knew was this young, drunk guy, and he and I ... went out drinking, ... then, we went to the University of Madrid, and then, we drank some more. I mean, that's the guy I knew, this crazy guy who I was drinking with. I didn't care to drink that much, but I was keeping him company, but the really powerful thing that happened to me in Spain is the day I spent alone with Martin Luther King, [Jr.], just he and I. [Editor's Note: Martin Luther King, Jr., was a prominent leader in the African-American Civil Rights Movement.] He got the Nobel Peace Prize two weeks later [in 1964], something we didn't talk about. We spent the whole day together and I set up a press conference for him and, basically, I was protecting him from the media and taking him around Madrid to eat and go to museums, you know, do stuff. ... You know, when I tell students this, they think, "God, that's like saying you used to hang out with George Washington or something," you know, I mean, because, for students today, Martin Luther King is ancient history. For me, ... you know, it's still very present. I wrote something about it, and there's a chapter in the book on Martin, that I'm doing on Spain, as well, and it was an incredible occasion. I mean, Martin is the closest thing this country's ever produced to a saint. I don't believe in saints, but a very, very great figure, and, yet, very, very human. The funniest thing is that when I found him, I had to find him in Madrid, and then, offer my services, to take him anywhere, look after him, and ... first thing I

said to him, "Is there anything I can do for you right now?" and he had been with Pope Paul VI the day before, in Rome, and everybody knew he was in Madrid, because every Madrid newspaper had a picture of Martin with the Pope the day before in Rome. They had it that morning in Madrid and they said he was coming to Madrid, and the press didn't know where he was and I didn't know where he was, until I found him, and so, basically, I was, so-to-speak, riding shotgun on him during the time together. ... The funniest thing is that, when I finally found him, I went up and called him from the lobby of the hotel and I told him what I was there for and everything. He said, "I don't speak Spanish," and I said, "This isn't Spanish, this is English," because he didn't understand any Spanish and, since he didn't understand my New York accent, he thought I must be speaking Spanish or some other language. So, I repeated, and he said, "Yes, come on up," and I went up to his room and he opened the door, and he was standing there in his underpants. [laughter] I mean, you meet the great Martin Luther King and he's in his underpants. I mean, it was just, you know, too human and too weird, you know, and we became friends, really, during that day. When he was killed, four years later, it was very personal with me; he wasn't just a historic and important American figure, it was my friend who was killed. [Editor's Note: Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee.] ... It's still a very painful thing for me, especially because, you know, with all the conspiracy theorists, "Who really killed Jack Kennedy? Who really killed [Senator] Robert Kennedy?" etc., and some of the other assassinations of the '60s, and, you know, some large conspiracy and all that. I don't believe that about the other ones, but I absolutely believe there was a conspiracy to kill Martin Luther King and I absolutely believe that the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] was involved. So, so much for, you know, what happened with, you know, which reality.

SI: Where were you when that happened, back in New Brunswick?

MR: I had left the Foreign Service.

SI: Were you back in New Brunswick?

MR: No, that was during my year in state government.

SI: Okay.

MR: That year. ... I got out of the Diplomatic Service in March '68. I'd already come back to Washington and I'd entered the ... Foreign Service Institute in Washington, to study Vietnamese and to do Southeast Asian studies, and, meanwhile, every spare moment, I was flying out of there to look for a job. ... A guy named Ralph Dungan, who had been part of the Kennedy "Irish Mafia" in the White House. Ralph, Johnson didn't want him around, so, he sent him off to Chile, as Ambassador, and then, Ralph had been bounced out of Chile, for reasons I don't need to get into, and New Jersey had hired him, Governor Richard Hughes had hired him, as the new Chancellor of Higher Education. [Editor's Note: Ralph Dungan served as Special Assistant to the President from 1961 to 1964, as Ambassador to Chile from 1964 to 1967 and as Chancellor of Higher Education, State of New Jersey, from 1967 to 1977.] We had a Department of Higher Education, which [Governor] Christie [Christine] Whitman did in. That was just about the stupidest thing any Governor's ever done, because, ever since then, every jerkwater school in

New Jersey has declared itself a university. There's no control over anything anymore. We need to revive the Department of Higher Education, because, basically, what we did is, we categorized institutions. Rutgers was the only state university then. You've got Montclair ... and Trenton, all these other places that call themselves [universities], Glassboro, which is now ...

SI: Rowan.

MR: Rowan, they all call themselves a university, and all of this happened because we did away with this Department of Higher Education, which was small, and it didn't take up much by way of taxpayer's funds, but, so, no, I was in [state government]. ... I'll never forget this, too, I was in the barbershop, getting a haircut, when I heard about Martin, in Trenton, in a barbershop, and the shocking thing was that the people in the barbershop were happy. I just couldn't believe it. I just could [not] believe racism could reach that level, and, you know, he was, "Nigger this and nigger that," you know, and I just had to get out of there. I was going to punch somebody. I just couldn't take it. I think I left halfway through my haircut. [laughter] I said, "That's okay, I'll settle for a trim." I've sometimes wished I'd gotten into a fistfight there, but there were about ten people in there, [laughter] and they all seemed to be just [pleased] and that racism was just an ordinary thing for them. ... I mean, they weren't the slightest bit sad that he had been killed. That was a very painful [time]. Yes, when I got out of the Foreign Service, everything happened. Martin was assassinated, Bobby Kennedy was assassinated, Columbia [University] was taken over, Rutgers was occupied, Conklin Hall and all that stuff. [Editor's Note: In February 1969, students at the Rutgers-Newark Campus barricaded themselves inside Conklin Hall to protest the lack of minorities on the predominately white campus.] I mean, one thing after another, and then, I was hired away from the Department of Higher Education, as I say, to be the sort of political dean, and that's what I did for a bunch of years, until I looked around and said, "You know what? Gosh, look at these professors, they're free. They do whatever they want to do. ... They can spend time," like I am with you here today. ... I would say the most important professional "V" or "Y" in the road I reached was when I was a dean here, and then, I was offered the job as provost of the Newark Campus. I was going to be in charge of everything in Newark, and, in those days, I was still very political, like I had thought of joining Teddy Kennedy's White House, had that ever happened. Now that I was a dean, my plan was to be a university or college president, but, when I was offered the provostship of the Newark Campus, I thought, "I don't want to be the provost of any campus," and then, I realized, "I don't want to be a dean, either." That was the most difficult decision I've ever made, to give up the power and the three telephones that I had, and the hot and cold running secretaries, ... you know, and the fancy, swanky office, and realizing that what I really wanted to do was, I wanted to be a writer and teach. I was teaching part-time while I was a dean, and I liked that so much better than the dean-ing, I thought, "Well, gee, why don't I do that full-time?" and my first book came out with Princeton University Press and I was offered tenure, and I thought, "Well, I'm out of here," and I've been [happy]. As I say, for one week after that, I was deeply depressed, because I had voluntarily given up this political life, and then, I started to be happy, and I've been happy ever since. [laughter] It was the best decision I ever made, but it was horrible at the time; I was deeply depressed. People said, "What's the matter with you?" I was like a zombie for a week, thinking, "They didn't fire me, I resigned. Why did I resign all this power?" and then, I realized that I really wanted to be a poet, not a politician. ... You know, I think we all contain those two

sides, and I was opting for one of the two in giving up the other, and best decision I ever made, but it was very hard.

SI: This was the same year that you completed your doctoral studies at the University of Minnesota.

MR: Yes, I got my PhD in April or May '68, just, like, after I came out of the Foreign Service and just after I went to work ... in state government with the Department of Higher Education. I was the Chancellor's executive assistant. I'd met Ralph Dungan when I was in South America, in Argentina. He had come over to the inauguration of the new Argentine president and I was one of the guys [from] the Embassy looking after the American delegation and we'd met, and then, years later, he hired me to be his executive assistant. I was basically his hatchet man. I was the guy who carried out his orders, did all the bad, dirty things, which I didn't like much doing, but that was my job for a year.

SI: Can you relate some of those experiences, some of the things that stand out?

MR: Well, I had to fire people.

SI: Okay.

MR: You know, he said, "Get rid of So-and-So," and I had to be the one to carry the bad news, and I used to travel [to Rutgers]. Ralph would come to the Board of Governors meetings. The Chancellor attended Rutgers Board of Governors meetings. He didn't have a vote, he was *ex officio*, but he attended them, and I'd come up with him to these Board of Governors meetings. ... Every time I'd come here, I'd think, "God, it's so much nicer around here than it is down in Trenton, [laughter] and the things they're talking about interest me so much more." My job, one of my jobs with Ralph, is, I wrote all his speeches, I did the hiring and firing, and I was also secretary to the Board of Higher Education, which included some very distinguished people, including [C.] Douglas Dillon, who had been Secretary of the Treasury of the United States with Kennedy, a Republican who Kennedy had in his cabinet, and people of that stature were on the board. ... I looked after those people, prepared all the papers, did the minutes, ... arranged the meetings and that sort of thing, and so, when I got this opportunity, when Rutgers [offered me a position]; Rutgers would keep knowing me, because I was coming up with him. ... Finally, a guy named [Richard] Dick Schlatter, who was the number two guy, basically the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, ... asked me, "Would I like to come up here?" I said, "Would I like to come up here? [laughter] I'm here, man. Tomorrow, anytime you say, I'm here. ... You could lower my salary," which they did, but maybe I shouldn't have said that, but I wanted to come here.

SI: From having experienced the relationship between Rutgers and the state from both sides, when you were in the Chancellor of Higher Education's Office, what was the relationship with Rutgers like?

MR: Bad, it was bad. It was bad because Ralph Dungan hated Rutgers.

SI: Okay.

MR: I was, again, a secret agent. I was endearing myself to the Rutgers people while buttressing Ralph, and, funny, a daughter of his later was an American studies major. I got to see a bunch of Ralph, years later, after he was no longer my boss. Ralph thought that a university was a country club; that was his term, "country club." He never really understood what professors do. ... I mean, I probably work sixty hours a week, easy, but that's because, at least thirty of them, I'm at home writing books, you know, and Ralph saw that as [laziness], you know, he wasn't really aware of that. ... You know, there'd be people over in their scientific labs who maybe are going to, you know, develop a cure for cancer. We've had Nobel Prizes here, but, you know, you don't come to those things unless you have time, and Ralph said, "Why are these Rutgers professors," then, our course load was three per semester, now, it's basically two, and he said, "Why are they only teaching three courses? You could teach seven courses, and Rutgers would be so much cheaper." That's true. I mean, you know, I could just teach all day long, like a high school teacher, or a junior high school or elementary school teacher, but I'd never do any reading, I would never do any writing, and, when you're a state university and you consider yourself a research university, what that really means is [that] you try to keep the duties of the professors minimal, if you can, so that they can do, hopefully, other great things, whether in the sciences or the social sciences or the humanities, whatever it is, ... but Ralph had this sort of pugnacious attitude. He and Mason Gross, who was then our President, hated each other, God. [Editor's Note: Mason Gross was President of Rutgers University from 1959 to 1971.]

SI: He seems like the polar opposite of that.

MR: Oh, yes. Mason was a distinguished philosopher, handsome, tall, very erudite kind of guy, and Ralph was basically a street fighter, and Mason resented that the Chancellor of Higher Education, you know, was; basically, he regarded Ralph as a thug and Ralph regarded Mason as, oh, I don't know, a playboy, or something; not exactly, but something like that. I shouldn't say playboy; it has a connotation with women. I didn't mean that. I don't know what; an aristocrat.

SI: Okay.

MR: That's what ... he really saw Mason [as], and I just wasn't going to get caught in that crossfire, but, when I came to Rutgers, obviously, Mason was the President, and maybe I should tell the story, ... great story, about my first day on the job at Rutgers.

SI: I have one quick question before we get into that.

MR: Okay.

SI: When you described yourself as a "double agent" between the two agencies, would Dungan say, "Find something that I can use against Rutgers?"

MR: Oh, yes, gee, and ... he had it in for Rutgers much more than the state colleges, and, by the way, it was during his tenure as Chancellor that the state colleges, which had been teachers' colleges, became multipurpose colleges, and we created some new community colleges, and so,

it was a very active office. We did a lot of very important things, I think, yes, but they, those two, Mason wished Ralph would go away and Mason was a guy that everybody loved. I mean, he was the President and absolutely loved, you know. You'd have Vietnam War demonstrations, the students would occupy his office, and Mason, instead of throwing them out of his office and calling the campus patrol; we didn't have police then, we had a patrol. The campus patrol did not carry guns, that's a whole other story, that I feel very strongly about, how this place changed and became an armed place, which I think was a desperate mistake, and something I should really talk about, but, when the students occupied his office, Mason went out and got pizza, [laughter] and he endeared himself to the students. He said, "I don't like the war any more than you do. It's a good thing you're occupying my office," ... very interesting. He was so [understanding], he endeared himself to the radicals. ...

SI: Did that factor into this animosity, though, the political aspect?

MR: Between Ralph and Mason?

SI: Yes.

MR: No, I think Ralph thought the Vietnam War was insane, also. ... That was maybe one thing they shared. It was more or less a conflict of style.

SI: What were the kinds of things that he would have you try to do or dig up?

MR: Can we hold that a second? ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

MR: ... One thing I think I could say on Ralph's behalf is that he was very much somebody who felt that these institutions, including Rutgers, were racist, and we had very few black students, or minority students at all, when I came here, and, essentially, no, or virtually no faculty, and Ralph saw that as part of the country club, exclusionary, as he would have put it, aspect of Rutgers. Affirmative action, the whole idea of affirmative action, was just coming in, and one of the great things Ralph did set up was the EOF Program, Educational Opportunity Fund, ... which really helped an awful lot of kids to get through school. ... I mean, Rutgers is perhaps the most diverse university in the nation today. The Newark Campus is, ... specifically, the most diverse campus in the nation, and we're not far behind here in New Brunswick, and a lot of it had to do, ... I shouldn't say a lot, some of it had to do with the kind of agitation that Ralph Dungan was doing, which I think he deserves credit for, yes. I think I'd like to tell the story of what happened to me on my first day on the job at Rutgers, because I think it was really, ... it's terrifically funny, but, also, important, I think. My office was on the Douglass Campus, in College Hall, in that lovely Italianate building from the 1860s, I think, and I was up on the top floor there and I had been told, "Look, when you get here, don't worry about the student government. Nobody pays any attention to the student government. [What] you've got to worry about is the student radicals," and I was, in fact, given the name of a specific young woman who was the leader of the radical forces and it was suggested that I might cultivate her, which was a little bit like what I was doing in Spain, you know. [laughter] So, my first day on the job, and, by the way, my first day on the

job here at Rutgers was the very same day that Richard Nixon began his Presidency in the White House; it was January 20, 1969. I think I've fared a little better than he has, [laughter] and so, I was shown into my office, and it was a very nice, big office. I was sitting there and I had this young woman's name and I was going to try to find her and trying to figure out how, a way I could meet her, without her thinking I was some kind of administrative heavy, which I was, you know, when the secretary that I had said, "There's somebody here to see you." I hadn't been there an hour. "Somebody there to see you," and I said, "Oh, who's that?" and she told me the student's name. I said, "Oh, please, show her in. I really wanted to see her," and she came in and she was, like, sort of a stereotype of what student radicals looked like in those days. You know, she had jeans that had more holes than complete parts, they're all tied up with bandanas and stuff, and she had peace symbols and she had long hair. Of course, in those days, you couldn't tell who the men or the women were, because the men had long hair as much as the women did, and so, she came in my office and she sat down, and I said, "Well, I'm pleased to meet you. I was going to try to meet you anyway," ... and then, she immediately said, "Look, can we get out of here and go somewhere else?" I said, "Sure, but why?" She said, "Oh, they're probably bugging us." I said, "Who's bugging us?" She said, "[The] University probably has a microphone here in your new office," and I said, "Oh, no, I don't think so; this is a university." She said, "Oh, yes, a university," I mean, [laughter] and I said, "Well, we'll go wherever you want to." She said, "Let's go where [it] ... can't be microphoned. Let's go out on Antilles Field," which is this big field behind College Hall, and we went out there and we were walking along and she took out a joint, okay. I had never smoked marijuana; I'd never even laid eyes on it. I mean, I basically had my '60s in the '70s. [laughter] ... I spent my '60s in the Establishment, now, and she took out a joint and lit it up and passed it to me. This was my moment of truth, because I thought, "Well, I've never tried this before. This sounds like it'll be fun," but, on the other hand, I thought maybe, you know, there were people peering out of the windows of College Hall, observing this, "The first day on the job, the guy is smoking a joint with a student. What is it with this guy?" you know, but, yes, I inhaled, unlike Bill Clinton, who swore he did not inhale, I did inhale, and, after about five minutes, she and I were holding hands and skipping around this field and laughing and singing and everything, [laughter] and it was a great moment. It really was. ... It was my introduction to contemporary America. I had been in the "white glove" Foreign Service, I'd been with the state government, and, now, I was on campus, and, on my first day, ... it was really incredible, and we were just [happy], you know. ... From then on, we were great friends, and I don't think it would have happened without the aid of that joint. I would have been, you know, inhibited, she would have been inhibited, and so on. So, it's so funny, we were skipping around the field, and I didn't give a damn if anybody was looking out the window, wondering what I was doing out there, didn't matter then. After I sobered up, it mattered, but nobody did say anything. It was so emblematic of the times, it was so incredibly emblematic of the times. ... The next year, in May of '70, ... when we extended the ... Vietnam War into Cambodia, to try to flush out Vietcong and North Vietnamese sanctuaries across the border, across the Ho Chi Minh Trail into Cambodia, and then, Kent State happened, where four students were shot to death and others wounded, and then, Jackson State, which almost nobody ever talks about, happened some days later, and four students were also killed there. [Editor's Note: On May 4, 1970, Ohio National Guardsmen fired on students at Kent State University, killing four and wounding nine others. Some of the students had been protesting the United States entry into Cambodia, while others had been passing nearby or observing the demonstration. On May 14 and 15, 1970, students at Jackson State College protesting against racial harassment were fired

upon by state and city police, resulting in two deaths and a dozen injuries.] The history books seem to have forgotten about those students, just like we always talk about Hiroshima, we don't talk about Nagasaki, and, now, the students went on strike, and a lot of the faculty went on strike, and this is May. We are approaching graduation, we're about to have finals and the campus is [paralyzed], and then, we have the problem of students who did want to go ... to class and professors who did want to teach, and were they crossing picket lines to go into classrooms? Oh, incredible legal and moral kinds of issues, and that was an incredible problem. I mean, it really was an incredible problem, and the people who most wanted to stop the strike were the parents of the seniors. [laughter] They'd sent their kids to school, maybe paid for it, and they were just mucho pissed off. They wanted *me* to ... stop the strike. Meanwhile, I was hanging out with the strikers, and, by this time, I did know what I thought about Vietnam, in fact, made a speech in Voorhees Chapel ... about it, and so, now, I really was a double agent. ... By the way, the campus was radical, not just politically and socially, but artistically; I can't accentuate that enough. This was the heyday of the Happenings Movement, an earlier form of performance art, and crazy things were happening artistically all over campus, including, I went into lecture in one of the halls and, [on] the rostrum from which I was going to lecture, there was a fish nailed to the rostrum, a dead fish, and I took this very personally. I thought somebody was commenting on my teaching. It was only later I discovered there were dead fishes all over the campus, nailed to every rostrum, by artists; this was some kind of art thing, and we just had one crazy art thing after another. The *Orgies and Mysteries Theater* [*Orgies-Mysteries Theater*] came here. We had the *Flux-Mass* event, which took place in Voorhees Chapel, and the entire state was [abuzz]; every little old lady in tennis shoes ... went crazy over this, these artistic things. [Editor's Note: In 1970, Rutgers University Professor Emeritus of Art Geoffrey Hendricks brought Austrian Actionist artist Hermann Nitsch's *Orgies-Mysteries Theater* and avant-garde Fluxus art movement founder George Maciunas' *Flux-Mass* to Rutgers University. The *Orgies-Mysteries Theater* took place in the Round House on the Cook-Douglass College Campus on October 8, 1970. A lamb, killed before the performance, was skinned, disemboweled and hung from a rope.] The *Flux-Mass* was a kind of a parody of the Catholic Mass, and then, the Catholic chaplain [Father Proccacini] refused to use the chapel. [Editor's Note: The *Flux-Mass* was held at Voorhees Chapel on the Douglass Campus on February 17, 1970.] Now, the chapel was nonsectarian, any group could use it who wanted to, and there were services of all different kind of groups there, and the Catholic chaplain said a year had to go by until it could be used again, and then, a bishop had to be ... called in to sort of fumigate Voorhees Chapel. [laughter] You know, these things are happening daily, and they were terribly interesting, and so, the artists were just as radical in their own way as the political people, were in their way. There was a guy in the Art Department, I remember, who decided he would not speak anymore. This raised some very serious questions, because he had classes to teach, but mum was the word. He had discovered that the greatest wisdom was in silence, and that might be, but, nevertheless; [laughter] so, he'd come into his class and just sit there. Students'd all look at him, he'd look at them, and what the hell was I supposed to do about that, exactly? I had a conversation with him, or tried to. It was a one-way conversation; he wouldn't answer me, either. I said, "Look, you can't do that. You're paid to teach. You're putting us in a very funny situation. If you don't teach, we have to fire you, or have to bring you up on charges." He just sat there. Eventually, he gave it up, we didn't have to do anything, but it was incredible, and things were very permissive then. I can't accentuate this enough. My novel, *A Bliss Case* [(1989)], is very much about this time, and the divider, let's say, between students and faculty didn't exist. Faculty all dressed in

torn jeans, also, and everybody smoked marijuana. Faculty and students smoked marijuana. ... The faculty would take a couple of hits, and then, walk in to teach a class. You'd walk into a classroom, the whole class would smell like marijuana. Now, it's funny, because, in those days, ... this was pre-"No Smoking" signs. There were three things with smoking that I've experienced; the first thing, there weren't smoking signs and people smoked in class, usually cigarettes, but, sometimes, somebody'd just be smoking a joint right there in class. You'd get high just inhaling up where I was teaching, and marijuana came very close to being decriminalized; I hope it does again. I think it's absolutely ridiculous that it's not legal ... and, of course, half the people in jail in this country are in on marijuana charges. They're not violent, and we pay fifty thousand dollars a year in taxes to keep them there and we spend more money in this country on jails than we do on education. It's absolutely a disgrace. We have more people in jail, ... a higher percentage of the population in jail, than any country in the world. I mean, this is ridiculous, and half of them don't belong in jail at all, and, if they weren't criminals when they went there, they come out criminals. I mean, it's ridiculous.

SI: Was there any kind of enforcement attempt then, through your office? Was anything done to try to halt this?

MR: Halt what, exactly?

SI: The spread and use of drugs. Was it even addressed at all by the administration?

MR: No, it was like a natural thing. It was the last thing in the world that I was paying any attention to, or felt that I had to, and, besides, I had gone off on Antilles Field. I no longer had a soapbox to stand on, on that score, but another aspect of it is, the division between faculty and students was gone, so much so that there were faculty, radical faculty, who said we have to do away with grading. That was one thing that I had to deal with, you know. They said that, "It is fascist to grade students, that the best way we could learn together is learning together, and I shouldn't, as a faculty member, be in a position where I grade the students. Who am I to grade the students?" I thought this was a little crazy. I mean, you may not like to grade, I don't like to grade, to this day, but it's my job, I do it, you know, and I am not a student and they are not faculty and there are divisions between us, but, I mean, things were very loose, sexually, in those days. This is all the sexual revolution coming in here, the early '60s, and it was flowering, and faculty and students were sleeping together. It was just a very different time and, as long as faculty weren't brought up on charges, and those charges would have been harassment charges; consensual relationships ... between anybody were not even dealt with or particularly frowned upon. So, you know, it's a free country, that's the way it was seen, and so, it was interesting with the smoking thing. Eventually, they put up "No Smoking" signs in the classroom, and so, as a faculty member, by then, you know, it was something I had to enforce, but, eventually, most classrooms didn't even have "No Smoking" signs, because the whole university is a smoke-free environment and we just assume that, "You're going to smoke something? You have no right to smoke something and blow smoke in somebody else's face." Ambient smoke, we now know, is also dangerous, and so, it's interesting that we don't have to put up a red light anymore. So, it went from no signs and everybody smoked in class, to signs, nobody could smoke in class, to we don't even need the signs; very interesting to trace that, in terms of the change in human ... behavior. I mean, it could be a test case for how do you change human behavior.

SI: When you came here as a dean, can you describe to us who you reported to, where you fell into the administrative structure?

MR: Yes, I was attached to the Douglass administration, because I was on the Douglass Campus, though I had some New Brunswick-wide responsibilities, and I was, like, the male token in an all-female institution; that was an interesting thing. Women and minorities have experienced that a whole lot; now, I was experiencing it. I kind of liked it. It was kind of fun. I was the pet. I couldn't do any wrong. I was the only male in the whole building and I was everybody's pet, and so, I enjoyed it very much, you know. Everybody liked me just because I was a man, you know, and it was very nice. So, I reported to the Douglass Dean, but I also reported to the President.

SI: Most of your job consisted of dealing with these problems that they were experiencing.

MR: Yes. I was an academic dean, I was assistant dean of Douglass, but much of what I had to do with, almost virtually all of what I had to do with; I don't know that when I was hired that that's what they had in mind, but it seemed like the campus became more and more revolutionary every day, and so, I was very much involved with trying to both keep the campus open and, also, keep a lid on and say, "Look, you can protest all you want, but you don't have a right to throw Molotov cocktails." Right here, on College Avenue, at the ROTC Building, ... somebody threw a Molotov cocktail, ... burned half of it up, you know, and that was property, and you can say, "Well, you can march up and down in front of ROTC all you want to, but you can't throw Molotov cocktails." That was the kind of thing that I was very much involved with and trying to keep under wraps, yes.

SI: Before we get much further, I wanted to see if the students had any questions.

MR: Sure.

KT: The administration that you are talking about, how did they regulate the faculty? How did they make sure that their rules were upheld in the faculty? Did they care what the faculty was doing, in terms of protesting? I know you said, "No, not really," but how could they maintain that relationship? How could they keep some sort of structure? Do you know what I am saying?

MR: Yes. Well, in a way, we were a microcosm of the nation. I mean, the nation was ablaze with ferment, and so, we were, in a way, a reflection of that. As I say, Mason Gross was very much against the Vietnam War, and ... that kind of percolated down just a little bit. Well, yes, there were faculty who got out of control. I mean, if a faculty member didn't teach his or her classes, we had to do something about that. If a faculty member used their classes for propaganda, whatever that propaganda was, I would sometimes go and talk to them. It was very tricky, because everybody here was against the Vietnam War, virtually everybody was against the Vietnam War, but, you know, a faculty member has a bully pulpit, as Teddy Roosevelt called it; you have the bulkiest pulpit of all and you mustn't misuse that. You're supposed to teach people how to think, not what to think, and a lot of people went over that line. I daresay I went over it sometimes as well, and I shouldn't have. Again, it seems to me my job, as a faculty

member, is to blow people's minds, not to fill their minds, but to blow their minds, in terms of getting them to think outside of the box, think of new paradigms, think of different ways of seeing things, and, sometimes, hard to do that without crossing a line I shouldn't cross, which is, in effect, preaching. We should not do that, and, every once in awhile, I'd catch myself doing that, I'd try to stop, and, in those days, everybody was preaching. An awful lot of people were preaching, so-to-speak. Oh, I'll never forget this, a great moment; I was teaching my very first course. In the beginning, I wasn't teaching, I was just dean-ing, and I really wanted to teach and they said, "What do you want to teach?" I said I wanted to teach American studies. So, they said, "We don't have American studies." I said, "Let's have it." So, American Studies began with a piece of me. That was the whole thing. Now, we have eight full-time faculty members and a bunch of part-times. In the very beginning, we had this program, it wasn't a department, it was just a program, and I did it with my left pinky, you know, and I'll never forget my very first class. It was "America in the Arts" and a big enrollment, and a student, a guy, I wasn't two minutes into the first day, handed out the syllabus, was saying something about it, and this guy raises his hand. I said, "Yes, oh, good, I've got somebody who wants to say something immediately. This is going to be a lively class," and he stood up and he said, "Professor Rockland, we've been here several minutes now, and you have done nothing, you have done nothing, to help end the Vietnam War," and I said, "What? [laughter] This course is called 'America in the Arts.' It's about American aesthetics." He said, "I don't care what it's about. There are women and children being napalmed as we speak in Vietnam, and there is nothing more important than ending the Vietnam War, and you're not doing anything to end the war," and that was typical of the environment. ... Was I really going to be judged, on my teaching, as to whether I was ending the Vietnam War? I don't think that's what my job was, and, in fact, I think it definitely wasn't my job. I could believe anything I wanted to privately, and join any political organization I wanted to privately, but my job was, ... in this class, to teach about American aesthetics, and then, of course, that wonderful '60s statement, "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem." So, I was part of the problem, from his point of view. It was a very interesting moment, you know. At the time, I was just absolutely flabbergasted; I didn't know what to say. "You know, maybe the students hate me, I don't know, because I'm not talking about the Vietnam War, I'm talking about art and architecture and stuff." ... That incident, plus the one of running around with that student on Antilles Field, I remember very well, oh, and there was a third incident. The third incident was the African-American students ... in the old Cooper Dining Hall, which doesn't exist anymore. There's a new Cooper Dining Hall, though it's been closed the last few years, I think, for economic reasons. Everybody eats in Neilson on the Douglass Campus. ... Anyway, the old Cooper Dining Hall, which was built right in front of where the present one is, was made out of wood and it was really a firetrap, and what did I want to say about the old Cooper Dining Hall?

SI: The African-American students.

MR: Oh, yes, yes, right, sorry; yes, thanks for keeping me on the subject. [laughter] I get so carried away, I can't tell which tree I'm on here, what trunk I'm on; I'm off on some branch somewhere, a little twig. Yes, I hadn't been on campus but a few days when the black students, who had an organization called the Black Student Congress, which may still exist, I don't know, but they were agitating for more students ... and faculty, and they saw this as a "lily white" institution and elitist, and, by the way, Ralph Dungan, his feeling about Rutgers is that it was

elitist, that was his word, which he shared with the black students. Anyway, the black students went into Cooper Dining Hall, filled their trays with food, came off the line, and then, threw their trays up in the air and they all landed, making a terrible mess on the floor. ... That was about, oh, I wasn't here ten days when that happened, and a lot of what I had to do with after that had to do with the black students, you know, just trying to [ameliorate the situation?], and then, I was appointed chairman, chair; is not a good word, chair, of a commission on ethnic and race relations. ... We had about four, five members, one Puerto Rican student, one black student, me, the president of the student government, the official student government, and some other [member], some professor, and I was chair of the [committee], and we met for months and held hearings, and the whole idea of the thing was, this is while I was still a dean, the whole idea is, "There is so much animosity between people here at Rutgers, particularly between blacks and whites, what do we do about this?" and we wrote this report and it was circulated all over the University, and I think it was very important. I think it was very useful and helpful, in terms of ameliorating some of the conditions, ... but, when the Black Students Congress threw their trays up in the air, I said to them, "Who do you think is going to clean that up?" when I met with them the next day. I said, "Who do you think cleaned that up? Do you think it's fair that the people who work in the dining hall had to clean up that mess that you made? Couldn't you have expressed your feelings in some other fashion?" "Well, no, we wanted to do something dramatic." "Yes, but a lot of the people who had to clean that up not only are poor, but black. They had to clean up the mess you made. Is that right?" and so, that was one of the very interesting conversations I had with them, which made them uncomfortable, I think, but I think it was useful. I think they learned something from that.

SI: What were some of the suggestions that came out of that group that you described before?

MR: Well, clearly that we had to recruit, we had to really get into affirmative action, that we operated on the basis that this country had routinely excluded minorities and women. Women not at Douglass College, [laughter] but in the rest of America. This was part of a national conversation. I mean, let's face it, in those days, if you went to a medical school, you might have a hundred people in an entering class and one of them was a woman. Now, it's fifty-fifty, which is pretty doggone wonderful. We only have thirteen women Senators. We ought to have fifty, but, in those days, maybe we had one, you know. This was part of a [nationwide trend], and not to mention we didn't have but maybe one black Congressman, or something. ... So, we were part of this national picture, only we were dealing with these issues here, and the question is, "Well, how do you do affirmative action?" and, "How do you do affirmative action without righting one wrong but creating a new wrong?" A guy in my department, in fact, my good friend and colleague, Angus Gillespie, with whom I wrote the book *Looking for America on the New Jersey Turnpike*, Angus was a year to year [faculty appointment], ... and I was chair, by this time; well, I was chair of American Studies right from the beginning and was chair for about thirty-two years, [laughter] and the University was in budget straits. When is it not? When has it not been in budget straits? except, now, it's much more serious. ... Basically, they said they were going to get rid of all year-to-year appointments, ... but they weren't going to get rid of any minority people who were year-to-year and, you know, ... here he was, a guy I had hired, he just happened to be a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, poor guy, [laughter] and they were going to get rid of him, and I thought this was wrong, you know. We've got to do something for minorities and women, but he's doing a great job, I want to keep him, and I had to fight like crazy to keep

him, and I said to him, "For God's sake, man, finish your PhD dissertation." Necessity; I finished mine because I was about to be sent to Vietnam and he finished his because he was about to be fired. There's a lesson there [for] all of us who write. It's taken me a long time as a writer to not need that lesson anymore, that ... I don't need such dire motivations, but, for my first books, I did, you know, something had to [push me], "God, I've got to finish this thing," you know. Now, I'm self-motivated much more.

SI: You described earlier how the American Studies Department kind of just developed out of your desire to teach something. In those early semesters or years, could people major in American Studies or was it just whatever you taught?

MR: Yes. No, no, we did set up a program. You could major. It was not a department, it was a program, but, yes, you could major in American studies, and it became a very popular major, and, after I'd been a dean for a few years, it was partly that we were such a popular major, I wanted to do that, I mean, and I was really needed. As I say, first, it was my left pinky. Then, I managed to convince the powers-that-be that I'd be half-and-half dean, half American Studies, and, eventually, I [became full-time faculty], and then, I hired a full-time person. So, it was half of me, all of her, and then, I eventually got out of dean-ing and did American Studies full-time, and we have simply grown over the years. Many other humanities departments have shrunk; we've grown.

SI: Roughly what year was it that you finally left the dean's position?

MR: Being the dean? I dean-ed for three years, '69 to '72.

SI: Initially, before the program developed and you were really the only one there, would you have to, say, send students who wanted to major in American studies to the History Department, the English Department, to try to cobble together a course load?

MR: No, actually, I've forgotten one thing; I was allowed to hire one person temporarily, right from the beginning. So, there was a piece of me and one person, and the major. Then, we had, essentially, almost no American studies courses, *per se*. We had a senior seminar that pulled things together, that was about all there was, and maybe one or two courses, I taught one and he taught two or three, or something like that, ... but, then, I got a regular full-time, tenure-track person, and then, I got out of it [the dean's position]. Now, we had two. Then, I got another position, now, and hired Angus Gillespie, so, we had three, and it sort of went on from there and we grew. ... As we grew, we had more courses, more majors, we started an American Studies Club, we started our journal, a magazine called *The Salad Bowl*. Angus Gillespie began to put on the New Jersey Folk Festival, ... which celebrated its thirty-fifth anniversary this past spring, thirty-five years, and he does it with our students. We get fifteen thousand people coming to that thing. ... Before the football team began to win once in awhile, we got more people coming to the Folk Festival than went to the stadium. [laughter] You go to the stadium, there'd be maybe ten thousand people there, and we'd have fifteen thousand at the Folk Festival, and didn't cost anything, was very interesting.

SI: Was there any reaction from the other departments when American Studies started to develop, departments that might be a rival to American Studies, like History or English?

MR: Yes, there was some of that. I think they thought we were intellectual lightweights, I think, and the more popular we became, the more they believed that, and, more and more, our students tended to be refugees from those departments, especially from the English Department. This is when the English Department was, here and elsewhere, ... becoming crazy, from my point of view. They were getting into all this theory stuff and literature departments were more involved with criticism; literary claptrap, I think. I never understood it and never understood its value, and still don't, and, luckily, I think, they're beginning to come out of it, at last, but, for a whole generation-and-a-half, practically, of American students ... who loved literature were turned off by this garbage, and they resented us, because their students wanted to be with us. ... I mean, our students had to take a survey course in American lit and a survey course in American history, and often would take other American history or American lit courses that we would steer them into, the ones that weren't so "theory damaged," shall we say. Yes, they were resentful, but I think I felt the keenest ire, if you will, of the English Department when I came out with my first novel, because, ... I mean, in some ways, I think they were envious. They wished they wrote novels, and then, when my first novel became a *New York Times* "Notable Book of the Year," ... some of those people were really pissed off, I think. They never would have admitted it, but, "Who's this guy in American Studies? He isn't even in literature and he's writing novels, and it's a 'Notable Book of the Year' and we don't write novels. We have creative writing classes," which I always thought is absurd. I've always thought the whole idea of a creative writing class is absurd. I mean, all writing is creative, why is fiction any more, or poetry, ... creative than scholarship or journalism? They, in fact, should have been making that argument, not me. So, I mean, creative writing is a stupid term. If you want to call it a fiction course, okay, that's different. They don't want to call it a fiction course, because it sounds too out there, so, they call it "creative writing." So, when I came out with my first novel, yes, I think [so]; I'll never forget this. ... I did a program for their students and graduate students, to which the faculty did not come, except a couple of people who were friends of mine, and I'll never forget this, a grad student; grad students are crazy. They're sort of neither here nor there. Undergraduates, I understand, and professors, I understand; graduate students, especially since the academic marketplace has become so difficult, for three decades now, it's been so difficult to get a job, and graduate students are these people who are just, you know, so anxious and nervous. Are they going to get their PhD, and, even if you get your PhD, is there a job out there? When I got my PhD, goodness, you had your union card, you could get a job anywhere, and that's why I went in the Diplomatic Service without any concern whatsoever as to whether I could get an academic job someday. Anyway, I'll never forget this, at that particular program, sponsored by the graduate students in English, and a lot of undergrad creative writing types came, whatever, about a hundred people in Murray Hall, and I'll never forget this graduate student, who, after I talked about the novel some, had done some brief readings from it and got people laughing and thought I had charmed them, this guy raises his hand. ... I said, "Yes?" and he said, "Trouble with you is that you think that you wrote the novel." I said, "What?" [laughter] "Yes, you see, writers don't write novels. Critics who read the novels are the ones who really write the novels." I said, "What the hell are you talking about? This took me eight years, and it was rejected twenty-seven times, and I wrote the *Turnpike* book with Angus Gillespie to keep from going crazy while I was being rejected. ... You know, yes, I wrote this novel." I was really angry. "What are you

talking about?" He said, "Well, that's the trouble with you writers; you writers think you wrote the novel. The people who read the novels and the critics, they're the important people in literature," and I said, "Look, I'm not saying I'm more important than the critics, but, damn it, I wrote this novel." He says, "Well, every reader writes the novel for themselves." I said, "Look, are you trying to say that we all have our prescriptions and we all have our own mindset and, therefore, in a sense, when we read a novel, we bring to it who we are? If that's what you're trying to say, I agree with you a hundred percent, but don't tell me I didn't write this novel." It was a ridiculous conversation. I mean, this guy was the ultimate lunatic fringe of theory speak. ... [laughter] It's funny now, but, at the time, I was enraged. I remember this.

SI: Let me hit pause for a second.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Let me turn this back on. I wanted to ask about these dual roles that you had; first, with the Chancellor of Higher Education and the relationship between that office and Rutgers, you said that Ralph Dungan would try to have you, I do not know; could you explain that more? Were you digging up stuff that he could use against Rutgers?

MR: No, not really. He carried so much animosity towards Rutgers, he didn't need anybody to dig up anything. I don't think he was operating on the basis of fact. By the way, it was while he was Chancellor that the medical school was removed from Rutgers. The medical school, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, was part of Rutgers. ... As you know, in recent years, they've been talking about putting it back in Rutgers, especially with all of the scandals they've had there and the unbelievable corruption in that medical school, [laughter] you know, which is a real drag, because we, here at Rutgers, are watched in a way we never were before, in terms of every dime, because the state came down on all higher educational institutions because of the corruption in the medical school, which I think is unfortunate, you know. No, I don't think I was digging up stuff, no. I was in Trenton. I mean, I'd come up here once a month, with Ralph, for a meeting and just sit and listen and got to know Mason Gross and got to know Dick Schlatter, his number two, and, eventually, I was offered a job. [It] turned out that Dick Schlatter, the number two guy, had gone to graduate school at Harvard with my advisor at the University of Minnesota, and so, they were buddies, and, when he heard I'd gone to Minnesota, he said, "Did you know [Bernard] Bernie Bowron?" and I said, "Did I know Bernie Bowron? I love Bernie Bowron. He was my faculty advisor and thesis advisor," and I think that that's how I ended up here at Rutgers. I think I called up Bowron, Bowron sent him a letter and told him I was a good guy, and Schlatter then hired me, yes. So, no, I didn't dig up anything.

SI: All right; let us go back to this story that you told about your first day at Rutgers. You were told to make contact with this student leader.

MR: Right.

SI: What would be the end result of that? Would you just report back to the Dean of Douglass College, or whoever gave you the assignment, that, "I made contact and everything was fine?" What would you do there?

MR: Well, I didn't tell her that we smoked a joint. [laughter]

SI: Yes, I did not expect that.

MR: That, from their point of view, would have been going over to the, quote, "enemy," unquote. Yes, I wrote up a little report, ... but, from then on, I really had entrée into [the student world], and I think I was able to do a lot of good precisely because of that, that I was not mistrusted. I think I was more mistrusted by the administration than I was by the radicals. With each passing day, I think I was more moving into the radical camp. I was certainly fifty-fifty, that's for sure. I mean, I was doing my job, I was responsible, but the radical camp seemed so much more attractive [laughter] and seemed to be having more fun, I think is the way I'd put it. Well, I know I was more attracted to them, because this was the artistic side of me, also, coming out, which I eventually embraced, you know. I think, as time went by, I liked being an administrative heavy less and less. I mean, my whole life has been a matter of, like an onion, shedding layers of political desire. I mean, I do that in the Foreign Service; Teddy Kennedy asked me if I wanted to be on his White House staff and I'm thinking, "Yes, I'm going to be in the White House someday," and, of course, he doesn't get to be President. ... Then, I'm a dean, and, now, I want to be a college president, and then, I think, "No, I don't want to be a college president," and I think I finally sloughed off the last of it when I finally gave up being chair of American Studies, finally gave up the last of it, realized that, "I don't want to do this anymore. I really want to think of myself as an artist. ... I don't want to be a double agent anymore, so-to-speak." [laughter] Not so much a double agent, but somebody who's both political and artistic. Increasingly, the artistic side of me took over, and it's the happier side of me. It's the side that doesn't give a damn what anybody thinks about me, it cares about what *I* think about me, and I think that really is almost the story of my life. ... I mean, as a kid, I wanted to run for President of the United States, it's worse, you know, and I slowly, slowly gave up that side of things. I mean, I vote, I support candidates, I've done some public service, but ... my joy is in creating a world on paper, I'd say, and the classroom. ... I don't know if I've said this before, if I have, I'm repeating myself, but, being a professor and having the kind of freedom and trust that you have as a professor, and writing books, if I won the New Jersey Lottery tomorrow, not that I'll win it, because I've never bought a lottery ticket in my life, but, if I did and I won, I'd be here the next day. ... In fact, I would try to find some way to give the money away, because I don't know what I'd do with it, to tell you the truth. I guess I'd keep a little of it, [laughter] but I would just give it to charities that I support and environmental causes and Israel, and things like that is what I would do. ... I tell that to my students all the time; I say, "You've got to find a job which you would do even if you weren't paid and you were independently wealthy, so [that if] you could just afford peanut butter and jelly, but you weren't paid, you'd do it anyway." I mean, [then New Jersey Governor Jon] Corzine, I think, only accepts a dollar a year. I think he should make that more manifestly known. ... It is funny, isn't it, how little the Governor's paid anyway, compared to the President [of Rutgers University], and then, ... the President compared to the football coach? [laughter] We've got our priorities straight around here in New Jersey, don't we? but that's the way it is nationally. It's not any different.

SI: Any questions?

MR: There's something I could volunteer about Rutgers that I feel very strongly about. I mean, I love this place. I'm very dedicated to it. As I say, my wife went here, both as an undergraduate and as a PhD student, four of my kids went here, I've been here, now, forty years. Two struggles I was involved in, and lost; in '81-'82, it was decided to reorganize the University and take the professors out of the colleges. We had what was called the federated plan back then. Students from any college could major in and take courses in any other college, but the colleges were separate. The deans of the colleges were like presidents, the president was like a chancellor, or something, and, as an assistant dean, ... I was technically an assistant dean of Douglass, you had a lot to do, ... but, then, the professors were removed from the colleges and we were made University-wide, although the colleges continued, but, in a way, the deans of the colleges gradually became glorified deans of students. [Editor's Note: Professor Rockland is referring to the creation of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences in the early 1980s.] They were ... no longer really much by way of academic deans, okay, and I fought that tooth and nail. I thought that was a big mistake. I still think it was. Eddie [Edward] Bloustein was the President [Rutgers University President from 1971 to 1989] and we were friends. *New York Times* did a piece on this whole thing and it was about him and me. I don't know how I got into this thing, but I was focused on as the faculty member who was against what he was trying to do. ... Part of what he ... wanted to do, I suppose, was very good, because you could have stronger graduate programs if you didn't have English departments, let's say, or history departments, on five different campuses; you had one, together, and I think that could have been accomplished in a different way. So, I fought that and lost, and then, two, three years ago, again, I fought. Now, they were going to remove the students from the colleges and the colleges were going to become campuses. [Editor's Note: Professor Rockland is referring to the reorganization of Rutgers, Douglass, Livingston and University Colleges into the School of Arts and Sciences in 2007.] I have no idea what the Dean of Douglass does. ... What is there to do? ... Now, she is a dean of students; she doesn't have any faculty, she doesn't have any students. The students live there, and I guess there's something to do, there's disciplinary things or whatever, and I thought we were the perfect university before these two changes were made and we could have accomplished making the graduate programs stronger without destroying the colleges. I thought we were a unique place. I loved the federated plan, I think it made great sense, and, I mean, it's very simple. ... I'm saying this because I want this part of the record and, someday, they're going to reinvent the colleges and I want somebody to have said, "Hey, you're reinventing it. We did that already, you know, but I'm glad you're reinventing it." Each college had a real personality and everybody who was faculty at those colleges were dedicated to those students at the colleges and to that college. If you had a Douglass faculty meeting, you had about two hundred Douglass faculty members, 199 of them were at the meeting. The meeting always took place at a time when no classes were scheduled. So, unless you were in the hospital, you were there, and they were very lively meetings, everybody debating this and that. They were terrific, and that was true of the other colleges as well. Now, we have ... the School of Arts and Sciences. You go to a meeting, and we have the largest unit of the University, you go to a meeting of the School of Arts and Sciences and there's nobody there; I mean, very few people. Far fewer people go to a meeting of the School of Arts and Sciences than went to the Douglass faculty meeting, just Douglass. We were all there, and we had a real stake in it, and it was, ... in our case, a tremendous dedication to women, and women, you know, getting into the professions ... especially, and in women's studies and all kinds of things that ... were coming along and it was a very vibrant and exciting place. ... What happens now is the University tries to reinvent

this creative localism that we had. I mean, I'm a student of Alexis de Tocqueville, de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* [Volume I (1835), Volume II (1840)], the most important book ever written about the United States, is all about the wisdom of the United States' decentralization, and decentralization gives you creativity and decentralization gives you freedom and that every move to centralize gets rid of those two things. I think that's exactly what we've done. ... So, though I like our present President, Dick [Richard L.] McCormick and we're friends and I enjoy him, I think he's doing a great job, I certainly fought against this last thing of pulling the students out. [Editor's Note: Richard L. McCormick became the President of Rutgers University in 2002.] I think it's a mistake.

SI: In the period before the Faculty of the Arts and Sciences reorganization in the early 1980s, had American studies programs been developed in the other colleges?

MR: No, no, we've always been it, and, while there were English and history departments everywhere, we were only on the Douglass Campus, but people from the other colleges could major in American studies. We got a lot of Douglass students, not Cook, Livingston and Rutgers College and University College, we had majors. Cook was always separate. They took our courses, but they couldn't major. They had to major in something [like] environmental science, or something like that, and that's still the case. So, we've always been on the Douglass Campus, and we still are, but we don't have this identification with Douglass that we once had. I mean, if you went to a Douglass graduation, in those [days], back before '81-'82, you had two hundred faculty members, they were all there. You go to a Douglass graduation; well, now, they're ending. I think this past year was the last one, or maybe this year.

KT: This year will be the last.

MR: Will be the last. You go there and there's about twelve faculty members there. I mean, it's ridiculous, ... because it's clear what we learned was that we weren't going to get anything out of Douglass College, so, we weren't going to give anything to Douglass College. If you gave something to Douglass College, you did it out of your heart, you did it out of your dedication only. ... The Dean of Douglass ... had a lot to do with your well-being, had to do with your promotions, ... and you damn well would go to the Douglass graduation, and damn well would go to the faculty meeting, if for no other reason than that if you didn't, you were going to be in some serious trouble. ... You know, "Where's So-and-So?" the Dean of Douglass would ask, and I'm sure it happened in the other colleges as well, and, again, what I liked about it the most is we had this decentralization. We were very much like the Claremont Colleges, you know, but we also had a major state university. [Editor's Note: The Claremont Colleges, in Claremont, California, are a consortium of five undergraduate colleges and two graduate institutions that are centrally organized to provide services shared by all students, faculty and staff.] I think we had enough centralization and that we had creative localism. We were like the United States, where you have the Federal Government, but you also have the state governments, fifty of them, and you also have county governments, you also have municipal government. You know, the United States [has] four levels of government. We didn't have four levels, but each of the colleges was like a state and the dean of that college was a governor, and the citizens of that college, both faculty and students, were citizens of that, while also being citizens of the United States. I think it was ideal and I think we blew it. I really do.

SI: We probably used up more time than you allotted, so, we thank you very much for that.

MR: Sure.

SI: I hope we can have another session to continue this.

MR: Okay, yes, we can. [laughter]

SI: Thank you very much.

MR: You want to do another one?

SI: Absolutely. ...

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Reviewed by Jessica Ondusko 3/11/10
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 3/29/10
Reviewed by Michael Aaron Rockland 4/6/10