

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

AN INTERVIEW WITH

MICHAEL M. FISHER

for the

SCARLET AND BLACK PROJECT

in collaboration with the

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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and

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Deborah Gray White: So I'm beginning this conversation with Mike Fisher. We are in Bradenton? Brandington?

Michael Fisher: Bradenton.

DGW: Bradenton, Florida. I'm Deborah White, and today is May 24, 2022. So I'm going to start by just asking you some basic questions. Okay, so let's start with where you were born, and your parents' names, and your place of birth, and your birth year. That way when people read this or listen to it, however, they may come by it, they'll know exactly who they're talking to.

MF: Michael M. Fisher, nickname Mike Fisher, was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey in 1955 to Mary and Oliver Fisher. Oliver Fisher was a corrections officer. Mary was a registered nurse. Both worked for the county of Middlesex.

DGW: Do you know anything about your mother's family, where she was from and as well as your father's family?

MF: My mother's family was from North Carolina, Williamston. Her father was one of 24 children, 12 boys and 12 Girls. She was an only child. Her mother died giving birth to her. But she had a very despondent childhood because she was being sent from one cousin, one relative to another. And she was very bitter about that, constantly moving constantly not being appreciated, but not understanding she was another mouth to feed to poor people.

DGW: Absolutely.

MF: So I've heard some of that story. And she had a tough time getting past it, probably not until age 70, that she finally got past it. My father, on the other hand, came from a very proud father, William Buck Fisher, from Delaware; moved to New Jersey; was a competent plumber who was denied a license by the city of New Brunswick because of being a person of color. And therefore he couldn't perform his trade and eventually left and broke up his family because he couldn't get the work by not being licensed. My grandmother, my father's mother, remarried and married a man named Calvin

James. Mr. James' family is extensive into Perth Amboy, and so in Middlesex County, the Fishers and James became one. And I have an enormous amount of cousins and second cousins, because of the second marriage of my grandmother. And they had six children, five boys and one girl, when she married Calvin James.

DGW: So do you have any knowledge or any stories that you heard about their travel north, their migration? Because apparently they must have come up during what we call the Great Migration, maybe World War II? Yeah, what do you know about their migration?

MF: My grandfather, my mother's father, William "Boot" Hopkins, did come up from North Carolina, partially to work in the Philadelphia shipyards with his brother... Tobe Hopkins, who also came north and they shared housing together. I believe they were two years apart. But they both were avid baseball players. In fact, they played in the Negro Leagues, Tobe Hopkins played for Philadelphia's team post World War II. But yes, they did leave the south to work in the shipyards in Philadelphia. They left the shipyards and Tobe wound up at Sears and Roebuck. But my grandfather wound up being an independent working man, a hustler, a numbers runner, and bootleg liquor man.

DGW: Everybody has those in their family.

MF: And so... My grandfather always... had money in his pocket. And so the other people, particularly his sisters, prayed for him every day due to the danger in his line of work. And of course, at the same time borrowed money from him once a week. His nickname was "Boot" because of his complexion, he was as dark as a boot. And he would get teased by them. Something that they passed on to me because of my dark complexion. They teased me about that when I was growing up from age 4 to 14, a decade long of being teased about my complexion. [In a] loving way, but also still negative in its overall content. And that also taught me at age four, that people who like you, or criticize you also and comments about complexion come from both races. Boot Hopkins was shot and killed during a robbery attempt in Philadelphia in the spring of 1974 never seeing me play college football.

DGW: Yeah.

MF: And so by having older siblings... I have one older brother and two older sisters of my mother's children, my father also remarried and had a son younger than me, which later on became his hero!. But what I learned from those older siblings and their friends, who were many colors, that color is an issue. The old brown bag theory, light is right. So going through that process, that would be in the early 60s, and then television brings Civil Rights to your doorstep. There are two aspects that were the strength of my growing up: there's going to be prejudice because of a culture; and there's going to be prejudice because of the civics that are involved, the politics, the economics. And you've got to weave your way through which one is affecting you most— the politics of culture, the racism of culture, or the racism of civics. Not being able to work at a place, not being able to vote at a place, not being able to live in a place. Living in New Jersey, in Middlesex County, there was tremendous racism economically, which I began to understand between the ages of four and eight. So much so that at age six when I was permitted to go to school, because I was born in December, and therefore at the age of five, it was past the time period to go to school in September, so I had to wait a whole 'nother year. What it teaches you is that certain people are being penalized for the wrong reason when they're born, and making you wait to go to school. And technically, people think you're left behind because you're of a certain age, but you're not at a certain grade level. So you learn that part. Then you learn a part of why is that neighborhood better than this neighborhood? And certain neighborhoods you aren't allowed to go to? I give an example that North Brunswick, which was bordering New Brunswick, on a street called Livingston Avenue they built an outdoor pool.

DGW: I know what's coming.

MF: And the first year the African American children from New Brunswick would go to North Brunswick. And I mean, it was right on the very border, probably, you know, no more than 100 yards from the city of New Brunswick border. We went in that pool and we swam in that pool for a week or two. And the summer was over, like they opened it like in August and by the time August was over, the swimming was done because we had to go back to school. And we're waiting for next year for that pool to open. And that pool became a blacktop parking lot the following year. Because those people saw those African American kids coming up from New Brunswick to swim in their, what was supposed to be, all white pool.

So you learn from that experience and how your parents wanted to soften the blow by saying, well, they just weren't sure the pool would be safe; as opposed to they didn't want you Black kids up there.

DGW: Right.

MF: And it's challenging when you hear the real stories and hear the changing of the stories from your own kind. There weren't many who blamed the white people for their racism of not allowing us in that public swimming pool in North Brunswick. It wasn't supposed to be only North Brunswick residents; it's a public swimming pool and county residents, not whether you've lived in North Brunswick. They never had a system that says, show us your ID to 4, 5, 6 year olds. So that was my, truly, first experience of understanding racism.

DGW: How old were you then?

MF: I was 5. Then we moved to Edison from New Brunswick. I finished kindergarten in New Brunswick, wind up starting first grade in Edison Township, some five miles to the north of New Brunswick.

DGW: What school did you go to in Edison?

MF: John Marshall Elementary School, which all of a sudden, I went from having eight to ten African American kids in my kindergarten class to none in first grade, I was the only black one in my first grade class. I was the only one in my second grade class. I was the only one in my third grade class. There might have been one other black kid in my fourth grade class. She moved from New Brunswick, her name Javone Walker.

DGW: Any idea of why your parents moved to Edison?

MF: Certainly do. At the time my mother had been divorced from my father and had a boyfriend, their relationship was for 12 years and I was 3 when they got together. We moved from New Brunswick because my older brother and his friends were picked up by the New Brunswick police for suspicion of vandalism at a car dealership, which was directly across the street from us, called Handy Motors. We lived on Handy Street and Handy motors, which was a Volkswagen dealer, was directly across the street from us. And there was some vandalism to the place, and they immediately came and got my brother and his friends. And the second act of racism was these boys were nowhere near Handy Motors at the

time that this [vandalism] could have occurred. But the police wanted to get someone and they came and got them. And my mother said, "We're out of here." And so yep, she left New Brunswick because of that incident. She wasn't allowing her son to be called a juvenile delinquent or be sent to a juvenile school and they didn't do anything. And the process I didn't completely understand. They were trying to get lawyers, trying to get these guys out of the police station. And I'm not sure whether she had to call my father, who was in corrections, to call the people he knew to say, "No, my 'sons' didn't do it, these are good boys," that sort of thing. "They're not ruffians." And so, we moved the following year, maybe six months after that incident, she couldn't wait to get out of the city of New Brunswick.

DGW: So you graduated from Edison High School?

MF: Edison High School, which is probably, well, it was the oldest of the two high schools in Edison. Edison was built first and then JP Stevens some four years later, probably. Class of '74. Again, probably 50% of my classes I would have been the only Black male in the class, and the other 50% there would have been no more than three of us in that same class.

DGW: Were there any black females in the class?

MF: Uh, probably two, simply because in my graduating class, there were a total of five Black males I believe, and five Black females.

DGW: Wow.

MF: Out of 700 kids plus or minus in the graduating class.

DGW: What made you choose Rutgers? I mean, you didn't want to get away or leave New Jersey? Tell me what brought you to Rutgers University. A lot of people want to get away from home and travel and, yeah, do something different.

MF: So when I was 13, I played Pop Warner for the Edison Jets, football. [Editor's Note: [Pop Warner Little Scholars](#) is a nonprofit organization that provides American football and cheerleading activities

for K-12 students. Founded in Philadelphia in 1929, it is the largest youth football organization in the United States.] While growing up in Edison from age seven to thirteen, I lived on an international street. We had Russians, we had Cubans, we had Puerto Ricans, we had Irish, Italian families, we had Hungarians, we had almost every type of family background that you can have in a three block radius. Very, very diverse, very diverse. And, of course, in those times, most families had 3.5 kids. And those who had more than 3.5 kids were also there. So we had an abundance of kids either three years to five years older than myself, or three years to five years younger than myself. So easily 50 children in a three block radius, minimum, minimum 50 kids and out of those 50 kids, 20 of us played sports regularly. What [do the] the parents say? "Get out of the house!" in those days. And we all had yards. So we could play football in the yard—tackle football—we could play touch football on the street. We could play basketball. And eventually, families got a little money, and they put basketball hoops in their own driveways, and they got swimming pools, and I got to go swimming in their swimming pool. Edison was a democratic community at the time, and we had great parks and recreation during the summer. But what happened is we all became super athletes. I was an all star baseball player, centerfielder, and really could have probably played baseball as well and succeeded in that. I was bored by baseball. Edison had outstanding pitchers, and so there weren't a whole lot of balls coming to centerfield, and football was more action. So the Edison Jets in 1969 were undefeated. So...

DGW: Jets is what kind of [sport]?

MF: Pop Warner Football.

DGW: Okay, football.

MF: Yes, Pop Warner Football, Midget Pop Warner Football. And we were undefeated, having beaten the East Brunswick Bears. And I was very proud of that in 1969, because 1969 the New York Mets won the World Series, and subsequently the New York Knicks won the basketball, and subsequently the New York Jets, Joe Willie, won the Super Bowl.

DGW: I remember.

MF: ...beat my favorite team, the Kansas City Chiefs in conference playoffs... beat the Baltimore Colts in Super Bowl, excuse me. And the following year, the Kansas City Chiefs came in and won. I was a Kansas City Chiefs fan because it appeared that they had the most African Americans on their team. And I was finally reading the story about athletes in sports, and during the late 60s to 70s, sports truly became the integrating substance of America. Jackie Robinson started it, but bit by bit by bit the outstanding play of Wilt Chamberlain, the outstanding play of Willie Mays, the outstanding play of Roberto Clemente, the outstanding play of Jim Brown. I can go on and on of the athletes at that time, Bill Russell with the Celtics. And so as TV brings those sports into your living room, people see people—black and white—playing together and hugging each other and giving each other five and camaraderie after the game. And so, we on our street in our neighborhood related to that, and luckily, we all had parents who never said, "Don't play with that kid." We were never told not to play with any one particular child.

DGW: But you never told me why Rutgers, why Rutgers and not someplace else?

MF: So I had over 60 letters to go to different universities and recruited and probably 50% of those were Ivy League schools. I was selected a Scholar Athlete of Edison High School. In fact, I received a letter from West Point and the Naval Academy and I wanted to go to West Point Academy, but my congressman didn't write the letter, and there was some racist attitudes...

DGW: To get in you had to get a letter...

MF: From your congressman.

DGW: From your congressman, correct.

MF: So, it was late in coming. I don't want to say he purposely didn't do it or wasn't informed that I needed it. The stories that got back to me are: I didn't get it, I didn't get it.

DGW: And he didn't do it.

MF: He didn't do it. So I was going to wind up going to the University of Maryland, and my mother had cancer. And she had, she had a mild, very small case, very small case. But I stayed home with her because I was the only child remaining back at home, and my other siblings were all married and out of the house. And so I was concerned about her health. And then also,...five years prior, Rutgers was on TV to celebrate 100 years of college football so I learned what Rutgers was. So they were on ABC Sports, and had them on the college football game of the week. My senior year at Edison High School 1973, J.J. Jennings, who was Rutgers star football player and led the nation in rushing, did an internship—teaching internship—at Edison High School. [Editor's Note: [James Henry "J.J." Jennings RC'74](#) was a star tailback on the Rutgers football team from 1971 to 1973. He went on to play in the World Football League from 1974 to 1975. He was inducted into the Rutgers Athletics Hall of Fame in 1989.] And we used to bet who would score the most touchdowns on Saturday. And I think he won most of them probably about 4-2, and so I was starting to learn more about Rutgers because he was in the building. And so, of course, being in Middlesex County, I knew of Rutgers, didn't realize what Rutgers football was about, I had seen the one hundred year game celebration on television. Now I have a Rutgers player who's also recruiting me, yet he was from Massachusetts—totally different perspective; but he was talking about, it's a great school. He had a big Afro, I had TWA, teeny weeny Afro. So I looked at him as a pro-Black guy, because he had this big Afro. And so if this pro-Black guy can go to Rutgers, let me consider going to Rutgers. Well, they schmoozed me pretty good. They did some things that were in recruiting...

DGW: This is in 1974...

MF: This is 1974. This is the winter Dec/Jan of '74. They did some things that were really great and had banquets and... And I was chosen Middlesex County Back of the Year by the New Brunswick Touchdown Club, which were basically Rutgers alumni. So being chosen the Outstanding Back in Middlesex County—and I had some pretty steep competition—that was like, okay, guys, you win. You know, I got it, you really think that much of me. And so I'll go to Rutgers. And I received what is called the Thomas Barr scholarship. And I laugh because the Thomas Barr scholarship was \$2,800 which gave me a full ride, books, and a little bit of pocket change. [Editor's Note: Thomas Turner Barr RC1913, endowed a scholarship to support student athletes, specifically football players, at Rutgers. The first recipients were named in 1967. The scholarship continues to serve as a major source of support for Rutgers athletes today.]

DGW: Can't go to school like that on that dime today.

MF: I almost probably couldn't get public housing for that.

DGW: [Laughter]

MF: So that was a full ride every year, and I thank Mr. Barr for that scholarship. The funny part of it was a classmate of mine, because our high school coach passed away last year—Vincent Capraro—we created a scholarship in his name this past year for a high school student. So we hope to have this go on for a long time as well, even though there weren't as many African American students and the scholarship is not for an African American student, and neither was my scholarship. My scholarship was for an athlete who was attending Rutgers College. And so I was admitted to Rutgers College and went to the River Dorms. [Editor's Note: The River Dorms are a trio of residential buildings—Hardenbergh Hall, Frelinghuysen Hall, and Campbell Hall—located between George Street and the Raritan River on the College Avenue Campus in New Brunswick.

They were opened in 1956.] And I want to say it was...

DGW: [Laughter] I laugh because they're thinking of tearing those down.

MF: They should. I mean, I know they, there's not any modern electrical systems in the building that, you know, students need nowadays. So, okay, I'm going to Rutgers and...

DGW: Let me just interrupt you here. Did you have any idea or did you know about Paul Robeson? Had you... was that in any way influential? I'm asking because, you know, Paul Robeson was an alum.

MF: Well, there were people telling me about Paul Robeson, but Paul Robeson was in the same light as Jackie Robinson, that was ages ago. Yeah, he survived. I know he got kicked and spit on, because in the 50s and 60s, there were ballplayers who got kicked and spit on because of being an African American. The biggest challenge at that time was, how are you defining yourself? Because remember, there was colored, there was negro, there was Black, there was African American. So now you've got to deal with which one do I want to be? Well, quite frankly, because I had a tremendous support group of Caucasians, particularly Jewish kids... We had an area in Edison called Twin Brooks and it had a large Jewish population. And many of these Jewish families were professional people in New Brunswick or in Edison—attorneys, jewelry store owners, managers of banks, managers of finance institutions that were

out at that time. And so their children played with me and we had conversations about prejudice... I probably went to more Bah and Bar Mitzvahs than almost any other person I know of...

DGW: So did I.

MF: And so their support, which I understood because of the prejudice that also Jews [experienced], we were one family. And because they were German Jews, and Russian Jews, and a small contingent of Hungarian Jews, they all gravitated toward me. And be that as it may, the Jews were taking the same route as Blacks in sports. Red Holzman in the New York Knickerbockers and some of the great ballplayers who were Jewish ballplayers, baseball players at the time. So if you were an athlete, you were supported by both prongs, the Black people and the Jewish people. And so I hit the trifecta by also being a scholar by being an intelligent [person]. But that wasn't because I was a book study person. That was because I was a knowledge-seeking person. What do you know? I listened to everybody. I would sit in a room with adults (my mother had rent parties) and I would listen to all the adults and want to hear what they said and explain things.

DGW: So, you went through Rutgers in four years, not five...

MF: Well, four and a half...

DGW: Okay, four and a half years.

MF: So, the point that I'm making is that my education, no disparity to Rutgers, was more from a community than an institution. And it grew at Rutgers because of the other students that came there. Now, sadly, I'm going to say when I got there as a freshman, and my concentration was on football as we went to Hightstown, New Jersey, for football camp... In Hightstown, we had to be told not to go out in the street at night because of the Ku Klux Klan in Hightstown! This is 1974! I'm like, "What are you kidding me?" — "No, they're here man. You guys... make sure you guys stay together." — "Ah, what?!" Now, I'm angry because it's New Jersey. I'm hearing about the Klan in Alabama and Georgia, now we're talking New Jersey? And of course, Hightstown was dark in '74, it's not the little downtown, there's some lights, but the rest of it is dark. And so there's, you've instilled fear into an 18 year old now.

And many of the other fellows who came to camp that year, came from all over the state of New Jersey: South Jersey, North Jersey, Newark—Barringer, West Side. Rutgers for the first time probably had, if they had 60 kids come to the school—I don't know if they all were on scholarship or some were walk ons—but if there were 60 football players in my freshman class... probably too high, but let me say 40, I would probably say 25 were Black, and 15 were white in my freshman class. And that was very surprising, because when I saw Rutgers on TV in 1969, they only had three. And then when I saw J.J. Jennings in 1973 and '72, they only had three or four starters. Then I get to the school and Edward J. Bloustein is the new president of the school! A Jew, the undercurrent that was being told in New Jersey public civics of this Jew being the first Jew as president of this school. You would have thought it was an earthquake happening in New Jersey, that he got the position.

DGW: Well, you know that, just to interrupt, you know that Rutgers now has its first African American president, right?

MF: Yes, I do. I think he's on the cover of one of these (Rutgers alumni magazine on my table). So yeah, so as I go to Rutgers, post-Martin Luther King, post-Kent State, all the civics of racism and civil disobedience and all of those things, and then they change the age to 18 where you can drink and vote. So now you're qualified as an adult. Yikes! I'm qualified as an adult, and yet I got to be afraid to walk the streets of Hightstown, New Jersey, for fear of the Ku Klux Klan. All right, well, then let me concentrate on football.

Earlier in...

DGW: Let me just ask you one more question before we make that turn.

MF: Sure.

DGW: Did you hang out with students who were not in the football program? Or were most of your friends...?

MF: Yes. In fact, one of those students are still they're still at Rutgers teaching also. And that's Bill Davis, brother Black, who was known back then. He was a year or two ahead of me. But we hung out with a lot of the non-athletes and athletes for two reasons. And one of those reasons, reason number one

was, during the parties that were thrown—because now we're 18, and adults, there were parties, you could rent the halls at campuses to different sororities and different clubs, there was a party almost every weekend—and the football players were used as security at these parties to keep the New Brunswick townies out of the party. The party was supposed to be only for Rutgers students. And so when the townies, the kids that didn't go to college, came in, the girls were scared, the guys were scared, because these guys were a little bit older, some of them.

DGW: These frat houses, were they on Rutgers campus?

MF: Well, we did very few of the frat house parties on Rutgers campus because those are all white. The Black frats always had a party in Livingston Hall basement.

DGW: These the Alphas, the Kappas, Omegas...?

MF: Alphas, Kappas, Omegas, exactly. The Grooves. [Editor's Note: This refers to the African American fraternal organizations—Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, and Groove Phi Groove Social Fellowship.]

DGW: And how about the women?

MF: The Deltas and the AKA. [Editor's Note: This refers to the African American sororities—Delta Sigma Theta and Alpha Kappa Alpha.] So those sororities—Douglass had a few parties over there—would have one or two ballplayers as security and/or a boyfriend from home who was a big guy or something like that. But we got to intermingle with a lot of non-athletic related people because football players were used as security back in those days.

DGW: That's a really, that's a fact—I'm really glad you said that, because I don't think that has ever come up even in the research that I've done. One other question, when you were admitted to Rutgers, were you admitted to Livingston?

MF: Rutgers College.

DGW: Right. But did you know a lot of people at Livingston campus?

MF: Of course.

DGW: Because Livingston was still relatively new and had lots of complaints about the dormitories and the living conditions at Livingston.

MF: Listen, those dormitories were brand spanking new and spectacular, a little small compared to College Avenue. But at the same time, I'm not going to say people were destructive, I'm going to say that 18-year-olds who have freedom, aren't as respectful to public service buildings also. And some of them came from public housing buildings who were at Livingston College. And specifically, we talked about the Towers, and I actually had a young lady who I was dating my freshman year who lived over there, so I had to go over there regularly. [Editor's Note: The Towers is an 8-story dorm complex built in 1972 on Joyce Kilmer Ave., Piscataway, on the Livingston Campus. The complex is now known as the Ernest A. Lynton Towers, named after the first dean of Livingston College.] And then I had to meet other people who were there. And the security of getting in the building and all of those kinds of things were, well, once they know you're Mike, the football player, I can go anywhere now. So, "Oh, you're that guy?" — "Yeah." So being an athlete gives you tremendous access to the campus, and people recognize you and you can go anywhere. And then you hear all the stories about what's wrong with Cook, what's wrong with Douglass, what's wrong with Livingston College.

And because of, probably now, my sophomore... junior year, a third of the black ball players are going... are admitted into Livingston College. Again, those brothers that are from Newark, Barringer, East Orange, and those areas there. A few from South Jersey—Cinnaminson, Delran. What other schools are down there? Lawnside, Burlington, Mt. Holly so forth. So, but I know that they were as intelligent as I was. I've always hated this, one campus is better than the other, smarter than the other. Because I knew that wasn't the truth. Everybody knows education is based upon application. Are there a few people who got lucky and have a little bit more brain power? Yeah, but not in the, in the title that we have it...that all these students are, you know, slackers because they're at Livingston College. And it took Livingston College, what 40 years to finally, or Rutgers to finally say, we don't need to identify which campus you want on the diploma, please. And needless to say, the great thing about mixing with all of those students, as I said, myself, I was a learner from other people. I still ask people, what's your story?

Similar to mine? How were you raised? What was your childhood like? What was your preteen like? What was your teenage like? Because I know people make choices based upon that history in that past.

MF: One story, negative. As an Edison Jet, Pop Warner player, we had to canvas for money. And so we set out in front of a store on a Friday afternoon or Friday evening, as it were. And we're standing in front of a store called Great Eastern. It was on the Route 1 bridge that separates Edison and New Brunswick on Highway route one. And this Great Eastern store, which became a movie theater, which became something else five, seven years later. Some kid recognized me because we had our uniforms on, we had these bright gold pants and black jerseys and black and gold. We look like Steelers, but back then, but that's the colors of the Edison Jets.

DGW: You didn't wear black and red?

MF: No, this is Pop Warner.

DGW: Oh, Pop Warner, right.

MF: A kid recognized me and was so excited to see Mike Fisher, so excited. And his mother said, "He's just an athlete. He's just a ballplayer." She was disparaging the fact that I played sports. And I had seen that look on white people where they're like, "Eh, but he's colored." They'd say it in a nice way, "He's a nice person, but he's colored." You could hear it and you can see it from the people's body language and you know. And that kind of coaxed me that day to say, "You'll never just say I'm an athlete." And so you just take that and say, "No, I'm going to be more. People are going to know more about me than just my athletics." And we talked about, because I was also a Cub Scout for probably one year, about being well-rounded. That aspect taught me. When I was in fifth grade, they chose me as captain of the Safety Patrol. And I got a tutorage by Lieutenant Palko of the Edison Police Department. And this man was so sharp in a uniform. And he said, "I have so much respect for you. You as a Black man doing these things that you're doing at this school." What!? This guy who's a policeman—remember the policemen I knew were trying to arrest my brother.

DGW: Right.

MF: And then some three, four years later, I got this policeman telling me— who's in the sharpest uniform—telling me I'm a special guy and that's why I got this position as captain of the Safety Patrol! And I can do it and all the other kids who were— [imitating whining] "Why didn't I get it?"—who were whiners, why didn't they get it? And I understand now there are people who are born leaders, and there are people who think they're leaders. And he was able, because of his military training, to recognize what a born leader has, as opposed to people who want to be a leader, who don't have the total skill set to do leadership, but think they do. So, I took his mentorship and his advice. He probably came once a month, but it seemed like once a week I was seeing him. And I probably did see him once a week, but it wasn't always in the school setting. He would just stop by the post that I was at. Or he would drive by my home or he did something that for some odd reason I saw Lieutenant Palko more often than I thought I should've.

DGW: Would you say he had an influence? What kind of impact, lasting impact would you say?

MF: Well, as I speak about him today, it's obviously a lasting impact. But it also helped me understand what military men are about. And I had my brothers, and my father's brothers who were also in the military to show me discipline...

DGW: He was in the military? He had a career in the military before he became a police officer?

MF: He had a career in the military before he became a police officer, which most men at the time did. My father who was in corrections, was an MP in the service. [Editor's Note: MP refers to Military Police, the law enforcement agencies connected with the military.] His brothers, and all of them served in the United States branch of service, two in the Marines and two in the Army. And the one I recognize the most as having served was the one who went to Vietnam, my uncle Samuel James.

DGW: Since you mentioned Vietnam, and that was one of the questions, were you at all impacted by it? I know you went in...

MF: Yes, I was impacted...

DGW: ...in '74. At that time the war was waning down.

MF: The war was waning down. That's right.

DGW: Almost done.

MF: And I get recruited by West Point and the Naval Academy. And so yes, I wanted to go to West Point.

DGW: Does that mean you wanted to go to Vietnam?

MF: No, it doesn't mean that.

MF: It means I wanted to go because the uniforms were so sharp that I saw them when they entered the football stadium. And the marching that took place at a football game. That's why I wanted to go. Once I got past that, and Nixon was president, and I was becoming more and more politically aware, I was like, okay, he didn't write the letter, no biggie—the congressman—no biggie.

DGW: Okay.

DGW: That may have saved you. [Laughter]

MF: Exactly, exactly. And...

DGW: You never know.

MF: Yeah, I don't. I don't begrudge him for not having written a letter because I still have the letters that say Naval Academy, West Point wanted me, addressed to Michael Fisher. So, be that as it may, really the effect that Vietnam had was my brother's friends, who I knew, all went. Only my brother went to college from Edison High School. He graduated on a partial track scholarship and went to Northeast Missouri State. He went out to the boonies. What? North...? I never heard of such a place. [Editor's Note: Northeast Missouri State University was renamed Truman State University in 1996. It is located in Kirksville, Missouri.] And it became a teacher's college, and he became a teacher, and he met his wife out there and they're married 55 years. But I didn't get to see his full potential. He was on the only—no,

I won't say only now—he was on the first undefeated Edison High School football team, my brother. Many of those ballplayers made All-state. In fact, at Edison High School, in 2006, was the inaugural Hall of Fame class of which I was inducted with one of those ballplayers from the '61 undefeated team—football team—Richie Davis.

DGW: I know Richie Davis. So tell me about Rutgers football. Whatever you want to tell me.

MF: Well, here we go. Rutgers football, I'll go back to Hightstown. Here I am, knowing none of the other players, none of the other freshmen. We all get to this camp in early August, somewhere like August 8th, with two weeks or two and a half weeks. Then our first game is September 3rd or 4th, whatever it is. And so I hear where some of the guys are from. Rutgers tells me in the springtime that they're going to run a Wing-T. They were running a tailback formation with J.J. Jennings. Meaning, there's a fullback in front and a tailback, and 90% of the time that tailback gets the football. It was another guy who was running crazy like that, his name was O.J. Simpson. I loved O.J. Simpson, and I loved that tailback position. We didn't run it in Edison High School, we ran the Wing-T formation it's called. Well, Rutgers said we're going to run the Wing-T formation also. "Oh, you're going to leave that tailback formation? That's pretty good. I like that idea." Another reason for going to Rutgers, they're going to run the offense that I'm running in high school that I already know. I should know the plays left and right. They may change the name but I know what's going on. Get to camp, the Wing-T has three running backs: a left halfback, a fullback, and a right halfback. In high school, I was the left halfback. Why? Because most teams are right-handed and you run to the right and, therefore, the stronger, better, running back runs to the right.

I get to Rutgers, and they make me right halfback instead of left halfback. While the right halfback doesn't carry the ball as much. Rutgers puts me... No, excuse me! They do put me in a left halfback position, they do. I'm number eight, number eight at the left halfback position when we get to camp. There's first string, second string, third string, I'm number eight. When you get to camp you start to see, in running backs, there's eight left halfbacks, there're five fullbacks and there's eight right halfbacks. Two weeks go by, they move me from fifth string left halfback to third string right halfback. "You want to move, Mike?" — "Yeah, sure. No biggie." I know I'm gonna get more reps because—repetitions, more practice—because of this. And typically with freshmen, let me also reiterate that this is only the second year that the NCAA permitted freshmen to play varsity football. And so I was going to have an opportunity to play varsity football if I moved to the right side, knowing I would carry the ball less. So now I'm third string in the second week of camp right halfback; by the end of camp I'm the starting right

halfback. So I'm going to be the starter and when we leave Hightstown, when we survive Hightstown, I get to campus. The first day on campus, I'm assigned my dormitory room, and the *Targum* has done a story on Mike Fisher, that I'm starting as a freshman. The game is coming Saturday the following week. [Editor's Note: *The Daily Targum* is the official student newspaper of Rutgers University.]

DGW: So this is September 1974. Just in case someone wants to go back and...

MF: ...see that *Targum* article about Mike Fisher starting as a freshman. Well, I get a congratulatory party in my dorm from the kids who are there who I don't even know! But they heard Mike Fisher, who's in today's *Targum* is going to be living in this dorm. So the kids are having their own party, also. So, my roommate throws a party for...

DGW: These are Blacks and whites?

MF: These are only whites. There are no Blacks but one female on the other side, from Trenton, I can't think of her name.

DGW: That's important.

MF: One Black female on the other side, the room is totally white. But then again, my roommate is a Jewish kid, and I'm sorry, so sad, I don't know his name. But we were only roommates for that freshman year, because I went off campus the following years. And again, because of football, because...

DGW: Excuse me, they didn't make the football players live on campus and stay together? You could be all over the campus?

MF: We were all over the campuses. Some lived in frat houses, some lived off campus. Some guys were Middlesex County kids. Yeah! Went home, literally went back home.

DGW: I don't think they do that now.

MF: Well, no, probably not. But they kept the money in their pocket and said the housing, they created an address off campus, you got the check. Go pay the housing, but the kids lived at home. I mean, because they were from Bound Brook. We're talking two miles away, right down the street. Yeah, there were kids that were close, you know, that lived in the area that went to Rutgers to play on the Rutgers football team. Other guys were from Matawan and Plainfield, you know, every bit of a 10 mile ride back to their home. So, I had fun at the party. My first introduction into college campus party life, let's say it got a little wild. Let's say it did get wild because it was also the first year where women were on the same dormitory floor as men.

DGW: You guys are drinking alcohol?

MF: Yeah, they're drinking alcohol and one or two are having some other products.

DGW: Listen, I went to campus....

MF: They had some other products. I, on the other hand, as an athlete, did not drink alcohol. I was raised in an era where alcohol and smoking cigarettes were no good for you. And so I believed that.

DGW: And you didn't smoke any marijuana?

MF: I didn't do it. No, I didn't smoke any marijuana probably until my senior year. And only because I never bought it. If it was nearby, I would do it because I know it didn't affect me. I never got high. Now, was it lousy marijuana? I guess so. But if you don't pay for it, what'd you expect? [Laughter] So there were very few ballplayers who did do marijuana, and the few that did didn't have anything good either. So they didn't get high or get affected or miss a practice session because they were hung over. And the few that did do it regularly didn't travel, Okay, because their performance on the football field was no good. And I say this to say, after my illustrious freshman year—I started every game, nine in a row—but the final game was in Hawaii. Oh yeah! That was another reason I chose Rutgers because on the schedule was Hawaii. "I'd like to go to Hawaii," I said to myself. I'd like to go. My mother had gotten me into traveling and taking cruises and being all over the place because she only had the one child remaining now. So she's got some disposable income and we're traveling.

DGW: Good for her!

MF: I love traveling. And of course college, traveling, hotels, this traveling thing is great. This is really great. And so there's nothing like a hotel bed. Really big beds, big fluffy pillows, turned down sheets. It's the bomb. To an eighteen year old, it's the bomb. And then, if I can say it, you know, one of us snuck our girlfriends into those hotels...

DGW: You can say it...

MF: And so that was, you know, you had a gorgeous room... because also some of the females came from poor homes and had to sleep with their siblings and all those other kinds of things. And so when you got into that hotel and that bed was huge, you went to work! [Laughter] So let me say this though. So football changes me drastically because now I'm a starter. So much so, that as I get my identity pictures with Rutgers I become the face of Rutgers football in the *Home News*; 24 is me. So, when they talk about Rutgers football, they're using Mike Fisher. [Editor's Note: The *Home News* was the local newspaper in New Brunswick. It merged with the Woodbridge paper *News Tribune* in 1995 to create the *Home News Tribune*, which serves Middlesex County today.]

DGW: I'm hoping that you will let me take a couple of these pictures just so that they can accompany your intro.

MF: Sure, absolutely. Particularly that one, because everybody knows after a touchdown, you know, you're standing there, 24! Or that one, that's a touchdown it says, in the Meadowlands. So, as I've mentioned to you about us giving a scholarship in the name of my high school football coach, Dr. Vince Capraro. Coach Capraro had a sporting goods store. Back then athletes weren't allowed anything from anybody, except Coach Capraro gave me these new suede Converse for free.

DGW: Say that again so that we make sure... It's okay to tell people that now.

MF: Yes, Coach Capraro gave me these brand new Converse sneakers that I used in the Meadowlands, because Rutgers played the first collegiate football game in the New Jersey Meadowlands Stadium. [Editor's Note: The Giants Stadium at the Meadowlands, located in East Rutherford, New Jersey, was

the home field of the New York Giants football team and was regularly used by Rutgers for home games. The stadium opened on October 10, 1976. The first collegiate football game at the stadium took place on October 23, 1976, with the Rutgers Scarlet Knights crushing Columbia Lions 47-0. The stadium closed in 2010 and was replaced by the MetLife Stadium at the Meadowlands Sports Complex.]

DGW: Wow.

MF: And I didn't need spikes, you needed sneakers on astroturf. And he gave me these new red Converse All Stars. I was the only Rutgers player on the field with red shoes. Everybody else had white sneakers or white shoes. The *News Tribune* continually utilized me in all other phases of advertisement. So I say today, when we talk about the NIL, [Name] Image and Likeness, where these college ball players now are receiving funds. I'm missing a couple checks. Okay, see marketing for clothing.

[Editor's Note: In June 2021, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) changed its long-standing rules that previously prohibited college athletes from receiving financial compensation for their name, image and likeness (NIL). The new rules opened the door for student athletes to profit from NIL activities, such as media promotions and brand endorsements. The rules were changed following the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *NCAA v. Alston*, where the court ruled unanimously against the NCAA's rules that limited the benefits that colleges can offer athletes. The court decision and the ensuing change of NCAA rules is seen as a monumental shift in college sports.]

My Mother, bless her soul, kept some of the items that represent Mike Fisher.

[Editor's Note: Mr. Fisher here shares items with Dr. White.]

DGW: Wow!

MF: All Star Dairies, which was in Somerset, New Jersey, always had the Scarlet Knights schedule on their package, and whose image and likeness is there? Number 24, Mike Fisher, showing the 1975 schedule. So again, how many cartons of milk did they sell that I should be getting a check from?

DGW: Wow, yeah, wow.

MF: Yeah. So, sophomore year, we wound up being 7-3-1, if I recall correctly. Freshman year, excuse me, 7-3-1, had a reasonably decent year yardage wise, running wise. No big deal. Excited about coming back for the sophomore campaign. Particularly, because I'm understanding college and I'm understanding football. Come back for the sophomore year, and we elect Curt Edwards as the captain. First Black captain in Rutgers football history. You would have thought we voted for Hitler. That's how dramatic the undercurrent was, throughout the university, that Rutgers had a black football captain.

DGW: This was in '75.

MF: This is in '75, this is in '75. And so, well, we did it, that's it. And the coach said, "Okay. The team voted for it. That's the way it is." And Curt was from Matawan, New Jersey. Came from a mixed race town, a hard working guy, a hard running back. Had a different style of leadership. He had an "in your face" style leadership. But he wanted to win, which is the most important thing that I liked about him was he wanted to win. And after a while, he would always pick on me from being from Edison. Matawan never played Edison High Schools, but Matawan football was far superior in history than Edison, in terms of winning state championships, and things of that nature. So, he's coming in thinking that his school is better than my school and I... Because also we had Bert Kosup at quarterback who was from J.P. Stevens [High School] in Edison. [Editor's Note: [Albert Kosup](#) RC'77 was inducted into the Rutgers Athletics Hall of Fame in 2000.] So there are Edison teammates on the team, so that helped settle down the rivalry of the guys who are local and the local high school rivalries between guys who came from Piscataway, guys that came from South Plainfield, guys that came from Lawnside, guys that came from... They kept their high school rivalries alive at Rutgers, amongst each other.

DGW: I see, I see.

MF: Trying to say who's the better ballplayer and, particularly, the South Jersey guys were like, "You northern guys, you guys don't know nothing about football. We play football." And we would tell them the northern guys who played a couple teams from Pennsylvania, and I can't remember their names. But these are the guys from Pennsylvania who went to Penn State. These boys were huge! Okay, big farm kids, they were huge. And one or two high schools always played these guys and always got shellacked, because they were...guys who looked like pros when we were in high school. They look like real football players when they come out.

But I digress to say, sophomore year, we go 9-2. We were 2-2 in our first 4 games. We win 7 in a row. Big Game at our stadium, the final game of the season is versus Syracuse, which had just beat Notre Dame, which had just beat Alabama, the week before. So, there was some "WHEW!" going on, because now we're going to play Syracuse who just defeated a top 20 team. And on the other side of the field, is a guy from J.P. Stevens [High School], Edison, named Charlie Brown, running back. Jimmy and I had always been competing against each other throughout our careers. And so now here's another opportunity to go against Charlie Brown. But again, it's the Rutgers football team versus the Syracuse football team, not Mike Fisher versus Charlie Browns, Edison versus J.P. Stevens. But...

DGW: Who wins?

MF: We win in a fantastic game! I probably had the greatest run of the year of any running back on the team. There was a free safety, he was coming up to hit me at about the 14-yard line, maybe the 10-yard line. And I literally ran him over. It was such a collision. Then I wound up going into the endzone and I did a little tiptoe dance into the endzone and raise my arms up. Curt Edwards picked me up as I was holding up my arms. There's a picture of that in this book somewhere as well. But that was the start of, "We're pretty good," because we beat Syracuse, who had just beat whomever it was that was part of the top 20. And so that was... And we had a full house! We had 30,000 people at that game, which was a big deal for Rutgers at the time, a full house stadium. People from Syracuse came down because they thought Syracuse was going to beat us...

DGW: You were playing on Rutgers campus at that time?

MF: We were playing at Rutgers campus at that time.

DGW: I know I'm moving along, but what do you think of the new stadium now?

MF: Oh, it's perfect for the progress that Rutgers has made. You know, part of being a Big Ten school, a part of being Big East when it was Big East when the stadium was built and added on. And so we only had 28,000, but that's all that was needed at that time. It was a deterrent in 1976 when we were undefeated. Because we got undefeated, we had a great year, everybody had a great year, I had a great year—I think I led the team in scoring or in the top five, something of that nature, top two scoring—but when we went undefeated, 1976 football season, there were only six bowls.

DGW: And they are considerably more now.

MF: Considerably more, 10 times as many, okay? Sixty. So which bowl are we going to get invited to? Well, Rutgers, you're not a real football team, and you're independent, so you're not part of a conference, and all that other kind of stuff. And of course, you can name the 12 teams that go to bowls every year Notre Dame, USC, Georgia Tech, Alabama, so we're not going to get to a bowl.

DGW: So can I ask you this? [There was] a lot of controversy on campus when Rutgers joined the Big Ten. What did you think of it?

MF: I thought it was a smart move. I thought it was beneficial for both the Big Ten and Rutgers. A—you get the original college football team as part of your historical content. And, obviously, businesswise to New York–North Jersey metropolitan market, why do you think they wanted...? It's the marketplace! And because when—what's the current coach's name? I've forgotten...

DGW: [Greg] Schiano.

MF: [When] Schiano was winning, there were 50-60,000 people at the games. And great for him, he had a plus bowl game winning record. So when they went to the bowls, we didn't lose them. He won most of them. So Schiano did a fantastic job in getting Rutgers into the top, you know, 20. When I went there, I was probably back to three games. I just don't go back. I just don't go back. But I went back for that Louisville-Rutgers football game, in whatever year it was.

DGW: Because they were a winning team and...

MF: It was exciting. The other team was undefeated, and it was a night game, I think it was, but Rutgers prevailed.

DGW: But let me just be the devil's advocate here. I don't want to go too far afield. But most analysts would argue that a school like Rutgers is really not going to make that much money off of football and that football really drains the money out of this school. Because considering what is put into it in terms of coaches salaries, it's not worth it. And that most schools really do not realize the gain.

MF: Well, I've heard that argument. Yeah, I've heard that argument. And suffice to say, if Northwestern can do it, a state university like Rutgers can do it. There's some fudging that goes with the numbers all the time, we know that. And those who are anti-sports can certainly try to find every reason—coaches salaries. I think coaches' salaries are way out of control. They are so far out of control. It is...it is sad. And one of the reasons why I don't go to the games, because college football is now such a business that it has ruined, ruined, literally ruined the competitive nature of young men who want to play football. Because the schools that have the history are getting the money from the sponsors and have the stadiums to have the crowds to play in them. Rutgers would only be in the Big Ten because they have at least a 50,000 seat stadium. If they had anything smaller, they couldn't even... because 25,000 people travel with Michigan every year to a game no matter where they play. So it would be imperative to have a stadium that can seat a larger number because these Big Ten schools travel very well. And Rutgers, I would put on the minus as a traveling institution, maybe 12 to 15,000 people buy season tickets and travel to away games for Rutgers.

DGW: Okay, let me just, because we're getting a little far afield, I want to make sure—and I don't know how much time you still have—but going back to your college days, '74 through '78. Is there anything that stands out, say as maybe your worst experience at Rutgers? And then tell me what your best experience at Rutgers was?

MF: Well, the best experience is being part of an undefeated team. There's no ifs, ands, or buts, on the athletic side...

DGW: That's got to be great.

MF: That is, that's the best thing. And we were on TV, Primetime ABC TV, it was Thanksgiving night, or that weekend thereof, I should say. So that was the greatest experience. Obviously, injury is one of those things... Prior to that Syracuse game I had severely twisted my ankle, severely, probably shouldn't have played. And they gave me a shot in my ankle. I hadn't practiced for two out of the three days prior to the game. The team medics gave me a shot to my ankle, and "Whoa! I can play!" And I started, I played and won and scored a big touchdown. That was as exciting to me as well, that I overcame that pain and played. However, game number 44 in my career. I've started every game in Rutgers football in my four year career. I get my last carry as they take athletes out one at a time, seniors I should say, take us out one at a time and we can get our fanfare applause. I know this is my last carry. And so, we're

winning the game handedly, so there's a good chance at this particular play that they call, I might go for a touchdown. I got about 35 yards, but I think I can take this puppy in. I break free, it's only a free safety left, one-two men to beat. And I said, "This is my last carry. I need to hit somebody." And I lower my shoulder and I run right smack dab into this guy. I don't dance. I don't twirl. I don't do the Jitterbug, like I normally do, break a guy's ankle. No, I'm gonna run this son-of-a-gun over. And I blew my shoulder out for the second time. I had injured it in high school, missed my whole junior year, I was in a sling my whole junior year of high school. From my knee and my shoulder and my last carry. I couldn't even wave to the crowd on the way out, I couldn't even put both arms up. As soon as that happened, I knew it. I just rolled over and got up and ran off the field, couldn't even get to real applause. Even my mother and her new husband had come to every game with my grandmother, my father's mother. They came to every game, and I knew where they would be sitting, and I was going to look up at them and give them the wave and thank them for coming. Couldn't even...

DGW: God don't like ugly.

MF: And so yes, that's correct. [Laughter] And so when you think about it, yes, you know, why not just go ahead and go for the touchdown. No, I want to punish this guy for the last time and wind up punishing myself and blow my shoulder out. And to this day, and I'm talking about last night, I don't ever, I can't sleep on the shoulder. One of the other reasons I moved to Florida, the shoulder in the wintertime, throbbing aching, throbbing along with the knees and all the other things. So the injuries themselves have been the most negative thing because of how they affect your body as you progress in age.

DGW: You're talking to someone who knows.

MF: It's mind boggling. Now. The one thing the pandemic has done was Netflix. And I watched *What the Health?* and *The Game Changers*. I had already slowed down my consumption of red meat. Now I entirely eliminated it. I eliminated dairy as much as I could. Like, if I order [food], I don't eat macaroni and cheese. But if somebody has a dairy product in something, what can I do? I can't avoid it. My wife makes great deviled eggs. But she used to make them every week. Now I get them once a quarter, Okay. Fish all the time. And everybody asks, "Where do you get your protein?" I get it from nuts and one or two supplements. And I don't need as much protein because I'm not playing football. So although I teach tennis six days a week, being an instructor is not like playing. You are instructing, you're guiding, you're

performing certain functions, but more importantly, you're giving information, and then those players translate that information as to how they do it. I'm not on a court for two straight hours playing at a high level, so I don't need the type of protein that I would have needed if I was playing sports and needed a steak every day before a game. And that was something Rutgers did in those days, they gave me a steak before every game.

DGW: Let me ask you this. You are on campus from 1974 to '78 and...

MF: Well, let's correct that term. I'm on campus 1974 to 1975. I lived off campus all the other time. And trust me, when I say I lived off campus. I was never on campus, except for maybe if it was a party thrown by the group.

DGW: Why was that?

MF: Well, football was good to me. A—I got jobs from Rutgers alumni. So I worked at Littman Jewelers, I worked at Briggs Ford dealership, Mr. Briggs was the primary sponsor for the sporting events, his car book was on the cover of most of the programs. I had one or two lady friends that were an hour away. And because of the racism that existed... Let me give you an example. So you have a full scholarship, and you go to the library, you go to the hall to get your books, they have all these books lined up. And depending upon the courses that you took...

[phone rings, brief interview interruption]

MF: So when school begins, they have a list of the athletes, the athletes go get their books based upon the courses that they take. And as you well know, there are professors who have required reading and supplemental reading. And here we are athletes standing in line, waiting to go get our books, and all we have to do is sign.

MF: So they bought your books, or they had your books waiting for you based on the courses? You didn't have to go to the bookstore?

MF: Sometimes you did, most of the time you did not. Most of the time you did not. However, the kids who were assisting in this program, and the adults who were assisting in this program, the Black athletes could only take the required reading. The white boys got to take the supplemental reading books, also. Huh, what's that about?! Because we all are trying to sell these books at the end of the semester to get what? Money! We all need money. If you get three more books than I get, you're gonna be getting more money. Nobody's keeping these books. We're turning these books in for cash at the end of the semester. That's what we're doing. And some guys are taking courses based upon the prices of the books. Yes, indeed. Absolutely. And I'm not trying to disparage my white teammates. I'm just making the point that the racism that occurs in a college institution is a structural system. Partly here, with the books that people say, "You black guys, you don't get the extra reading material. They get the extra reading material, you don't get it," number one.

Number two, the white boys are in a fraternity, and they go to class, and they sit next to each other and, during the test, feed each other answers. Oh, did I say that part of the other members of their fraternity of the year before gave them the test from the year before. And so you're sitting there, the only Black in the classroom, or one of very few, and you know these clowns over here are passing the tests back and forth to each other. And the lone professor staring at you for 90 minutes! And if you turn your head one time, "What are you doing?" He's thinking you're cheating, because they're not used to having Black people in their class and they think the Black kids aren't smart enough and are cheating!

And that's when that happened to me 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 times, I was through. The education part I was looking at all these clowns over here, passing the test to each other, you know, the chairs, you can't hide, passing the test. The professors are worrying about the lone Black kid cheating on that test. And all these white [students], they're in the same frat, they act like they don't know each other when they walk in. But these guys have been drinking, smoking for the last two weeks; because I know who they are, they're my teammates. I'm not gonna rat on my teammates. But I know one thing, they were able to pass a lot of classes without even showing up for the class because they shared the answers and the tests. I mean, the frats got a library, a catalog of tests from these [courses], and they tell each other what courses to take and what not to take. We know that. So how is that fair? It's not. And it'll never be. And it's sad to say that the dominant group will continue to dominate because they continue to institute policies that support the dominant group. And that's the way it is.

I've made a great living, Okay? Not because I've held a Rutgers diploma, but because Rutgers alumni and my popularity coincided. And my work ethic helped me to achieve my success in the businesses that

I had as an entrepreneur, but I was introduced to the field because of Rutgers alumni. I had an internship, because I was an economics major...

DGW: When you say Rutgers alumni, are you talking about white, Black, or both?

MF: Only white. I was only supported by white Rutgers alumni, there was no... there was one Black face. That was Bob, who was Rutgers Media Director... I can't...

DGW: Can you think of his last name?

MF: I cannot think of his last name. But Bob, to some people, they thought Bob was white. That's how fair he was. Of course, as a Black person, you know he ain't white. But...

DGW: We know.

MF: So anyway, it is cumbersome upon an individual who is an athlete to determine what is important to them, their success on the athletic field or the success in the classroom. Listen, the counseling that we got back then was very minor. There was no staff member, specifically, for Rutgers to counsel. Some of the coaches tried counseling to try helping guys out. We had several fellas drop out, some quit, some... you never knew the whole story and it didn't matter anyway. Somebody's gone, they're gone. They're gone because they flunked out, they're gone because they quit. They're gone! It's a combination of both. Most of the time quitters do flunk out, okay. Or most of the time guys who flunk out man, I missed it by one point or one test. Oh, well, that could have been the racism that the institution is a part of. Again, part of the reason I don't go back to Rutgers, a lot of it is also what they did to Frank Burns, who was the head coach when I was there. And trying to think of this guy from Penn State, who I can't think of his name right now, would have been a better coach as Rutgers was winning. We had my four years we never had a losing season, never close, 70% winning percentage. And I think in the 44 games that I started, we lost 6? 8? No more than 8.

[Editor's Note: [Frank Burns](#) (1928-2012) was the head coach of Rutgers football from 1973 to 1983. He was replaced by [Dick Anderson](#) (b. 1941), who was previously the offensive line coach at Penn State; Anderson was at Rutgers from 1884 to 1989.]

DGW: That's impressive.

MF: Yeah, no more than 8. And he had a winning year prior to my year with J.J. Jennings.

DGW: This is Frank Burns?

MF: This is Frank Burns.

DGW: Is he white or Black?

MF: He's white, Frank Burns was white. Frank Burns was a Rutgers alumni. Frank Burns won MVP of the college pro football game, very, very smart man. I respected Burns entirely, completely a different type of personality than my high school coach, but it made me understand levels of coaching. What a head coach is actually responsible for in comparison to the wide receiver coach, the defensive line coordinator, the offensive line coordinator, that you don't get in a high school setting. You got two coaches, maybe three, at a high school setting. And when you get to college, there's 6, 7, 8, 9 coaches. And so you understand the level of why there are that many coaches, and what you're trying to achieve for those position coaches that are there, that need to be there. And it's imperative, though, that some of those coaches come in and out every two years, from different programs, they're moving up, and coach likes what they've done in another program. But you don't build relationships with people who fly in and out.

DGW: Right.

MF: And so it is upon the head coach to try to maintain his staff, so that this cohesiveness [is maintained] with the players and the kids and the commitments that the schools make to these kids... Even though in today's college football, there's so much money, there's so much celebrity that can occur through Instagram and Facebook and those kinds of things, that... There's a famous saying from Oakland Raiders' Al Davis, "Just win, baby." And as long as you do that, everything will be alright.

DGW: So we're going to wind this down now. But let me just ask you if you have any final things that you want to say that you haven't said, particularly about Rutgers in the 1970s, the time that you went. Let me just say this. I do know that by the time you got there in '74, there were considerably more African American students than there had been even five years before that.

MF: Correct.

DGW: Did you feel that?

MF: Well, let me say this. Yes. And that's what I meant by that's a whole 'nother storyline, that even though I'm an athlete, how we as athletes brought those people out to support us. Those other Black kids also could have went home. A lot of them again, were were local kids, they were within an hour's drive, so some did go home. Some came and supported the brothers that were on the field or on the court, and specifically came to support the brothers that are on the field, and on the court. And, particularly, even some of the city residents of New Brunswick came to support the brothers that were on the field and on the court because of our color. So I can give you tremendous number of stories of those type of instances that I felt as an athlete, the support from the Black community when we traveled.

DGW: When you traveled outside of the state of New Jersey?

MF: Outside of the state of New Jersey, and when we traveled within, you know, when we went up to the Meadowlands as our second home field. So, there are people who wanted to make... that's what college football, it's an event. And so Black people like being at events. And so because of it being an event and having Black ballplayers on the team, starting and significant positions, you know, when I was there the following year, although these guys were second team and third teams players, Rutgers had Black quarterbacks. It was a big deal, Okay. But Eddie McMichael and some of these other guys who later played and who later alternated, you know, like they would start four games, and then somebody else would come in and do those kinds of things. [Editor's Note: [Ed McMichael](#) RC'80 was inducted into the Rutgers Athletics Hall of Fame in 1993.] But Rutgers had a black quarterback way before I thought they would even come close to having an African American as quarterback. It was so phenomenal. When that happened. We were all like, "Well, yeah, we're trying to win." If you're trying to win, then you get the best athletes at whatever position that position is. And if we're not trying to get the

best athlete... Now, you overhear the talk all the time, "We got too many." Rutgers defense when it was number one in the nation, there's only two white boys on the field.

DGW: You mean, we got too many...?

MF: Black people. We only had two white boys starting on the defense. I'm gonna say three, so eight out of eleven are African American that are starting on the number one defense in the nation! Eight out of the eleven.

DGW: And you got pushback? Or people saying bad things?

MF: Let me say this, I'm going to say the coaching staff heard it from other individuals, alumni, family members of those white players who weren't starting. Who they felt that their son was just as good as this Black guy who's playing, and "How [could] my son who was All-state not be starting over a guy who's a walk on?" Okay, and you'd have to tell them, you'd have to explain to them this guy is quicker, faster, stronger. Your son may be bigger, but that doesn't make him a football player just because he's bigger. And I had the same thing happen to me, where even these Black athletes who came in as running backs behind me when I'm a junior, and they're freshman and sophomore. Some of these—I ran a 4.5—these guys ran 4.25. They ran 4.3! These guys were quick as lightning and bigger and stronger. But guess what? They couldn't remember the plays, they came to practice late, they would roll their eyes at the coach when the coach said something to them. So there are so many things that get you on that football field, besides your talent. That's something I observed. I never rolled my eyes at a coach. "Yes, sir."

DGW: You would have been a good soldier.

MF: I am a good soldier. I am a good soldier because I was raised by soldiers. My mother's boyfriend was in Korea. My father was in Korea. His brothers were in Korea and in Vietnam, and any other man and my grandfathers were soldiers working in Navy Yard, they supported this. So you're around soldiers, you act like soldiers. And to this day, people constantly believe I've been in the service, constantly. My mannerisms, how I walk, how I'm... My strength of voice is, "Why do you always think you're right?" You mean because I'm talking and saying things in this manner? Well, if I have the information that's been given to me that I know to be correct, why would I sound like it's not correct? Why would you? Why would I? So I have a tremendous problem with the general public who believes

that people are always incorrect in what they're stating. Because I've been an instructor, I'm a licensed instructor now to teach security for the state of Florida. I teach tennis, and have been doing that for 40 years. And it's amazing how people would rather try it their way than learn the proper instruction way. There's always another method. But that method is not the method that brings about the most success. You can walk down the street hopping on one foot, you probably won't travel as far and as fast as you would if you put two feet on the ground.

DGW: On that note, do you have any final thing that you want to say about Rutgers?

MF: I would want to come back because my memory as you can appreciate, being 66, flashbacks of different things come back to my mind that, "Oh, I forgot to say this. Oh, I forgot to say that." And particularly the African American experience of entertainment that was on the campus at that time, where Motown was king, and then disco was king, and funk was king. And these groups came to Rutgers University. And again, the football team was used as security when these... When Earth, Wind & Fire came, when Eddie Kendricks came, Parliament-Funkadelic, which was local from Plainfield, played at Rutgers University halls and dormitories and things of that nature. And how, as being an athlete, you got even more notoriety because of a sorority with twenty women online, three of them you know, so now you know the other seventeen because they introduce you. And you know, like anything in life, if you have twenty women, there are three that don't like athletes at all; there are three who love athletes; there are three who, "Well, my brother's an athlete..." So there's personalities of a group of people who think they understand an athlete for whatever reason; they don't know *me* though. But because I'm labeled an athlete, they believe they know me. And so you have to meander your way through that. Whether it's just normal manners of conversation with people, how you look at people, you know, women. We all know, you can't stare at anybody for three seconds or more. You can't whistle. You can't say anything, even in those days where women were burning bras and wearing, you know, hot pants and all the other kinds of things that the sexual revolution had just ended, or began, I should say. We turned 18 and we're supposed to be adults. Oh, did I just tell you they were giving out the pill for free? Okay, at the school in 1974. Young ladies could go get birth control, and it didn't cost them anything. What's that about?

DGW: Must have been fun, particularly being an athlete.

MF: I will say it was an enormous challenge. And there are some of us, Magic Johnson had the most famous saying, and I appreciate Magic Johnson, "I tried to accommodate as many as I could." [laughter] Let me say that Rutgers should induct every player, coach and staff of the 76 undefeated team into the hall of fame!!

DGW: On that note, Mike Fisher, we will end this interview.