

Oral History Interview

September 28, 2021

Rudy Bryant and Ron Shiffman

Heather Lewis, Interviewer

Rudy Bryant

I'm Rudy Bryant and I joined the Pratt Center... I believe it was either October or November, 1967. And I retired in January of 2007. And during that time I got to work with a lot of different communities throughout New York City and actually the U S and quite a few overseas as well. I got to do things I never thought that I would be doing as I was growing up, engaging with people in their communities, helping them and meeting a lot of people across the state and across the country. At some point, I guess in the early seventies, I was promoted to assistant director of the Pratt Center, and essentially remained in that role until Ron resigned, retired, I should say. And, I became acting director for two to three weeks until we hired a new director.

I was born in New York and raised on a farm in South Carolina. And so I like to say that my Southern influence has come from that time on the farm in South Carolina, but I returned to New York as a teenager, spent four years in the Air Force. And it was after I came out of the Air Force that I stumbled upon the program that the Pratt Center was assisting with that ultimately led me to be hired by Ron at the Pratt Center. That particular program was the Central Brooklyn Neighborhood College. I guess before I get into all of this detail, I should give Ron an opportunity to introduce himself.

Ron Shiffman

Thanks Rudy. And thanks Heather for this opportunity. I have to apologize. There's a lot of construction around where I am at the moment.

I often say that I have served a life sentence at Pratt. I started as a student in 1956, probably before some of the students' grandparents were born. I started as an architectural student and had the opportunity over the years to begin to work with some of the neighborhood organizations surrounding Pratt, primarily in the sixties, early sixties, and, helped form and found what became the Pratt Center for Community and Environmental Development now known as the Pratt Center for Community Development. And it was by working with some of the leaders in the Bedford-Stuyvesant community, that my education was really, I believe, rounded out and informed and helped condition the kinds of work I did.

Some of those people were people like Elsie Richardson, Donald Benjamin, a woman by the name of Shirley Chisholm, and a couple of others, who've gone on to be recognized for a variety of other reasons over the years. Some of the early work that we did led to the formation of what now is the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, which was a model for community based development groups around the country. One of the things that we did initially at Pratt was to try to get an Upward Bound program for young people that had been funded by the federal government. And we were turned down for that and a couple of other efforts. So we said, well, working with groups like the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, if they don't do it, we'll undertake the work ourselves.

And out of that grew that Central Brooklyn Neighborhood College, and a couple of other efforts like that. I had the opportunity then to meet some of the graduate students that were running that. And that's when I met Rudy Bryant and he became a member of the Pratt Center staff. I think just introducing him with that title is wrong. Rudy helped build the center. He helped create some of its focal points. He helped educate a lot of the students and staff, and he was an indispensable partner in building the Pratt center. And one of the things that we're talking about and what you're uncovering is that unlike today, Pratt didn't know what we were doing, or like today, they still don't know what the Pratt Center did, but there wasn't a commitment by the institution to what we were doing or what others at Pratt were doing that were, activist and working with the communities.

So a lot of what we'd done was done in spite of the leadership at Pratt, in spite of the direction of the institution, and built various different programs at Pratt that address what were the issues confronting our neighbors in Fort Green, in Bedford-Stuyvesant and in other parts of the city as well. And so I think your effort here to uncover that history, particularly now that there's a recognition that this is an important part of an educational experience for students, and that the Institute as a whole is much more dedicated to participatory processes than they've ever been, what you're doing is really exciting me. So I just wanted to put it that way.

Heather Lewis

Thank you, Ron. So back to Central Brooklyn Neighborhood College, which I have been wanting to hear about for five years now.

Rudy Bryant

I came out of the Air Force in 1967 and I think I was 21 years old at the time. And I had a GED diploma that I had earned in the military and I wanted to get into college. So I just happened to be walking down the street in Bed Stuy one day and noticed a sign in a window building at the corner of Arlington Place and Fulton Street that said, Central Brooklyn Neighborhood College; free classes, no grades, et cetera, et cetera. So I walked in to see what this was all about. And there, I met a Pratt student that was manning the desk, the recruiting desk by the name of Jim Shirley. And we talked and he told me about the thing that they were starting called Central Brooklyn Neighborhood College.

And I said, all right, sign me up, sign me up. And I began taking classes that summer of 67. I think I took two classes, I met the instructors in those classes and other students as well. And at the time I was working as a security guard at Long Island University on the midnight to 8:00 AM shift. So I had lots of time in the afternoon. So I began to volunteer through Pratt Center, helping put things in place for the neighborhood college. So doing some of the administrative work, copying lesson plans and materials, getting those materials to people in the classes, whatever they might be doing, all of that kind of background work. I had plenty of time in the afternoons to do that. And so that's kind of how I came to be known by Ron and others at the Pratt Center at that time.

The neighborhood college at that time was largely, its faculty was largely individuals from Pratt as well as professionals in the community. I remember that one of the photography classes was actually taught by a professional photographer on Fulton Street. I think his name was Hope, but I don't recall right now.

Folks from Bedford-Stuyvesant taught stuff like stenography, typing, and I took a class in chemistry and mathematics, and so classes were taught somewhere on the campus of Pratt, but many were actually in the community. So that photography class was actually taught in the community, and Kingsborough Community College had a facility and Clinton Hill at the time (classes were held) in the Masonic Temple and there were classes held in the church across the street from the library. And there were dance studios, there were academic courses, there were professional courses to prepare people for a job. If they needed that help, they helped folks to get their GED, if they wanted to help folks to get in college. All of those things were what the faculty of the neighborhood college did to help people in the community to move on. So for that summer, that's when I was both a student and a volunteer. Come September, Jim Shirley and the other students that were employed through college work study at the Pratt Center to assist the neighborhood college, they went back to class. And so that led to a dearth, if you will, of administrative assistants to keep the neighborhood college operating. By that time I had actually been elected by the other students to the board of the steering committee of the college.

And folks kind of looked at me as the coordinator and I was still doing that as a volunteer. And sometime in September, Ron offered me a paid position to do what I was doing. I kind of resisted that for, I guess, a little over a month or so, because I was worried that being paid for what I was doing, what I enjoyed so much, would change the dynamic for me. But I did ultimately, in late September or October agree to take the position. And so I came on staff, I think late October, early November. The agreement that Ron and I had was that I would respond to and be accountable to the steering committee of the neighborhood college and the steering committee was made up of a variety of people from the community.

Ron mentioned the name of Elsie Richardson. I don't think Lucy Rose was on it, but I'm not gonna try and remember those names right now, but, , when it met, when the steering committee met it often met at the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council. I don't remember who was the executive director over there at the time, but I remember one of the staff people was Dorothy Ankrom and she was kind of the liaison from CBCC to the neighborhood college that first year. That first summer, the college had about 60-75 students spread around and courses all throughout the community. September of that year the student body expanded to probably about 150 or so. And when I left the college, I believe in 1972, we had about 500 students and we were operating then out of the industrial building on Vanderbilt between Fulton and Atlantic.

(In 1972) another program followed the neighborhood college in that building. During that period from 67 to 72 or so, the neighborhood college began to reach out to do other things as well. And so one of the things that we did was apply for Vista volunteer grants, and the college became the first organization in the country to have what was called an indigenous Vista volunteer program. Before that time, , Vista volunteer sites recruited people from across the country and brought them into their neighborhoods. , the neighborhood college had national volunteers that way for a couple of years. One of them was a guy by the name of David Lee out of California. But after, I guess about two years, we were working with a staff member of Vista to develop the indigenous Vista volunteer program and we recruited seven people from the Bed Stuy, Bushwick, Brownsville community to be Vista volunteers and serve through the neighborhood college.

And that lasted, I think, through 1972 as well. And I think it probably ended around about the same time that I left the neighborhood college, and David Lee working with some other folks from the community, established what was called the Education Action Program.

Ron Shiffman

We partnered with some folks from NYU education. I forgot the name.

Rudy Bryant

Jeanette Hughes was an indigenous Vista volunteer, by the way, so they were working with David Lee on this education action program and part of what the education action program was about. Because I was not directly involved in it, it was training parents on how to work with schools, parents and parent teachers' associations. For a while the neighborhood college printed a newsletter called the ?, and the editor for that was a young man by the name of Robert Townsend (who) I'm thinking now goes by the name of Reverend Robert Townsend.

And the newsletter was assisted by another Pratt Center staff member, Rick Curry, who was the lead person on putting together the Pratt center's newsletter called Street Magazine. And so Robert and Rick worked together fairly closely. I don't know if you want to know the names of those that I remember of folks that were part of this VISTA volunteer group at the time.

Heather Lewis

If you remember them, yes. And also, if you remember any of the names of Pratt students who taught or Pratt faculty who taught that would be great too.

Rudy Bryant

One of them was Barry Schwartz. Barry, I believe committed suicide. The art therapy program at Pratt, and it was one of the faculty members... Rita, Sue Siegel, and her husband, Richard Siegel her then husband. Where were they at Pratt? What were they in?

Ron Shiffman

Placement officer or something like that?

Rudy Bryan

Richard was in the art school. He was, I think, in marketing.

Ron Shiffman

I think she placed students in art, in the art field.

Ron Shiffman

There was a gentleman by the name of Herman Patterson who helped Rudy, I think he established a small college program at Brooklyn College. One of the ideas behind the neighborhood college was to set up a permanent institution that would do the kinds of things the neighborhood college did. And that helped it. (The college) was not the only element that led to it. But it was part of the movement that led to Medgar Evers and a couple of efforts.

It was one other thing. The neighborhood college program was part of our relationship with Vista and one of the successes of the program was a university year of action, which was a program geared primarily to college students. And we were able to eventually get a whole set of slots for Pratt students, but because we had more slots than we could accommodate at Pratt, we partnered informally with Brooklyn College and eventually City University and set up programs at both those schools that were basically run through Pratt. And the one at City University led to the establishment of the city universities' community design center. So the influence of our program actually was at three institutions at that time. And it was all informal relationships with faculty at those places. Edward Galfsky at City University, , and then one of our faculty went and became Dean at City University. We sent over, , two people whose name escapes me to run their community design center from Pratt. They hired them and that's what set up the community design center, which has had a focky history there, but I still think it exists.

Rudy Bryant

The faculty from the school of liberal studies, who was instrumental in teaching classes at the neighborhood college. One of them was called Cray McRaft, one of the former deans of the school of liberal studies.

Ron Shiffman

A guy by the name of James Hurley ran a class in the Central Brooklyn Neighborhood College that started the discussion and involved Joan Maynard and was the beginning of our relationship with what eventually became Weeksville.

Heather Lewis

Moving beyond 72, , if you could just tell us a little bit about your trajectory, you know, in the Pratt Center then, and then some questions about other things that were going on in the Pratt campus, educationally for youth.

Rudy Bryant

The atmosphere in New York at that point in time was pretty charged if you will. The feminist movement had emerged and there was a great deal of, push to get kind of universal daycare and the whole experimental, education program leading to the Brownsville experiment, East Harlem and the Lower East Side, where those demonstration districts existed. It was causing racial tension in the city and the other staff members at the Pratt Center. , we thought that there might be some role that we could play in helping to reduce racial tensions in the city. And one of the ways that we might be able to do that was by bringign folks together around their children. And so we started in an, and this is to my recollection, the only time that the Pratt center actually advertised to see clients.

As we put out the word that we were willing to help communities establish a daycare center and I was assigned to take the lead in this. At the time I was also beginning to work with a citywide organization that was trying to establish daycare centers, , in the, in the city. And that organization essentially led to the formation of the agency for child development whose, , first, , commissioner was Georgia McNary. , and so we started advertising to assist with daycare centers. And what would happen is a group would contact us and we would work with them to either find a location if they didn't have one. And if they had one, to provide architectural designs for that space as a daycare center, work with them, with the

health department first, before the agency for child development was formed, work with them to apply through the health department for a license to operate the daycare center.

If it were necessary for them to hire a contractor, we would work with them to contact contractors and to provide the specifications for the job and then help to supervise the contractor in developing the facility. And over the next few years, we probably worked with over a hundred daycare centers or daycare organizations throughout the city. Not all of them became daycare centers and they certainly didn't all last long. Not all of them became city funded daycare centers, but, , , the number of, of, , community groups, if you will, that approached us was well in the neighborhood of 170 some odd groups. So I did that for a number of years at the same time something was happening nationally that provided a direction for the center as well. And that was the movement to try and improve the environment.

So the Pratt Center began working on environmental education, , and to a lesser degree working with groups that were interested in their ethnic heritage. And so this was around the time that the ethnic heritage act, came in into, into being, those things existed. But my work was in daycare at the time. ,We also worked with individuals who were trying to establish alternative schools. My timing may be off about this, but I'm thinking now, Ron, about Bill who was a teacher in the education system in secondary schools and often worked with troubled youth. And he wanted to find a way to provide a place for troubled youth that was different from what the Board of Education was doing normally. And so, he pulled together a group of people, Ron and I worked with them and created an organization called alternative schools for effective children.

Ron Shiffman

Advocates for children grew out of a relationship between Queens advocacy organizations with an activist by the name of Miriam Thompson and an attorney by the name of Jane Stern, and they were working with parents who, particularly parents whose children had been suspended and getting them back into the school system and, or representing those children and parents, , as they fought the cases in the school system. They, shared an office for a couple of years and they decided to merge and the merged organization became Advocates for Children. And before that a priest started Martin de Porres, part of the alternative schools for effective children effort.

Heather Lewis

Rudy, now that you've kind of traced a bit of the seventies and thank you for telling us, reminding us, or telling some of us who didn't know about what's happening nationally at the time, and the daycare centers. I want to ask you a bit about what you remember about what was happening on the Pratt campus at the time. , and you told me you're, you're not sure you remember that much, but what we could trace so far, we're still looking, we're still researching. There was a community program on the Pratt campus. It started around 1970. . It had funding from lots of different sources from model cities one year, there were a lot of young people on campus, you know, mostly high school age, maybe a little older. What we know so far is Horace Williams became the director of a program that then lasted for, we think about 30 years. Pratt's archives don't have very much about this program.

Ron Shiffman

You can correct me if my memory is somewhat cloudy on this. But when we started working on the issue of early childhood, a member of faculty at Pratt said, why don't we establish a daycare center here for our students and for the community, for our children and the community. And I forget who they were, but out of that, we then got a program for the summer, I think out of the Fort Greene community anti-poverty program that was over on Fulton street. And we were able to get it to operate each year in the subsequent years. And I think Horace quickly became the director of that. He picked it up after a while because Jerry Pratt, who was president at one point, recruited him and supported him.

Rudy Bryant

Actually Ron, , it was different. You gotta start with, , the Vietnam war and student protests against the war. And Horace was active among the students. And he was a student at Pratt. And it was during those protests that some of the students decided that they needed childcare in order to be able to be their best at Pratt. And so, , we were able to create a temporary childcare center in the basement of the building... I don't remember the name of the building now, but it's at the corner of Willoughby and Hall Street.

At one point they operated a daycare center there for the summer. I don't remember now whether it was 71 or 72. , , but I believe it was in 1970-71. Timmy Vincent, and one other brother whose name escapes me right now, from the community basically brow-beat Pratt into allowing them to have a program on the campus. And I think part of their leverage came from the fact that Pratt had threatened to put up a fence around the community around the campus. But these two brothers were strong advocates and activists and they convinced Pratt to let them have a summer program there. And so, , they brought kids in that summer.

I think it was called campaign something. Horace saw this and did not believe that Pratt should allow these activists, I should say, to have this kind of a free for all on campus. So he created an organization called the Youth Services Coalition and recruited people from Fort Green, Clinton hill, Crown Heights, , and Bedford-Stuyvesant to serve on his board. Actually let me back up a bit. Out of the student unrest on campus, students insisted that Pratt needed to have more representation of African-Americans on its faculty and in its administration. Pratt then created a position called the director of community affairs and they hired Horace in that role. And so it was in that role as director of community affairs that Horace created the youth services coalition, got it incorporated separately and used it to bring in programs, working with youth on the campus.

Ron Shiffman

I have a slightly different perspective, I believe, and I could be wrong cause it's a long time ago that Timmy Vincent was basically brought in by president Donovan because when Donovan was head of the board of education in the city of New York, he had made an alliance with Timmy Vincent and a couple of folks from Bedford Stuyvesant to support him against some of the advocates in the community that were very much fighting for integration of the public school system. And that when the students at Pratt organized, Donovan was concerned and brought in Timmy Vincent to sort of pacify and hold the Pratt African-American students at bay. And he was being used by Donovan. And whatnHorace did was basically fight back in doing what you just described. That was my read of the situation.

Rudy Bryant

I didn't know about the Donovan connection.

Ron Shiffman

I once had breakfast with Timmy Vincent at, at one of the cafeterias. And he basically warned me that if I wanted to survive at Pratt, I had to support Donovan and I should step back. I know that occurred. And so I think that played a role in the tensions on campus at that point. And it was really being used by Donovan.

Rudy Bryant

Well, the youth services coalition, went on to run the set of programs that you alluded to, , for a number of years. Horace had a professional staff, probably about four or five people at its height, but then during the summer he would hire Pratt students to actually to be the instructors and chaperones, if you will, , teachers of the students and in the various classes and programs that they operated. And there were both recreation and sports activities, as well as academic activities that they were engaged in. As a matter of fact, a couple of my kids participated in the youth services coalition summer program, at least one year. It was Horace's desire to expose the kids to as much of New York as possible, he really wanted to broaden their horizons. I served on the board of the Youth Services Coalition for awhile.

Heather Lewis

Could you speak a bit about Pratt's support for that program? What was happening?

Rudy Bryant

I'm going to try and be judicious here. At Horace's retirement party, if you will, from Pratt or the separation party from Pratt, the president (Thomas Schutte) was there and I got to say a word about who Horace was and what he had done on the campus. And I thought he was misused by the school. , that by and large Horace had to raise the money for the youth services coalition himself. , and to my recollection, there was little or no agreement at Pratt to put money into the program. What Pratt's role was to open up the facilities and allow him to have these 200 or so kids on campus for about six weeks or so but I don't recall that Pratt put any, any money into, into the program.

Ron Shiffman

I think that Rudy is being overly judicious. I think Pratt did not want the program on campus, but they were very much afraid of the support that Horace had in the community. And to the same degree, a bit afraid about the support that the Pratt Center had.

Heather Lewis

Rudy, could you say a little bit about, more about what you said in the sense that he was misused by Pratt?

Rudy Bryant

What I explained to the folks who were there that day (at the retirement party) was that Horace always had loyalty to Pratt that he had stepped in the gap to the community and to push out the program (inaudible)

Heather Lewis

You're breaking up. You're breaking up a little, I don't know if it's your microphone. Maybe if you sit back, let's see. Let's see now you're muted. We have about a half an hour more. We really want to hear what you have to say. So why don't you work on the, on the sound and Ron, if you could just add what you know about Horace to this, and then, I want to move us on to Benjamin Banneker. I just want to ask a question on behalf of one of the students who is very interested in understanding why did Pratt (leave the Pratt center alone)?

Ron Shiffman

I think Pratt never understood what we were doing at first. And by the time they found out what we were doing, we had a constituency, in the community that would support us. And so they were very reluctant to do away with us. I think Pratt was it was a completely different campus in the seventies and even in the eighties and later on than it is today, and a completely different environment and what we were doing, , we were doing because of the commitment of individuals, the commitment of staff, , and some of the faculty to those issues. , and they were far more progressive, , than Donovan would have , wanted, then ? who was there before Donovan wanted, or Schutte after Jerry Pratt left Jerry Pratt in many ways, was much more astute to the changes that were taking place.

He wasn't much into the traditional educational systems, but he did understand the need to engage the community that surrounded them. So he provided some level of support for Horace and a level of understanding of the kind of work that we were doing at the Pratt Center, , and came from, , a perspective that was very normative on one level, , but very open to the kind of issues that we were addressing, and so he was much more supportive of us than some of the more quote liberal or progressive faculty, presidents and administrations we had. But I used to joke that if we had had in any way distributed propaganda that was, you know, we had distributed some illicit propaganda. We would not be criticized by Pratt for what we were distributing, but for littering, they were more concerned with the appearance than the substance of what we were doing. And so we grew at a time where they weren't, they didn't look at, or try to interfere in what was going on in the various different schools. Every school had their own promoters and were doing what they felt was important. The graduate planning program, which the Pratt Center had a perspective of community engagement, because that's what enticed us, a couple of members of the faculty, including myself, to focus in on.

Ron Shiffman

There were one or two things that Rudy didn't mention, which I just want to talk about, t the whole idea about universal daycare. Rudy also partnered and worked very closely with Bank Street, which had an early childhood unit to produce the brochure out of Pratt. I only have the cover, , but basically was a guide to the development of early childhood centers in New York City. The other point I wanted to make was that at the same time that we were involved with the youth coming on campus. Rudy had mentioned that we were working, that there was tension in the city around the school strikes.

We were at the time that, , the schools had a lot of tension in New York city, there were three experiments. And Rudy alluded to those experiments were to give parents and teachers in different districts, power. One of them was in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. One of them was in Harlem, at IS 2 0 1, which a colleague of Rudy's and mine, a friend of both of ours, Charlie Wilson was the educational director. And he did some training modules for us at the Pratt Center. And so while that experiment was going on, we also had students that were working out of community offices as architects. One of the places we had students stationed was in the offices, in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, and that same group were the group that was sponsoring the local school out there. And that triggered a strike in the city of teachers against the community groups that were experimenting with this greater community participation in the schools system. A great deal of connection between the civil rights (and community control) We had students working there at the time that the city went up and literally there was open warfare between whites and blacks in New York city.

So while we were in Ocean Hill Brownsville, two things occurred when there was a fire in the one of the neighborhood buildings and a kid who had been suspended from school went into that fire and, and saved some people's lives and came back and had his story. And we had him dictate that story cause he couldn't write. So he dictated that story and all of a sudden it was in the press. And we realized that one of the things we had to do was to focus on early childhood education. So that was one thing in the back of our minds. And at the same time we felt it was really important. , and we referred and brought in the New York civil liberties union to point out that a lot of what was going on in the community had substantive agents.

And it led to a report being issued by the New York Civil Liberties union called the Burden of Blame about the school strike. And so those two things came out of our engagement there. But, , then what happens a couple of months later is that, , based on all of this experience, , this whole alternative or moving towards charter schools begins, but our commitment to public schools led us to look at how do we create and participate in New Vision schools. And, we got a call, we were working in the Bronx and working on a school program. We are with a woman by the way, , who is one of the teenage leaders of that community group that we were working with in the Bronx, who basically said, look, they're building a courthouse. And that courthouse is only a symbol of oppression to us. What if we changed that to a high school, build that courthouse into high school that enabled us to look at justice as an opportunity, not only a system of oppression and out of that, that woman, by the way, is now the chancellor of the City of New York. And Misha was that teenage girl that we worked with that helped us build a school in the Bronx based on that we got a call from, , from Roger. And, , I'll let turn it over to Rudy to talk about what Roger proposed,

Rudy Bryant

Roger Green at the time was a state assemblyman from Fort Greene and he put together a proposal, , brought together a group of people to put together a proposal for a New Vision school. , that school ultimately became Benjamin Banneker Academy for Community development. , , with Roger was the major political force behind the, the, the school. , he got the proposals funded and there was an org board set up, , of about eight people. And I was asked to join that board, , and, , Horace assisted, but he was not on the board itself. , the co-chair of that board was a woman by the name of Jane Hartwell, who was a community activists, , in education, , apparent activist in education. , well, Banneker, as I said, my

memory is weak around this, but Banika basically started as a , , the intention was to create a school that would go from eighth through 12th grade. And it started with, , two classes to the eighth and ninth grade. I believe it was, , of what I don't remember, what are the years that that's okay.

And it started on the campus at Pratt and Horace was instrumental in helping to fight that battle. , and I guess the senior meetings of, , staff with, , Dr. [inaudible] and others, , we received a small grant to hire a administrator for the school whose first name was Frank and last name escapes me right now. , but Frank was the, the administrator, the board of, of, , Banneker wanted to establish a scholarship program, which would ensure that each graduate, ,had funds to go on to college once they graduate, that never happened, after a couple of years of operating on the campus at Pratt and somewhat of, , an acrimonious environment, it was believed that college students and young high school students just did not mix well. , and so there was a strong push to get the school off the campus.

Ultimately we identified a space, , along park avenue in Clinton Hill, which the school moved into. And at the point in time, it moved into there kind of expanded from the two grades it had to, I guess, two more, and at some point it was clear that the school and the board, I guess, was not living up all to all that it needed to live up to in terms of the vision for the school. And so the board of education ultimately transferred supervision of the school from the high school division to the district. And so, , the district tended to, , took over that, that role, ,

Heather Lewis

That was Lester Young, correct?

Rudy Bryant

Correct. Yeah.

Heather Lewis

But could you just go back to the, you know, the acrimonious environment on campus and the fact that people said that the camp high school students, college students didn't mix. Could you talk a little bit about that

Ron Shiffman

Before we get into that? You have to set the context we were at that time, the Pratt center was in what we now call Steuben Hall. The Steuben building was vacant. The Pratt Center occupied the second floor. The first floor was maintenance and mailroom for Pratt and the upper two or three floors were vacant. That building was primarily vacant and that's the space they occupied.

Heather Lewis

And Ron, and you played a role in designing, developing a design for, you know, for me designing Steuben for the high school.

Ron Shiffman

No, we played a role in getting them there, eventually hoping that they would have their own building, but the idea was to really build a strong curriculum based on revitalizing the community and the education that was going on in that community. And that was sort of the lesson we learned. And why are

I alluded to that kid in ocean hill Brownsville, we felt that we could, it would be a great place to motivate, motivate kids, to talk about the rebuilding of their communities and to understand the dynamics and the injustices that inflicted many of those communities.

I think there was a great deal, as Rudy pointed out, there was a great deal of anxiety and outright racial discrimination on behalf of the administration at Pratt as a whole. And they wanted to, they didn't like the idea that the school was there.

He (the principal) told me that students at Pratt didn't like the idea that they had to deal with younger students, on the campus at the same time that they came to college to escape that I think that was more Schutte's perspective than it was a student's perspective, but it was the perspective through which he operated. He was, he couldn't wait to get rid of them.

Heather Lewis

Okay, anything else you wanted to add Rudy about the school or that time period at present?

We had big dreams about Banneker and how it would interact with community and there were times when Banneker students did try and work in the community, but it didn't get done as nicely as we would have would've liked, and I think that was part of the reason why the board of education transferred supervision from the high school division to the local superintendent that the superintendent could provide closer hands-on supervision, if you will. They changed the director from Frank to a guy by the name of ?

Heather Lewis

If you could just go back to your remarks at about the retirement party for Horace, which I don't know what year that was. We don't have a record of it. We have no record of that retirement party, nothing, so we don't even know what year he left. If you could just speak a little bit about who was there and what happened.

Rudy Bryant

It was held off campus at a facility on Atlantic Avenue, and I guess it was the staff of the Youth Services Coalition that actually organized it for Horace, cause I can't imagine anybody at Pratt doing it and I know the Pratt Center didn't did not do it. There were members of the youth service coalition board, there as well as a whole range of, there must've been a good 60, 70 people in the room, friends of Horace over the years, and Schutte was there, so I got to say a little bit about Horace. I wanted to let folks know that he had been instrumental in opening up the face of Pratt Institute to community and doing that, sometimes in a very hostile environment around them. He had come in as director of community affairs and over the years got promoted to vice-president for community affairs.

And then at some point in time, for reasons, no one understood the was kept out of some of the decision-making despite his tenure at Pratt, and the fact that he had brought in, I'd have to say millions of dollars over the years. And even though the school did not directly contribute to the youth services coalition, the money that Horace brought in for that program paid administrative fees, if you will, overhead that's what I'm looking for overhead to Pratt. So that, some of the space that, that he used office space, classroom space, et cetera, et cetera, that Pratt was compensated for that, and so I wanted folks to, to, to know this about him and that he had worked hard on behalf of the Institute, but in return, the Institute did not embrace him as he deserved.

Heather Lewis

I just want you to share your thinking about why you think this was so, why he was undervalued. This is not about any incidents that happened. Just your own thoughts about why

Rudy Bryant:

I think there are two persons, I believe, one was Schutte himself and I don't know whether the man was racist or not, but, , he certainly had over time, a different outlook about Horace and what Horace was doing. But the other one was the vice president for financial affairs and he had a, probably a stronger hold on, Schutte's ear. And, , I'm trying to remember his name,

Heather Lewis

Rogowski?

Rudy Bryant

This is just my belief, (he had) a role in continually poisoning the air around what the youth services coalition was, what Horace was trying to do in the role, , he was trying to have Pratt play in, in the community, et cetera. , One of the things we did not mention was the conflict that Pratt had with Willoughby Walk at some point. And I don't really know the story around that, but, , I guess that was around the same time that they were talking about putting a fence around the school. , you might remember what that was.

Ron Shiffman

When Donovan was president Pratt bought the third building, which is now a dormitory. , the Pratt dorm. All three of them were apartment houses. And early on, I guess it was in the mid eighties. , they ran into some difficulty and then decided to buy one of those apartment buildings at the same time, by the way, I must say that they were also considering closing the Brooklyn campus and moving to Long Island , and we organized a protest with some of the community groups and marched in protest, against Pratt's acquisition of this apartment house in the neighborhood. And, , to the, I think to the extent that the Institute was really angry at us and ready to get rid of us, fortunately, Donovan resigns, or gets ill before that could occur.

And, the subsequent president Salzman, , says that the Pratt Center is an asset to the Institute and we should, they should value it more. , and so, but I must say that that was much earlier than the whole, , period of, , of Banneker, but that you have to understand that for many years it was a tension between Pratt and the, , and the Pratt center, , and including, , Rogowski who at times appeared to me to pick on our finances in such a way as to make it almost intolerable. And I think he was trying to do to us and to Horace the same thing.

Rudy Bryant

Bank Street College had a technical assistance program, , similar to the Pratt center that was focused on childcare and daycare. , and during the period that we were working, , assiduously to set up daycare and to get the agency for child development established. We worked also with, , with Bank Street and out of

that relationship came a manual on how to set up and establish and operate daycare centers. Manuals are around, , someplace now, , Harriet Bogart, Leona, , Peterm and one other person whose name I do not recall.

Heather Lewis

Wow. Ah, you know, your memory is pretty good, Rudy. So we've been on the phone a long time and I, I think we should end it now, but you've opened up so many new areas of exploration and I want to thank you for that,