

RUTGERS THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT L. BERKOWITZ

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

and

KATHERINE SILVA

and

LOUIS BARTOLOMEO

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TRANSCRIPT BY

JESSE BRADDELL

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Robert Berkowitz, on April 20, 2022, with Shaun Illingworth and--Katherine, why don't you go first?

Katherine Silva: Katherine Silva.

Louis Bartolomeo: Louis Bartolomeo.

SI: Thanks, again, Mr. Berkowitz, for joining us. To begin, can you tell us where and when you were born?

Robert Berkowitz: I was born in Jersey City on December 17, 1947 at Margaret Hague Hospital, one of largest maternity wards in the nation at the time. "Due to the "Great Blizzard of '47," which occurred eight days later, I was confined there for nearly two weeks. [Editor's Note: In the Great Blizzard of 1947, 26.2 inches of snow fell at Newark Airport. The blizzard began on December 25, 1947.]

However, since my parents were living in Newark at the time, my address for the first two years of my life was 55 Summit Avenue. It was named Summit because it was atop the crest of a modest-size hill and possibly at the highest elevation in the Weequahic section of Newark. Summit Avenue was prominent for another reason. It was where the Pulitzer-Prize winning author Philip Roth lived during his early childhood years. It was also where his fictional character resided in his historic novel *The Plot Against America*. Much of the novel takes place on Summit Avenue. Though Roth's family lived nine doors down from my family home, my parents did not know the Roth family. By the time I was born, they had moved a few blocks away.

My father, Bernard Berkowitz, was born on July 10, 1918 in Bayonne, N.J. Sadly, his father Aaron, who had immigrated from Northern Rumania as a teenager, died three months later at the age of twenty-eight from the influenza epidemic, which had engulfed Hudson County that year. [Editor's Note: The influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 spread around the world and killed about fifty million people. In the United States, the virus killed about 675,000 Americans.]

His mother, a first-generation immigrant from Eastern Poland, soon remarried a widower. My father was the youngest of nine siblings at the time. He graduated from Snyder High School in Jersey City. Five years later, on the heels of the attack on Pearl Harbor, he was drafted for a second time into the Army. Like many of the vanishing members of the "Greatest Generation," he fought valiantly and humbly in World War II. As breathtaking as were his wartime accomplishments, he rarely spoke about them, and only then begrudgingly when a family member (me) pleaded with him to do so in the name of recorded history. A non-commissioned infantry officer in armored field artillery, he fought in four major campaigns, including Rome-Arno, Naples-Foggia, Southern France, and the Rhineland. He served as a ground observer in forward positions in many battles at great risk to his life. As head of the reconnaissance section of his unit, he flew in 135 highly-dangerous reconnaissance missions. His decorations were countless, including the Silver Star, Bronze Star, Air Medal, American Defense Service and Good Conduct, and European-African-Middle Eastern Service Medals. A man of peace, who considered his job done when the war ended in victory, he turned down a promotion as a

commissioned officer to return to civilian life, where he devotedly raised a family and pursued an exemplary career as a real estate property manager. In his last job before retirement, he was property manager for Co-op City, the largest cooperative apartment building complex in the world. Bernie, as he was fondly known, was a very kind, gentle and fair man. [Editor's Note: Located in the Bronx, New York, Co-Op City was completed in 1973 and is currently the world's largest housing cooperative. It consists of thirty-five high-rise buildings and townhouses and has a population of around forty thousand residents.]

My mother--Mildred Claire Berkowitz--was born November 20, 1920. Her father Herman Barth emigrated from Vienna in 1910. Her mother Helene, who was pregnant at the time, followed four months later. Both settled in downtown Jersey City, where Herman initially worked for his older sister's husband, Morris Stiereman, who was the largest furniture dealer in Jersey City at the time. He later established his own retail furniture business. Herman was born in Herodyzche, a small village in the Galicia region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire heavily populated by Jews and subject to periodic pogroms. Helene was born in what was called Lemberg at the time, also located in the Galicia region. [Editor's Note: Today, the city is known as Lviv, located in western Ukraine. Historically, it has had different names, depending on the era and the nation that controlled the city: Lemberg in German, Lwów in Polish, and Lvov in Russian.]

I've written about Herman and Helene in an essay entitled "The Long Damn Summer of '42." Like Roth's *The Plot Against America*, it is set in the Weequahic and Clinton Hill sections of Newark, where the Jewish population of the city congregated. Unlike *The Plot Against America*, my essay is a non-fictional family memoir. [Editor's Note: Robert Leonard Berkowitz's "The Long Damn Summer of '42" can be found at <https://rlberko-42995.medium.com/the-long-damn-summer-of-42-aaa841bf2242>. His "Reflections on the Long Damn Summer of '42--On the 80th Anniversary of Kristallnacht" can be found at <https://rlberko-42995.medium.com/reflections-on-the-long-damn-summer-of-42-on-the-80th-anniversary-of-kristallnacht-17b55832ae10>.]

SI: Yes.

RB: About my mother, she was a quite extraordinary person. At the age of seventeen, she was instrumental in securing affidavits of support for relatives who as Jews were suffering under the horrors of the Nazi occupation of Austria in the aftermath of its invasion in March of 1938, known as *Anschluss*. She did all within her limited powers to rescue our European relatives. Thanks to her efforts--writing to congressmen and senators to help fight the bureaucratic inertia in the State Department, tracking down relatives to provide affidavits of support, corresponding with the stranded relatives in Vienna with meticulous instructions about how to deal with U.S. Consular officers handling emigration applications, helping them to secure steamship tickets, and keeping their spirits up and assuaging their panic-stricken anxieties--she was able to save the lives of five very close relatives. Two arrived in 1939, two more in 1940, and the last, my cousin David, in August 1942. It was just in a nick of time. [Editor's Note: The *Anschluss* was the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany on March 12, 1938.]

It was about then that Hermann Goring, the second most powerful Nazi leader after Adolf Hitler, instructed Reinhard Heydrich (head of the Reich's Security Main Office and considered the

architect of the Holocaust) to prepare for the "complete solution of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe." Heydrich was directed to carry out the deportation of Jews from all over Europe (including Austria) to the killing centers. That effectively ended all emigration of Jews. Had my mother not secured the emigration to America of David's two children, it's highly doubtful that he would have been admitted into the U.S. At the time, the State Department rejected visa applicants who still had family member in Nazi-occupied countries out of concern (almost entirely unwarranted) that the Nazis would threaten their families unless they became spies! In David's case, his bond was posted by George Siegler, a family cousin from Jersey City who was the chief engineer and construction manager overseeing the building of the Lincoln Tunnel. Unfortunately, dozens of relatives living in Eastern Poland were not so fortunate. All but two of them--climicians who were hidden by two Catholic families--were murdered in the killing centers of Belzec and Treblinka.

After World War II, my mother raised my older brother Howard and myself, and became an office assistant to a renowned physicist and former Columbia University professor at Vitro Laboratories in West Orange, where we lived beginning in early 1950. She later became executive assistant to the head of the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia and, for the last ten years before retirement, served as executive assistant to the head of the Toxicology Department at Hoffmann-La Roche in Nutley, New Jersey.

There is a disturbing story about one of reasons for my parents' decision to leave Newark and move to the suburb of West Orange. It was a story I only learned about years after my parents were deceased. In early 2020, I was working on an essay on the 1947 United Nations two-state solution for Palestine, published as "Once Upon a Time in Queens" (<https://rlberko-42995.medium.com/once-upon-a-time-in-queens-34b7852d2d7b>) and stumbled on a March 8, 1948 front-page article in the *Newark Evening News* headlined "Woman is Beaten Answering Door." The article began: "Mrs. Mildred Berkowitz, 27, of 55 Summit Avenue was severely beaten shortly after noon today by two men who entered her second-floor apartment after ringing the doorbell, according to the police. She was treated by Dr. Elvin I. Cohen at 561 Elizabeth Avenue for deep scalp wounds requiring five stitches to close." An article appearing at the same time in the *Newark Star-Ledger* reported that after my mother had let out a thunderous scream, the two perpetrators wearing white masks took flight down the stairs. I was a three-a-half month-old toddler and was apparently in the apartment at the time of the aborted burglary. However, I have no conscious recollection of the incident. I say "conscious" because after we moved to West Orange, I had recurring and quite vivid nightmares of a white-masked monster lurking in our basement and making its way up to the second-floor bedroom of our home. Apparently, on some level, I had witnessed the assault and it had seeped into my subconscious only to surface as a nightmare. For whatever reasons, whether to put the horror of the episode behind her and/or to shield me from the memory of it, my mother appeared to have no interest in exploring the real-life source of my nightmare.

Though the Newark Police Department was unable to track down the perpetrators, I was able to track down the young daughter of the family who lived in the first-floor apartment. Unlike mine, her parents shared the incident with her, as she was quite familiar with it. It was her understanding that it was an attempted burglary. As she told me, my Uncle Syd and Aunt Jeanette, who lived in the third-floor apartment of the single-family house, kept stashes of cash

in it. Syd and Jeannette owned a sandwich shop just around corner on Chancellor Avenue. The sandwich shop, known as Syd's, was immortalized in several of Philip Roth's novels. It was also where the real-life Roth worked as a busboy during his teenage years. Syd's was an all-cash business, and apparently the burglars got wind that the third-floor apartment was Fort Knox.

When I stumbled on the *Newark Evening News* and *Newark Star-Ledger* coverage of the attempted burglary, my parents were years long gone. So, I never got the chance to ask them why they never told me about it. However, I suspected that the answer would have been to shield me from the dark shadows of family history, much like they tried to do about the fate of our relatives in the Holocaust, as well as my father's nightmarish wartime experience--all to preserve and extend the innocence of my youth, which they did masterfully.

SI: It is really interesting how World War II affected them both and how they both really answered the call to do something about it. I was curious, when you were growing up, did you know a lot of these relatives that they brought over from Vienna, or had they moved to other parts of the country?

RB: There were five relatives from Vienna for whom my family was able to secure visas. Initially, all five lived in Newark. Two moved to the nearby town of Nutley, along with their newborn daughter. The other three relatives moved to Philadelphia. We were very close to our Nutley relatives, who were forever grateful to my mother for saving their lives. I am still very close to the daughter, my cousin Judith Stone, who became a professor of French history and published several books including *The Search for Social Peace: Reform Legislation in France, 1890-1914*, and *Sons of the Revolution: Radical Democrats in France, 1862-1914*. However, I have no recollection of conversations about the fate of our other, less fortunate relatives, whose fate I didn't fully learn about until the summer of 1961--the summer of the dramatic, televised coverage from Jerusalem of the trial of Adolph Eichmann. By then, it was no longer possible to shield me from the haunting family history. [Editor's Note: In 1960, Mossad agents conducted a covert operation to arrest former Nazi SS officer Adolf Eichmann in Argentina and transport him to Israel, where he stood trial before a war crimes tribunal for his role in the Final Solution. Eichmann had fled to Argentina in 1950 and established a new identity in Buenos Aires. On April 11, 1961, Eichmann's trial began in Jerusalem and was broadcast on television. On December 15, he was found guilty, and on May 31, 1962, Eichmann was executed by hanging.]

I also just had my bar mitzvah. In Jewish tradition, when a boy performs the ritual ceremony of the bar mitzvah, he becomes a "son of the Commandments" and thus a "man." In the eyes of my parents, I was apparently man enough to learn about our less fortunate relatives, as well as several of them who were my namesakes. There was my grandmother's older sister Tante Rosa, and her son Norbert, to whom I owe my given first name Robert. Both were caught in the deadly crosshairs of *Anschluss* (the Nazi occupation of Austria) and *Kristallnacht* (the deadly "Night of Broken Glass" pogrom that occurred in November of 1938). Norbert died during those hellish nine months of 1938 after *Anschluss*. Following his death, my Tante Rosa, a naturalized U.S. citizen, returned to America physically and emotionally spent, wanting nothing more than to die. Her wish was fulfilled a few months later. [Editor's Note: Tante is Yiddish for aunt.]

My middle name is Leonard. Until 1961, my father had led me to believe I was named after the famous boxer of the 1920s Benny Leonard--one of the greatest lightweight boxers of all time and a cousin by marriage who died of a heart attack refereeing a boxing match at St. Nicholas Arena in April of 1947. That was eight months before I was born. So, being a cousin, even if a very distant one, whom I physically resembled and who, like my entire family, was a passionate supporter of the creation of the State of Israel, it made a lot of sense for me to be named after him. I took great pride in being named after Leonard. He was not only athletically agile but exceptionally smart, which earned him the nickname "The Ghetto Wizard." As a budding athlete insecure about my intelligence, I was completely incurious about disputing the genesis of my middle name.

The "white lie" about it was disclosed as such to me that summer of the Eichmann Trial, when it was revealed that I had been named after my Uncle Leon. Sadly, he had been rounded up in a bloody *Aktion* [action] in July 1942 and packed into a cattle car with the Belzec killing center as the final terminus. As I would learn over the years, Uncle Leon was a gentle and sweet bachelor whose great passion was his priceless stamp collection. Despite his own uncertain future in Poland in 1941, Uncle Leon selflessly shipped that collection to his younger brother David, who was barely surviving in Vienna and desperately seeking to immigrate to America to be with his children, who were, thanks to my mother, now safely living in Newark. It was a time when the Nazis had halted voluntary emigration from Austria and begun mandatory "resettlement to the East." As mentioned, it was also a time when the State Department, in one of the cruelest ironies of history, drastically curtailed the issuance of visas, arguing, as one of its justifications, that among Jewish applicants with families still in Nazi-occupied territories possibly lurked Nazi agents posing a risk to national security. Whether David used that stamp collection to bribe a Nazi clerk to issue him an exit visa from Austria, or to persuade a U.S. consular officer that he was not a Nazi agent and to grant him a transit visa to America, it saved his life.

As much as I was proud to be named after the "Ghetto Wizard," I was deeply honored to be named after someone as gentle and selfless as Uncle Leon. I was also deeply enraged that someone as gentle and selfless as Uncle Leon was murdered simply because of his religion and ethnicity--a victim of hate and bigotry like my Tante Rosa and Cousin Norbert. To honor their lives and memory, it became very hard to remain indifferent to all forms of ethnic and religious bigotry and hate crimes.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about some of your earliest memories? I guess you would have been in West Orange by then, when you would probably remember things.

RB: Yes.

SI: What stands out in your memory about where you were living, your neighborhood, things like that?

RB: Sure. When we moved from Newark to West Orange, I was just two years old, so I really have no memories of those early years in Newark. West Orange is a different story. The town is located at the base of the first ridge of the Watchung Mountain range--about seven miles from Newark--and extends a few miles beyond it to the second ridge. I lived in the valley between the

two mountain ridges. At the time we moved there in early 1950, West Orange was mostly farmland. We moved into a new development of mostly Cape Cod homes, thanks to the G.I. Bill. The development was one of the first of its kind in West Orange. It neighbored with a grazing farm. One of my earliest memories is of sheep grazing on our front lawn!

Ethnically speaking, West Orange was about fifty percent Jewish, and the rest of the population pretty much split down the middle between those of Italian and Irish descent. Like mine, most of the Jewish parents of West Orange were second-generation immigrants whose parents had emigrated from Eastern Europe and settled in Jersey City and Newark. The Black, Hispanic, and Asian population was almost nonexistent. In my high school graduating class, the only non-Caucasian student was an Asian-born girl. She was an art major. Anti-Semitism was virtually nonexistent in our town.

When I learned in middle school that Jews in America made up less than five percent of the population, and was apprised in Hebrew School that anti-Semitism in America was still quite pervasive, both facts were difficult to comprehend, and not at all reflective of what life was like for me growing up in West Orange. Yes, there was Llewellyn Park, an upscale gated community of mansions in West Orange where the inventor Thomas Edison had lived, that excluded Jews. There were also a few country clubs that did the same, but none of our parents had the desire nor the money to live or play golf in those places, nor did I or any of my friends. However, my Jewish friends and I would periodically stake out behind a clump of trees on the golf course of one of the several restrictive country clubs in our neighborhood and make golf balls disappear when they landed on the green. In the winter, we would defy its "non-trespassing" golf-course signs and sled down the snow-packed hills, playing cat and mouse with the club guards and the local police. Those mischievous escapades were done mostly for fun, but there was also an element of defiance in those petty crimes and misdemeanors. On some level, they were protests against being cast as a member of an unwanted ethnic group. My father, the family enforcer of bad behavior, rarely if ever chastised or punished me except when I once got caught and hauled down to police headquarters. It bothered him more that I was dumb enough to get caught than what I did to get caught.

Speaking of crime, there was an event in our otherwise sleepy and somnolent town deeply etched in my memory. It was the shocking death of one of the most notorious citizens of our small town. His name was Abner "Longie" Zwillman. Born in the heart of Newark to Russian Jewish emigrants, and supporting his parents by selling household odds and ends off his pushcart on Prince Street, his street-smart entrepreneurial talents, muscular strength, and fearlessness in defending against anti-Semitic assaults by marauding Irish hoodlums led him down the long and windy road into bootlegging, which he then parlayed into such diversified businesses as illegal gambling, prostitution, labor racketeering, as well as a bunch of highly successful, legitimate businesses that gave him a panache of respectability. Extolled and decried as the "Al Capone of New Jersey" and "The man who invented organized crime" (the subtitle of his biography by the *Newark Star-Ledger* reporter Mark Stuart), Longie was a high-ranking member of the Luciano crime family, a close associate of its boss Frank Costello and "accountant" Meyer Lansky. He was also the inspiration and financier of a vigilante group called the Minutemen, who during the late 1930s waged street wars against the Nazi Bund and the fascistic Christian Front that bullied and harassed the Newark Jews of Weequahic and Clinton Hill. Several of their members made a

big miscalculation. They attacked the synagogue where Longie's mother worshiped. (The story of the Minutemen is chronicled by the historian and acquaintance of mine from West Orange Warren Grover in his acclaimed book *Nazis in Newark*.) Longie was, in short, a mixed bag.

On Friday, February 26, 1959, Longie was found dead in the basement of his English Tudor mansion in lower West Orange with an electric cord hung from a cellar rafter and bound tightly around his neck. As shocking as the news was to residents of our blissful town, it was especially shocking to my sheltered, eleven-year-old psyche. What made it so was that Longie and his wife Mary had been regular and very lucrative customers of my father's Jewish "Deli-on-Wheels." On Fridays during the 1950s, my father, at times with me as his dutiful helper, would deliver Sabbath dinner to the Zwillman household. The catered meal included the standard Sabbath menu: challah, chicken soup with matzah balls, roast chicken or brisket, kugel or roasted potatoes, and a medley of roasted vegetables, even the Shabbos candles. Most of the time, the maid would receive the bountiful delivery. However, on occasion, Longie's wife Mary would come to the door and in a few instances Longie himself. His death, and the gruesome way it happened, came as a shock to me. How could such a powerful and wealthy man, and a Jew who honored the Sabbath with my father's homemade kosher meals, take his own life? Suicide, as I learned in Hebrew School, was a grave violation of one of the countless amendments to the Ten Commandments. Longie may have evaded taxes, engaged in bootlegging, and run the numbers racket in Newark, but to me those activities, much like my escapades on the country club golf course, were run-of-the-mill, small-time crimes and misdemeanors that we all engaged in now and then. But a Jew taking his own life, especially one who honored the Sabbath and appeared to have everything going for him--a beautiful wife and an estate to kill for? Suicide seemed highly improbable.

That was my take and, as far as I was concerned, well-substantiated by my Uncle Sammy from the Bronx, who had good reason to believe, based on a highly reliable source, that Longie had been rubbed out by the Genovese crime family. As the inside story went, Longie, who was under investigation for tax fraud and jury tampering, copped a plea deal with the Feds and was prepared to spill the beans on the Genovese crime family that was up to its eyeballs in the heroin trade, a lucrative enterprise that Longie wanted nothing to do with. My Uncle Sammy's reliable source was his nephew Syd Rosenthal who lived in Great Neck, Long Island. Syd was an associate of the Luciano crime family. He ran "rolling crap games" in New York City for Meyer Lansky. They were called "rolling crap games" because they had to roll up the crap game and dash to another secretive location when word got back to them from well-paid informants in the NYPD that their latest venue had come to its attention. In any case, my Uncle Sammy, who was a great storyteller, shared with my family the "real story" behind Longie's cellar hanging, and I bought it lock, stock and barrel. What made it especially convincing was that a few years later, nephew Syd's police informants were asleep at the wheel and he was taken into police custody and booked by the NYPD--his face appearing on the front page of one of the New York dailies. I don't recall which one. It was either the *New York Post* or *Daily News*. In any case, I recognized his face, as I had met him several times at cousin club New Year's Eve parties at his home in Great Neck, where he would roll out several slot machines that he rigged for us kids so we'd start the new year with wads of quarters to deposit in our savings account.

Not long after his run-in with the authorities, nephew Syd, who was then in his forties and quite vigorous and fit, died of a "massive heart attack." Of course, despite having not a shred of evidence, my Uncle Sammy convinced me that his nephew, like Longie, had also been rubbed out by the Genovese crime syndicate because he too was also willing to expose in all its details its ever-proliferating trafficking in heroin. It was one thing to engage in illicit gambling and even tax fraud, but trafficking in heroin was something else. Like suicide, it was a grave violation of one of the many amendments to the Ten Commandments, and not an enterprise that Jews engaged in, even Jewish mobsters. So, for me, Longie became a renegade hero who was about to expose the dark underside of the mob's criminal activities. When I learned much later in life that Longie took on the Nazis and fascists of Newark, that only elevated my view of him, despite his all-too-many flaws.

There was one more inventor from West Orange besides the one who invented organized crime. His name was Thomas Edison. He lived in Llewelyn Park in the 1920s when the gated community excluded Jews. Edison was a genius who invented the light bulb, among countless other inventions. He also palled around with Henry Ford, the automaker who fully embraced and popularized the conspiratorial anti-Semitic tract *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. When I am asked which of my hometown inventors I admire more, the eleven-year-old in me pleads the fifth!

Truth be told, it was conclusively determined by the Essex County medical examiner at the time that the real perpetrator of the crime-of-the-century in West Orange was Longie himself. Presumably, he was suffering from depression for being under investigation for tax evasion and jury tampering, and for knowing that he would likely spend the rest of his living days in the can instead of his English Tudor mansion. [Editor's Note: Abner "Longie" Zwillman was a Jewish-American mafia member who got his start during Prohibition as a bootlegger in Newark. He was found dead by hanging on February 26, 1959 in his home in West Orange. The death was ruled a suicide, but suspicions have always remained about mob involvement.]

Which brings me to another sudden and inexplicable death four-plus years later that still sears in my memory--an event that was life-shaping for a fifteen-year-old, as I suspect it was for my entire cohort of baby boomers. At about two PM on November 22, 1963, the principal of our high school announced over the public address system that President Kennedy had been shot and pronounced dead. My fellow tenth graders and I, who were in study hall in the school cafeteria, sat in shocking, numbing, and silent disbelief. We were told that the remaining hour of school was cancelled and advised to go home to be with our families. My parents both worked, and my brother was in Newark on his way home from class at Rutgers, so when I arrived there was no one to console me. Rather than turning on the television and face the painful reality that my youthful president was no more, like many of friends on my block, I changed into play clothes, and joined them on the street in front of my house. For three straight hours, we played endless games of touch football. Not once was a word uttered about what was the most tragic and traumatic public event in our lifetimes. In retrospect, I'd like to think that running ourselves ragged tossing and catching that leather-bound Wilson football was our only way of honoring and memorializing our beloved, fallen president whose recreational release was playing touch football at the family compound in Hyannis Port. More likely, we played hard and tirelessly to keep at bay the unbearable pain of our president's death.

I would have played into the wee hours of the night under the streetlamp in front of my house. However, at about six PM, my mother, soon after arriving home from work, called me over and announced that we were going to shul for the Friday evening Sabbath service at B'nai Abraham in Newark. Why in Newark, I asked. "To hear Rabbi Prinz give a sermon on our beloved President Kennedy," replied my mother. I balked. My synagogue was in West Orange, a stone's throw from home, which I calculated would give me another hour or so to play ball and escape the painful reality of the president's death. I had no interest in listening to a rabbi sermonize about what I did not want to be reminded of and by one who I knew little if anything about other than that my refugee cousins from Nutley had often attended what they called his Friday night lectures. "He's a wise and learned man and he knew President Kennedy and he'll comfort you," my mother went on, trying to convince me to join the family in the seven-mile trek to Newark. I dug in my heels. "And he's the President of the American Jewish Congress," she informed me, as if that would impress and move me. Feeling more comforted by clutching the leather-bound football as if it were a stuffed teddy bear, I balked again, until my father, the family enforcer, arrived home and commanded me to get the hell in the house and dress for shul. And so, I begrudgingly went to hear Rabbi Prinz's Friday evening Sabbath sermon on the assassination of the 35th President of the United States.

I recall little if anything about that Friday evening Sabbath service except being awed by the entire experience--awed by the physical awesomeness of B'nai Abraham, and most of all by the entire service, including Rabbi Prinz's sermon, an understandably solemn one, but one that would give me the emotional strength to begin to face the tragedy of such an irrational loss. It was abundantly clear to me that Rabbi Prinz was personally shaken by the president's death. It was apparent that he had placed a great deal of hope for the future of our nation and mankind on his young shoulders. And his death was a personal and very painful one. Unlike me, he clearly had the courage and strength to face it and to share his pain with his congregants. His very mournful sermon was genuinely and emotionally authentic.

Years later, I was reminded by Rabbi Prinz's son Jonathan, himself a rabbi, and whom I had come to know later in life, that he had opened the service by reciting from the bible King David's lament for his best friend Jonathan, who had just been slain in battle on the mountains of Gilboa in Israel by the Philistines. He too was in the prime of his youth. The dirge begins with the lines, "A gazelle lies slain on your heights, Israel. How the mighty have fallen!" I'm not sure I fully appreciated the allusion at the time when I listened to Jonathan recite King David's lament that Dallas was the Mountains of Gilboa, and the gazelle was my beloved president who, despite suffering from Addison's disease, was still able to run yardage as swift as a gazelle playing touch football at the family compound in Hyannis Port until senselessly and mercilessly gunned down in the prime of youth.

That evening service was life-shaping. It inspired me to learn more about this wise and charismatic rabbi who preferred to be addressed as a doctor. I learned from my refugee cousins that as the head rabbi of the Jewish community in Berlin, the young Prinz had courageously spoken out against Nazi persecution, despite repeated arrests and threats to his life. I learned that from his pulpit in Berlin, Prinz urged Jews to emigrate before it was too late. Personally, he had no choice in the matter. In 1937, he was expelled. I learned that for his first two years as a

refugee in America, he went on lecture tours to create awareness of the gravity of the Nazi threat to world Jewry, democracy, and peace. I learned that in 1960, when he was president of the American Jewish Congress, he and forty of its officers and members picketed a Fifth Avenue Woolworth store to protest lunch-counter segregation in the South. I learned what moved him to become one of the early and foremost champions of the Civil Rights Movement. It was as he eloquently stated when picketing Woolworth that, "As Jews we are animated by our prophetic tradition which asserts that we are all the creatures of one God." I learned that he was a good friend of Martin Luther King, Jr., who had personally asked him to speak immediately before the reverend delivered his *I have a Dream* speech at the March for Jobs and Freedom in August of 1963. I learned from reading that speech he delivered with his back to the Lincoln Memorial that when he was the rabbi of the Jewish community in Berlin under the reign of Nazism, he too learned many things, the most important one being that more disgraceful, shameful, and tragic than acts of bigotry and hate is the silence in the face of it. And when I read his urgent pleading that Americans not become a nation of silent onlookers like so many of the German citizens who had cowered in the face of hate, brutality and mass murder, I was deeply moved and inspired. [Editor's Note: President John F. Kennedy (JFK) served as the 35th president of the United States from 1961 until his assassination on November 22, 1963 in Dallas, Texas. Rabbi Joachim Prinz (1902-1988) was a German-American rabbi who was expelled from Nazi Germany in 1937 for his outspoken criticism of the Nazis. He settled in Newark, where he served as rabbi of Temple B'Nai Abraham, and became active in Zionism and the Civil Rights Movement. On August 28, 1963, at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in Washington, D.C., Prinz spoke before Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech. Prinz succeeded gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, who performed a spiritual.]

A year later, in the fall of 1964, I joined the Congress of Racial Equality, mostly tutoring Black youth on weekends at its office in downtown Newark. In June of 1965, upon graduation, I submitted a letter-to-the-editor to the *Rambler*--my high school newspaper--with the parting words to my fellow classmates that, "Unless the student body awakens to its moral responsibilities, contributions to the Civil Rights Movement--regardless of the size of the donation--will be meaningless. Only the genuine desire of the people to eradicate this blemish from our democratic system can and hopefully will be the ultimate means of achieving equality." I must have been channeling Rabbi Prinz, my new local hero, who by then had long displaced Longie Zwillman, who happened to be a congregant of B'nai Abraham, and at whose funeral at the B'nai Abraham Cemetery in Union Rabbi Prinz officiated. I believed at the time that I was also honoring the memory of my namesakes who were victims of hate and bigotry run amok, and of the all-too-many silent bystanders. That letter-to-the-editor, controversial at the time, was only published because the editor of the school newspaper shared my views. His name was Peter Kaminsky, who went on to Princeton and became an active member of Students for a Democratic Society. He also became managing editor of the *National Lampoon* and a creator and executive producer of the Kennedy Center Mark Twain Prize for American Humor, as well as the Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song on PBS. Peter and I recently reminisced about those early years.

Speaking of heroes, there were two more teenage heroes I would be remiss not to mention. One was my cousin Allie Stolz. Allie's paternal grandfather and my maternal great grandmother were siblings who grew up in a small village in Galicia. Like my more distant cousin-by-marriage

Benny Leonard, Allie was a lightweight boxer and a great one at that. He was indisputably the greatest boxer to come out of Newark, when the city was home to a handful of always-packed boxing arenas during the golden age of boxing. Allie was also, at least in my biased eyes, the third greatest Jewish lightweight boxer of his generation after Benny Leonard and Barney Ross, both of whom consecutively dominated the lightweight boxing class in the 1920s and '30s, winning one after another title championship. Both mentored Allie and encouraged him to follow in their footsteps. And Allie would have done so had he played ball with the mob--specifically with Frankie Carbo, who was known as the "shadow commissioner of boxing," and who ran the numbers racket for the Lucchese crime family. Allie chose not to do so, turning down an offer by Carbo to be his manager in exchange for being guaranteed a title championship ring. Allie's refusal to play ball with the mob occurred several months before his title fight at Madison Square Garden in May of 1942--a fight which the officiating referee, and most of the sports writers who covered it, strongly believed Allie had decisively won, but which he "officially" lost because the two presiding judges, who "coincidentally" had identical scores for each of the fifteen rounds, were rumored to have been paid two hundred dollars each by Carbo to vote in favor of his opponent. [Editor's Note: On May 15, 1942, Allie Stolz lost a highly disputed lightweight championship bout to Sammy Angott at Madison Square Garden.]

What made Allie a hero to me was that he stood up to the mob at the expense of his life-long dream of becoming the lightweight boxing champion of the world. I've written about that title fight in "The Long Damn Summer of '42." Like the Genovese crime family, the Lucchese crime family also trafficked heavily in heroin, or what Martin Luther King referred to as the scourge of the Black ghetto. Newark was one of its biggest and most lucrative markets and the consequences for its Black population were devastating and to this day not fully appreciated.

My other sports-related teenage hero (besides Mickey Mantle, who inspired me to become a not-so-bad switch hitter and drag bunter in high school) was Les Fein. Les was the legendary basketball coach of Weequahic High School from 1955 to 1967. During those twelve years, he coached the basketball team to three impressive Group IV State Championships--the first in the 1961-'62 season and the last two in the 1965-'66 and 1966-'67 seasons. In that final season, the team ran up a perfect 26-0 record and was ranked number one in the nation. All this is well-known, at least among those of us who grew up in Essex County during those years.

Less well known is that during most of those years Les moonlighted during the summer months as general manager of a swim club and day camp called Mountain Crest. It was so named because it sat atop the first ridge of the Watchung Mountain Range. It was a summer getaway for mostly Jews of modest means from Newark, Jersey City, Union, and the suburbs of Essex County. My family belonged to Mountain Crest, and I went there for summer camp. The summer of 1962 was my last year at Mountain Crest. It was also the summer I landed the most coveted paying job. It was running the "Shack." The shack was a small cinderblock structure that housed the swim club and day camp's athletic equipment--basketballs, bats, softballs, volley balls, handballs, paddles for ping pong and paddle ball, shuffle board cues and pucks, horseshoes, and more. I had the keys to the summer treasure chest! That was the summer I really got to know Les. He was proud of the shack and made sure there was a generous budget to keep the stock of athletic equipment fresh and plentiful.

That was also the summer that Les introduced what for want of a better name I called the "Newark Games." During a handful of Saturdays over the course of the summer, Les would invite the crème-de-la crème of Newark's best current and former basketball players--a number of whom went on to play college ball--to compete against each other in the freshly-paved outdoor basketball court a short distance from the shack. Having just won the prestigious Group IV state championship for Weequahic High, Lou had cache. Every one of those players--even those from South Side [now Malcolm X Shabazz High School] and Central high schools that were bitter, arch-rivals of Weequahic High--happily accepted the invitation to play. They came because they had incredible admiration for Les as a coach and human being.

There was one player that mesmerized me, my fellow campers and our fathers, who had turned their foldable beach chairs into front-row court-side seats to watch the "Newark Games." His name was Lonnie Wright. Besides being awarded first team all-state honors in basketball, he was, as I recall, an All-American in several sports, including football. On the basketball court, Lonnie was "Air Jordan" before there was Michael Jordan and "Magic Johnson" before there was Earvin Johnson, Jr. There was nothing more thrilling than watching him spring into the air to sink a distant jump shot over players a half-foot taller than him, or effortlessly vault into the air from half-way out to foul line to dunk a layup.

After that first debut game, Les invited all the players to take a dip in the Olympic swimming pool to cool off. Lonnie, like most of the players that Les invited to play in the Newark games, was Black. Inviting them to play ball was one thing, but to take a swim in the all-white members pool was another. A handful of women who had cabanas adjacent to the pool were not especially happy about sharing the pool with "Negroes" and unleashed a very nasty and ugly protest. Les would have none of it. He publicly chastised them, telling them that as Jews who had forever been victims of bigotry and prejudice, they should be ashamed of themselves. At Les' insistence, Lonnie and Chris and the dozen or more of Newark's greatest Black athletes jumped into the Olympic pool and swam to their delight. The Newark Games and the post-invitation to swim continued for the rest of the summer without a peep from the cabana ladies.

Many years later, I ran into Les. It was August of 2004. He, along with my cousin Allie, Syd Dorfman (the great sportswriter for the *Newark Star-Ledger*) and Seymour "Swede" Masin (the legendary Weequahic High School athlete after whom Philip Roth modeled his fictional character "The Swede" in his Pulitzer-Prize winning novel *American Pastoral*), were being inducted in the newly-established New Jersey Jewish Hall of Fame. I congratulated Les on his induction and let him know that, in my eyes, he was the second greatest Jewish civil rights champion in New Jersey history. He was befuddled until I refreshed his memory of how he courageously stood up against the "cabana ladies" and integrated the Olympic pool at Mountain Crest. He thanked me for sharing that memory and was greatly honored by it. As Les started to move on to the next person at the event, he hesitated and turned back to me with a mischievous grin, "Bobby, you know how much I hate coming in second. So, who beat me?" I answered, "Your one-time rabbi, Rabbi Prinz." Les was also a congregant of B'nai Abraham and, like Longie, he had also been a customer of my father's Jewish deli on wheels in the 1950s. "Well, that's not fair--nobody can beat Rabbi Prinz, not even me! He has God on his side," he protested.

There was one more life-shaping event in my teenage years that still vividly lives with me. Although quite enraging at the time, I find the event to be quite amusing when I now look back at it. It happened just after I graduated from high school, and a few months before I began my freshman year at Rutgers in New Brunswick. My older brother and I shared a cramped upstairs bedroom in our quite modest Cape Cod home. Sometime in the late '50s or early '60s, my father added a small dormer addition to the bedroom to make space for a home study for me and my brother. Along two short walls at right angles to each other were two connected desks my father built to my brother's specifications. His was the longer one with a window view. Mine was the far shorter one that faced a wall from which hung a tiny bulletin board. On another, longer wall, my father built two sets of floor-to-ceiling recessed bookcases, also to my brother's exact specifications--the much wider one designated for my brother and the far narrower one for me.

My brother's justification for his more spacious accommodations was that he was the serious student and I was, in his words, a "suburban philistine." There was a degree of justification for the unequal division of the real estate of the study. His intellectual acumen and breadth of knowledge were astonishing, and his library collection staggering in numbers, range of topics, scholarliness, and contemporary relevance. His library encompassed works across every imaginable field: ancient history, modern and contemporary history, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, science, drama, art, literature, and current affairs. One entire shelf was almost entirely lined with Will Durant's multi-volume *Story of Western Civilization*. And there were the countless subscriptions: *The Saturday Review*, *The New Republic*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The American Scholar*, *Daedalus*, *Commentary*, *The New Yorker*, *I.F. Stone's Weekly*, and on and on. They quickly occupied every square inch of his bookshelves, and like an imperial army, they steadily colonized mine, which were thinly and meagerly populated by the Encyclopedia Britannica, a Webster's Dictionary (so I could look up the definition of words like philistine), a Roget's Thesaurus, a handful of adventure and sports books gifted to me over the years as birthday presents, as well as several dozen baseball and bowling trophies, including one for winning the prized decathlon at summer camp three years earlier, and another for being the MVP of our high school baseball team. The gold-plated trophies took up most of the space of my bookshelves. However, my brother was firmly of the opinion that sports trophies should not be displayed in bookcases. [Editor's Note: *The Story of Civilization* is an eleven-volume book series about Western civilization by Will and Ariel Durant.]

It was June 1965, a week or so after high school. I was working as a lifeguard at a high-rise luxury apartment building in East Orange. When I arrived home one early evening, my jaw dropped when I made my way into the bedroom. It was as if Ajax's White Tornado and Proctor and Gamble's Mr. Clean had teamed up and executed a clean sweep of every item and object on my desk, bulletin board, and ever-shrinking section of my allotted half of the recessed bookshelves. Everything in the middle of my desk had been removed, except a note conspicuously clipped to a magazine and prominently displayed. I could instantly tell it had been written by my brother. The lettering on the yellow, legal-sized slip of paper was meticulously penned in his rigid and erect style of font, and inked with a finely-edged fountain pen that was his signature handwriting implement. The note, which my mother had saved, and which I recently discovered in going through her files after her death in 2014, began as follows:

A desk is an area of intellectual stimulation, not a shit heap. As yours has persistently been the latter, this morning I took liberty to make it the former:

I. I cleaned your bulletin board.

II. I cleaned your desk.

III. I stuffed all papers in your drawers (for you to throw out).

IV. I put the high school laurels in the attic trophy box (you're no longer a kid; you're a college man).

The desk is now set for serious reading and thinking: sit down and get intellectually stimulated.

Yes, he had done all those things. The news clippings from local and regional papers of my feats on the ballfield and athletic award certificates were all removed from my bulletin board. The clutter of paper on my desk--homework assignments, drafts of final papers, scraps of study notes for my final exams, and news clippings waiting to make their appearance on my bulletin board--were stuffed so tightly in my desk drawer that it nearly took a crowbar to open. And to accommodate my brother's burgeoning collection of high-brow, hardback books, my bookshelves were vacated of every one of my prized-sports trophies.

Then came the assignment.

"I: Read article beginning pg. 60 in *The New Yorker* ("The Ex-Untouchables" by Harold Isaacs).

II: Write the following essay

A: On the conditions of the Untouchables in the past, present, and prospects for the future.

B. Comparing the Untouchables with the American Negro before and after emancipation.

(At least three sides in length)"

[Editor's Note: "The Ex-Untouchables" by Harold Isaacs was published in *The New Yorker* on December 19, 1964.]

My first instinct was to heave his hundreds of books and neatly stacked piles of magazines out the dormer window, which conveniently overlooked a concrete platform that housed the family refuse bins. However, fear got the better of me and I wisely decided otherwise. My fear was that I would never get past my first year at Rutgers, even though I had consistently made the honor roll in high school, was in the top ten percent of my class, had received early acceptance at Rutgers, and, just weeks before, had gotten a laudatory "A" grade on a twenty-eight-page paper on the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. What fanned the flames of my fear was that during my junior year in high school, I sat at a lunch table with all seniors, most of whom were quite bright and went on to Rutgers. Half of them never made it past their freshman year. So, that fear of following in the footsteps of my former high school lunchmates and Rutgers flunkouts got exponentially compounded by the self-doubts fueled by my brother's lashing note. I was, as far as I was concerned, a doomed college student, and if I failed to get academically serious and smarten-up, I would end up rehabilitating my father's Jewish deli-on-wheels business, which he had long ago ditched for a more remunerative and less grueling job as a real estate property manager.

After my parents made him apologize and retrieve my trophies from the unfinished attic, I dutifully carried out the assignment, retrieving from my brother's library the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal's 1944 book *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and American Democracy*, the Fortune editor Charles Silverman's 1964 book *Crisis in Black and White*, as well as other research sources, including C. Van Woodward's *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, as well as drawing on my insights and observations from my time working in CORE's Newark office as a math tutor.

SI: Had he been in CORE?

RB: My brother was either a member of CORE or a "fellow traveler." It was not unusual at that time for a Jew from the suburbs to be a member of CORE, at least in Newark. More than half its members were Jews from the suburbs of Essex County, who were a major source of funds for the organization. I believe my brother was also a tutor in their Newark office, in his case most likely in history, his major at Rutgers. In fact, I'm almost certain that it was my brother who encouraged if not cajoled me into tutoring at CORE's Newark office.

My brother was very outspoken on the issues of the day--racial inequality, the "dark forces" behind the Kennedy assassination, the invasion of the Dominican Republic, and the creeping escalation of our involvement in Vietnam. I vividly recall him inviting his college friends to our home in West Orange--both white and Black--where they would sit in our tiny living room playing protest folk music by Pete Seeger, Phil Ochs, the early Bob Dylan, and Tom Lehrer, among others, and have weighty conversations about politics and the arts that soared way over my head. They talked a lot about the Kennedy assassination, all firmly believing that Lee Harvey Oswald was just a "fall guy" and that larger, sinister forces were behind the president's murder. They only disputed whether it was the CIA, the Soviet Union, LBJ, Jimmy Hoffa or the mob. I was convinced that the president was killed on orders from one of the major crime families, given my own predisposition to believe that Longie, nephew Syd and, in a less fatal way, Cousin Allie were all its victims. I rarely joined in the living room debates, generally rushing past them to hit the neighborhood playfields, but now and then I would sit in the peanut gallery and audit them.

I did accompany them to the Manhattan Center in New York for what turned out to be a very heated debate between Mark Lane and Melvin Belli about the Kennedy assassination. Of course, we all sided with Mark Lane, who was convinced that Oswald could not have possibly done that foul deed in Dallas by himself. My brother's friends were all left-liberal, somewhat beat, a tidbit eccentric and deeply intellectual. One was a Black poet from Newark. His name escapes me. He was not Leroy Jones, who name-changed to Amiri Baraka. One of my brother's closest friends, a regular at the living room gatherings, was Larry Lorre, a nephew of the famed Jewish actor Peter Lorre, who fled Nazi Germany in the early 1930s and starred in such movies as *Casablanca*, *The Maltese Falcon*, and dozens more. I remember how upsetting it was for Larry, and all my brother's friends, when his Uncle Peter died. It was March of 1964. He was only fifty-nine years old. [Editor's Note: Mark Lane was an attorney and author whose 1966 book *Rush to Judgment* refuted the Warren Commission's finding that Lee Harvey Oswald was John F. Kennedy's lone assassin. Attorney Melvin Belli represented Jack Ruby, who shot Oswald while he was being transferred to the county jail two days following the president's assassination.]

There was one subject that caught my rapt attention and concentrated the mind. It was the threat of thermonuclear war--not surprising in the aftermath of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. The big living room debate was not just about how great the threat was, the consensus being that it was just a matter of time before the outbreak of thermonuclear Armageddon. The debate was about the ethics and morality of fallout shelters. That debate was triggered by the fact that in the late 1950s, my parents were snookered into installing one in the cellar basement. Why they agreed to it at my mother's insistence (my father not being a big fan of it, since it would take out a big chunk of his workshop space) was because she wanted to do everything within her power to protect her children. The heated discussion among my brother's friends was over what one does in the event of thermonuclear war when a neighbor knocks on the triple-locked door to the fallout shelter and wants to shelter he and his family from the radioactive storm. The only answer agreed upon was to let in as many as physically possible, which maybe was two or three at most.

SI: Let me see if Katherine or Louis have any questions about this early period. Katherine, do you want to go ahead?

KS: I was curious about your comment about how you had a specific reason for why you moved to West Orange, and I was interested in hearing about the story of your move from Newark to West Orange.

RB: We moved in the fall of 1949. There were a myriad of reasons. I have mentioned the aborted burglary that occurred the year before when my mother received five stitches. I don't know how much that attack factored into the decision, but I wouldn't rule it out. We also shared the three-story house with my widowed grandmother, as well aunt and uncle. My grandmother passed away months after the burglary from ovarian cancer, and soon after that, my aunt and uncle moved away after having sold the sandwich shop.

There was another factor. My father opened a Jewish delicatessen on Bloomfield Avenue in the suburb of Verona, a town adjacent to West Orange. I suspect my father wanted to live close to the deli. Unfortunately, he made a poor decision in store location, as Verona was home to mostly Italians and to very few Jews. The name of the town should have been a clue. Had he opened the deli in West Orange, which would soon become heavily populated by Jews, he wouldn't have had to shutter the Verona store and open his Jewish deli-on-wheels to serve the ever-growing Jewish populations of Livingston, South Orange, and West Orange.

There was also the phenomenon of "white flight" from Newark, but I do not believe that got under way until the mid-to-late 1950s, and not in earnest until the early 1960s, when red lining and blockbusting real estate practices became common practice, and plans were underway for the construction of Route 78 that would drive an arterial stake through the heart of Weequahic, eviscerating the cohesive neighborhood. I do not believe that "white flight" was a consideration in my parent's decision to migrate to the suburbs. Was there a concern about crime, especially after the attempted burglary? Quite possibly. However, crime was not much of an issue in the late 1940s in Weequahic. To the best of my knowledge, the aborted burglary was a one-off

event. [Editor's Note: Governor Richard Hughes proposed the plan to build Interstate-78 through the City of Newark in 1963.]

SI: Louis, did you have any questions?

LB: Yes. You just mentioned, when talking about trophies, the decathlon trophy that you won at summer camp. I was just wondering if you would like to talk about that a little more.

RB: Sure. I was very proud of that trophy. I won it during the summer of 1962 at Mountain Crest--the same summer the "Newark Games" were introduced by Les Fein. The decathlon was the finale of summer camp, and it was a big event--big for the summer campers, big for their parents and big for Les Fein, who was the event's inspiration. The funny thing about it was that until the tenth event, Les's son Kenny and I were tied neck-and-neck for the lead. The tenth and final competition was the foul shooting contest at the very basketball court where the Newark Games were played. Whoever made the most of ten shots in that contest won the decathlon. Kenny and I were tied until the tenth foul shot. He went first and missed. I took a deep breath and made a wish that I would make the shot for my cousin Allie who lost that title fight he deserved to win. So, that decathlon was quite dear to me. Less so to my brother who thought the gold-plated trophy deserved to be stored in our unfinished attic.

Sadly, when a few years later my parents moved to an apartment in the neighboring community of Verona, they asked me what I wanted to do with my trophies. Since I was up to my eyeballs in school work and extracurricular political activities and had no room for them, including the decathlon trophy, I told my parents to give them away, which they did, along with my priceless baseball card collection that today is probably worth more than my home in Guilford, Connecticut. By then, I must have fully internalized my brother's low valuation of those teenage heirlooms--even the decathlon.

SI: Oh, wow.

RB: I suspect that baseball collection is now worth half a million dollars. [laughter] In retrospect, I have more regrets about having given away the monetarily worthless gold-plated decathlon.

SI: Going back to high school and when you got involved in CORE, what year was that? Were you a junior or a senior?

RB: I joined CORE in the fall of 1964. It was the beginning of my senior year in high school. It was before CORE had become more Black power-oriented and less welcoming of "white liberals." I believe James Farmer was the national director of CORE at the time, and Bob Curvin the head of the Newark chapter. [Editor's Note: James Farmer (1920-1999) was a civil rights activist and founder of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Robert Curvin (1934-2015) was an author, activist, scholar, and administrator who served as the national vice chair and Newark chapter head of CORE. He graduated in 1960 from the Rutgers Newark College of Arts and Sciences and earned his Master's of Social Work in 1967 at Rutgers. He subsequently

earned his Ph.D. in politics at Princeton University. Curvin served as a senior policy fellow at Rutgers' Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy.]

SI: Yes, yes.

RB: My involvement with CORE in Newark ended when I went off to college.

SI: What kind of activities would you do with CORE?

RB: Mostly teaching math to middle schoolers. I excelled in math and believed learning math was indispensable for middle schoolers. My parents were very supportive of my tutoring and of the Civil Rights Movement in general. However, they were not politically active. Both worked full time just trying to make ends meet. They could not afford to send my brother away to college, and I had to juggle a bunch of year-round and summer jobs, such as delivering newspapers, shoveling driveways, mowing lawns, and being a lifeguard, if I hoped to do so. Which I was able to do since room and board at Rutgers was a pittance by today's standards, even adjusting for inflation.

SI: You mentioned your parents tried to stay neutral in these kinds of debates, but did they talk about things like the Civil Rights Movement in this early part of the '60s or other issues?

RB: Not that much. My father was not at all involved in the Civil Rights Movement. However, he had a hard time tolerating bigotry and refused to tolerate it when personally encountered. Metaphorically speaking, my dad was colorblind. I think he acquired that blindness in World War II when he fought alongside soldiers of color with whom he established strong human bonds. When he became a property manager, he judged and treated all those he managed--Blacks, Irish, Italians, and Jews--purely on merit. None received special favors, nor were penalized due to their race, religion, or ethnicity. If they worked hard and gave it their all, he rewarded them with raises and promotions no matter their background. If they were laggards, he let them know it in no uncertain terms. And if they displayed bigotry toward fellow employees, he came down hard on them.

There was one incident that captures my father's abhorrence of racism. One of the properties he managed was called the Executive House. It was a new luxury apartment building on Prospect Street in East Orange near what at the time was called Upsala College. It was around 1965. He hired a Black assistant superintendent. The affluent, all-white residents were not at all pleased with his decision. My father, in his typically firm and laconic style, bluntly told them, "I don't care if you like him or not. He's qualified, so live with it."

My mother was much the same way, though she had a deeper awareness and understanding of the depth of bigotry and the more subtle and less subtle ways it impacted Black people. She was also more supportive of the Civil Rights movement, if not actively so, because of her own experience with bigotry in her youth and its deadly consequences for the European wing of her family. My mother had great admiration for Rabbi Prinz and championed his work on behalf of the Civil Rights Movement. If a neighbor made a prejudicial or racial slur, she would directly call the person out, just like my father. Both were great role models in that respect.

SI: As you were getting up to the end of high school and looking at colleges, what was your search process, your decision process, in where you wanted to go?

RB: There were two universities in my sights. One was the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). I'm not sure why I was drawn to MIT. Perhaps it was because I excelled in mathematics and hoped to become the next Albert Einstein, or maybe it was my guidance counselor Dr. Rubinstein who told me that and who confidently believed I would have a good shot of being admitted to MIT due to my high SAT score in math. And then there was Rutgers. I was more inclined towards Rutgers for a host of reasons. It was local, inexpensive, had a great reputation, and my high school baseball coach had put in a good word for me with Rutgers baseball coaches Bolger and Szabo, with whom he was on a first name basis. I really wanted to play college ball and had impressive enough stats to have a decent shot at making the JV team. There was one more reason. My brother strongly urged me to go to Rutgers and major in history. He majored in history at Rutgers in Newark and was very familiar with the history department in New Brunswick.

As my brother's area of interest in American history was the antebellum, Civil War and Reconstruction periods, he was very familiar with Rutgers historian Eugene Genovese--and became more so after he announced at an April 1965 teach-in at Rutgers that he welcomed a Vietcong victory. My brother was very much against the Vietnam War, which was beginning to escalate in the months leading up to that April teach-in. Though Genovese's words were taken out of context, the Republican candidate for governor Wayne Dumont used them to launch his firebrand campaign to "Rid Rutgers of Reds." It was McCarthyism déjà vu, and my brother thought I should fight the infringement on academic freedom where it was directly under attack, which was at Rutgers in New Brunswick. He also heard great things about Warren Susman, a professor of intellectual history in the Rutgers-New Brunswick history department. Though fighting McCarthyism at Rutgers did not weigh heavily in my decision, it's difficult to underestimate my brother's powers of persuasion. So, despite Dr. Rubinstein's insistence that I apply to MIT, I chose instead to apply for early acceptance at Rutgers. [Editor's Note: On April 23, 1965, at a teach-in at Scott Hall dedicated to discussing U.S. foreign policy in Vietnam, Eugene Genovese declared, "Those of you who know me know that I am a Marxist and a Socialist. Therefore, unlike most of my distinguished colleagues here this morning, I do not fear or regret the impending Viet Cong victory in Vietnam. I welcome it." Amidst the firestorm of controversy that ensued, Rutgers President Mason Gross, with the support of the faculty, resisted public pressure to dismiss Genovese and staunchly defended the principle of academic freedom. Genovese left Rutgers in 1967 and taught at Sir George Williams University until 1969 and thereafter at the University of Rochester. Warren Susman served as a professor of history at Rutgers from 1960 until his sudden death in 1985.]

After I completed my brother's college prep assignment comparing the life of Black Americans after emancipation to that of India's Untouchables after the formal dissolution of the caste system, I had yet another assignment to take on during the summer after my high school graduation. Rutgers had assigned a handful of suggested readings for freshman orientation week. The books were intellectually daunting. They were certainly not light readings one would take to the beach. As I recall, they included *Brighter than a Thousand Suns* by Robert Jungk, a

book about the moral scruples of the scientist who built the atomic bomb; *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* by Jane Jacobs, a sweeping indictment of urban planning and renewal policies that sired those ubiquitous high-rise "vertical ghetto" housing projects and ribbons of elevated freeways that produced lifeless and broken-up neighborhoods like Newark and the South Bronx; *Darwin's Century* by Loren Eiseley, an history of evolutionary thought and the role of agency in evolution (Eiseley was a guest speaker at freshman orientation); C.P. Snow's essay *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* about the great chasm between the arts and sciences and how to bridge the gap. There may have been one or two others.

I queried my fellow classmate and history major Doug Greenberg about the names of the other assigned summer readings. Doug, who would become an executive director of the Shoah Foundation at the University of Southern California and later an executive dean and professor of history at Rutgers, recalled that *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and *Civilization and its Discontents* by Sigmund Freud were among the assigned books. I also had a vague recollection that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* by Hannah Arendt had been assigned, though it may well have been a book my brother encouraged me to read after seeing the film *The Pawnbroker* the month before I went off to Rutgers. [Editor's Note: Douglas Greenberg served as the Executive Dean of the Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences from 2008 to 2012. He graduated from Rutgers College in 1969 and received his Ph.D. in history from Cornell in 1974.]

In any case, it was quite the summer of heavyweight readings. They were certainly mind-stretching and got me to begin to ponder and wrestle with such daunting philosophical, existential and life issues as the role of agency and volition in evolution; whether Eros the life instinct would triumph over the death instinct; and whether I should major in the arts or the sciences, or both! Jacob's book also provided a framework for helping me begin to make sense of the beleaguered plight of Newark and its spiraling decline. In reflecting on prep books for freshman orientation, Doug quipped that we devoured more of the "great books" that summer than students nowadays read in four years of college.

By the end of that intellectual feast of a summer, even considering my brother's high-bar standards, I qualified as a "college man." Still, when my parents dropped me off at Rutgers in early September in front of Clothier Hall--that relatively new, high-rise, impersonal dorm facility that Jane Jacobs would have bemoaned--I still had serious doubts that I would make it past my first year, if not first semester.

SI: Did you go in thinking that you were going to study history, or did you have something else in mind for what you wanted to do?

RB: Under the weight of my brother's influence, I was leaning heavily in the direction of majoring in history. Mathematics was still a consideration, as I was quite proficient in it and much more confident in mastering it than history. So, I welcomed taking "Calculus 101" with its four credits. And in acing it, I found calculus to be of great utilitarian value. It not only helped me to stay above water academically, but also helped me to make the dean's list my first semester.

Of course, my minor would soon be campus politics. My first exposure to it was in late September--three weeks after setting foot on campus. It was at a teach-in on academic freedom and free speech sponsored by the Committee on Free Speech. The teach-in was prompted by the attack on academic freedom by Wayne Dumont, who wanted Genovese fired for his remarks about welcoming a Vietcong victory. It was the first teach-in since the one the previous April, so I was excited to attend. I had been fired up enough by the attacks on academic freedom at Rutgers that over the summer I had submitted a letter-to-the-editor of the *Newark Evening News* defending it. To my surprise, my father's "paper of record" published it!

There is a funny side story that reflected my still lingering doubts about making it academically at Rutgers. It was late September. That first teach-in I attended was being held late in the evening at Records Hall. Earlier that evening, I had my first hourly exam in "English 101." The hourly was on James Joyce's *The Dubliners*. The test question, as I recall, had something to do with the meaning of "green" in one of the short stories. I believe Joyce had described an ominous character who had "bottled-green eyes." I panicked. My brain went into a deep freeze. As I'm observing my classmates--hundreds of them--effortlessly writing up a storm in their bluebooks, the image of a plaster of Paris map of Wales I made for a middle-school science project popped into my head. Why its image flashed across my mind at that moment, who knows except possibly Freud? However, the elevations of the map were painted in lush forest green to depict the rolling green hills of Wales. And of course, Wales is just across the Irish Sea from Dublin. Maybe therein lies the explanation. So, since I had come to accept that I would be submitting a blank blue book, a mischievous prank occurred to me: I would go home, retrieve the map of Wales from the unfinished attic, and hand deliver it to my instructor the next day in place of my blue book. That wildly absurd thought had the effect of unfreezing my brain just enough to allow me to scribble some cockamamie answer. [laughter] What I wrote I have no clue, though I do recall scraping by with a grade "3" (the equivalent in the Rutgers inverted grading system of a "C"). Which may explain why I've never read *Ulysses*.

Fresh on my mind were the haunting words of Reginald Bishop. An assistant dean of the college, he was an intimidating figure. He reminded me of Ichabod Crane, a person of puritanical and stern temperament, and physically very gaunt and wiry. That his last name was Bishop only magnified his intimidating image. [laughter] In a speech he delivered during freshman orientation at the Rutgers Gym, he told us to, "Look to the left, and look to the right" and then made unambiguously clear that "one of you won't be here next year." I was now confident that I would be one of them. So, after the *Dubliners* debacle, I recall walking out of Records Hall, slumbering over to the Ledge for a coffee and donut, and telling myself that since I was going to end up like my former high school lunchroom classmates and get the dean's pink slip, rather than make the dean's list, I decided to throw caution to the wind and attend the all-night, marathon teach-in organized by the Rutgers Committee for Free Speech and then sleep through the next morning classes. [Editor's Note: George Reginald Bishop, Jr. joined the faculty at Rutgers as a professor of French in 1952. He later became Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. The Ledge is the former nickname of the Rutgers Student Activities Center on George Street on the College Avenue Campus.]

So, I returned to Records Hall a few hours later and had my first eye-opening exposure to campus politics. Staughton Lynd, the Yale historian, civil rights activists, and one of the

organizers of the previous spring's March on Washington to protest America's involvement in the Vietnam War, was one of the main off-campus speakers. Although the teach-in was mostly about defending academic freedom and free speech, the subtext was about the Vietnam War. With several historians in the Rutgers history department in addition to Genovese coming under attack for their anti-war positions, including diplomatic historian Lloyd Gardner, Italian historian John Cammett, and Warren Susman, if I wasn't leaning fully in the direction of becoming a history major three weeks earlier, I certainly was by the wee hours of the morning when that teach-in ended. I surely wasn't going to major in English literature.

The second teach-in I attended came a few weeks later. The subject was the origins of the Cold War. It was sponsored by the campus chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). One of the late-night speakers was Carl Oglesby, national president of SDS at the time. Though the teach-in was about the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and the origins of our involvement in it, was front-and-center and undoubtedly the main reason for the event. That teach-in was my first campus exposure to SDS, which among several other on and off campus anti-war groups I would come to associate with over the next several years. [Editor's Note: Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was a national student organization known for its activism against the Vietnam War in the mid to late 1960s.]

My first active participation in the campus anti-war movement took place a month later. There was a planned march from the Ledge to the New Brunswick Post Office that was sponsored by the ADHOC Committee to Save Lives in Vietnam, and organized mainly by history graduate students who were the principal leaders of the Rutgers SDS chapter. The pretext for the march was the revelation by news commentator and reporter Eric Severeid in an exposé in *Look* magazine that President Johnson had on several occasions rebuffed back-channel overtures by North Vietnam through the U.N. to enter negotiations with the United States to end the conflict. Participating in a peaceful protest march to encourage diplomatic talks that might just save lives made a lot of sense, so I did. There's an amusing side story to my inaugural campus anti-war march that might be worth sharing. Shall I?

SI: Please, go ahead.

RB: My friend and fellow freshman and Chinese-American Stu Berman agreed to swing by my dorm room on our way to the Ledge, where the march was to begin. It was Stu's inaugural campus anti-war march as well as mine. As he ambled in, and as I was about to throw on my brown, corduroy sports jacket--the one I bought for five bucks at the E.J. Korvettes discount store the previous winter--Stu's deceptively sleepy eyes caught its flowery, paisley lining. He shook his head disapprovingly, eyes rolling in disbelief. "You can't wear that," he protested. This was before the psychedelic rage invaded the campus. I was puzzled. "Why, is there a dress code?" I asked. "No," he shot back, "but they will kick your sorry, sissy ass if they catch sight of it." The "they" were, of course, the bulked-up, egg-throwing, sign-tearing "Rid Rutgers of Reds" frat boys who Stu had gotten wind of were planning a counter-protest. "I'll button-up the jacket," I said, thanking him for his concern for my physical well-being. He ignored me, his eyes roaming my dorm room. "What about your high school varsity jacket?" "What about it?" I replied. He wanted to know where it was. "In my closet where it stays," I insisted. Stu ignored me and retrieved my varsity jacket. "Here, put it on!" he commanded. "Why?" "So, you won't

look like a sissy, pinko-commie beatnik, and you won't have to button it up," he responded. "No, I'll just look like one of those mindless, fraternity jocks," I shot back. "That's the whole point," Stu exclaimed, adding a potential side benefit to wearing it. "Who knows, maybe they'll identify with you and join our ranks." He paused, seeing I didn't buy that it would serve a recruitment vehicle. "Maybe so," he half conceded, "but anyway, it's a real beauty and a chick magnet." That line worked!

The varsity jacket was a work of art. It had pristine, white leather sleeves, a golden ram sporting sinister-looking horns embroidered on the back, and a large, bright golden letter "M" sewn on the front. Woven onto a dark black wooly material, the golden ram and letter "M" did create a kind of magnetic-field force that attracted more than a few flirtatious eyes during my high school years. Stu was spot on--it was a lady's man jacket. So, I threw it on.

As we reached downtown New Brunswick and turned the corner onto Church Street, a few dozen counter-protesters awaited us. Roger Cross, who was a history graduate student of "I welcome a Vietcong victory" Genovese and the vice-president of the campus SDS chapter, was handling protest logistics and security. My jacket apparently caught his attention. He sauntered up to me. "Love your jacket," he said sizing it up. He looked down at the golden letter "M" and asked what it stood for. "Mountain," I said. The name of my high school was West Orange Mountain High, even though it was situated in the valley between two mountain ridges. Roger smiled, pulled me aside, and directed me to the head of the line. "Why me?" I asked meekly. Roger was big-framed and well over six feet in height; I was more than a half-foot shorter and scores of pounds lighter. Roger was too busy cajoling me to the front of the line to hear or answer my question. But Stu, who followed directly behind me, answered on his behalf. "It's not about you. It's about your jacket. The 'M' will send a mountain of message to them," he said, pointing in the direction of the growing number of counter-protestors heading in our direction, a few of whom had already hurled a dozen or so eggs, spewed racial and religious slurs, and happily offered to supply the gasoline to encourage us to immolate ourselves in protest. Unfortunately, to those attacking counter-protestors, the letter "M" read "Maul Me." Well, I didn't exactly get mauled, but I did take a few punches and kicks, and my "Negotiate Now" sign was grabbed and torn to shreds. (I shared this amusing story at Stu's memorial service in early 2017. He had passed away the previous December.)

However, thanks to the physical attacks on a peaceful protest with such an anodyne purpose of saving lives, the protest march headlined the next issue of the Rutgers *Targum* and, in turn, generated considerable sympathy for it. The coverage also helped to begin to slowly expand the ranks of the campus anti-war movement that was still quite small at the time. In fact, the following month, one of the egg-throwing students showed up at an anti-war literature table at the Commons and was persuaded to join the slow but growing ranks of the campus anti-war movement. So, there was a kernel of truth to Stu's thinking that my varsity jacket would serve as a recruitment device. In fact, over the next several years, more than a few frat boys as well as star athletes at Rutgers would join the ranks of the campus anti-war movement. Still, there was an ugly side to the counter-protest that was unsettling. Two of the participants in the march, one a graduate student in history, told a reporter for *Targum* that the "irrational violence" they witnessed reminded them of the street thuggery that went on in Nazi Germany. Though the historic analogy was overdrawn, the behavior was certainly thuggish.

SI: I wanted to go back and ask about when you first became aware of the war in Vietnam and when and how you developed your views on the war.

RB: It was mostly background noise until early 1965 when President Johnson authorized the aerial bombing of North Vietnam and then began to expand our ground troop presence over the summer until it reached a level that by late fall had effectively Americanized the war. It was over the course of those eleven months up to that maiden protest march in November to the New Brunswick Post Office that my views about the war began to take shape and formed, at least in general terms.

It's difficult to identify, let alone rank, all the threads of influence that shaped my views about the war. However, there were handful that likely entered the mix. There was David Halberstam's *The Making of a Quagmire*, a book that came out in early 1965. My brother, who at the time worked in the book and records department at E.J. Korvettes, acquired it as soon as it hit the display shelves. I read the book sometime in the spring of that year, soon after the sustained bombing of North Vietnam got underway. Halberstam was a war correspondent based in Saigon during the Kennedy years. For Halberstam, the situation was quite grim, especially in the countryside where the elusive insurgency was steadily gaining ground and there were no easy options. U.S. withdrawal would ensure a communist, insurgent victory. U.S. troop escalation and aerial bombing, both in the South and North, would boomerang and turn the insurgents into heroes in the eyes of the peasants. Halberstam's concluding sentence of the book, which I've just reread yet again, ended on a very cautionary note. He wrote, "Before we ever plant the flag again, we must make sure that the grounds for mutual self-interest exist, that the situation has not deteriorated beyond control and, above all, that we are wanted."

As I've mentioned, one of my brother's myriad of magazine subscriptions was *I.F. Stone's Weekly*. Stone was a maverick investigative reporter whose weekly news review was packed with exposés and nuggets of facts one rarely found in the mainstream U.S. papers until weeks or months later, if then. One such nugget Stone surfaced was an interview with the head of the South Vietnam government and our partner-in-arms, Air Force General Ky, who when asked to name his heroes, proudly said, "I have only one, Hitler." That revelation was quite unsettling and its impact on my views of the war is hard to overstate. Stone's coverage of the Vietnam War was as scathing as it was revelatory. My brother declared it a "must read." Given that it was only four pages, I read it on a regular basis. Stone championed a halt to the bombing, a cease-fire, free elections under the international supervision of the U.N., the negotiated withdrawal of U.S. troops, and a neutral and independent Vietnam accepted by the great powers. Based on reading Halberstam, Stone and the steady stream of candid dispatches from Saigon by the *Times* Vietnam War correspondent Charles Mohr, my views of the war were beginning to form.

What was becoming clear to me, even before I set foot on a college campus in the fall, was that our saturation bombing campaign in the south would drive the peasantry into the hands of the Vietcong and the Vietcong into the arms of the North Vietnamese, and that our aerial bombing of industry and infrastructure in North Vietnam would drive its nation's "Founding Father" Ho Chi Minh into the arms of the Soviet Union, if not China. It was also becoming clear to me, especially based on my reading of *I.F. Stone's Weekly*, that the ever-increasing expenditures on

what seemed to me an unnecessary, ill-fated, and destructive war would sap the Great Society anti-poverty programs of their funding needs. Which is sadly what happened. [Editor's Note: The Great Society was President Lyndon B. Johnson's domestic agenda that aimed to end poverty, reduce crime, abolish inequality, improve education, and promote conservation. Much of the funding for the Great Society was diverted to funding the Vietnam War during the latter half of the 1960s.]

There were a few more influences closer to home. One was my father, who was convinced that in a war where there were no fronts, and the enemy wore no uniforms, there was no way the war was conventionally winnable. In his mind, fighting in a jungle eight thousand miles from home was not worth the loss of life of a single infantryman. Obviously, that Hitler was General Ky's one and only hero did not sit well with my father, who had fought the fascists and Nazis for four years. As an infantryman who carried out hundreds of reconnaissance missions directing firepower against an identifiable enemy in five major campaigns in World War II and who earned the Silver Star, his military assessment of the Americanization of the Vietnam War was something I took quite seriously.

There was one more influence--the singer-song writer Phil Ochs. His anti-war album, *I Ain't Marching Anymore*, came out in February of 1965. My brother quickly snatched it up. The album would have reached number one in the charts that year if the determining metric was the playing time it got in our living room. It was as if Phil Ochs was a member of our household--at least one almost as vocal as my brother on the issues of the day, be they war, peace, poverty, or racism. Of course, by far the greatest influence in shaping my overall political perspective was my brother.

SI: Louis, Katherine, do you have questions?

KS: Okay. I have two, one of them being can you provide more details about your brother's involvement in the anti-war movement? Then, another, which might segue into something else, is that you mentioned that you were also involved in environmental causes, and I was wondering if this was during the same time as the anti-war Vietnam movement during your college years or if it was a different time period.

RB: My brother went on protest marches. It's very likely he went on the SDS-sponsored student March on Washington in April of 1965. I know he went on the one the following November in Washington. However, I don't recall him being actively involved in the student anti-war movement at the time--at least not as active as I would become over the next several years. I'd have to say that as the war intensified, he became more of an armchair critic.

As to my involvement in environmental causes, that has mostly been of late in response to the climate crisis. For the past decade, I have been active at the local level in a handful of carbon-footprint-reducing initiatives. I have also written several pieces about the climate crisis. A few are available on medium.com. One is entitled *Race Against Time* (<https://medium.com/me/stats/post/7aeaa16006f3>), another *The Climate Crisis and a Springtime Bout of Cognitive Dissonance* (<https://medium.com/p/167d0def1d9a>). Despite my active support of clean energy alternatives and ambitious recycling initiatives, I worry that unless there is a

substantial downshifting in worldwide economic growth, a dramatic change in the cultural values that inform what and how much we consume, and an end to the arms race and senseless wars that seem more and more prolific and that wreak untold environmental as well as human havoc, the future of our species and the millions of the non-human ones with whom we share our planet are at grave risk. Depending on which side of the bed I roll out of in the morning, I am either feeling hopeful or dreadful about our prospects as a viable and thriving species. When I am full of despair, it is a challenging feat to roll one way or the other under the weight of it. [laughter]

SI: You described to us this initial march, where you had the jacket on, and there was a violent response. How often would you have actions like that, marches or some other kind of protest, particularly in those first few years?

RB: During my freshman year, there were a handful of protest marches and teach-ins. As I recall, most were free of violence, despite the often-heated and combative debates and vitriolic shouting attacks from pro-war students in the audience that accompanied them. The month after what I now amusingly call the "Church Street Massacre," there was an SDS peace vigil at the Commons Plaza that drew about sixty participants, me included, this time without my varsity jacket. We walked around the four corners of the Commons Plaza quad carrying such innocuous signs as "Walk for Peace" and "Peace on Earth." We even distributed Christmas cards with the theme of peace. The Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), a conservative campus pro-war group, demonstrated against the vigil, equating peace with a communist victory in Vietnam. However, in keeping with the holiday spirit of "peace, goodwill toward men" the vigil remained free of violence.

There was another SDS anti-war protest demonstration that I attended the following March. It had very broad representation across a host of peace groups. Joining in were members of SANE, Woman's Strike for Peace and the Fellowship Reconciliation Group. We walked around the town's Memorial Square at the corner of Livingston Avenue and George Street carrying such signs as "Wage War on Poverty, not People" and "Withdraw from Vietnam." The demonstration was peaceful and without incident. There was also one other demonstration I attended. It was at Military Park in Newark a few weeks later. That much larger anti-war event was also free of violence. [Editor's Note: The National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, or SANE, is a disarmament and anti-nuclear organization that was established in April 1957. In 1987, it merged with the Nuclear Weapons FREEZE Campaign and, in 1983, became known as Peace Action. Women Strike for Peace (WSP) grew out of a 1961 international protest against the above-ground testing of nuclear weapons. Throughout the 1960s, WSP focused on anti-nuclear proliferation and anti-Vietnam War activism.]

The last campus Vietnam War-related event that I attended during my freshman year was a teach-in at the Rutgers Gym in commemoration of the one-year anniversary of the occasion at which Genovese made his controversial, "I welcome a Vietcong victory" remarks. Genovese was the event's main attraction, and the presumed reason it drew more than three thousand students and faculty members. Despite calling our foreign policy in Vietnam "Hitlerian," and reiterating his previous year's controversial statement, the teach-in went on without physical disturbance, at least as best as I recall. So, but for that one protest march to the New Brunswick Post Office, all others during my first year at Rutgers were peaceful and mostly civil.

However, in the spring of 1967, when we held several anti-draft demonstrations at the local Selective Service office on George and Church Streets, we did experience a lot of jeering and occasional fusillades of beer cans. One of the victims was my friend, fellow classmate and anti-war sympathizer, Owen Ullmann, who was covering one of those demonstrations for *Targum*. Still, the counter-protests and attacks were relatively tame and constrained.

In reflecting back on that first year at Rutgers, I am reminded of just how many faculty members and graduate students in the history department were involved in the anti-war movement. Among the most outspoken of the department's faculty were Eugene Genovese, Warren Susman, John Cammett, Lloyd Gardner, and Carter Jefferson. The graduate students, many of whom were either leaders, members, or fellow travelers of SDS, included Norm Berzon, Paul Lyons, Roger Cross, Gene Lieber, Michael Padwee, and Michael Greenberg. I befriended several of them. Many of them urged me to join SDS, as well as to become a history major, as if I needed the encouragement. Norm would become my recitation instructor in my junior year when I took Gardner's quite popular course on the history of American foreign policy. He and his wife Judith would become my friends when I returned to Rutgers for graduate school. There were other anti-war faculty members outside the history department whom I befriended during my undergraduate years, including Chemistry Professor Seymour Zenchelsky, French Professors Gerald Bertin and Michael Seitz, Political Science Professor Gordon Schochet, Mathematics Professor Terry Butler, Physics Professor Maurice Bezin, and Professor of Psychology George Collier.

There was one more Rutgers faculty member that deserves mention. His name is David Frost, a Rutgers biology researcher and member of SANE. Near the end of my freshman year, Frost announced his insurgent candidacy for New Jersey Senator in the upcoming September Democratic Party primary against the pro-war, pro-Johnson administration, establishment-supported candidate Warren Wilentz. He ran on a peace platform that called for a halt to all bombing, negotiations with the Vietcong, binding arbitration among the parties under the auspices of the U.N. and immediate troop withdrawal. Frost's decision to run for Senate ratcheted up my involvement in the anti-war movement to a new level. Over the next few years, I would spend more than a few evenings at meetings in his home in Plainfield planning anti-war strategies and campaign events.

I worked on the Frost campaign during the summer after my freshman year distributing campaign literature, and spent the first week of my sophomore year living out of the Frost headquarters in New Brunswick, making endless get-out-the-vote calls. Somehow, I still managed to go to classes and attend a speech by the famous pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock, who was chairman of SANE at the time and a vocal critique of the war. In his speech at the Roger Smith Hotel in New Brunswick, Spock enthusiastically endorsed the Frost candidacy. My work on the Frost campaign was my first active participation in electoral politics. I worked very closely with Michael Greenberg, a graduate student of Genovese, who was overseeing get-out-the-vote operations at campaign headquarters, which was conveniently located just off campus in a second floor flat across from the railroad station on Railroad Plaza. It was quite a gratifying experience to be working on the campaign--much more so than going on protest marches, especially in those euphoric moments when in our little bubble, we expected Frost to deliver a

powerful blow to the pro-war establishment candidate: not necessarily to defeat Wilentz, but at least make significant inroads. We were hoping for twenty to thirty percent of the vote. Instead, and to our chagrin, Frost got trounced, receiving under ten percent of the vote. The other New Jersey peace candidates running for congressional office in the Democratic Party did even worse. The crushing defeat was a wake-up call that beyond the physical borders of the campus, a super-majority of the public was fully in support of the war. [Editor's Note: David Frost was a peace activist who challenged Middlesex County attorney Warren W. Wilentz for the Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate in New Jersey in 1966. Wilentz won the primary on September 13, 1966 and lost in the general election to Republican incumbent Clifford P. Case. Frost, a Plainfield resident, taught at Rutgers from 1952 to 1978 and worked for the Squibb Institute for Medical Research from 1959 to 1975. The New Jersey Democratic Council, a grassroots anti-war organization, chose Frost as their candidate for the Senate seat in 1966. Frost went on to run as comedian Dick Gregory's vice-presidential candidate on the Peace and Freedom ticket in 1968. Wilentz's father, David Wilentz, was a Middlesex County Democratic Party leader, and his brother, Robert Wilentz, served as the chief justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court.]

In many ways, the abysmal results of that campaign created something of a divide among anti-war students. Some who wanted immediate war-ending results began to lose patience with electoral politics. That was easy to do. We were morally enraged by the war, the unconscionable human suffering it was causing, and the waste of resources that could and should have been deployed to tackle the domestic challenges of poverty, education, and housing, especially in the nation's inner cities. Our troop buildup in Vietnam was on a trajectory to nearly double to almost 400,000 by the end of the 1966. Others saw in those five thousand plus voters who pulled the lever for Frost the seeds of opportunity to be harvested. I was somewhat on the fence. [Editor's Note: American troop strength in Vietnam numbered at 16,300 in 1963, 23,300 in 1964, 184,300 in 1965, 385,300 in 1966, 485,600 in 1967, and peaked at 536,100 soldiers in 1968.]

I was certainly demoralized by the outcome of the primary, and more so when nine days later Vice President Hubert Humphrey arrived on campus to deliver the keynote speaker at Rutgers Bicentennial commemoration on invitation from the University--which I boycotted and protested. I also failed to remove my car in the designated "no parking" zone on College Avenue, either because I was so involved in picketing Humphrey's speech, or as a form of "civil disobedience." That act of inadvertent defiance didn't land me in jail; however, it did land my car there until I bailed it out from a towing facility in North Brunswick, where I tracked it down a few weeks later. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Hubert Humphrey spoke at the Rutgers Bicentennial Convocation on September 22, 1966. Humphrey served as the 38th Vice President of the United States under Lyndon B. Johnson from 1965 to 1969 and lost the presidential election to Richard Nixon in 1968.]

Despite the abysmal results of the Frost campaign, I did not give up on electoral politics. A month later, Rutgers history professor Carter Jefferson threw his hat into the electoral ring as a peace candidate, running against the Republican candidate Peter Frelinghuysen for the House seat in Middlesex County's Fifth District. I was somewhat involved in the Jefferson campaign, but much less so than in Frost's. Sure enough, Jefferson got clobbered. What softened the blow of another abysmal showing by a peace candidate was that Wilentz not only got trounced by the

incumbent Republican Senator Clifford Case but performed worse than Jefferson in the Fifth District. That likely had something to do with the very active support Jefferson's campaign received from a sizeable number of Rutgers students. That was the silver lining of the November elections. [Editor's Note: Republican Peter H.B. Frelinghuysen, Jr. represented New Jersey's Fifth District in the House of Representatives from 1953 to 1975. In the election in 1966, Frelinghuysen won with 70.8 percent to Democrat Carter Jefferson's 27.1 percent of the vote.]

There was a memorable classroom experience a month or so after the 1966 Rutgers Bicentennial. I was taking the survey course in American history with Professor Richard McCormick at Scott Hall, a stone's throw away from where Humphrey had recently spoke. McCormick was the chairman of the history department at the time and a venerated figure at the University and in the historical profession. His area of expertise was early American and New Jersey history. As a lecturer, he was as engaging as he was informative. He always held the full attention of the several hundred sophomores, not an easy accomplishment for a survey course. He certainly held my attention, especially when he began to lecture about the Sons of Liberty. The Sons of Liberty was a somewhat clandestine group formed initially to challenge the Stamp Act and later British colonial rule. It played a critical role in amassing support for the American Revolution and in its ultimate success. When McCormick concluded his quite laudatory remarks about the organizing skills of the Sons of Liberty that went into creating the most successful civilian resistance movement in the nation's history, he looked straight at me (at least that was my impression) and said that if SDS was truly serious about ending the war and revolutionizing American society, its time would be well spent studying the Sons of Liberty. Having just got trounced in the Democratic primaries, it was truly a humbling experience to have a renowned and respected historian tell us that we had best get our act together if we ever hoped to build an effective anti-war movement. Though feeling more than a little defensive, I took his advice, or should I say needling, to heart and wasted little time heading over to the Alexander library to read up on Sam Adams and the Sons of Liberty. Professor McCormick was spot-on. Adams and the Sons of Liberty knew how to build a grassroots movement and mobilize against arbitrary and oppressive British rule. We had our work cut out for us. [Editor's Note: Richard P. McCormick served as a professor of history at Rutgers from 1945 to 1982. He is the father of Rutgers President Emeritus Richard L. McCormick.]

Moved by LBJ's defiant escalation of troop buildup, the massive step up of indiscriminate, saturation bombing against civilian populations, and the heartbreaking images and photographs of ever-increasing flag-draped coffins of U.S. soldiers arriving at Dover Air Force Base, as well as of Vietnamese children and other innocent victims of the war that began to flash across the TV screens and appear in magazines with ever-greater frequency, the spring semester at Rutgers and campuses across the country became the semester of the MOBE--MOBE being short for mobilization. With a handful of new and old campus anti-war student and faculty organizations, including SDS, SANE, the University Committee for War and Peace, and the newly-formed student group The Committee of Conscience, as well as veterans of the Frost and Jefferson campaigns, we launched a campus-wide campaign that extended cross town to Douglass College to mobilize for what was hoped to be, and what would turn out to be, the largest anti-war demonstration in the nation's history in mid-April 1967. Working with the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, whose members included such high-profile names as Martin Luther King, Benjamin Spock, and Tom Hayden, we distributed

anti-war pamphlets and buttons, wrote letters-to-the-editors of the local newsletters, and bombarded our senators and congressmen with calls to stop the bombing and support a U.N.-sponsored peace plan. We also held several protest demonstrations against the draft at the local Selective Service office on Church Street in downtown New Brunswick. Through all these efforts, the anti-war movement at Rutgers really began to take off. More than several hundred Rutgers students bussed into Manhattan for the march from Central Park to the U.N. Many more went by other means to march with an estimated 150,000 demonstrators. I went in with my father who, encouraged mostly by my brother, turned in his World War II medals, including the Silver Star, as did several other veterans of the war. I was quite proud of him at the time, especially given his heroic efforts as a U.S. Army infantryman. It was not an easy decision for him to make, but it was a measure of how much our government had strayed from the values that informed our war efforts against the barbarity of Nazism, fascism and Japanese militarism. However, I now have regrets that my father's Silver Star is no longer among the family heirlooms. [Editor's Note: On April 15, 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dr. Benjamin Spock, along with hundreds of thousands of protestors, marched to the United Nations in New York City to protest the Vietnam War.]

My father was quite supportive of my anti-war activities, with the caveat that I kept my grades up and didn't "go crazy on him." [laughter] I think he was already getting a sense that with the beginning of draft-card burning, things might well get out of hand. For him, it was one thing for my car to be impounded as at the Rutgers Bicentennial--quite another for me to get impounded. It was good admonition, and I took it to heart, just as I had that of Professor McCormick. Though our success in mobilizing for that historic protest march paled in comparison to that of Sons of Liberty, we had come quite a distance since Professor McCormick's lecture on the subject. Though I was still a sophomore, I no longer felt quite as sophomoric, at least as far as grassroots campus organizing skills and accomplishments went. I don't know if you want me to stop, or do you have more questions.

SI: No, no, keep going. We will ask questions after.

RB: The summer of 1967 was the most memorable summer of my young adult years, if not of my entire life. It began with a road trip to Canada with fellow classmates Jim "Binky" Fine and Richard "Hesh" Najarian days after final exams. Both were anti-war activists and emerging leaders of SDS on campus. I got to know them through our anti-war activities, and we developed a fondness for each other despite our differing temperaments or quite possibly because of them--me more circumspect, introverted, naive and studious, and them more adventurous, outgoing, savvy, and street smart. That Hesh and I were both born in Jersey City, and Binky and I were both from West Orange, may have had something to do with the mutual affinity.

In any case, we had several reasons for taking the road trip to Canada. One was simply to have some recreational release after a semester of grueling organizing and academic work and have a bit of time to let loose. The second was to visit Expo '67--the celebrated World's Fair in Montreal. The theme of the exposition was "Man and His World," and its message of the human need for solidarity and international cooperation resonated with us. However, there was a third reason, and likely the most compelling one. As early as 1965, Canada had become an asylum for

Vietnam War draft resisters. [Editor's Note: The 1967 International and Universal Exposition, or Expo 67, was a world's fair exhibition in Montreal, Canada that was open from April to October in 1967.]

As the war escalated over the next few years, the number of draft resisters, as well as soldiers who went AWOL [absent without leave], mounted, helped along by anti-war groups in the U.S. actively encouraging draft resistance. 1967 was the birth of the Resistance movement in the U.S. and that was the year the number of asylum-seekers soared. One of the anti-war groups supporting the Resistance was SDS. In early 1967, SDS, along with several other anti-war groups, began working closely with the Canadian-based anti-war group Student Committee for Peace Action that helped those seeking asylum with the cumbersome paperwork that had to be submitted to satisfy Canadian immigration requirements, as well as assisting them in securing lodging and eventual employment. As high-profile anti-war activists on campus, and supportive of the Resistance, we were getting many requests for help and guidance from eligible draftees and AWOL soldiers seeking asylum in Canada.

Personally, as willing as I was to defy the draft when my student deferment ended, by seeking asylum in Canada or simply turning in my draft card and risking imprisonment, I was reluctant to encourage others to do the same. I felt the decision was a very personal one. However, if the decision was to defy the draft or to go AWOL if already drafted, I felt compelled to provide as much assistance as possible if requested--whether it meant directing them to church groups to help them file for conscientious-objector status or to pro-bono anti-war lawyers to defend them, if on principle they were willing to remain in the States and risk being jailed, or linking them up with Canadian anti-war organizations, as well as draft resisters already settled in Montreal, to help them find asylum in Canada if that was their preferred option.

So, we packed our duffel bags, jammed into Binky's father's Chrysler 300 convertible, and headed straight north from West Orange, along the eastern border of Upstate New York, to Montreal. Along the way, we discussed what exhibits to visit. Najarian wanted to visit the Soviet Union Pavilion since it was the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution of 1917. Though he had little fondness for the current bureaucratic and dictatorial regime, he still believed in the original vision of a worker's democracy that the revolution inspired. If I remember correctly, his father had also once been a member or fellow traveler of the Communist Party years ago. Father's Day was just around the corner, so a trinket from the Soviet Pavilion as a Father's Day gift was a must for Najarian. Fine wanted to pay his respects to the Cuban Pavilion. A pre-med student who now fancied himself as something of a revolutionary, he was enamored of Che Guevara, the medical doctor turned revolutionary. There was another reason: his father was a cigar aficionado. Several boxes of Cuban cigars would be the consummate Father's Day gift.

As much as my interest was piqued in checking out both pavilions, especially the Soviet Union with its soaring rooftop, I was far more interested in seeing the U.S. Pavilion, with the geodesic dome designed by Buckminster Fuller, and Habitat 67, the urban modular housing complex designed by Moshe Safdie. That Safdie was an Israeli Jew who was a proponent of mixed-use urban cities championed by Jane Jacobs made visiting Habitat 67 mandatory. So, we spent a few days making the rounds at Expo 67 and then a few more meeting with ex-pat resisters and

Canadian anti-war activists, and gathering a lot of contact and asylum-seeking information, which we stuffed, along with the four boxes of Cuban cigars (two for Fine's father and two for mine), deep in the bottom of the behemoth Chrysler 300 trunk. Cuban cigars being contraband, we hoped to avert the notice of U.S. immigration officials. Fortunately, to our great relief, we managed to do just that. Due to the backed-up traffic from American tourists returning in droves to the States from Expo 67, the customs officials waved us straight through without searching our belongings.

However, we were not so fortunate, or so we thought, as a dozen or so miles beyond the border-crossing into New York State, we were pulled over by local police who commanded us to exit the car and open our trunk for inspection. After fifteen minutes of rummaging through every single item in the trunk, including the four boxes of Cuban cigars, and several folders of "draft-dodging" guides and manuals that stared them in the face, they glared at us and wanted us to fess up to "its" whereabouts. Fearing that Fine would mouth off, as he had a habit of doing at uniformed authorities and call them "effing blind idiots," and land us in the can, I offered to help them find what they were looking for if they would only let us know what exactly they were looking for. "The damn fireworks," they accusatorily replied in frustration. Despite our insistence that shooting off firecrackers and cherry bombs were not our thing, they ran a second search, this time emptying every item in the trunk and spreading them out on the ground, even cutting the seals on each of the four boxes of Cuban cigars in hopes of hitting pay dirt. They eventually gave up and released us under our own recognizance with our unconfiscated contraband of Cuban cigars and treasonous draft-dodging materials.

Within a few days of returning from Montreal, I received a call from Dorothy Eldridge. Dorothy was a veteran peace advocate in her early sixties. She had founded the New Jersey chapter of SANE. She was also its long-standing executive director, and a tireless advocate of banning the testing of nuclear weapons and ending their proliferation. I had gotten to know Dorothy during the 1966 Frost senatorial primary campaign, and we reacquainted at Rutgers in early 1967, when a group of peace activities met at the Labor Education Center on the Douglass College campus to lay the groundwork for forming a new political party in New Jersey to end the Vietnam War. As envisioned by Frost, who was the keynote speaker at the conference, the three main components of the platform included a cessation of bombing of North Vietnam, support for medical care in the United States for Vietnamese children suffering the flesh-burning effects of napalm bombs and the backing of SANE's efforts to end the draft. [Editor's Note: Dorothy Eldridge was the founding director of the New Jersey chapter of SANE from 1958 until her death in 1986.]

I assumed Dorothy called to ask for my help in building the new party--something I had offered to do at the end of the semester. Instead, she asked that I serve as state-wide student coordinator for Vietnam Summer. Co-sponsored by SANE Chairman Benjamin Spock and Martin Luther King, Jr., Vietnam Summer was an educational outreach program to be spearheaded by student activists to extend the anti-war movement beyond the campus and into the homes, places of worship, civic associations, and community organizations of middle America. It was a nationwide effort to basically lay the groundwork for the 1968 elections. As student anti-war activists, we were advised to step outside our university bubble, dress and groom appropriately, listen as much as we talked, and when we talked make sure we were well-informed--informed about the history of the Vietnam War and informed about what was happening on the ground

versus what the Johnson administration was telling. Since Vietnam Summer sounded a lot like building the grassroots foundation of a new political party that I had already offered to help build, and was being co-sponsored by Dr. Spock and Dr. King, both of whom I had enormous respect as champions of peace, disarmament, civil rights, and nonviolent protest, it was an opportunity hard to refuse. [Editor's Note: The Vietnam Summer campaign was carried out in the summer of 1967 by a coalition of organizations that coordinated canvassing, teach-ins and other activities committed to ending the war in Vietnam.]

Within a few weeks, I rented a house on Louis Street in New Brunswick that served as our headquarters. I quickly recruited a dozen or so student activists. We held a few tutorials, did some role-playing in anticipation of to-be-expected objections, read and discussed a few books on the history of Vietnam, including Franz Schurman's *Politics of Escalation*, Kahin and Lewis' *The U.S. in Vietnam* and Carl Ogelsby's *Containment and Change*, as well as Dr. King's Riverside Church address given the previous April where he directly connected the anti-war and Civil Rights movements. We then set up meetings in our hometowns through family, friends, former high school teachers, and local religious organizations. Given the short amount of time we had to set up operations, recruit volunteers, arrange meetings, and prepare for them, it was quite a seat-of-the-pants operation. Our presentations were drafted on the fly. We did our best to be factual, to methodically challenge the rationale for the war, to focus on practical steps to resolve it peacefully, to play up the imperative of redirecting resources to address the increasingly neglected crises of poverty, education, and housing in the inner cities, and to raise the inconvenient truth of the loss and suffering of countless human lives for a needless and senseless war. We did our best to keep our sloganeering, rhetoric and posturing to a minimum. We also cautioned ourselves to prepare for the unexpected, though there were a few times where we were caught off guard and had to do a bit of improvising. [Editor's Note: On April 4, 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his speech "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence" in opposition to the Vietnam War at Riverside Church in New York City. Carl Oglesby, who was the president of SDS from 1965 to 1966, is best known for his speech "Let Us Shape the Future," given before tens of thousands of anti-war demonstrators in Washington on November 27, 1965.]

The first handful of meetings occurred during the build up to and aftermath of the Six Day War. Many of those who attended the initial meetings were Jewish, as were the Vietnam Summer volunteers who ran them. That "other war" took up a great deal of oxygen and generated a host of questions and concerns. Did the anti-war movement support Israel? Many had their doubts based on statements coming from elements of the New Left, including some in leadership positions in SDS. We countered with quotes from Dr. Spock and Dr. King. It was also a challenge to fund raise for Vietnam Summer when we were competing with the United Jewish Appeal, which happen to be running a major fundraising campaign for Israel at the same time. Still, we were able to raise enough cash to help defray some of our out-of-pocket expenses. [Editor's Note: The Six Day War took place from June 5 to June 10, 1967 between Israel and a coalition of Arab states. Israel's decisive victory included the capture of the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, Old City of Jerusalem and Golan Heights, the status of which subsequently became major points of contention in the Arab-Israeli conflict.]

There were also concerns about the anti-war movement turning violent. At one of the meetings, a friend of my parents, who worked in the corporate headquarters of *The New York Times*, referenced a recently published front-page article in the paper headlined, "The New Left Turns to Mood of Violence in Place of Protest." The lengthy piece began with a quote from the national secretary of SDS extolling urban guerrilla warfare. It was an awkward situation, since my parents' neighbors, including *The Times* employee, were aware I was closely associated with SDS. I countered with quotes from Dr. Spock and Dr. King, both of whom without qualification condemned violence at home as well as in Vietnam, and explained that lobbying congressmen and voting peace candidates into office who promised to bring the war to an end and redirect resources back home was Vietnam Summer's goal and penultimate solution to the despair and hopelessness that fueled the anger and rage that inevitably spilled over into violence. Without unloading heaps of guilt on the informed gentleman from the nation's "paper of record," and on those who shared his concerns, I let them know that their apathy and indifference were no small factors in breeding a climate of hopelessness and despair. As Jews, I reminded them what Rabbi Prinz, a good friend of Dr. King, said at the March for Jobs and Freedom about the shame and tragedy of silence in the face of bigotry and hatred, and that just as much as he was an outspoken supporter of going to war against Nazism and fascism during World War II and an unapologetic supporter of Israel's right to defend itself against those who wished to annihilate it, that's how much he opposed our hapless and morally problematic war in Vietnam. Many in the room were quite familiar with Rabbi Prinz, who had only recently retired as head of the American Jewish Congress. That struck a nerve: all the doubting heads in the room nodded in agreement. It was a small victory, but that's what grassroots organizing is all about--the cumulative, multiplier effect of those small victories.

SI: Going back to Vietnam Summer, can you give us a sense, very roughly, of how many people went through your trainings? Was it dozens or hundreds? Would they come back to you and tell you how things went when they went out to their communities? Did you get a sense if it was working or not working?

RB: No. Not that many. I'd say about ten or so. It was really a small-time, seat-of-the-pants operation. Over the course of the month, we held about a dozen meetings that took us to North, Central and South Jersey. Maybe a hundred or so individual in total attended them--mostly moms and pops of volunteers, high school, and college students. I moderated or attended many of the meetings. The meetings I didn't attend I got feedback about either by phone or in person. Overall, the receptivity was favorable. We were able to convince a few fence-sitters at each of the meetings that the war was senseless and needless, and the many who needed no such convincing to become more actively involved either through donations, hosting future meetings or joining up as volunteers. Still, progress was slow, frustrating, and hard to measure, and we only had a few months left before returning to campus. However, we were building momentum and just hoped that the rest of the summer would be free of unexpected surprises such as the Six Day War and allow us to step up our efforts. No such luck!

In early July, I received a call from Dorothy Eldridge inviting me to attend a meeting to review our progress and share our experiences. It was to be held in Newark on July 14. In passing, she noted that the meeting would be hosted by Tom Hayden. "Would I be able to attend?" Hayden was already something of a legend among student activists. I knew he was the principal author

of the 1962 *Port Huron Statement*, the founding declaration of SDS--a manifesto full of hope that challenged a generation of college students bred in the material comforts of post-war America to shake themselves out of a life of apathy, boredom, and alienation, and to address the realities of a runaway arms race, the existential threat of nuclear warfare, widespread poverty, and widespread racial discrimination and inequality. I had picked up a copy of the *Port Huron Statement* at an SDS literature table for thirty-five cents during freshmen orientation. It had a huge impact on me. Its call for a participatory democracy struck a nerve and, as much as anything I had read up until that time, it moved me to participate in campus politics and associate with SDS. Though I was aware of Hayden's community organizing work in the Clinton Hill section of Newark and, before that, his involvement with SNCC in the Black voter registration drive and the Freedom Rides in Georgia and Mississippi, I was mostly familiar with his anti-war activities, and especially his very high-profile and quite controversial visit to North Vietnam in January of '66 with Yale historian Staughton Lynd and Marxist historian Herbert Aptheker. I'd never met Tom but was thrilled by the opportunity to meet this legendary author and activist who called to mind American revolutionaries Tom Paine and Sam Adams, thanks to Professor McCormick. And to meet Tom just blocks away from where I spent the first few years of my life, and on Bastille Day, was icing on the cake! [Editor's Note: Tom Hayden was a political activist, author and politician who is the principal author of the *Port Huron Statement*, the 1962 political manifesto of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). In late 1965, Staughton Lynd, a Yale professor of American history and civil rights activist, Herbert Aptheker, an historian and communist activist, and Tom Hayden embarked upon a trip to North Vietnam in an unofficial diplomatic mission and met with North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front (NLF) officials, as well as representatives from a number of groups.]

On the Friday morning of Bastille Day, I called Dorothy to make sure the meeting was still on. There was a reason for my call. The front-page, lead story of *The New York Times* read, "NEWARK'S MAYOR CALLS IN GUARD AS RIOTS SPREAD." The rioting that had begun on Wednesday evening, when an angry mob began tossing rocks and bottles at the Central Ward's Fourth Precinct station house sparked by charges of police brutality after the arrest of a Black cab driver, had spread over the next day and into the wee hours of Friday morning across scores of blocks extending along Belmont and Springfield Avenues and into the downtown business district. Extensive window smashing and looting of stores, gun-firing from cars, sniping from rooftops, and fire-bombing with Molotov cocktails were reported. There had been more than sixty arrests and seventy-five injuries. At one-thirty AM Friday morning, Mayor Addonizio ordered a full police alert that activated the city's entire 1,400 manned force. At two-twenty AM, the mayor placed a call to Governor Hughes describing the situation as ominous and requested the activation of the National Guard and State Police. Hughes immediately agreed to do so. [Editor's Note: The Newark riots, or rebellion, lasted from July 12 to July 17, 1967. The unrest resulted in over two dozen deaths and seven hundred injuries, fifteen hundred arrests, and property damage exceeding ten million dollars.]

The Vietnam Summer meeting was to be held just a few blocks north of Bergen Street, and just a few doors away from Clinton Avenue--the main thoroughfare and business district in the Clinton Hill section of Newark. I knew the area quite well. B'nai Abraham synagogue was about ten short blocks north, and many of my relatives, who had only recently moved to the suburbs, including my cousin Allie Stolz, lived in Clinton Hill. The Fourth Precinct, located at the corner

of Livingston Avenue and 17th Street, was about ten blocks, or four minutes by car, from where we were to meet. As far as Dorothy knew, the meeting was still on, but given the ominous turn of events, she decided to skip it. Since the rioting had spread mostly north, northwest and east, and we were meeting to the southwest of the Fourth Precinct station house, and given my familiarity with the geography of the area, as well as youthful naiveté and sense of impregnability and immortality, I jumped into my car, took the turnpike to the Garden State Parkway, exited onto Chancellor Avenue in Irvington and weaved along the familiar, residential cross-streets of Weequahic to one of those two-story wooden-framed flats, which I believe was on Seymour Street.

The surprising thing about the two-hour or so mid-morning gathering was that only a few passing references were made about what Tom would later call the Newark Rebellion--the title of a book he authored, which came out a few months later. Tom led the discussion and asked each of us to give updates on our off-campus foray into the suburbs of middle America to persuade our moms and dads, as he called them, of the efficacy of the anti-war movement. It was clear to me that he was now singularly focused on the anti-war movement, and that his days and years as a white Midwesterner trying to organize and empower poor, inner-city Blacks in Newark were behind him. He shared his newfound conviction that the war was now the central challenge of our generation and that until the war ended, there was little hope for the future of our nation, our blighted cities, and the poor Blacks who inhabited our inner cities, whose sons were now giving their lives as freedom-fighters in a misbegotten war eight-thousand miles away, when their freedom at home was becoming an evermore-distant hope. If ever there was more palpable and tangible evidence of that, it was what was happening ten blocks away in a city that was quickly becoming an armed camp. Tom listened more than he talked and was very low-key. Perhaps his mind was ten blocks away, but one would never know it. Despite all his trials and tribulations in grassroots organizing, and perhaps because of it, he exuded a confidence that the anti-war movement was at an inflexion point where it was about to explode, and that history was on our side if only we would seize the moment. As far as could tell, he hadn't lost any of the passion, spirit and hopefulness that inspired and imbued the *Port Huron Statement*. We were all buoyed.

After the meeting, Tom pulled me aside and said, "Hey Berkowitz, there's great Jewish deli a stone's throw away on Clinton Avenue. What do you say?" So off we traversed the few blocks to Lipschitz Delicatessen & Restaurant at 497 Clinton Avenue, a deli I was quite familiar with when it was patronized mostly by Jews in the 1950s and early 1960s when the Clinton Hill and Weequahic neighborhoods were their homes. Lipschitz was much darker than I recall. Lights were dim and blinds drawn. There were no more than a handful of patrons--all Black men, solid blue-collar looking, wolfing down pastrami and sliced turkey sandwiches and munching on fries. Nothing seemed unusual except that it was unusually quiet, at least compared to the hustle, bustle and endless chatter and order shouting of years past. A few nodded to Tom, who was apparently a regular and admired patron. It made me feel at home and at ease.

We took a corner table in the rear of the restaurant. I recall Tom asking a lot about my background and my interests, and how I got involved in Vietnam Summer. When I mentioned that I had played baseball in high school but then dropped out of spring training at Rutgers to focus on my studies and campus politics, we spent quite some time talking about baseball, which

he had also played as a teenager. When I mentioned the influence Rabbi Prinz's had on me, he shared my admiration. He was very familiar with Prinz and recalled his speech at the March for Jobs and Freedom, which he had attended. We also talked about Newark's challenges. I thought city hall corruption under Addonizio and proliferation of drug trafficking by the mafia, specifically by the Lucchese crime family that had taken over the lucrative business, were major issues that needed to be addressed. He concurred. Of course, I shared with him the impact that the *Port Huron Statement* had on me. He was humble about his authorial role in it. The strangest thing about our lunchtime conversation was not a word was said or mentioned about what had transpired in the past forty-eight hours just blocks away. The only allusion to what was going on came as we exited the restaurant and stepped on to the sidewalk. I recall commenting that it was eerily quiet. An hour and half earlier, the street had been bustling with cars and shoppers. But when we left Lipschitz, the business district of Clinton Avenue felt and sounded like a ghost town. Tom nodded in agreement. I then said, "It feels like the calm before the storm." We shook hands and parted company. [Editor's Note: Hugh Addonizio served as the mayor of Newark from 1962 until 1970, when he lost his reelection bid to Kenneth A. Gibson, who went on to serve as mayor until 1986. In 1969, Addonizio and nine current and former members of his administration were indicted on extortion charges. In 1970, Addonizio was found guilty of conspiracy and extortion and sentenced to ten years in jail.]

I walked a few blocks to my car in the scorching and steaming heat. The temperature was well into the upper eighties if not low nineties, and the air was thick. I retraced my route back to my two-story wood-framed house on Louis Street in New Brunswick, took a shower, and when I turned on the evening news, the lead story might as well have been about the latest bombings and casualties in Vietnam. All-out war had exploded in Newark. The Vietnam War had come home.

I returned to Newark after things settled down, working with SANE and Women's Strike for Peace to help provide relief aid through local churches to families stricken by the riots. We resumed our Vietnam Summer on campaign efforts in August, but before long, we were back on campus. That was the summer of '67.

SI: Okay. Well, I was thinking, since it is after twelve now, we might save that for another session, but I wanted to ask a couple follow ups. First, can you tell us a little more about that time that you spent delivering aid in Newark, working with these churches, what that constituted, what you saw, the immediate aftereffects of the riots?

RB: Yes. We collected food and clothing and delivered it to local churches. They knew best who in their community was most in need of relief. Social life in the inner city centered around the churches. The impact of the riots was devastating. Food, clothing, hardware, and appliance stores were shuttered, many for good. I don't believe Lipschitz Deli ever reopened, as was the case with so many sandwich shops and restaurants in the Central Ward. I pretty much stayed away from the areas most ravaged by the riots, but I saw the photos and the images broadcast across the networks and they were heartbreaking. Eventually, the city recovered, but it took many decades but never entirely, especially at ground zero of the riots.

I was involved years later in one renewal project. In the late 1990s, I was working with Habitat for Humanity. When I learned they were putting up new homes on Prince Street in the Central

Ward, though I was living in Connecticut, I decided to travel down on weekends to lend a helping hand with my carpentry tools and whatever building skills I had learned watching my father build the study room in our house. Prince Street was where first-generation Jews settled in Newark near the turn-of-the-century, leaving behind a world of poverty and pogroms in the hope of building a new life for themselves and their children. So, it was a thrill to see the smiles of hope on face of the Black family when we hammered the last nail into their new home.

SI: Katherine, Louis, do you have any final questions for this session?

LB: With how you were involved in student activism, how would you rate how the administration either helped or hindered that? I know people talk about Mason Gross as a proponent of student activism and free speech, but I am wondering if you had any thoughts on that.

RB: Much more in my junior year, when I was involved with the occupation of Army ROTC [pronounced "rot-see"] headquarters in the fall, and the Dow Chemical debate on the moral issue of using napalm as a weapon of war in Vietnam in the winter. In general, the University administration was fair, especially President Gross, Dean Crosby, and Dean Grobman. I believe all three were sympathetic to the anti-war movement. However, there were concerns about some of the methods, which I can talk about more at length when we discuss the occupation of Army ROTC headquarters. Overall, they were quite flexible and patient when it came to protests, but understandably, they had their limits, especially when it came to disruptive protests and those that interfered with University operations. They were successful in avoiding what happened at Columbia in the spring of '68, when the university administration called in the NYPD. However, I suspect that if Rutgers had to deal with the level of disruption that went on at Columbia, I think their patience would have worn very thin very quickly. Who knows how they would have responded if someone like Mark Rudd was head of SDS at Rutgers? Even the most extreme elements of the anti-war movement at Rutgers, at least during my years there as an undergraduate, were tame and moderate by comparison. [Editor's Note: ROTC is the Reserve Officers' Training Corps. Mason Gross served as the president of Rutgers University from 1959 to 1971. Howard J. Crosby was a long-time administrator at Rutgers, including nineteen years as the Dean of Men and later Dean of Students before his retirement in 1983. In 1965, Arnold B. Grobman became the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, soon to be known as Rutgers College. He served in the position until 1972, when he took a position at the University of Illinois.]

I do have to say that I had a great deal of respect for the way Mason Gross handled the question of academic freedom and free speech that surrounded the Genovese controversy. It helped that Genovese did not make his controversial remarks about welcoming a Vietcong victory in the classroom. Having studied with him at the University of Rochester, I believe that was not something he would have done. He always kept politics out of the classroom. That certainly made it easier for Gross to defend him.

SI: Katherine, is there anything you wanted to ask?

KS: No, the other questions I have are further down, post-Rutgers.

RB: Okay.

SI: Thank you very much for today's session. We really appreciate it. We look forward to talking more about your time at Rutgers and then later on in your academic career and your post-academic career.

RB: Right.

SI: I will reach out to you and set up a second session, but if there is anything that comes to mind, I encourage you to jot it down.

RB: Sure.

SI: Often, we interview people, and then they say, "All these things come back to me."

RB: Yes, yes, sure.

SI: So, it might help.

RB: Sure.

SI: Thank you, it has been great, and I will conclude for now.

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

Transcribed by Jesse Braddell 5/7/2022

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