

Speaker 1 (00:00:01):

Dan to get us started. All right. Thank you. Um, so I'm going to start with giving today's day, uh, which is, uh, today's date is, uh, February 24th, 2021. Uh, my name is Oprah Mondays year. And then, um, I'm going to ask, uh, everyone in the room to say their full names. So, um, and I'll just go in order of, of screen. So, Jonathan, could you go first? Hi, my name is Jonathan Christian, Leon. Nice to meet you. And, uh, then Sophia, my name is Sophia Marie auntie. And then, uh, I see Alyssa. Um, my name is Alyssa clamps and then Rita. My name is [inaudible]. Uh, and then finally, I'm going to ask, um, Rebecca, could you say your full name? My name is Rebecca Krakoff, right? Yup. And, um, where I'm collecting this oral history for, um, for the archives and, um, to understand, um, Pratt's role in, um, multiple happenings in, in, in Brooklyn, but like with some focus on, uh, what's happening within the campus, but also like in the surrounding community. And, uh, Ron, could you, um, say your first, your, your first and last name?

Speaker 2 (00:01:28):

It's Ronald Schiffman and I'm in the graduate center for planning and the environment at Pratt.

Speaker 1 (00:01:37):

And, uh, could you start by telling me when and where you were born?

Speaker 2 (00:01:42):

I was born in Tel Aviv in 1938. Uh, I guess it was Palestine at the time. It's now Israel. I don't guess I know it was Palestine and British mandate.

Speaker 1 (00:02:01):

And, uh, could you tell me about your family?

Speaker 2 (00:02:04):

Well, uh, my family were, uh, were primarily Russian. Uh, they were Jewish and living in, uh, a part of Russia, uh, that was, uh, Niaslits or Minsk, which was the largest city in the area. Uh, they were there during the Russian revolution and before, and were subject to a great deal of anti-Semitism and move from place to place. Uh, my father joined a group of young Jewish men who fought to protect themselves. He was arrested and put in prison for two years and then an exile while he was in exile. Uh, he, uh, met my mother, uh, uh, they got married. They had, my brother who was born in, in Russia is 10 years older than I am. He's now 93. Uh, and, uh, he, uh, uh, they, during a period of time where the wife of, I believe it was Maxine Gorky intervened on behalf of, uh, political prisoners. And he was given the choice to immigrate to Palestine, which he did. Uh, some of his friends did not take that choice and they were eventually executed by Stalin and in 1938, uh, I was born in Intel Aviv. Uh, my family, uh, uh, w particularly because my mother wanted to be reunited with family, uh, eventually immigrated to the United States. And I came here when I was, I guess, nine months old. So I basically grew up in New York.

Speaker 1 (00:03:53):

And, um, could you describe the house or apartment that you lived in, um, in, in the Bronx?

Speaker 2 (00:04:02):

Yeah, I lived, we lived on two streets in the Bronx, one, which I don't remember, which was when we first came, which was Knox place. Uh, it's in the Northern part of the Bronx, just South of a gun Hill road. Uh, and, uh, my folks then moved, uh, my brother claimed that where we moving would been, it was catastrophic. It was just a block away. It was Gates place. So I grew

up on case place, uh, uh, uh, which was if you walked South, you wound up in Marshall, Lou Parkway in Marshall park. And if you walk North, you walk, went into Gunhill park. If you went, uh, West, uh, you wound up in Vancouver Island park. So I was surrounded part by agreeing or a, uh, growing up.

Speaker 1 (00:04:56):

And, um,

Speaker 2 (00:04:58):

We lived in a one-bedroom apartment. Uh, my, my folks and my brother was 10 years older. He was, uh, he, and I think shared space. My parents had the bedroom, uh, and, uh, there was a foyer where we slept, uh, and then eventually, uh, my grandfather who also lived in the building, uh, my grandmother died. So my uncle who is sort of a wealthy person in the family arranged for us to have two apartments next to each other. Uh, and we, uh, then wound up with what was the combination of two, one bedroom apartments.

Speaker 1 (00:05:40):

And, um, could you tell me what it was like living in that area during the 1940s?

Speaker 2 (00:05:47):

It was, um, it was actually terrific. Uh, uh, we would, we were surrounded by parks, but we use the street and played on every street game. That's conceivable. Uh, it was, uh, it was, you know, really a terrific time to grow up in the city. It was, uh, it was a area that when I lived in, it was predominantly white, predominantly Jewish. Uh, we had one or two people who were people of color, primarily a Puerto Rican origin. And, uh, it was well given who were living there. It was well integrated. Uh, we were, the enemy was on Bailey Avenue, believe it or not, which was the Irish neighborhood. Uh, and, uh, the other neighborhood not too far away, uh, was Villa Avenue, which was, believe it or not the Italian neighborhood. And each of those, uh, were alien territory. Uh, if you went in there, you, uh, you know, juveniles, delinquency was beginning to rear its head. And so you would probably get into what were a mild form of gang violence, not, not significantly threatening, but, uh, you know, maybe you can get beat up with this, but nothing more. It went downhill a little bit later on, but the advent of something called a zip gun in a way of creating a weapon out of rubber bands and pipes and things of that sort.

Speaker 1 (00:07:29):

And, uh, these are the things that were happening, um, like in, in the neighborhood.

Speaker 2 (00:07:36):

Uh, yeah. Uh, you know, there was, we always hung out in the parks. Uh, uh, there was a railing along the park on Marshall and Parkway, uh, where everybody would hang out, you just go sit there and, uh, and you felt comfortable hanging out late at night and things of that sort, uh, there was a place near D with Clinton high school. There was that we refer to as an Island, it still exists in the middle of it. We're a group of pine trees and that you used to go down there to meet with teenagers, other girls, that guys and girls, and it was really, it was a nice place to grow up. Yeah.

Speaker 1 (00:08:17):

And, um, uh, what's your mentioning of, of, of, uh, school, uh, you know, what are the main interests is, um, your experience with Pratt? So, um, could you talk about your exit educational experience and how it led to attending Pratt?

Speaker 2 (00:08:37):

Yeah, I, uh, my folks, eventually, I, as I mentioned before, I had an uncle who was, uh, owned a business, that it was a business that my father worked in, uh, and was, uh, sort of, uh, uh, a foreman in the factory. Uh, they manufactured jewelry boxes and, and watch crystals. And, uh, my uncle eventually bought a house in the suburbs, uh, and the family slowly but surely followed them. And the worst thing about that was that, uh, the family began to be sorted out, uh, the wealthier parts of the family moved to places like Scarsdale and Hartsdale, and, uh, uh, the working more working class, like my father moved to Yonkers New York, uh, and, uh, and where we all lived within a block and a half of each other as a family where I really knew and all my cousins and my second cousins and the family was really tight knit.

Speaker 2 (00:09:41):

It began to unravel a bit, and, uh, we moved to Yonkers. Uh, and as I said before, we shared the apartment with my grandfather who remained in the Bronx. And because I did not want to go to high school in Yonkers, I had been admitted to the Bronx high school of science and wanted to continue there. Uh, I, I started living with my grandfather, uh, and, uh, we share between my father's, my parents' house and my grandfather's house. And so I continued going to high school in the Bronx. I refused to go after the second year to, uh, to change high schools. So I was at the Bronx high school science. I was not the best, uh, uh, attentive student. Uh, and as a result, uh, you know, got through that place. I didn't like the competition that students had academically, where everybody was ready to, uh, to screw the next student in order to get two points higher on their average, uh, and eventually, um, really like the idea of drafting and, and physical stuff. So I decided I wanted to go to an architectural school. Uh, so I went to Pratt and at that time Pratt's tuition for a semester was I think, less than it is for credit. Now, I think it was \$250 to go to Pratt and I could, and so it was \$500 a year. Uh, uh, I couldn't afford all of it, uh, quite frankly. And so I, I took some courses at city university to lower that now to save on a semester or so at prep, things has changed a lot.

Speaker 1 (00:11:42):

And could you describe while attending Pratt? Could you describe, um, when you initially started going there, the campus and, um, the surrounding neighborhood when you arrived?

Speaker 2 (00:11:57):

Uh, when I first went to visit Pratt, uh, it was, uh, I say it had a campus would be a stretch. Uh, what you now know is the main building. And then we had the bursar's office, that whole area were, were, were buildings. Uh, it was just at the time that I guess the urban renewal program was beginning or was taking place. It was, uh, 1956. Uh, and so, uh, certain buildings were being demolished and the campus was being put together, uh, being assembled. Uh, the, uh, I think the dorms had just been built or just were built. So, and, and the dorms and I'm referring to the buildings, uh, one way or the Canon is, which is now an administrative building, was a dorm. And the other one was on the other side, the two buildings on either side of the library, uh, the, the buildings over on the dormitory, over on w on, uh, off Willoughby Avenue and Myrtle were not built at that time.

Speaker 2 (00:13:14):

Uh, there were a whole series of stores that we referred to as basically where the owners first names. Uh, there was an odd store called trolleys where I worked, uh, which is we had, there is now, uh, one of the cafeterias and not one of the, uh, uh, you know, greasy spoons that exist on the wall street, uh, right around the corner, uh, where there is still an old school store was

something called Jake's. It was owned by a guy by the name of Jake Steinhauer, uh, across the street where there is still a greasy spoon was, uh, Mike's. I think it may still be referred to as Mike's across the street, we were willing to be walked apartments, uh, exists now that no, I'm not well, but, um, the tower, the three tower buildings between that and, uh, exists. There was a drug store where everybody actually went for lunch.

Speaker 2 (00:14:15):

Uh, they had a lunch counter, uh, and it was a tight knit block. And eventually if you go down, uh, St James place, uh, and you look as you're walking to Higgins or, and look to the right, you see brownstones when I was there. If you look to the left, you would have seen a reflection of those same buildings. So it was, uh, it was a really a brownstone neighborhood that always being expanded by Robert Moses, uh, in his traditional, uh, effort to create a campus, uh, and to create, uh, uh, both the public housing, uh, Lafayette gardens, uh, St James towers and Willoughby towers

Speaker 3 (00:15:01):

[inaudible].

Speaker 2 (00:15:02):

And so it was, uh, it was really much more of an urban fabric than you see today. Uh, unless if the campus,

Speaker 2 (00:15:12):

If you walk down a hall street now into St. James, you'll see that hole is very right near St. Jane it's towers. The street is very wide opposite, uh, Emmanuel Baptist church. And if you go down on the other side of Pratt's campus, uh, between Willoughby and Myrtle, you see it is very wide near Willoughby. The intention was to widen hall street to create a broad, uh, band, a wide network of streets surrounding what was really a nine block area, a square block area. So if you, the original intention was to take that little rotunda that comes out of the library and demolish it a little known fact, uh, that the Pratt center did when I was there. I forget what year, but it must have been in the seventies or eighties was to D map that expansion of that street in order to make sure that the library would not lose that apps that existed, that, that end of the building and the same existed on class and Avenue.

Speaker 2 (00:16:26):

If you go to look at class and Avenue, you'll see, it was supposed to be widened. You'll see the Pratt fence is back. Uh, it was supposed to be a wide fence there that would have gone all the way down to Myrtle Avenue. And if you look at Myrtle Avenue, Myrtle Avenue is, is widened and as is Lafayette Avenue, and that was supposed to create this sort of raw network around the campus. Uh, fortunately some of that was not, did not take place and it sort of saved, uh, uh, it allowed press campus to be a little bit bigger. It saved the library, it did a number of things, and we worked with city planning quietly, uh, to have that removed. Uh, I guess it was in the early eighties while Maryland caliber was in the Brooklyn office of city planning. I, I, at that time Pratt's administration literally did not know what had had.

Speaker 3 (00:17:36):

[inaudible]

Speaker 4 (00:17:37):

Great speaking. Uh, okay. This is afraid. The speaking, since you speak about the, uh, derms, I have a question, uh, regarding the women women's dorms, uh, which w which is now I S C

building and w and the men's dorm, which is now that decal park, um, you know, where those students and upcoming students move to,

Speaker 2 (00:18:06):

Would they move to where they came from? Why did they move to, uh, when it was changed slowly over the years, and they moved to the buildings that are now on, uh, on, uh, I guess it will be walked that the 17 story building there, and then many of the students actually started moving into the surrounding neighborhood. You began to see more and more of that. We used to flip it and away Reese say that Pratt had a very high recidivism rate. People would graduate, but not leave the neighborhood. And that I think still exists. It's just people would rent rooms in the, in the neighborhood and they would remain even after they graduated.

Speaker 4 (00:18:57):

Um, also, um, about the Willoughby, uh, since it's, uh, it was newly built. Um, do you remember what was previously in that place until you lived there?

Speaker 2 (00:19:11):

Yeah, it was, again, if you walk down hall street between Willoughby and Myrtle, and look as you're walking to Myrtle and look to the left, that's what was on the right. Uh, and it was a mixture there of more, uh, wood-frame townhouses, uh, uh, that were there. Uh, and it was a very working class, primarily white community. Uh, there may have been a significant number of Italians living in the area. I'm not sure, I don't know. Uh, but there was a fabulous, uh, Italian restaurant on Myrtle Avenue, not too far from Clinton and Myrtle that existed there for a long time. Uh, there was another one on DeKalb called chinos, which just went out maybe a dozen years ago. Uh, and one on right next to, uh, the building. Uh, geez, I'm forgetting the names of streets all of a sudden, uh, uh, right on the back of, uh, of where the, uh, Pratt houses on, uh, on Clinton and, uh, that was Joe's restaurant, which was really fabulous.

Speaker 2 (00:20:32):

And so we had a great number of Italian restaurants in the neighborhood at one point, uh, in 1963, when I got started at the center, we were about to do a study in Bedford-Stuyvesant and a young African-American kid was shot by a police officer in the city of New York, something that continues till today, unfortunately. And, uh, uh, there was a uprising and unrest in the lower East side in Bedford-Stuyvesant hall. Um, uh, and, uh, as a result of that shooting and we were going to be doing a survey in Bedstein at that point in time. And I decided, uh, rather than have them trained to do the physical surveys on the streets of bed Stuy, I was worried that the police were very nervous and, uh, people were nervous that if they were there, that there could be an incident. So we started training them on the street, uh, right, uh, between DeKalb, uh, and Mo and Willoughby and DeKalb and park, uh, and, uh, within a few hours, we had, I got a call from the police that they were surrounded by angry residents because, uh, they were, they were the people who were displaced for Willoughby and for the Pratt.

Speaker 2 (00:22:02):

Uh, and they thought that Pratt was now undergoing another expansion, uh, in the urban renewal plan. That would be displaced again. So the four or five students I had out there looking at buildings and being trained to evaluate the buildings, uh, were really, uh, accosted by angry residents in the surrounding neighborhood. And that's where I learned, uh, you know, about the impacts of, uh, past policies on people.

Speaker 5 (00:22:37):

Um, I know this is a little bit of a shift from what you were addressed discussing, but I'm bringing back to like this conversation about like, um, the space at pride and what was, uh, campus life like. Um, I know that you were temporarily a part of the ROTC at prep, and I would be curious for you to talk about, um, what that experience was like.

Speaker 2 (00:23:00):

Well, I was 18 years old. We just came out of, uh, out of high school and maybe becoming 19. I don't even remember any longer. And, uh, we were at Pratt and they offered you, you gotta either take phys ed or join ROTC. Uh, uh, and, uh, we were still, we still had a very active draft and, uh, the, the, uh, outlook was that no matter what happened after a few years, uh, I would be going into the armed services, uh, when I entered in 58 and 56, uh, we, it was just at the end of the Korean war and the beginning, and prior to the war in Vietnam. And as a result, uh, you know, there was sort of this peace or limbo, uh, and, uh, the idea of going into the army just didn't was you weren't even Mo motivated by patriotism or whatever.

Speaker 2 (00:24:06):

It was a pragmatic decision that, uh, if I was going to go into the army, I might as well go in as an officer. So I joined ROTC, uh, as did a group of friends. Uh, and, and we didn't have to take phys ed, so we could spend more time doing our architectural work one day. I, because we had training after class, I walked into the class being taught by civil Nagi. Uh, and for those who don't know her, she was married to Lazlo. Moholy-Nagy one of the great artists from the Bauhaus period. And, uh, the school of architecture Pratt would never have attained its stature of civil. We're not teaching their civil toward our architectural history. Uh, she brought with her, uh, this great experience from the Bauhaus. Uh, and so she and bill Breger and Stanley Salzman became sort of the, the trio that built the school of architecture and brought an attracted, talented architects from all over.

Speaker 2 (00:25:10):

And civil was really an unbelievable educator. She was fabulous. She also fabricated some of what she taught. Uh, she fabricated is an ex is, is a flip way of saying she, she was very creative in her interpretations of things, but she was a dynamic teacher and held you to where at an extremely high standard, if you got two B's in a row, you got to see for the class, you really needed to show her dramatic improvement. And, uh, uh, you know, I started out by getting CS wound up, getting A's from her. Uh, but, uh, I walked into class with a, wearing my uniform at which she said in her thick German accent. I better show up and see her after class. And I did. And she just told me, what do you want to be an architect or a militarist? Those are exact words.

Speaker 2 (00:26:09):

And I decided I didn't want to be a militarist. I wanted to be an architect. Uh, and so I went and I re, uh, tried to resign from ROTC and they wouldn't let me resign, but they offered me to be discharged at the, uh, uh, at the request of the federal government. So I, I accepted that and I was discharged from ROTC, uh, but ROTC was very prevalent at the school up until the years, uh, that I there. And it began to add right after that, once the war in Vietnam became an issue and a lot of us were opposed to it. Uh, and there was a very strong presence at pride of students who were opposed to the war. Uh, uh, you began to see, uh, it diminishing and role to the point that one, one time, uh, there was a faculty meeting and room three 70, one 80 of the elect electrical building, uh, you know, with three 70, one 80 is if you go up there to the third floor and a whole group of students went on the roof and turn that into a drum, and they were

beating on the roof while the faculty sat in three 71 E and after that, it for, they forced, uh, ROTC off-campus, or they no longer existed on campus.

Speaker 2 (00:27:36):

And for professional school, it had no right being there. So that was my part in the military. Fortunately, uh, uh, uh, I, I had gotten out years before that, but it, it was, uh, it w it played a role, but not as significant role at Pratt.

Speaker 5 (00:28:03):

Yeah. Thank you for that. Um, something I would be curious about is sort of, um, if you a remember maybe the general time period you left the ROTC and sort of, um, you described sort of this shift in like perception of the RMTC, and I would be curious for you to expand upon, um, maybe why you think that shift happened.

Speaker 2 (00:28:25):

Well, I think I left in a bad 58 or 57 that period of time. I think I was in ROTC long enough to hold a rifle only once or twice. Uh, I think it was the feeling that began to emerge, uh, at Pratt very early on with some of us, and then eventually, uh, caught fire that our role, uh, as a university, uh, really had to be a lot more concerned about the issues in the surrounding neighborhood. There were a core of faculty that I worked with, uh, that were very upset with the fact that architects were given projects to design beach houses and mansions in various different places. And yet when we looked out the window, we began to see the growth of poverty and the out migration of a lot of people that were living in, in Fort Greene and Clinton Hill and in Bedford-Stuyvesant.

Speaker 2 (00:29:24):

And so we began to get a greater sense of that. Uh, I think by the early sixties, uh, you know, in, in the fifties, you know, the civil rights movement started occurring. We saw, uh, children being blown up in, in churches. We saw, uh, the civil rights, uh, activists being hosed down in various different places in the South. Uh, and you began to see, you know, it's not only the Birmingham four, but you began to see a great deal of unrest if you watch television. And so more and more of our focus began to look at the sort of the neighborhood in which we were surrounded. Uh, I, I, I immediately went from architectural school to the graduate program at Pratt. Some of you are 50 year students. So this began to be in my fifth and sixth year. I began to study city and regional planning in part, it enabled me to extend my, uh, my deferment.

Speaker 2 (00:30:34):

So I didn't have to serve in the army. I didn't have to become the militarists that I was one not to become by civil. And so by that, but by that period of time, uh, the civil rights movement had really begun to take hold. Uh, one of my classmates in around 1960, 61 period was a guy by the name of Clarence Fenay. Clarence was head of a group, uh, in Manhattan called the Congress of racial equality. It, uh, uh, for those course still exists today, uh, but in the sixties, it was a really committed, uh, group working on racial equity issues and the Congress of racial equality. And it really was a fabulous organization. Uh, it was far more militant than the urban league or the NAACP, uh, and, uh, had some great leadership, a guy by the name of James form or a national level.

Speaker 2 (00:31:39):

I forget who, uh, uh, headed in Brooklyn. But, uh, uh, it was, I think both major Owens who eventually became a Congressman from Brooklyn and, uh, this guy Lee Harrow leads, but I may

be wrong headed the Brooklyn chapter, uh, of, uh, the Congress of racial equality, but Clarence headed the New York city chapter, his brother-in-law who we hated, uh, eventually took over and told the Congress of racial equality to the right, as opposed to sort of a progressive organization that it was at that time. Clarence and his wife, Mary Fenay were the first African-American family to move into Clinton Hill apartments. They had to sit in and stage protests for two to three weeks before the insurance company that built that would allow them to move in as African-Americans that's how much the neighborhood changed in. And so that must have been in about 1960, 61, that they moved in, uh, Clarence and I became friends about 61 62, uh, and, uh, literally changed my life, uh, because, uh, we became friends.

Speaker 2 (00:32:57):

We did projects together. Uh, it worked on until he was killed in a plane crash. Clarence was a pilot, had been in the air force, uh, came out and bought his own plane. I was supposed to be a partner in buying that plane, uh, but I didn't, I was too much of a coward to invest in it or unable to, uh, uh, and he died in that plane crash. I, it must've been 67, uh, period of time. Uh, uh, and we were sure that his playing was sabotage because it was flying from one part of the South, I think to North Carolina. Uh, we were never able to prove it, but he was a very good pilot and, uh, he and two other people were killed in that plane crash. Uh, but Clarence, uh, you know, help me begin to understand, uh, issues of, uh, of deprivation of discrimination, uh, about segregation and things of that sort.

Speaker 2 (00:34:07):

We brought something together early on, on, uh, de ghettoisation issues. Uh, and, and through Clarence, I met some other people that got me involved in the civil rights movement in 1963, August 28th. Uh, uh, and I don't know why or how, but I decided I would go to the March on Washington and left my home, which was then in Washington Heights and went to Harlem and went down on a bus, uh, by myself, not by myself, but, uh, without any other people to, to attend the March in 63. And, uh, just that movement of seeing so many people at one time, uh, you know, was moving and I created a lasting imprint. It wasn't the, it was the first major protest I ever participated in. Uh, and there were many after, but it was, I, I, there were people, you know, like rah, rah, Rajai Katon at Pratt.

Speaker 2 (00:35:15):

There were a couple of students, uh, that were involved in SDS, uh, Mimi Rosenberg, who now has a program on, uh, on, uh, on the radio, uh, uh, uh, was a student at Pratt. And, uh, and for certain land and a whole bunch of others were really very active, uh, uh, in, uh, in supporting the strikes that eventually took place, but it really raising the consciousness of other students. And there were intense discussions that took place around the relationship of the physical environment. We lived in, uh, the professions we were pursuing, uh, and, uh, what the role of an architect and an artist, uh, and a planner should be in a society that needed to change. And then we had a young president by the name of John F. Kennedy who, uh, had, you know, read books or was surrounded by people who were talking about the divide, a country that was divided, uh, uh, wrong economic and racial lines. And so all of a sudden we began to think aspirationally, can we build a better society who we abolish poverty, uh, and whether we were idealistic or mistaken, and in believing that we could accomplish it, that's what drove a lot of the thinking that took place at Pratt with a handful of people, uh, and some were in the art program and some word in architecture. And we

Speaker 2 (00:37:01):

Unfortunately, you know, taught Toyota trial and, uh, in the art, in the art school and somebody I never met, uh, but his influence, uh, uh, uh, uh, and his talk and the issues around the Mike, the great migration, uh, really began to reverberate because we had discovered, you know, the, the role that planners and architects had played and, and, and still play in segregating our cities. And, and, uh, and in, in many of the problems that we now face and sorting out the populations that we now have, uh, and the segregation we now had, uh, the color of law was such that, uh, it was, it was imprinting segregation, even in the North and the separations of people. And how did we really, we needed to begin to address that. So groups of students in the mid sixties started meeting with students at Yale and at Harvard and at, uh, and at Howard university and in New Jersey. And, uh, there was a lot more of an exchange going on about what our role should be in the future. We saw a young doctors who refuse to go into the war in Vietnam, and all of a sudden, uh, they raised questions about what our roles should be. And so that took, took a lot of time and effort, but it was probably the best education ever had.

Speaker 2 (00:38:38):

And as a young faculty member, as a graduate student, uh, I had the honor and the privilege of being part of those discussions.

Speaker 5 (00:38:50):

Yes. Thank you for that. That was fantastic. Um, so you, you spoke to this idea of like institutions and I guess, sort of this tension between different parties within institutions. Um, so something I'm interested in is exploring sort of this generational shift from like the forties and fifties to, um, sort of the sixties and seventies, um, and then centering around this idea of like the administration at prep. Um, thinking about the presidency of James B. Donovan, um, as well as sort of the student protests around that time. I see, I see a smirk on your face.

Speaker 2 (00:39:27):

Yeah. Um, well, for a long time, I think what you really saw at Pratt was an administration that would be, if you were passing around literature that dealt with organizing, or even on uprising or a strike or whatever, you would never be con you would never be criticized for the content of it, you'd be criticized for littering the administration didn't, it just didn't have that. It was very ad hoc. The schools were run by each of the deans and, uh, and the administration and Pratt were at best accountants and, and never really created. And there was no real oversight into what was going on. Uh, that was what had a lot of beneficial aspects to it. Believe me, it also meant that there was a lot of disorganization and lack of lack of connection. Uh, but, uh, but it really enabled us to begin to think about things and develop things in a very substantive way.

Speaker 2 (00:40:43):

The Pratt center grew out of that in 64, uh, had we gone and needed permission to develop it today? You can't create a center. You can't really create a program without it going through layers of bureaucracy. We started it because it, it, it just occurred. And we got money and resources in the first money that came to Pratt, came from the Rockefeller foundation, Rockefeller brothers foundation. And it came about because, uh, the chair of the department of, uh, city planning that time, which was in the school of architecture, uh, had an idea, uh, uh, had a group of students working in what we call downtown Brooklyn, uh, or, or Boerum Hill today.

Speaker 2 (00:41:33):

And I have some slides if you want, I can pull up and show you, but the plan came up with an urban renewal plan for the downtown area of Brooklyn. Uh, and, uh, it looked like it was a very progressive plan to many people in that period of time. It reflected some of the racial changes that were taking place in Boerum Hill and Clinton, uh, and, uh, Boerum Hill and, uh, and Carroll gardens, uh, and, uh, attempted to preserve some of the housing. But, uh, also to begin to look at how you demolish some of it to build new high rise development, uh, put in some roads and overpasses and things of that sort. And, uh, and the plan caught the attention of a lot of the leaders in the Brooklyn, Brooklyn, uh, and they were trying to get it approved as an urban renewal plan for that area.

Speaker 2 (00:42:32):

Uh, there was a, uh, a historic preservation person from, uh, uh, sections in Brooklyn. Uh, Oh, I forgot his name, uh, that began looking at, uh, at this project and really felt that it was not appropriate. So we invited a woman who had done some really good organizing in lower Manhattan to come over to Brooklyn. Her name was Jane Jacobs. I don't know how many of, you know, Jane Jacobs, but Jane wrote life and death of great American cities, uh, uh, fought for, uh, the preservation of Greenwich village, uh, and actually got a rethinking in American life about how cities really developed, uh, uh, her adversary in life was Robert Moses, the guy who did, uh, the urban renewal plan for, uh, for Brooklyn, uh, and, uh, uh, uh, the urban renewal plan for Pratt. And, and, and so she really fought to save Greenwich village, uh, to save us from building a highway across what is now canal street that would have linked, uh, the Manhattan bridge, uh, to, uh, the, uh, to, uh, the, the tunnel of going to New Jersey, uh, the Holland tunnel.

Speaker 2 (00:44:05):

And so she came over and working, uh, very closely with the folks in Brooklyn defeated George Raymond's plan and the student's plan for downtown area of Brooklyn. And, uh, at which point George got very upset. He felt that the communities didn't understand what the city wanted to do that would them, they didn't understand urban renewal. They didn't understand how government functioned. And he, uh, went to the Rockefeller brothers fund and asked for some money, uh, to set up a community education program. Uh, and he got \$90,000 for a three year program at that time, which was a lot of money actually in those days. And, uh, the money came to Pratt and there was a debate in the board of trustees should Pratt take money from a Rockefeller because it was the Pratt's that lent the money to the Rockefellers, to do their expedition, that guy got them all their wealth.

Speaker 2 (00:45:12):

And so it was a parochial discussion, uh, uh, among family members at Pratt as to whether they should take this foundation money. And it was one of the first foundation grants that Pratt got, uh, in those days, it was just basically an Institute that was training, not really educating professionals. And so that changed the nature of what was going on. Unfortunately, George hired me to, I was a graduate student at that time to run that program. And, uh, I had read Jane Jacobs and eventually became a friend of hers. Uh, and we really opposed a lot of what he was doing. And so it created, uh, tensions. Uh, I have a lot that I learned and admired from George, but a lot that we disagreed on. Uh, but, uh, so the center then became the voice of communities fighting against urban renewal by giving them opportunities to know what their choices were rather than thinking there was only one solution to any given problem.

Speaker 2 (00:46:22):

Um, I'm sort of jumping around and trying to link things together today to the question, but the really the real issue here is that, uh, we were able to set up a program that once Pratt recognized what existed, uh, uh, they couldn't do anything about it. Uh, and we had built a strong constituency in some of the neighborhoods that had joined Pratt, uh, and, uh, with some of the organizations and even, uh, respect in city government that sometimes was really annoyed with what we were doing, but really recognized our capabilities and our, of, of bringing architects, planners, and artists, by the way, uh, to work in some of the communities, some of the earliest programs we did in, in Williamsburg, we're running, uh, uh, art workshops in communities. Uh, we worked with the art school in, uh, reclaiming our parks. We through believe it or not, people were afraid in the early seventies to go to prospect park and working with some people in the parks department and the park, some of the park committees around the city of New York Pratt, uh, working with the art school, the Pratt center, working with the art school, uh, threw a birthday party for ER, uh, uh, the, uh, one of the characters and Winnie the Pooh.

Speaker 2 (00:47:54):

And we had this amazing turnout in prospect park, uh, of people celebrating, uh, uh, in the park. And it was really fabulous. I mean, some students in industrial design develop these huge tinker toys of styrofoam and huge cardboard tubes, and they actually created these tinker toy structures in the park. Uh, we got Walt Disney to donate us, uh, costumes from Winnie the Pooh. Uh, and I never realized how, how vicious young kids could be. Cause I was dressed as Winnie the Pooh and they came and started kicking me and trying to roll me down Hills. And it was an amazing day. We must have had 10 to 15,000 people show up for that festival. Uh, uh, we ran a festival with Pete Seeger on the shore of pier six at the edge of Atlantic Avenue, uh, that preceded the Atlantic antic by about two years.

Speaker 2 (00:49:00):

And eventually I was taken over by more commercialized interest in created the Atlantic antic that we have. Now, we work with groups, uh, you know, along the Columbia street waterfront and, and doing that. And so there were a lot of those issues that took place, but Pratt never knew what we were doing, uh, at we, our offices for awhile. And this is what is now the Pratt center offices, uh, richer in one of the administrative buildings. But at that time we were at on Washington Avenue between DeKalb and Willoughby and, uh, uh, we had this great building and, uh, a lot of space and we had a pretty big staff and a lot of students that came and went, but we had offices that were or space that was unused. And this group came to us called the otters and writers collaborative, a group that came out of Mississippi, uh, working on community education there.

Speaker 2 (00:50:03):

And, uh, with some of the folks from the otters and writers collaborative, we said, if you need space, we'll give it to you. So that the artists and writers, uh, uh, collaborative in the, in the seventies in New York city was working out a Pratt and, uh, uh, working with, uh, uh, with community-based organizations and schools, by putting artists and writers into the schools, uh, that would then teach classes. But their offices, uh, were, were, were shared with us. And we did a couple of things together, but they functioned independently of us. I forget the names now, but I, somewhere I have it. And with them, we want something called the central Brooklyn neighborhood college. And we use spaces at Pratt to teach community education programs with

that in any way, uh, getting permission from prac you couldn't do that, but let me finish one thing, because there's a long way of getting to this.

Speaker 2 (00:51:05):

Uh, but we also had some people coming in and out of those offices for meetings that were part of the young Lords and the black Panthers. And at one of the faculty meetings, uh, James B. Donovan got up and accused the Pratt center of harboring radicals and left-wingers and criminals, and unbeknownst to us, he had the police observing who was going in and out of the Pratt center and what they were doing was they were working on, uh, either organizing around civil rights issues or employment issues or economic development issues, meeting with people to discuss, uh, issues that were pertinent to the neighbors and neighboring communities and very benign efforts. Uh, but, uh, uh, he claimed that we had, uh, we had been infiltrated and we were, we were having all these subverted subversives coming into the building at that faculty meeting to my surprise, a lot of the faculty started booing him saying that he was invading, uh, our, our academic freedom. He was invading our civil liberties and, uh, he left, uh, with, uh, heart palpitations, a heart attack or something of that nature. He never returned. And it was again in room three 70, one 80, that the faculty, right,

Speaker 2 (00:52:41):

All of these, these are my memories. And someone would get a little bit embellished in places and details lost than other places, but I'd love to speak to some other people who may have been there too to get their version, but that's my perception of it. And then Henry Saltzman was brought in, uh, as president of, uh, uh, as part of a group. I think it was a CA uh, Academy for educational development or something like that. And they were evaluating Pratt's roles. And, uh, he was basically saying Donovan to get rid of us at Pratt and do away with the Pratt center. And he said, no, that we were an asset. Uh, and, uh, that sort of changed, uh, the way some people that Pratt started looking at us and then eventually, uh, Saltzman was named interim president after, uh, Donovan left. Uh, and, uh, uh, we had it a bit easier at Pratt and then eventually, uh, people like Jerry Pratt, uh, Richardson, Pratt, and others who came to Pratt who may not have understood education, understood what we were doing in terms of community building and gave us a greater support than we would normally have had.

Speaker 2 (00:54:10):

I'm sorry, I cut you off, but okay.

Speaker 5 (00:54:16):

That was a good, go ahead. Do it. Yes. Oh, also I should say my name, John. Um, so yeah, you sort of alluded to, um, describing, uh, James B. Donovan and his pregnancy presidency. I would be interested to hear you sort of explicitly talk about, um, your perception of the man and sort of what his presidency was like at Pratt.

Speaker 2 (00:54:38):

Yeah. Well, if you saw the movie about his life, uh, uh, all I could say is I walked out of it and saying, that's not the man. I knew, uh, Donovan, uh, was at one point in time, head of the New York city board of education. And at the point in time, he was head of the city board of education. There was a great struggle going on in the city to fight for a greater community involvement in the schools to break down the racial segregation patterns of us schools and to really address issues of, uh, educational disparities from school to school. And, uh, there were some really great people engaged in that fight. Uh, there was, uh, a minister from Bedford

Stuyvesant by the name of Milton Glamis and who led it and eventually created what was called the people's board of education. Uh, he worked with people like Ellen Lory, who is a, uh, white, uh, community organizer from Washington Heights who had done a lot of work, uh, in the city of New York, uh, uh, teaching, uh, uh, people around, uh, educational issues and organizing issues, uh, eventually went to work for the community service society and head up and was the originator of their technical assistance unit, working with community groups throughout the city.

Speaker 2 (00:56:07):

Ellen was both a friend and a mentor. Uh, someone who taught me a lot, unfortunately, uh, someone who died too young, uh, uh, her daughter, Rebecca Lurie, is still around doing some really great work teaching at the city and, uh, things of that. So, uh, uh, Ellen early on, uh, also addressed issues of health, uh, and, uh, and work, uh, the fact that you, you didn't have healthcare if you didn't have a job. And so she worked on issues like that. Uh, she worked on organizing issues and in the upper West side and, uh, and on educational issues. Uh, but Milton Galamian was the, was in essence, uh, not knowing Columbus and, uh, Donovan was in essence, the major target of those fighting for school integration in the city of New York. Uh, uh, he had gotten a group of African-American folks who we used to quiet down the communities that were organizing against them. And he had a couple of those guys visit me at the Pratt, basically trying to threaten me and some of the people that work for me, uh, if we continued, uh, organizing and working in the communities that we would be not allowed to work in the communities, if we criticize the president any longer, they were there almost as henchman for

Speaker 3 (00:57:41):

Donovan. I remember

Speaker 2 (00:57:45):

Sitting them with them in Mike's and they're threatening me. And, uh, we decided at that point in time, uh, because it had to do with, with the dormitory that eventually took place at Pratt on, uh, on, uh, on Willoughby walk apartments, uh, the building that became the dormitory was being acquired by Pratt. And, uh, we were very much afraid that Pratt was going to do by buying that. And by even being offered, the next building is that they would remove from the community, what was housing for middle income families and other families, and undermine the quality of the community. So we led a walkout against Pratt with resonance of those apartments so that they wouldn't be displaced. And at that point in time, he got some of his henchmen to come and try to quiet us and scare us. Uh, and then we were at the point where we just ignore them and they did nothing, uh, fortunately, uh, but, uh, he, he was a ruthless individual. Uh, he also, uh, was involved in, uh, an exchange with Cuba, which I don't really fully understand, uh, what the benefits were after, uh, after the Bay of pigs. So he's got this great reputation, but my experiences with him were very negative, the most negative of any person at Pratt I've ever experienced and that's personal. So I can't prove it.

Speaker 1 (00:59:34):

Um, I mean, thanks for that. I think, um, we scheduled to take a brief break, um, for about five minutes. Um, but when we came, come back, I know that, uh, Alyssa and Sophia have questions pertaining to, um, um, community planning and also the strikes, which you alluded to, but I think we can go into deeper. Okay, great. Yeah. So I guess, uh, let's, let's take a break and, uh, we'll be back in a pause. Sorry. I'm going to pause the recording just so people know. And we'll start up again, picking up with Sophia. Yes. Um, I think did Jonathan, do you have any last

questions? Yeah, I mean, I've just had maybe like one more quick question, if that's all right. Um, so for the tinker recording, hi, my name is John again. Um, so you talked about, um, sort of the relationship between, um, Donovan and the board of trustees, um, with the students. And I would be interested to hear you talk about, um, you talked about sort of this form of intimidation, um, by the administration. And I would be curious to learn more about, like, if there were any examples that came to your mind.

Speaker 2 (01:01:00):

I don't think there was in any way intimidation by the administration. I think there was an intimidation by Donovan. Uh, and so, uh, I'm not sure, uh, that permeated to the deans or to other people that are operating at the university. I do know, uh, that, uh, there was a great number of faculty members who were supportive, uh, who volunteered their time for some of the things that we were doing. So I, I just put it on him years later, uh, there was a vice president or Pratt who shared with me photographs that were taken during some of the school. Some of the strikes, particularly when the black students went on strike of, uh, a picture taken from the, uh, I guess the roof of, uh, St James towers of Stanley Salzman, and myself delivering food to the students that were occupying the bursar's office, things like that. And so obviously there was somebody had invited the police onto campus to observe, and his accusation when we were at two 75 Washington, I think that was the address, uh, abandoned two 75 Vanderbilt, not Washington, uh, uh, Avenue. And then we were at Washington, uh, but, uh, looking at, uh, uh, people coming in and going, obviously there was some observation taking place. So there was a period of time, particularly in the sixties and into the seventies when there were folks that were observing what was going on on campus that in retrospect is very scary.

Speaker 5 (01:02:56):

And then I just wanted to add my set of questions with, um, like thinking, thinking about this, uh, Donovan, not only as an individual, do you think, um, sort of those actions that he had as a president sort of speak to sort of this generational shift of like the, the old guard generation versus sort of, um, the generation of like the sixties and seventies, um, and this idea of like engaging in student in activism and protest.

Speaker 2 (01:03:31):

Yeah, I do think you're right. There is a generational shift and I think some of it, at least in my mind, and this may not be factual, but it's my impression is that Richardson Pratt, who is a very much a patrician, we disagreed intensely around unions. I really believe that prac should be able to be unionized, uh, uh, but he had a great respect for, uh, academic freedom and broke. The, there were a whole group of people in the fifties and sixties that were blacklisted from the city university and Pratt broke that blacklist by hiring some people in our program. I wish I could remember it was w was it Jack Minkoff, but were people who worked with Jack Minkoff at that time. And, uh, and by hiring them, uh, he really made a statement that people have the right to, to speak out. And, uh, and, uh, and so, uh, I do think there was a major change in the proud administration at that point in time, a greater expansion of the board of trustees, greater involvement of students and faculty in those institutions, in the, in the governance of the Institute. And I think that began, uh, with, uh, you know, with once Donovan left. I don't think he was the only one who held those, but I think after he left, there was continual, uh, set of progressions to greater progressivity in the administration at Pratt.

Speaker 2 (01:05:27):

And, and, and one of the interesting things, maybe I shouldn't say this, but I will, uh, was that, uh, Richardson Pratt once called me in. And he said, you know, I'm going to do something that I think you're going to, like he said, I'm going to take the bla and I'm using his term, the black sheep of our family, and bring him into the board of trustees at Pratt. And that was Michael Pratt. Who's now a member, or was a member of the board of trustees and chair for awhile. And Michael, not only was he progressive, uh, he was, uh, a lawyer working for one of the, uh, advocacy groups in New York city. Uh, but Michael was also married outside of the Protestant faith. He married a Jewish woman and, uh, and Michael has been at Pratt for a while, uh, and has played a major role in making proud, I think a much more progressive and open institution over the years and is really, uh, you know, he's now with one of the major foundations, uh, has been for a long time, but, uh, uh, has done quite a bit to make sure that the board and the institution function more effectively and accountably.

Speaker 6 (01:06:53):

Um, John, if you don't have any follow-up questions, I think, all right, I'll get started then. So we started talking a little bit about some of these students strikes and I, I read through your interview last year with Heather and you talked about supporting, um, a lot of those strikes. I mean, you've talked about it today as well. Um, why did you choose to support this series of student strikes that was happening in the late sixties, early seventies,

Speaker 2 (01:07:21):

Variety of reasons. One, uh, we're, you know, some of the, some of the strikes, uh, strikers where they are, because they didn't have chalk for the chalkboards and they didn't have erasers in the room and the rooms weren't heated, and it was just, the physical conditions were bad. Some of them were really interested in broadening the educational scope, uh, really, uh, getting involved in issues that were visible to them, you know, when they traveled to Pratt, where they lived, uh, at that point in time and what they saw in the areas outside of the Gates at Pratt, uh, even the Gates were an issue that some people had talked about. Why should we have Gates, uh, uh, the Pratt library by the, by, by its charter has to be open to the community. And it isn't. And so those are issues, uh, that were, uh, you know, were, were discussed.

Speaker 2 (01:08:21):

Uh, and, uh, we were very much working already in the community. And from a very selfish perspective, we saw this way of changing some of the curriculum so that the, we can get the students who wanted to work with us to work, uh, with the community on issues that were important to them. Uh, uh, I forget exactly the names of the folks, but we worked with a group, I think it was called and, uh, in Williamsburg and placed Pratt, art, art, art students, and faculty, working with community folks in educating young people, uh, in, in the arts. And it was a way of taking art education and taking it away from the four walls around Pratt and really bringing it to communities that needed it, uh, in terms of architecture, it really meant looking at are there new ways and new roles that architects and young professionals have to play when you're drawing to address issues of poverty and, and, and divestment in communities, should we really be lending, uh, how do you work, uh, when you want to create an urban environment to make sure it is more democratic and accountable to the people that are there, we have to develop new means of participation.

Speaker 2 (01:09:41):

How do you work in a pluralistic society as opposed to a homogenous society where decisions aren't made by one group on behalf of their members, but there are a diverse sets of groups. Each of whom have different ways of interpreting a set of facts. I'm not saying you altered the facts. All it gets altered is how those facts impact you. So, uh, what does it mean, uh, by having, uh, uh, areas that lead to displacement of people? What does it mean to the people being displaced, as opposed to the people who may have an opportunity to come in there, uh, both have needs, uh, but both needs need to be represented in the decision making. And so we developed a whole philosophy around urban planning and architecture, uh, about participatory processes, as opposed to just working with, uh, the head of, of a church group, but working with the laity in that church, uh, not only working with, uh, elected officials, but working with the people at the base and communities. So we developed participatory processes. We developed accountability processes. Uh, we, uh, began to recognize that in a pluralistic society, everybody had to be rough referee had the right to be represented in public policy decisions. And so how do we lend our skills to those who did not have access to those skills before if we're working

Speaker 7 (01:11:14):

In low-income communities, how do we help empower those communities? And that's a professional role as well as a civic role to play. And so we began thinking about our professions in ways. We didn't think about it before, uh, the same with education, uh, uh, uh, and the same with the art community and the same with interior design and the same in architecture and urban planning, what do we do in a society, uh, so that we're learning to express things in different ways,

Speaker 3 (01:11:48):

Uh, and,

Speaker 7 (01:11:49):

Uh, reflective of, of that great multicultural environment we're living in. And these are the things we were thinking about. Then the Pratt center took its name, the press center for community and environmental development. Before the idea of sustainable development was established before environment was an issue. It was 1968 because we were dealing in urban environments where, which were rat-infested, where there was lead paint in the buildings. And we knew what was adversely affecting young kids. We knew that in 68 and yet nobody was doing anything about it. And so if you look at street magazine, which was published in the seventies, and you look at it, there is an edition about the role of women in architecture, 1973. There are issues in there that we were raising about the physical environment and what it meant to be growing up with with lead paint and other things in it.

Speaker 7 (01:12:51):

And so there were articles about that. And so what we did at magazine was say, these are the professions, but the professions have a role to serve communities. And that is to open up the options and open up the knowledge base of communities. We learned early on that when you talk to communities and one who engage them, they will only engage in solutions that they can borrow from their experiences. And so that means that they're not really being able to participate because they don't know what the alternatives might be. So it becomes incumbent upon us to really begin to show alternatives. And we can't only show alternatives based on our own cultural limitations. So we have to begin to look at how we broaden those out. And so diversity was something we were arguing for early on

Speaker 3 (01:13:45):

And

Speaker 7 (01:13:45):

Accountability was something we were arguing early on. A lot of the rhetoric that we're using in 2021, if you read some of the work coming out of the Pratt center in 2000 and in 1998 is the same rhetoric, but it was then called radical. And today it's called

Speaker 3 (01:14:05):

Woke. All right,

Speaker 7 (01:14:07):

Maybe it's a wrong definition, but it's, it's, it's that pendulum. Uh, and, and, and it wasn't because we didn't know about it. And people didn't know about it is that we were exposed to it in different ways. We were working hand in hand with the leadership in ocean Hill-Brownsville with the leadership in, uh, in the low reside with the kids who took over vacant and abandoned buildings, uh, in, uh, in East Harlem with the renegades in the Bronx, with the mid Bronx desperadoes in the low reside, with adopted building and, and with, uh, Lowy SIDA. And in Lowy side, uh, you had, uh, uh, a group called the real great society that emerged saying, well, what Johnson wanted to do, which I embraced. And other people embraced is great society issues, melding, social, and economic and physical renewal together. Uh, it was a great initiative by the federal government diverted by the war in Vietnam and abandoned, but those ideas to uproot poverty in our society existed.

Speaker 7 (01:15:17):

And there were others like the real great society that were coming up with more innovative ways of doing it. And it was in those discussions that we learn things that we never learned in academia. And then we try to sort of applying it. And, and so we've changed a lot of that in the school. It's, it's why you have people like Rebecca now teaching this course, it's why you're beginning to see the kind of discourse that we've had in the, in the graduate program in Sydney and regional planning. And there's terrific leadership now at Pratt, everybody from the president on down, uh, the Dean of the school of architecture, Pratt Harry at Harris is a breath of fresh air after all the years of thinking in, in limitations, by the Dean and attention that existed between us and them. Unfortunately, there's also a bureaucracy that's grown up that insulates you sometimes from these people.

Speaker 7 (01:16:18):

Uh, and, and at the same time, uh, you know, uh, this enormous discourse, that's now taking a place, uh, at Pratt on, uh, on dealing with racism within our society, I think is really important. And, uh, I think we need, and what we're going through is a form of truth and reconciliation. That's not only targeting individuals who would, may have abused people, but our own institutions and our own professions that have led and continued those abuses. And I think we have to begin to look at those in, in sort of a systemic way. And you've got people, uh, you know, fortunately you're in a class, you know, with two faculty members that are leaders at Pratt over the years for it. And, and, you know, and, and, and not only at Pratt, but within the city as a whole, and this is not something that any individual did it proud, it's just, uh, it's just, there would be CHADS in different places. And PRA unlike others enable that to take place in part, because they weren't bureaucratic. And in part, uh, because, uh, things that are faculty led rather than

top led really, I think have longterm implications as opposed to things that come just from the, from the head.

Speaker 6 (01:17:45):

Um, since you started talking about kind of, uh, the contemporary structure of practice administration, um, I wanted to ask, you know, how do you think the current relationship between prep students, administration, and faculty compares to the relationship that existed in the late sixties to early seventies when the strikes were happening? What is the same, what is different about that relationship between each of these three groups at Pratt?

Speaker 7 (01:18:21):

That's a very good question. I wish I could answer it in a simple way. Uh, I do think that there's some similarities, uh, over the years, uh, and that is that, uh, and in some way it's getting a little worse Pratt people that identify with their schools and what's happening now is everybody wants you to identify with the Institute as a whole before the school. So I know the schools are struggling in their ability to set up their own financial support mechanisms and, uh, get people to contribute to them. Uh, I believe in the unity of the, of Pratt, you know, I believe in the cross-fertilization and the transdisciplinary nature of working with each of the schools together. But if you don't allow each of the schools to have their own identity and a strong identity, then it's hard for them to function with others as equals.

Speaker 7 (01:19:27):

And so how do you work with that tension, I think is what we're going through today. How do you really recognize your own identity? But at the same time are able to work across identities in a transdisciplinary way. How do you recognize your own discipline and, and broaden that scope of discipline of that discipline, but also work with others who have other other attributes to bring together. And that tension between, uh, exists at Pratt. And I think that that's something that has always existed, uh, and it, it manifests in administrative ways that the creativity that bubbles up from the bottom is sometimes insulated from reaching decision makers, by mid-level bureaucrats, at Pratt that still exists. And, uh, and a lot of the real connections are, you know, my working with Rebecca, Rebecca working, uh, with, uh, somebody in the school of industrial design, Jack Travis, for instance.

Speaker 7 (01:20:34):

And so you, you find people at the Institute that are your kids and you're working there, and that, that existed in the past. And it exists today in some ways it's harder today because we've got more middle level bureaucrats, you know, the, uh, uh, uh, all of a sudden we're getting a plethora of centers at Pratt, uh, without, uh, and it's great that everybody now is talking about, you know, the decolonization of our curriculum and the di and making sure that we're taking racism out of the, our curriculum. I think that's wonderful at the same time. There's so many different groups doing that, that, and I'm part of a lot of them that you're being torn apart. There's no cohesiveness in the effort. And I think it's critically important that we do both, that we do it in a de-centralized as well as a recognized way, but we don't drive people to the point of exhaustion, but it's gotta be done.

Speaker 7 (01:21:35):

Uh, and I think that's, uh, maybe it's a, that's a function of the time, uh, but I think it's important function. And so I think there's been a lot of change. I think the students today, uh, for a variety of reasons, uh, are as good as they've ever been, if not better. Uh, I, I, you know, I'm 80, I'll be

83 in June. And I must say meeting with folks like you make me feel 30 years younger. Uh, and it really is amazing just to hear the quality that's coming out of our students now and what they're striving to do and how they're doing it and the tools they have to do with, you know, I can't, I can't figure out how to do it, but collaborating with some of you is just been a godsend. And so it really is, you know, it's a different time and the issues are, um, many of the same, uh, uh, recognition of the issues have changed, uh, and they're broader and they're more diverse and I think they're healthier.

Speaker 7 (01:22:45):

And so I think the relationship today is a healthier one. Uh, the pandemic has thrown a big monkey wrench into everything. Uh, we, we, we don't know each other to the point where we can touch each other. And I think, uh, that that's something that's missing, uh, but hopefully that'll be overcome in the next year, uh, and that we will be able not to go back to the old normal, but that we'll be able to create a new normal in which there are, uh, different changes that take place, uh, the challenges that face your generation and your kids' generation, my grandkids generation is really going to be overwhelming. And at the same time, it is pregnant with opportunity to make a big difference. And I think those challenges are the ones that will, but it should both excite you and animate you because there we can make a difference and we're going to have to make a difference. Uh, but the pandemic is something we've got a vaccination for. And so we'll be able to solve it, but the issues of other pandemics, the issues of climate change, the issues that come along with climate change of other vector-borne diseases, other events occurring are, are enormous. And Texas and California are only testimony to that.

Speaker 7 (01:24:20):

And, and my generation and the generation before me failed in being able to garner the political force to make the changes that are necessary. And I think that's part and parcel of what you've got to do is you've got to not only acquire the skills and the technical skills of knowing how to create change or what should be changed, but also how to move public policy to the point where you can achieve those changes.

Speaker 6 (01:24:56):

Um, speaking about, you know, creating change. I want to get back to some of the protests in the sixties and seventies. Um, specifically, I just wanted to hear a little bit about how the protests were organized. Um, were there a small handful of student leaders, um, or was it more of a group collective effort?

Speaker 7 (01:25:23):

They were obviously leaders, but it was a collective effort of those leaders throughout the Institute. And there were various different things that triggered it, you know, and each time it was triggered, it was, it became a learning experience that got you to understand a broader set of issues. And we're the ones that initially led to it. I wasn't kidding. The, I think the first attempt at doing anything in, at the Institute, I think grew out of complaints in the school of architecture, by students about not having enough desks, not enough chalk in the classrooms. And they began to be a little bit upset, but there were one or two leaders who then said, but there were other things we have to do look at, look at what's going on outside our window. And that's when they approached me because I was working with some folks outside of Pratt.

Speaker 7 (01:26:23):

And so that's how we develop. And then all of a sudden we found out, you know, it, wasn't only us. Some of this is contagious. And all of a sudden we heard Columbia university was on strike and Columbia was a little bit more adamant in terms of their relationship with the community. They were building a gymnasium that was going to take something away from one of the parks, uh, in the Harlem community. And all of a sudden we started working with the folks. Some of us had connections with folks in Harlem. There was another community design center in Harlem, uh, called the architects renewal committee for Harlem arch. And so the Pratt center, we had already been working with arch on community building issues. And all of a sudden we knew some of the leaders at the school in Harlem, so that, that, uh, with Columbia school of architecture, that's where the strike started in the schools of architecture, the ones that were more, had a greater intersection with the communities, so that it went beyond the desk space to what the profession was doing. And then all of a sudden you had stuff going on in Berkeley, the free speech movement and students began learning from each other, which is what we should be doing. This should be a discourse that enables us all to begin to understand the complexities of everything that's going on. And so you began seeing a greater amount of this coming together. And so there may have been different sparks at different points

Speaker 3 (01:27:57):

In time, the invasion

Speaker 7 (01:27:59):

Of Cambodia, the expansion of the Vietnam war, why are we spending money on, in fighting a war that is perpetuating a form of colonialism rather than investing in the people at home.

Speaker 3 (01:28:14):

And then we begin

Speaker 7 (01:28:15):

And seeing that some of the people coming back, you know, we're coming back with drugs and, you know, many of the communities felt that drugs will be introduced into their neighborhoods.

Speaker 3 (01:28:27):

And what did

Speaker 7 (01:28:27):

It really mean? And, uh, and, and, and now when we read in retrospect about the drug Wars and, and about the caste system in the United States, and about all of these things that were occurring at the time, uh, you know, some of the paranoia that existed today, uh, existed then became, were facts. In retrospect, people really understood what was happening and what was happening to the communities and the growth of incarceration and things of that nature, all of that, you know, things that we were hearing, uh, earlier on, uh, I dunno, how many of you know, this concept of the million block million dollar block do any of, you know, what that means? It's where we are spending about a million dollars to incarcerate people who came out of a particular block in ocean Hill, Brownsville, Brownsville, and are now wanting an upstate prison. And had we spent a fraction of that on education and on alternative opportunities year when they were young, they wouldn't be up there.

Speaker 7 (01:29:36):

They wouldn't be in prison. Well, the first maps of those that kind were drawn by, by someone who was working on GIS at the Pratt center. And they didn't work on those maps because they knew this. But because somebody who was working on a project, this guy, Eric, Eric Dora, came

to us because we do do GIS work. And we were the only ones he knew who could do it, uh, who drew up the maps for him. He then took those maps, got money from the Soros foundation, worked with people who had more capability than we at Pratt and produce those maps that now prove that kind of connection between where we are disinvestment and people have led to enormous costs, social and other costs and incarceration. And then now all you have to do is read one of the books that are coming in that the new Jim Crow. And you begin to see how that became an industry in the United States. Uh, one of the groups that I had the honor of being honored with many years ago, architects for architects and designers for social responsibility, ADP Sr years ago, mandated that an architect that worked to design a prison was one who was unethical.

Speaker 7 (01:31:08):

The AIA hasn't done that yet, but they did. And they w it was it. And now it's, it's almost discourse that we shouldn't be working with the prison camp, industrial prison complex, but these are the things that we discovered today. It was those who were working at the edge with communities that are suffering from this knew about, it's not that we were brilliant. It was that we were exposed. And that's what we fought for in all those educational, uh, strikes at Pratt was how do we create greater exposure so that we become better professionals? And how do we become better professionals? Is that when we learn how to work with other professionals. So a lot of what we do is never done in isolation. It's always done with somebody it's done with the Royal we,

Speaker 6 (01:32:07):

So the architecture students were really interested in changing the curriculum in order to better support these goals that you're talking about. Did they ever submit any proposals or suggestions to prod administration and faculty, and were any of their suggestions implemented?

Speaker 7 (01:32:28):

Oh, yes. I mean, we changed classes in many of the schools. Uh, a lot of what we were doing, uh, you know, uh, became new coursework, experiential education programs became the, uh, the mode of the graduate urban planning program. For instance, it really, uh, I think put the, for a private school like Pratt, but our planning school and one of the top schools in the country, if not in the world, because of participatory processes that came out of those changes that people fought for. Uh, we had a greater, uh, allowing of students to participate in what originally were called social sociology courses, rather than planning architectural courses. But eventually it became part of the architectural curriculum. It's becoming much more part of that. Now with Harriet there than it was before you've got, uh, you know, stuff that Rebecca has been doing in the chorus programs that emerged out of those, that period of time, you know, the work that Heather has done has been groundbreaking, not only at Pratt, but city-wide, if not internationally, in terms of the work of artists were art education programs.

Speaker 7 (01:33:47):

So you began to see those changes in interaction. The center was allowed to grow in ways that didn't grow for a while for a while. It only was within the school of architecture was brought out of the school to serve all the Institute. I used to sit when I was a director of Pratt, I was part of the ACA Dean's council. I wasn't a Dean, but I was sitting with them in what was an academic council. I forget the exact name, but it had all the deans plus two or three of the administrative heads. All right. And, and so some coordination began to take place then and interactions. Then

I think it's now happening a little bit more through the chairs at Pratt, but it did make changes and substantive changes in what, what is being taught and how it's being taught. And who's beginning to teach it, is it where it should be? Absolutely not. Are there enough resources to make it work really well? No. Is our faculty diverse enough today? Uh, no. The Pratt center staff was for a long time. Uh, is it as diverse as it was years ago? It's not, unfortunately I think it's beginning to rethink and become as diverse as it was. And by that, I mean, racially and, and on the whole, on the whole spectrum,

Speaker 8 (01:35:14):

Um, you began to talk about just the urban planning and urban renewal, um, that came out of Pratt. And that's actually something that I'm interested in, in relation to Pratt's impact in specifically Bed-Stuy. Um, so I just wanted to ask if you could describe the urban renewal work and projects that you and Pratt were involved with within the Bedford Stuyvesant community during like the late fifties and sixties.

Speaker 7 (01:35:42):

Well, it wasn't in the late fifties and sixties, as I mentioned, there was something in the very late fifties and early sixties that was done for downtown Brooklyn. Uh, uh, up until that time, Pratt didn't really have a planning program. And George Raymond, who was brought in to deal with urban planning issues eventually created what eventually became the planning department. And he did it by setting up a program to train people about the new zoning resolution around the turn of 1968. And there was a new zoning resolution. I can't remember exactly the date that it came about. And by running a training program, he earned enough money to hire a secretary. All right. And that secretary and he, and he was here only. Part-time actually where the beginning of the planning department and that, and what they did is they felt that commute, that the students in urban planning needed to be in real work, in a real context in a community.

Speaker 7 (01:36:47):

So the place they picked was downtown area around the Brooklyn Academy of music, moving into what we now know was cobble Hill and Carroll gardens. And that became what they called the dare project, downtown area renewal effort. That was the one that, uh, got the, uh, the folks upset in the knee. Some leaders in the neighborhood that attracted Jane Jacobs to, uh, opposing it. And it was eventually defeated. He then gets this grant to deal with, uh, uh, a community education at that same time. Uh, the city was beginning to feel, uh, uh, the impacts of urban policy in the United States, uh, uh, because the federal government, uh, after world war II began to finance the development of, uh, FHA housing, federal housing administration, uh, that, uh, provided low cost loans to people to be able to move to suburban housing, to allow working class and middle-class families to own their own home.

Speaker 7 (01:38:01):

Uh, that became part of the national policy. In part, it became about because of a national defense policy that in the 50, like fifties, early sixties, uh, atomic warfare was in everybody's mind when I was your age or a bit younger and in high school, and then public school, we had to duck under the get desks because we had to be afraid. What do you do with an atomic bomb? It, and part of that led to what Eisenhower did, which was to create the national defense highway. And what did that mean? It was build a highway system from the East coast to the West coast. So you can move military weapons all throughout the United States, but at the same time, you could decentralize our cities of essential population and essential work. So what

does that mean? You could take the, the industrial complex of the United States and distributed throughout the United States.

Speaker 7 (01:39:09):

More equally, you could put some of it in more rural and urban areas, uh non-urban areas. So you would deconcentrating the United States. So in case of an enemy attack, no, but no place would wipe you out. If all of it were within certain areas, uh, then it could be easily targeted, but if you distributed it throughout the United States, uh, you were safer. And so that was the idea behind the national defense. I went network, and it meant that you could then let the essential populations leave and distribute. And what happened was FHA. And there's a great book called the color of law allowed for do developments to pop up all over the United States. The biggest one around New York was Levittown, which are built out in long Island. For those of you who know New York city Levittown, it's built, I forget what year, but it was in the fifties, got federal money for about 1600 units of housing.

Speaker 7 (01:40:12):

It prohibited alone to anybody of color. If you were black or African-American or Puerto Rican, you could not get alone. If you were a woman head of household, you can not get alone in some areas of the country. If you were Jewish, you could not get alone. They took this federal program, which was putting in below market money, guaranteeing mortgages, not for five years, but for 20 years or 25 years. So it made it affordable. It was then given through the veterans administration to all returning veterans, if you will, white, what did it do? It enabled the out migration of whites from cities and what was left were concentrations of poor people in urban areas. And the only money for urban areas was public housing, which were large concentrations and dense concentrations in some parts of the city to counter that later on, they put in urban renewal programs to clean up some areas and build offices and job concentrations in the city.

Speaker 7 (01:41:21):

But what that period of time did, and this was the early sixties, was it ease? It created the out migration of white communities from the cities at the same time that had concentrated poor African-American and Latino and new immigrants into the cities in large numbers. And they created blacks cores surrounded by white noose. And that was the pattern of development until there were, uh, there was a guy who taught at Pratt, one of my faculty, Ernie Erber. They remember all these years. I didn't, I should write it down. So I don't forget it again. Ernie, Erber worked with a group called the national committee against discrimination in the housing, and in the mid sixties, they ruled these restrictive covenants unconstitutional. I think it was in 1968, 1969, that these restrictive covenants were removed. You could S you could still say it only could be one and two family housing, but you could not discriminate based on race, but that set the pattern that we are facing today in South Africa, we called it apartheid.

Speaker 7 (01:42:40):

It was done forcibly, and then a different degree, but it wound up with the same type of result, not as the intensity is different. Uh, but it really wound up with that effort in the seventies. All of a sudden, we began to understand that with the new technologies that we could console, we could protect concentrations. We could create missile systems of defense around our cities. And in the seventies, we began to see the federal government begin to think about re concentrating cities in part, because we began to see that the dispersal of our cities was creating a, a fear of running out of oil. So if you look at the mid seventies after the Arab oil boycott and a number of

other events that occurred, uh, you began to see that oil and the cost of oil and the cost of fuel began even before we knew fully the, the adverse impacts of the carbon on our, our globe, or recognize that sufficiently.

Speaker 7 (01:43:54):

We were, we were concerned with what we called peak oil. Will we run out of oil by a certain period of time. And that peak oil period is for some companies now reaching. In other words, what is the known resources oil in the world? And when does it begin to go down? In other words, we were finding more and more and more and more resources. And then all of a sudden we don't find any more resources and it's going down. And that's what peak oil is. And it means that eventually we're going to run out of oil. Now, fortunately, hopefully we won't ever run out of oil because we won't use it because it's killing our planet. But at that point in time, we were very concerned with it. What happened was in cities, all of a sudden, the cost of maintaining and operating a house went up appreciably.

Speaker 7 (01:44:49):

Why did it go up a lot? Because the price of heating and cooling your house skyrocketed, it went from 20 cents a gallon to much more, you know, to, to 20, to \$3, a gallon for fuel oil. And that costs the, the price of heating and cooling a house to skyrocket people wanted a decent wage. So the labor went up in housing, the cost of water and water purification went up. All of this started adding to the housing burden. And we began to understand that the dispersal of population, the maintenance of the highway system, the long commute to work, the overcrowded highways were costing our society more. And we began to remove some of those barriers and incentives to de-centralize and some communities, one something, our work in Bedford-Stuyvesant, which started in this middle year. We started with this siphoning off a population in the city, a loss of population within Bedford-Stuyvesant and all of this.

Speaker 7 (01:45:59):

And at the same time, it was the beginning of the civil rights movement. And so a group of ministers in Bedstein were very concerned that they may lose their parishioners. And at the same time, because of all this disinvestment, they're seeing housing that was deteriorating in their homes and their neighborhoods. So they wanted a study done of how do they really Revit ledge their neighborhood and stabilize Bedstein. So it doesn't become depopulated or totally run down because of the disinvestment that was taking place. So they went to Rockefeller brothers who had funded Pratt and said, can we get a grant to see how we develop more housing and improve the quality of our neighborhood and Rockefeller, like most foundations? Well, we don't want to give you the grant, but we just gave some money to Pratt. Why don't you go to them? They're your neighbor and see whether or not you want, they won't help you.

Speaker 7 (01:46:59):

So this group called church community services, a group of about a dozen African-American churches in Bedford-Stuyvesant came to Pratt, and they went and they met with George Raymond, and they asked him if he would work with the community. And he said, no, but what I'll do is I'll send one of our graduates meet to meet with them. And we started meeting with them and, uh, went to one of the meetings in Bedford-Stuyvesant and all hell broke, loose. The community groups that showed up at that meeting, wanting to know what was the city doing in that neighborhood? They were afraid it would be another urban renewal program, like Pratt expansion in their neighborhood. And at that time, urban renewal was known as re Negro

removal. I'm using the language of that time because it displaced people in order to build and preserve or revitalize a neighborhood. And they were very concerned why the ministers weren't involved because while the ministers may have been African-American, none of them lived in the community.

Speaker 7 (01:48:07):

And so they were really upset with the ministers and they want to know what Pratt or white institution was doing in their neighborhood. I mentioned earlier that I had gone on the March in Washington, and I didn't, I went by myself, but I met somebody on that bus totally by accident. I don't know the person's name any longer. I can't, I've been trying to remember it, but I can't, but that person knew one of the leaders in Bedstein. And when we, I got to that meeting happened to be at that same meeting and introduced me to Don Benjamin, who was then one of the leaders working in the central Brooklyn coordinating council. And so Don Benjamin made sure that even though there was this anger in the room, that it wasn't directed at me, and it was pure luck, but we started working with that group that was angry. And within six months started working with a group that was opposed to us as well as with church community services. And that was called, they were residents of Fulton park, a group that thought they were going to be renewed under urban renewal and a group called the central Brooklyn coordinating council. And we started working with them in a participant, a way opt in. Do you have a question?

Speaker 1 (01:49:31):

No. Um, I, I wanted to say that we, we have a stop at 12, but if it seems like Alyssa will be able to continue this part of the interview, um, well, would it be possible to continue to have Alyssa continue this part of the interview?

Speaker 7 (01:49:48):

I'll try to be as short as possible. Okay. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Yeah, no. And so we started working with those groups and came up with a proposal for the comprehensive renewal Bedford-Stuyvesant and that plan made a lot of sense to a lot of people, the community bought into it. It came out over a two year period based on a lot of work with the local neighborhood and the community with local residents and the community started going to various different city officials to peddle it, to see if they could get city or federal money. The federal government began, uh, you know, Kennedy who had already been assassinated. Uh, uh, and there was the Johnson was the president, and there was a lot of Diane Kennedy legacy money. We call it that was going into cities. And, uh, they were going to select one neighborhood in every city to begin to do some of this kind of work.

Speaker 7 (01:50:45):

And we wanted, that started to be the beneficiary of it. Well, Bedford-Stuyvesant, didn't have a congressperson. The only African-American Congress person from New York city was Adam Clayton Powell from Harlem. Every other one of the communities of color in New York was divided or gerrymandered into different congressional districts. 1960, there was an order to Rican re district to city. And we started working with the community, this group based on the 60 census to redistrict Bedford-Stuyvesant into what became a into a district that could at least have a chance of electing an African-American to Congress. And so we worked with that group to do that, and eventually came up with the district that Shirley Chisholm was elected to. Shirley Chisholm was one of the women that I had the fortunate opportunity to work with Shirley

Chisholm, uh, Elsie, Elsie Richardson, Louise bowling, a whole bunch of others from the community that I worked very closely with.

Speaker 7 (01:51:52):

And they, they came up with this plan and they were still turned down even because the congressional district had not yet been evolved and eventually were so frustrated. They didn't know what to do. And so began saying if government won't do it for us, let's create our own entity. And that attracted the attention of a woman in the city planning commission, uh, by the name of Eleanor Guggenheim and Ellie Guggenheim then arranged for Bobby Kennedy, brother of the slain president, who was going to run for Congress from New York state to meet with the group. And that was arranged. It took a long time and working with Elsie Richardson and her committee, we eventually hosted him throughout the community and worked with him on this idea. And over a period of 18 months, the idea to form a community development cooperation was born. It was one of the first three in the country.

Speaker 7 (01:53:01):

And then when he was elected Senator working with the Republican Senator from New York, Jacob Javits, they introduced legislation for 10 community development corporations in the country based on that work. And it was done by the two senators from New York built on the model of Bed-Stuy restoration. There were over 30,000 community development corporations today. We had the opportunity because of the leadership of LC and, uh, people like Shirley and some of the others to really work on that. And that's what gave birth to the ongoing ability of the Pratt center to function over the years, we've helped create dozens of them. And tonight I'm actually, uh, delivering a lecture, uh, uh, Cleveland state university on the history of community development. And I can send you a copy if you want Rebecca of that video presentation, uh, after I go through it tonight, uh, it basically is one that will address, uh, you know, the impact of the community development corporation over the years until today, because the institutions that evolved on it, the Pratt center didn't do all of it.

Speaker 7 (01:54:24):

Obviously it came out of the work that the community had done, that we were riding the, the current with, uh, but eventually created a whole landscape of, of intermediary corporations, national legislation, and others that grew up around the advocacy efforts of groups coming together, collectively, nationally, uh, but also grew out of independent ideas. A woman by the name of Galston cotta in Chicago, uh, created an organization called national people's action that resulted in, uh, fighting red lining first by creating something called the home mortgage disclosure act harmed, uh, uh, that really said these are where banks raise money. This is where they're spending their money. That raised the consciousness of groups all over the country to do that kind of research. And out of that came the community reinvestment act, which required banks to affirm affirmatively lend in low income communities so that this investment was reversed and created investment coming into those communities.

Speaker 7 (01:55:34):

And they were supposed to benefit low income communities. What it did is it worked very well for a great number of years, but now it, the geography, but not the people. If it's a low income area, you can invest in it, but it doesn't mean that the investment won't displace people. So one of the things we have to do is constantly be vigilant. And so what we're talking about today is how we have to reconfigure the community development movement. So it holds government

more accountable so that the beneficiaries or the people who have been discriminated against not the geographies, you know, I could go on for hours, but I think I need to stop. I don't know if that answered your question, but

Speaker 8 (01:56:26):

No, it gave me my answer in a lot more. I'm going to actually stop the recording now, if that's okay. Open. Is that okay?