Matthew Crenson
Interviewed by Jennifer Kinniff
February 19, 2015
This is Jenny Kinniff, program manager of Hopkins Retrospective and I'm here today with Matthew Crenson, Johns Hopkins alumnus and longtime professor of political science here in the Keswick Recording Studio. So thank you for being here.

Thank you.

So I'd like to start, as we were talking about earlier, you've been around Baltimore for a very long time. I want to talk about your pre-Hopkins time in Baltimore, as well as your time at Hopkins. So can you let me know about your family here in Baltimore and your early life?

Well, I was born in Baltimore. My parents emigrated here from the Bronx before I was born, and they taught me to speak what they regarded as proper English, which meant that every time I opened my mouth in Baltimore people labeled me as an outsider – somebody who's just passing through. And I think for the first twenty years of my life here that's how I felt too. I felt more like a New Yorker than a Baltimorean. We can come back to that but it wasn't until I left to go to graduate school in Chicago that I suddenly discovered how distinctive Baltimore was and how comfortable I felt here – how close I felt to the city.

My first contact with Hopkins came when I was nine years old. At that time, the school system was fueling the leading edge of the Baby Boom, and so they were trying to move students through the system more rapidly so they could accommodate a higher volume. And so there's a program here at Hopkins where public school students would come and do a semester's work in six weeks and
then go back and skip a semester. In the summer of 1952, I arrived at Hopkins. I recall the classroom was in Latrobe Hall and Shriver Hall was still under construction. We used to play on the construction site during recess and we hung out in Levering Hall. So I formed an early attachment for the place.

When time came to go to college, I was only allowed to apply to two places, because my mother thought I was too young to leave Baltimore on my own—so I got to apply to Loyola and Hopkins. I'm not even sure I bothered with Loyola. I just applied to Hopkins and came here in 1959 as an undergraduate. I remember one of the bizarre things about my entry was I was still going to a pediatrician at the time, and his office was right across the street on 33rd but in order to cross the boundary of the campus I had to get a bunch of shots for typhoid fever even though I was only going a block away but it was all on the form.

I came here and I – well, perhaps I should back up a minute. I attended Baltimore City College. It was a very good school. It gave you very solid grounding, but it was not what I would call an exciting learning environment. One of the graduation requirements was that you had to memorize word for word, and in order, sixteen rules of grammar and eighteen rules of punctuation. That was English. So when I came here and took my first literature course, it was like I had been reborn. That, and also philosophy I was really excited.

I became a philosophy major for a while, as a matter of fact, because I so enjoyed the courses and especially one of the teachers, Maurice Mendelbaum was a famous philosopher who wrote about the philosophy of the social sciences. I also remember that at that time there were many more students from Baltimore who were undergraduates at Hopkins. The prep school graduates referred to them disparagingly as Baltimore Bennies.

JK: Baltimore Bennies?

MC: Baltimore Bennies. Yes, so I was a Benny. People from Baltimore never have been what you would call sophisticates, and one of my sort of searing moments at Hopkins was when I had been at City College I got interested in Ancient Greek philosophy. And not sure why. Perhaps it was because at that time, it was an all-male institution so there were no other distractions, but I never got to discuss this with anybody because I came from Govans and nobody talked about that in Govans and City College didn't teach philosophy.
And, so when I got here, I was surprised and extremely embarrassed to discover that the name of my favorite philosopher was not pronounced “Plotto” because that's what it looked to me when I read it. For most Baltimoreans, although Hopkins was a local institution, it was also a foreign place. It was completely different from the rest of the city.

JK: Were there many students from City College that also went to Hopkins?

MC: Yeah. As a matter of fact, City College was founded before Hopkins and it was located almost next door to the original location down on Howard Street. It was the feeder school for Hopkins. It produced most of the original undergraduates, and for many years it continued in that role. So this was near the end of a tradition of Baltimore-based Hopkins students.

At that time, I remember that – I lived at home but the students who lived on campus were only guaranteed housing for the first year – freshman year. After that, unless there was spare space they were on their own, and I think that created a spirit of independence and even rebellion that I don't see among students today anymore.

JK: Just that they were thrust into that more adult role of –

MC: Right, very early and they referred to the place – I never heard – as the John [laughs]. And I remember in the spring semester of my freshman year I was walking across the upper quadrangle, and I looked up and there on the face of the Gilman Hall clock was a wonderfully executed Mickey Mouse face that somebody got from – and I sort of carried that into my own undergraduate activities. I was on the newsletter, which was one of the best things I think I ever did when I was an undergraduate here, and so I got to talk to a lot of people, had a license to ask questions.

I remember I interviewed one of my philosophy professors, a guy named Albert Hammond. He taught a course that I took on scientific method and logic and his specialty was probability, and I found out when I was doing the article but that was also his hobby because he played the horses at Pimlico [laughs]. He was very interested in the odds and things like that. But also, I remember I was features editor and there was a rumor that Hopkins owned the Gaiety Burlesque. It was only a rumor.
So, first I know the staff woman and we both interviewed the University treasurer to try to get him to tell us about what they owned, and he was very evasive, of course. So then we decided to go to the City Land Records Office and see if we could figure out who owned the Gaiety Burlesque—and we couldn't figure out who owned the Gaiety Burlesque, there was all sorts of shell corporations and things like that—but while we were looking at the records we noticed that the university tended to own, or at least the ground, for a lot of slum dwellings. So we went back to the office and got a Polaroid camera and went around to take pictures of these places.

I remember at one place we found two kids, obviously from low-income backgrounds. We gave him a quarter to stand in front of one of the houses, I don't know whether they lived there, and we had to keep yelling at them, "Don't smile. Don't smile." [Laughs]

**JK:** That's some pretty enterprising undercover work –

**MC:** Well, it got me into a little bit of trouble.

**JK:** Did you end up printing that story?

**MC:** Yeah, in the most sort of sensational way possible. Put an article based on the interview with the treasurer on one side of the page, the truth on the other side of the page and the pictures in between. The two co-editors got called into the office of the assistant to the president at the time, a man named Keith Spalding who later went on to be the president of Franklin and Marshall. As they relayed it to me, his message was that if I did anything more with this both they and I would be expelled [laughs].

**JK:** So it stopped right there?

**MC:** It stopped right there. And actually, the treasurer – we did not follow journalistic ethics with respect to the treasurer. When we found – we should have gone back to him and asked him for comments. We didn't.

[0:10:00]

**JK:** Were there other major stories that you –
MC: Yeah, there was one I manufactured. Well, there were several. I did one on the student council, for example, in which the lead was that they had more committees than they had members. Then, I also did one – I was running out of features material – excuse me – and so I began looking around for things. I noticed in those days the Sunday New York Times used to carry what they called the “Almanac.” It gave all the important dates for the coming months. I found that December 17 was – I think it was the 17th was the anniversary of the Boston Tea Party.

And then in the Baltimore papers, I read that Jane Mansfield – do you know? – Jane Mansfield was going to be here for a Cerebral Palsy telethon on the same day. So I called up the McCormick Tea Company and I said “We're going to have a commemorative tea on the occasion of the Boston Tea Party and Jane Mansfield's gonna be there, and we're gonna raise money for Cerebral Palsy.” And then I called the British Consul and I said, “We're having this commemorative tea to show that there are no hard feelings. We would like you to be the co-host along with Jane Mansfield.”

He was a very nice man named Roy Link and he agreed right away. And then I called up the Cerebral Palsy people and I said we've got this thing all set up and if you don't give us Jane Mansfield it's gonna fall apart. And sure enough – and you can check this, it's in the newsletter – she came and the only thing that went wrong was I was almost certain she was going to be late, but she was early, and so she got to speak first. And of course, when she left, the entire – it was an all-male student body – I tried to block one of the doors with my body. It was in the Great Hall of Levering. That was unsuccessful. Oh, and Chester Wickwire was the master of ceremonies.


MC: Yeah. He remembered that for years and years. The notice was that these guys were lining up to get served cups of tea by the colonial hostesses from McCormick. I noticed they were going out and dumping the tea in water fountains and then coming back for another helping. I couldn't figure it out and then I noticed that [these women] were wearing these scoop-necked things and they had to bend over to pour the tea. These were sort of backward socially and every other way – backward students that had little contact with women.
JK: Actually, so that's a good question. You're sort of segueing into more about the student body. You came here as a freshman in 1959, right?

MC: Right.

JK: Can you talk about what the climate was like on campus then, what it was like to be a student?

MC: It was a lot of work. It was tough. And I said, some of them were more independent and rebellious than I think students are today, but not politically. I mean politically, I remember in 1960 the newsletter did a survey and the campus split 50/50 between Nixon and Kennedy. It wouldn't happen today. There were a lot of engineers. A lot of my friends were engineers and that was the big concentration of Baltimoreans in the engineering majors, so I was sort of somewhat distinctive. I decided my major in a very sort of unscientific and perhaps irrational way.

I was interested in philosophy and literature and as I said, it was like coming alive after City College. But I rode to school on the bus and one of the other passengers was Francis E. Rourke, who was a professor of political science and so we got to know one another on the bus. I took a course from him and I decided that when I grow up I wanted to be like he was. He was an extraordinary person. I remember there was a political theorist in the department named Thomas Cook who referred to Professor Rourke as “our own Saint Francis,” and not ironically. He was very funny but he was also very kind. So I figured I would major in political science because he was a political scientist. That's how I made up my mind.

[0:15:00]

JK: And did you find were you socializing at that time with mostly other students from Baltimore or was it more sort of open than that?

MC: It was mixed. I joined a fraternity, Phi Kappa Psi, because otherwise I would have had no social life whatsoever. And most of the people in that fraternity did not come from Baltimore, so I met a lot of them. And one of them was a year behind me. He was Michael Bloomberg. Maybe I shouldn't say this but you can cut this, maybe. He and I discovered that we were both dating the same woman at Goucher at the same time.
JK: Oh no.

MC: So in my presence he called her up and said you can't go out with two guys from the same fraternity, so she stopped going out with him and she's now my wife. But maybe you wanna cut that [laughs].

JK: I think that's a perfectly fine thing to put in there.

MC: So that made me much more cosmopolitan. So the fraternity was a big outlet – social outlet. At that time about fifty percent of the student body belonged to fraternities, because it was the only way to have a social life at an all male institution. But for me, it was especially important because I didn't have a driver's license. I started when I was sixteen and didn't get a driver's license until I was eighteen, so it was my fraternity brothers who enabled me to get to places like Goucher and Notre Dame.

JK: And can you talk about that too, about the relationship with the women at Goucher?

MC: Right. Particular women or –

JK: No, what the sort of social scene was like.

MC: It was stunted because of the separateness of the two places and there were mixers to try to get us introduced to one another without very much luck. I went out for a while with a woman from Notre Dame who was very concerned because I wasn't Catholic. So that clearly wasn't going to go very far. I met my wife by accident on a blind date that a fraternity brother had arranged. In fact, on the night she went out with me, she was supposed to have gone out with Mike Bloomberg but he canceled for some reason and that's how we met.

JK: That [inaudible].

MC: Yeah [laughs].

JK: What about—I know that in 1960 there was some tension with the neighborhood in terms of sit-in protests and negotiations with the neighborhood merchants. Do you remember stuff that you could share?
MC: Yeah, as a matter of fact I covered one of those demonstrations for the newsletter. I covered several but one I remember was a very windy day and they all had these signs nailed to little sticks of wood. They were having a terrible time keeping them from flopping away and one of the – I guess it was the Blue Jay was one of the targets. It later was I believed burned down in a fire but nobody ever established any connections between the demonstrations and the fire.

JK: And this was like a sandwich shop?

MC: Yeah, and bar. Another place I think was Hooper's, which is now Pete's Grille over in – I used to eat breakfast there a lot. I was mostly an observer in these things. I was not a participant. And there was also a big protest during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. I remember there were – right now where the Glass Pavilion was there was a parking lot, and the protestors were going to drive to Washington and some counter protestors who supported the embargo with Cuba laid down in front of the entrance to the parking lot to block the exit of the cars. I forget – I wrote the headline for it – "Blockaders blockade anti-blockaders." [Laughs]

JK: Do you think any – I mean obviously that was a protest of a more international issue. Do you think the protests relating to local neighborhood issues had any effect?

MC: A very small number of students were involved. Most of Hopkins students were apolitical at that time. And many of the students who were involved were actually graduate students instead of undergraduates. There were undergraduates there but mostly I think it was dominated by graduate students. Later protests were not, but this was a small minority of the students. Most were just me, like an observer.

I'm trying to think what else – one thing that the newsletter taught me and it was a combination of Baltimore, the newsletter and Hopkins that sort of came together for me at the very end and determined my trajectory afterwards—I was used to getting stories by talking to people. And so in my senior year, I took a yearlong course on political parties with a visiting professor and we had to write a research paper each semester. I think the normal impulse would be to go to the library and do library research on presidential politics or congressional politics, but instead, partly because of the newsletter and partly because of my Baltimore base, I decided that
I was going to do a paper on neighborhood democratic clubs in Baltimore. I was going to go around and hand out questionnaires and interview people.

JK: Can you say a little bit about a neighborhood democratic club?

MC: Well, there was one where became important to me called the Shamrock Democratic Club. It was –actually I don't know how many Irish people it had in it, but it was named the Shamrock Democratic Club because it met in the basement of the Shamrock Bar and Grill I think over on Belair Road. I handed out a bunch of questionnaires at one of their meetings. As a matter of fact, when I called up to ask permission to come to the meeting, the president, this may be a hangover from the civil rights demonstrations here, the first thing the presidents wanted to know was, “Are from you from CORE?” The Congress of Racial Equality.

And I assured him I wasn't, and he said, “Okay you can come.” The Shamrock Club's bylaw said you had to be white, male, and twenty-one in order to belong to their club. I went there, I handed out a questionnaire, and I collected them and one of the questions asked for occupation. I noticed a man gave it back in big letters said politician. And he looked the part. He was wearing a fedora on the back of his head. He had a big, bulbous red nose and he was wearing his overcoat I remember, inside and I went over and introduced myself. His name was Vincent Lanasa, L-a-n-a-s-a.

But for some reason, I don't know why, he was called Murph. And I became his driver and gopher. This is my political education. Murph had dropped out of school in the fourth grade. His family, though, was relatively prosperous. They owned a produce company. They had a warehouse down at the inner harbor. He was, in many ways, an extraordinary person– along with Francis Rourke, he was my best teacher.

JK: Was he a city councilman?

MC: No. He held a patronage job as a city market inspector under the city controller and he would take me occasionally to go inspecting with him. It wasn't like supermarkets. The city market was like Lexington Market, Broadway – those were the ones he inspected. The inspection usually consisted of eating a couple of complimentary chilidogs. I think the theory being that if those didn't kill you nothing else would [laughs]. Anyway, although he had a fourth grade education, he was an enormously sort of persuasive person.
He had been in World War II where he got a silver star, and his brother showed me the citation. He didn't talk about it. Well, he tried show me his wounds once [laughs]. He was a medic and he had established, I think it was during the battle—they established an aid station that was subsequently behind German lines. He was running short of morphine. He found out there was a German aid station not far away and he figured he'd just walk over there and borrowed some. So he walked over there, and he saw that they were in pretty bad shape and so he persuaded them to surrender to him and marched them back, got his people, took them back through their lines and surrendered them to the Allied authorities.

And then he used his persuasive powers on me too. One time, the white Democrats and the black Democrats in Baltimore, they were completely separate from one another and you could tell which of the clubs was a black Democratic club because it would always have the word federal in its title. Murph was the kind of emissary that moved between the two, and I remember he had me drive him one evening to a meeting in a cocktail lounge on Pennsylvania Avenue. I remember that there were several Baltimore Colts there Lenny Moore, Big Daddy Lipscomb was there. I don't know – I was very impressed and the Democratic candidate for mayor, Phil Goodman, who had already become the mayor because the predecessor resigned, and they teased me a lot. They told me they were going to make me a liquor board inspector until they found out I wasn't twenty-one. When we had arrived, there were hardly any parking places and I started to pull into one and saw there was a fire hydrant there and I started to pull out. And Murph said forget it, we're late, park here. Don't worry about it.

So I did, and as we left, sure enough there was a cop with his ticket book out. Murph was taking his time saying goodbye to people. He comes over and the cop says, "Hi, Murph," [laughs]. And Murph says something like, how are Agnes and the kids – I don't remember [laughs]. And the guy is sort of poised. I think he says, "Go ahead." So he writes the ticket and before he can hand it to me, Murph snatches it out of his hand and he says, "I'll take care of this." So a couple of weeks later he comes to me with a receipt. What he did was he went to traffic court and he got the judge to knock the fine down to a dollar and he paid it.

And as he's releasing this receipt to me, he says, "I wonder if you could do me a favor." It turns out that there were these four precincts on Loch Raven Boulevard. They weren't silk stocking
districts, but they had a lot of white-collar workers. Not his usual constituents. Most of his poll-workers were winos because the bars were closed on Election Day, and he thought it would be a nice idea to send Hopkins students in jackets and ties to work these four precincts. So what he wanted me to do was organize some students to do that, and I did.

I had one of the multipurpose rooms in the dormitory, and just as I finished giving them their "Ask not what your country can do for you" speech, Murph walks in with this guy I've never seen before. And after he got finished he comes up to me and in front of everybody pulls a roll of bills out of his pocket like this, and he says, "This is for the boys," [laughs]. Apparently, they didn't trust you unless you were paid, so I paid them and I had money left over. I tried to give it back to him but he just laughed. We'd just throw a party. So that was my initiation into politics and that helped to make me the linkage between Hopkins and Baltimore.

JK: Yeah, we'll talk more later about some of the things that you started for the students here at Hopkins but I can see the roots of it in your own experiences. Well let's talk then about period of time where you weren't at Hopkins after graduating.

MC: Okay. By that time—well, I wasn't officially engaged. We hadn't had an engagement party yet, but my future wife came from Evanston, Illinois so I only applied to places that I could get to from Baltimore or that she could get to from Evanston. She transferred to Northwestern when I went to University of Chicago to graduate school. And for me I'd never lived any place but in Baltimore, even though I had relatives in New York, and it was just a tremendous shock. Part of it was that the university's on the south side of Chicago. I didn't have much money.

I had a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship which paid $1,500 a year to cover my living expenses, so I rented an apartment and shared with another guy from Hopkins in the Woodlawn neighborhood, which—we integrated our block. We were the only whites living on the block and it was a very sort of turbulent time. I don't know – there was a gang called the Blackstone Rangers. Later they would get grants from the poverty program, but at this point, they were intent on establishing their territory and wiping out a rival gang called the East Side Disciples, and I was right in the middle of all that. So that was scary.

The University of Chicago was scary. I thought—well Hopkins gave me good preparation for that because it was a no nonsense
kind of place. Chicago was even more so, maybe because it was graduate school. And although as I said for most of my time in Baltimore I never felt like a Baltimorean. I noticed within a few weeks of arriving in Chicago I began to have repeated persistent dreams about street intersections in Baltimore.

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Franklin and Cathedral, that was one of my favorites. Belvedere and York, I could see the Senator Theater where my wife and I had our first date. More recently, there was a guy, an urban geographer in Wisconsin named Robert Sack who writes about the sense of place, and he says as long as you're in your place the sense of place remains below the level of conscious thought. But when you leave your place, it emerges into consciousness and of course, now I realize retrospectively that's what happened to me. So I discovered I was a Baltimorean in Chicago. And the people there were just completely different. There was something harsh about them that I didn't experience in Baltimore. I realized that Baltimore was where I felt at home.

JK: Did you always have the idea of trying to make your way back here?

MC: When I left, my image was I would be a tweedy professor at some small New England liberal arts college [laughs]. But I suppose some time when I was in Chicago I began to think about that, but I thought it was a one in a million chance. The way I got back was quite circuitous. While I was there after my Woodrow Wilson Fellowship expired after one year, I became a fellow of the National Opinion Research Center, which had a program that in addition to learning political science, it would teach me how to do survey research and analysis and I did my doctorate dissertation based on one of their surveys. And the director there was a sociologist named Peter Rossi.

When I left Chicago, my first job was at MIT. I had a year in there where I was a Brookings Fellow, when I finished my dissertation. I went for one semester to MIT, Brookings for a year and then back to MIT again. My second stay at MIT, I got a call from Baltimore. It was Peter Rossi. He was now the chairman of the social relations department at Hopkins. He wanted me to come down and give a talk on my dissertation.

There's no discussion of a job at all, which is a good thing because I probably would have been terribly nervous if he had, and he
probably knew that. So I came down and gave the talk and a week or so later he called me up and he offered me a job with a joint appointment in political science and sociology, but it would revert to political science after the first year, which was unheard of. Nobody would do that now.

**JK:** What was the reason for that? Because he could only offer you the job within sociology?

**MC:** Yeah, it was a sociology job. Yeah. I did a lot of interaction with sociologists for a long time after that. I think one of the people that also came from Chicago with him was a guy that I worked with very closely on my dissertation. So that's how I got back here was really just a series of accidents, but I knew I wanted to come back immediately. I didn't even give – I don't know whether he would have tried to keep me there, but the chairman at MI—I just told him I'm leaving. So that's why I came back. It was tough. I've talked to some of my sort of age cohort of faculty members and they confirmed this was a time when assistant professors were supposed to be seen and not heard.

At MIT I taught a course in urban politics and it was the – but so MIT not many students took urban politics course so I had maybe twenty or twenty-five. It was at the height of the Urban Crisis. So I walked into my first class here and there were over a hundred kids there, and I had no TAs and the department didn't have any TAs to spare, so I had to grade all those papers on my own. Then a year or two into my tenure– they said the guy who was teaching the Introduction to American Politics course didn't want to do it anymore, and it was mine. It was of course about 300 – 350 students.

**JK:** Still on your own?

**MC:** Well, I had TAs then. I had TAs but you had to manage the TAs so it was a heavier drop, and also I had to teach outside my specialty, which was urban politics so I had to teach myself about Congress and all this stuff I had never taken any courses on, so it was a lot of work. And then they said “The senior seminar isn't much work. Why don't you do that, too?”

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So I was sort of plunged into teaching right away and it probably helped because I was petrified. I don't know – on a day when I had to teach, I could not eat lunch. That's how nervous I was.
JK: I'm sure it doesn't help to be not that much older than the students.

MC: That's right. As a matter of fact, that's when I started wearing a tie
and a jacket because I would walk into a room and they would just
ignore me [laughs]. I still had hair then. It didn't command
immediate respect, but it was a very good experience and I began
to enjoy it, the teaching part. The preparation part – since I was
nervous and obsessive about it, I would spend hours and hours of
time preparing for a two-hour class, which was what probably
prompted me to retire. It was not the teaching, it was the
preparation.

But I don't know when I started to teach these courses that put the
students out into the community, but it was at least as early as the
mid-seventies, maybe even earlier. I began to teach a course called
Neighborhood Politics. What I did was I would call up the
leaders— the presidents of community organizations in
neighborhoods immediately surrounding a campus—and ask if it
would be okay if I sent a couple of students to do research in the
neighborhood in return — for their right their privileges of their
service, they would do something for the community organization,
even if it was setting up chairs for a meeting or something like that.

It worked out surprisingly well. There were a few students that
turned out to be duds, but one pair of students wound up editing
the newsletter of the Hampden-Woodberry Association. Another
woman moved from her neighborhood to the neighborhood where
she was doing research because she felt it was so good. I began
doing this and then I started, since I was trained in survey research,
I decided we would do surveys. As a matter of fact, one of the
surveys that I did – I published an article on the basis of it, the
class was a research seminar.

The students would come back. I would tell them – give them a
series of questions that they were supposed to investigate within
the neighborhoods, and then we would come together and we
would compare notes and see if we could explain why the
Hampden organization was different from the Charles Village
organization, what explained variations. This actually had begun
erlier, because one of the first things that happened after I got out
of Hopkins, was that it was sort of the middle of the Model Cities
program and there was a program under Model Cities called the
Urban Observatory and I was hired – commissioned to do a study
of community organizations in Baltimore.
What I did was to compare the Model Cities councils with independently initiated organizations, and—graduate students mostly involved in that research. In the seminar, which I taught jointly with Peter Rossi as a matter of fact and so I wrote an article on the basis— and that's what was the basis for the Neighborhood Politics courses. That became sort of the blueprint. And eventually I went to the—the I don't know why, there was a Metropolitan Studies Subdivision of the National Institute of Mental Health, and in 1979 I went to them to get a grant to do a comprehensive study of Baltimore neighborhoods, which later became a book called *Neighborhood Politics* that I published in 1983. But the beginning of that was all student field research.

JK: Was that pretty atypical at the time, to have students doing that kind of sort of using the city as a ______?

MC: I think it was. I mean granted we come through the Sixties where these kinds of things were more acceptable but I didn't know of many other people, certainly not in my department, who did that sort of thing. I was pretty much the only one.

[0:40:00]

JK: So you came back to Hopkins. You started again as faculty in 1969.

MC: Right.

JK: So in terms of— what was your sort of assessment of what had changed in the ten years since you had come there as a freshman?

MC: Well, first of all, the next year women started Hopkins. That was a big change. The students had become much more political. In fact it was very early after my arrival that there was a student strike in which some faculty participated, including me, in the aftermath of the bombing in Cambodia and the shootings at Kent State. We occupied Charles Street and it was very sort of practical police officer major, his name was "Box" Harris. I don't know what his real name was, but he was known as “Box.” He handled it perfectly. He rerouted the traffic around [laughs].

And one of the main speakers at the demonstration was one of my colleagues in the political science party named Rick Pfeffer. He was a Maoist so he got up— I'm sure it wasn't a soapbox, but some kind— but he didn't know anything about Baltimore, and so I would whisper things to him about racial disparities and this was
part of the same general protest. Nobody got in any trouble for that. That was a big difference because that would have gotten you in big trouble –

JK: Ten years earlier.

MC: Ten years earlier. Yeah.

JK: And the faculty in general, did you find that there was political activism?

MC: Only among the young – there was Pfeffer and a guy in art history named Pepper, and a few others. They were the principal activists, and it may have been that neither of them got tenure. They both were let go.

JK: Is that true? They both were fired?

MC: Yeah, I can't say that it was because of their political activism, but they didn't make it.

JK: And what about – so you mentioned women coming as undergraduates. Can you talk about how that change rippled through campus?

MC: Well first of all I have to say, and it's still true today, the first cohort of women – I think they let some in early before, just a small group– they were really good, because they wanted to make sure that, I suppose, they succeeded so they could pick really good students. The group got larger but it was still a minority. It was not fifty percent for a long, long time and I know that many of them – some of them I know today, felt very much neglected and discriminated against. It was an all-male institution and it continued to operate that way for a long, long time. It relates too—I know this jumps about twenty, years but when I was associate dean of the University of Arts and Sciences, one of my jobs was to be chair of the ad hoc committee on the status of women, and it was me and seventeen radical feminists, and there I got it right in the face.

JK: What year would that have been?


JK: So there was still a lot of work to do.
MC: Oh yeah. Very few women on the faculty, hardly any tenured women and still a minority of women among undergraduates. But, even in the early days, the graduate departments all admitted women, and so I had women who were section instructors in my English courses. One of the ones who made my Introduction to English Literature so exciting was a woman named Elizabeth Dipple. I will always remember her. She was a Canadian and went back to teach in Toronto or some place like that. I found out later she died while young but she was a great teacher.

Anyway, to get back to the change, the women were there, the students were more politicized, they were very enthusiastic students. The kind of stuff I was teaching was exactly the stuff they were interested in. So I taught Urban Politics, and when I took over the Introductory to Urban Politics courses, what I did to give it some coherence was to organize it around the issue of civil rights and race because it was an issue that touched every single American institution. So I'd go over the course and show how each of these institutions reacted to that issue, and they liked that too. So it was a good time for me as a teacher.

[0:45:00]

JK: So you talked about being interim dean of Arts and Sciences. That happened a couple of times, right?

MC: No, I was at associate dean for three years, and then I came back to be interim dean for a little over a year between 1993 and 1994.

JK: Okay, and so how is the vantage point different? Can you talk about if that gave you a different perspective on your department, but also Hopkins as a whole?

MC: Yeah. Probably not favorable. Actually, I found it being – maybe it was because I was just acting dean, was a lot easier than being associate dean. And I say maybe it was because – I remember right after my appointment had been announced, but before I'd actually taken office, my wife and I were flying somewhere for vacation, and I got a call at the airport from Dennis O'Shea and he wanted to know whether I was going to be a candidate for the permanent deanship. I hadn't even thought about it very much, so I said no.
It may be that that was what made the job so easy for me, because people who wanted things would say well I'll wait a year and I'll hit the next person in the job. But the other thing that made being associate dean very difficult was – and I don't want to cast this aspersions on George Fisher but I think he gave me all the jobs he didn't want himself [laughs]. So I was in charge of the renovation of Mergenthaler Hall. I was in charge of the renovation of Gilman Hall. I was also chairman of the ad hoc committee on the status of women. There was a lot of friction in all those things.

There's one thing that really causes conflict in academia is space, and especially among the humanities departments housed in Gilman because the indicators of status in the humanities are much more uncertain, I think than, say, in the natural sciences or in engineering. And so the humanists tended to grasp at symbols of status, one of which was having a room with two windows and I had just – it was a nightmare.

JK: I have to tell you. I was looking through the archives, the University Archives for sort of documentation of what you've worked on over the years, and one of the things I came – didn't come across a lot of stuff from your time as acting dean, but I did find a lot of memos from people stating their case for what kind of office they needed.

MC: That was it. I won't name the people – there was one chairman of a fairly small department over there, and I was working with architects and they had drawn up the blueprints. And I went over and I had showed him and his administrative assistants the blueprints which rooms they would have and where their seminar room would be, and he was fine with that. And then the next morning he came, burst into my office with his entire department and said "This is outrageous!" [laughs].

So I was gonna call him on it, but I sat there and thought if I did I would probably have to get a new chairman for the department, and that was too much trouble, so I just sat there and took it [laughs]. Another time I remember the archeological museum was there and we wanted to make it stand up by putting a – I forget what it's called but a frame – a special frame around the door, and I was showing the blueprints to another department chair and he looked over and he said, "What's that?"

And I said to him, “That's a--” and he said, "I want one too." [laughs]. Just one after another. I suppose it made me more prepared for what was waiting for me as an interim dean because it
woke me up. I knew it was going to be a circus. I was like living in the middle of a soap opera. And later on President Richardson asked me if I would be, again, a candidate for the deanship, and since he was the president, I said okay.

[0:50:00]

So I went to be interviewed by the search committee, and they asked me to describe the environment at Hopkins. And I said that's like asking a fish to describe water. Two days later, I withdrew my name. I figured I pretty much disqualified myself with that response but also I didn't go to graduate school to do that. I was in the middle of working on another book and I really wanted to finish it very badly.

I think it's really probably the best thing I've ever written although it was a book about orphanages, and why orphanages disappeared. I have a wonderful archival research – I'd now abandoned in surveys entirely – at orphanage archives in four different states, not Maryland, and it was just a fascinating book, to me anyway. But the publisher neglected to send out any review copies for almost a year after its publication so it didn't get the kind of exposure that I'd hoped for, although they get cited occasionally now. Anyway, I was determined to get back to my professorial role so I could finish that book.

JK: Is a couple of the programs that you either created or were it leading that I want to be sure to ask you about. One is the city council internship program.

MC: Yeah, I did that in conjunction with Edgar Berman who was a personal physician to Hubert Humphrey and was willing to put up what money was needed for the program. I remember visiting him at his house. It was over on Greenspring Valley Road. It was a huge place. He had a butler [laughs], and the other guy who was interested in it was Ted Venetoulis who subsequently managed William Donald Schaefer's first campaign for mayor and then became county executive in Baltimore County.

And regionally Berman's plan was what he called the Jeffersonian Curriculum. He wanted the students to do an internship at the city level, then at the state level, then at the federal level. But the execution turned out to be much too complicated, and so he just did the city council. And I had the same kind of experience there I did with the neighborhood politics courses. There were two students who worked for one of the council members. This is a
time when a majority of the city's population was African-American, but a majority of the city council was not, and they were determined to keep it that way.

So one of the members drew up a reapportionment plan that was just plainly designed to disenfranchise blacks. It sliced up the city in pies so that the center of the city you'd split up all the black neighborhoods but not the white neighborhoods. These two guys saw, these students saw right away that this was not gonna fly and so they actually did the reapportionment plan themselves and that was the one that was adopted [laughs]. We also learned a lot. I remember there was a – one of the interns was working for a city councilman and his councilman was in a hearing and a city administrator was testifying and his intern had information which indicated that the administrator was lying.

So he went back to the office and got the file and took it to the city councilman. Not long afterwards, I got a phone call from Mayor Schaefer's – well some people called her the “dragon lady”—her name was Joan Bereska. She was his right hand and his enforcer. She led a staff of about fifty people. So she came up here to campus and she asked me to assemble the interns, and she lectured them harshly and made it clear that they were never to do anything like that again [laughs].

JK: That's a good lesson to [crosstalk] – okay. The City Council Internship Program, how long did it go for?

[0:55:00]

MC: Well it went on for quite some time, but it was taken over by what's now the Policy Studies Institute when it was still the Metro Center, and they ran it so I didn't have to do it anymore. It was a lot of work.

JK: Was it continued?

MC: They have some internship program there. I don't know. But now they're located down in East Baltimore, so I don't know much about what they're doing these days.

JK: Okay. And I also want to ask you about the Baltimore Scholars Program.

MC: Okay, I did not start that. John Latting was his – he conceived it and he I think was responsible in large part for its success. There
was a lot of anxiety among the administration that delayed the start of the program after he had proposed it. The fear was that we would get students from Baltimore City, and that they would not be as good as the students we normally got and they would fail, and that this would give the university a black eye. It was something that also had racial overtones. They were very nervous about getting anything started.

JK: In what era was this?

MC: This was in 2004 – 2005. But in 2005 it began, and the dean at that time, Dan [Weiss] – this is getting to be more and more a problem with me – the dean asked me if I would be the faculty director and I said it would be an honor. So our first class I think had twenty-one people, and they were extraordinary. Matter of fact I did a report – you may have it in the files there, I don't know. There's one version that's confidential and another one that's not—and showed that they were graduating at the same rate as the rest of our students. This was in 2012 when I wrote the report. And they were getting about the same GPAs and some of them were quite extraordinary.

There was one woman who graduated in that first class who became this sort of morale officer. Her name was Jessica Turral and I remember there was a student from Dunbar who was really scared, and we used to have meetings and she would show up with her hoodie and about that much of her face showing and Jessica would go over to her and say, "Let us see your face. You're beautiful. Don't hide from us." And Jessica herself at the time of her graduation got a grant from the Open Society Institute from the George Soros people to start a program working with juveniles who were being prosecuted as adults, and she engineered this thing pretty much all by herself.

She got access to the Baltimore City Detention Center; she set up sort of a pre-GED program there for the inmates. Most of them don't wind up getting prosecuted as adults anyway, but then they get out and they have no high school diploma – it's very difficult to get jobs. And she would run around to employers and high schools and also worked with their families so that when – and continued to work with them so that after they got released they would continue to get support from her. She recruited about thirty or forty PhD candidates in clinical psychology programs, and one of the requirements for graduation in most of those programs was that they spend a certain number of hours of clinical experience. And so they went into the prison and counseled these convicts. Up until
my last contact [with her] that she had, the recidivism rate for her people was zero.

JK: That's amazing.

MC: Yeah. Now the program is sort of in suspended animation right now. I'm on the board. It's called Hand in Hand and she's at Loyola getting a PhD in clinical psychology so she can do it herself.

JK: Yeah, that's great.

MC: And then there was another – Victor – he has a – who started while he was still a student started a robotics program for middle school students, which he would take around to different schools to get them interested in STEM disciplines. And they all had Baltimore loyalties.

[1:00:00]

They all were active in their communities, especially churches. I noticed that the ones who tended to be most active were the ones who attended church in their neighborhoods but we encouraged them to live on campus because we felt that if they went back to their neighborhoods, the burdens would become too great. We had one student who was from a single parent household and while he was here, his mother died and he became – he was the oldest sibling. I don't know. He graduated on time. I don't know how he managed to do it. In fact, if you can find it, there's a video that Rebecca Messner made. Do you know about this?

JK: I haven't seen it.

MC: It's about the Baltimore Scholars Program. He appears in that.

JK: Do you want to look it up?

MC: I have a bunch of thumb drives with the thing on it. I can get you one because I don't need that many.

JK: So as the faculty director, what were the biggest challenges in keeping that program successful and robust?

MC: This raises some issues that are currently still live so it's –

JK: Feel free to comment however you’d like.
MC: The distinctive thing about the program is that it's not need-based. So if a student goes to a Baltimore City public high school and has attended there for three consecutive years before starting college, they're eligible to apply and be considered no matter what their parents' income is. Some people have objected that this is a waste of money because we're giving money to students who don't need it. The confidential version of that memo that I wrote contains an argument against that where I try to suggest that this isn't just a program to help students in Baltimore.

This is a program that represents a commitment to Baltimore City itself and its public school system and just as we want to have diversity in our classes, the Baltimore City Public School System wants to have diversity in their classes. The awkward thing is that we need to do exactly the opposite things in order to maintain diversity. We have to accept low-income minority students. They have to recruit upper income white students and we know from a lot of research that kids from low-income backgrounds do better academically when they're in classes with kids who are not from low-income backgrounds.

In addition, having this scholarship program for middle class and above parents gives them an incentive to keep their kids in the public school system, which gives the public school system articulate, educated, and bold advocates to defend its budget and its programs. This worked for a while but it's now under fire again.

JK: It's interesting. This program is – one of the things I want to ask you about is that your role, you've kind of been a bridge between the City of Baltimore and Hopkins by virtue of your personal experience as a student and also the nature of your work and your research and leading programs like Baltimore Scholars. So in light of things like Baltimore Scholars and other programs, how do you see the relationship between Baltimore and Hopkins at this time, and what's been kind of the trajectory I guess?

MC: It's getting better. It used to be positively awful. I remember once – this was a long time ago – going down to East Baltimore where they just built a new swimming pool for the residents and medical students, and it was surrounded by a chain-link fence and on a hot summer day I saw kids eight or ten years old, black kids hanging on the chain link fence looking at all the white people jumping into the pool.

JK: In their neighborhood.
MC: Yeah. So that summed it all up, but I think President Daniels has attempted to take some important initiatives that change that – the Urban Health Initiative, in East Baltimore, the new— I think it’s the Institute for the American City that Professor – oh darn – I'm blanking again. You have to forgive this. It's getting more and more, worse and worse.

[1:05:00]

Anyway, also, he's been talking about starting a program that's sort of like Teach for America where Hopkins students go work as interns in city agencies for two years, and then they stay there for two years after graduation and continue working. So I think we're getting better but a lot of suspicion and ill will remains. One of the problems we had with the Baltimore Scholars Program was every time we went out into Baltimore to talk about it, the Baltimoreans, including a member of the city council, were convinced we were going to trash the program. We were about the cap it for reasons we couldn't figure out.

People would say, “You're going to get rid of this, aren't you?” And we had no intention of capping it or getting rid of it or anything like that, and I think one of the other problems with changing it in a way that excludes students that have less need is that would be perceived by many people as an abandonment of our commitment to Baltimore. So that's been tough. Although, I have to say my students always got a wonderful welcome wherever they went. People were happy to have them, and also the city was always happy to have people, students from Hopkins working in city agencies.

In fact, the proposal for this program came about because we had a meeting with some of the mayor's assistants, and they said that they had a good experience with Hopkins students and they wanted more. They wanted to find some way to increase the number.

JK: So are there sort of avenues of civic or cultural life in Baltimore that, if you had the ability to decide, you think Hopkins should play an even greater role in it?

MC: Let me think about that for a second. Yes. When what's now the Institute of Policy Studies got started, it was called the Metro Center. I thought that they should – they did things for the city, but it was my conviction then and it remains today that they need to do more research, social research for the city of an ambitious kind. They already do little projects, but things that would say look at
welfare in Baltimore and recommend ways to improve it or the school system – the [Center for Social Organization of Schools] CSOS does some of that already and they've been wonderful but we need to do more things like that.

We need to sort of bring the academic expertise of the institution to bear on Baltimore's problems to a much greater extent than we do. We probably need to have some kind of council or committee that's composed jointly of faculty members and city agency people and a minimum of administrators to talk freely about what it is they expect from one another. Right now, I'm writing a political history of Baltimore and I've been working in the city archives and I found some very telling documents where city officials are complaining about Hopkins and the Metro Center even.

Maybe they were doing the right thing, but they were telling city council members things that William Donald Schaefer did not want them to hear and he wanted to call up President Mueller and chew him out. I don't know whether he ever did but –

JK: Is there anything else that you'd like to return to and add a little more detail about or something I haven't asked you about yet?

MC: Well yeah. I guess it sounds sort of folky-ish but the faculty is not as—it's lost its sort of corporate identity. It used to have a really major role in the governance of the university when I arrived. If you went to the Hopkins Club for lunch, you would meet dozens of other people from other departments. And now I go and there are a bunch of old people like me sitting at the central table, and they come on Wednesdays and they talk about their surgeries and their health insurance plan and complain a lot about how the place is going to hell.

[1:10:00]

But the younger people don't do that anymore and I suspect that's not just the case at Hopkins. I think it's probably happening to academic institutions everywhere. But we really do lose something by not having the communication across disciplines that we used to have and the role in university governance. It's partly the result of the extension of academic administration into areas that used to be handled by the faculty and it's partly the faculty just withdraws because they have other things to do.

But I remember one when it was my first year here, and I went to one of my first faculty assembly meetings where Lincoln Gordon
was the president then. And there was a lot of discontent because they charged that he was expanding the central administration, and he swore up and down that he wasn't. And then in the back of the room was Carl Christ. You ought to interview if you get a – he's been here since 1950. He's an economist. But at that time, he was playing his role as chairman of the parking committee and the parking committee at that time issued different kinds of permits for faculty members and administrators so he had the numbers right there. And he cut the ground from under Lincoln Gordon and not long afterwards, several department chairs from Arts and Sciences went to the Board of Trustees, and said that the faculty had lost confidence in the president and they fired him. That would never happen today.

And as I say, it's probably the fault of the faculty itself. It's not entirely administration. Although my colleague, Benjamin Ginsberg, has recently published a book called The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University, when he cites an economic study that shows that nationwide about forty percent of the tuition increase that's occurred since the 1970s is due to administrative overhead. So that's how this place has changed. I mean every place has changed like that, but that's the change that I've experienced since I've been here.

JK: Yeah, it's interesting because in some ways there's a lot more emphasis on interdisciplinary research now, but I guess there's not as much room for those organic connections to be made.

MC: No. And the kind of – what it does is to push decision-making upward in the hierarchy because you have to make arrangements between schools or between departments so it has the effect of giving greater weight to administration. But it is something that's happening not just at Hopkins but at all universities. It's probably less here than in many others, but it's one of the most momentous changes that I've experienced in my years at Hopkins.

JK: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

MC: Probably something offensive –

[Laughter]

So I'm trying to think of something else. Actually, I'm having trouble – I think I've told you about everything I can think of unless you have more questions.
JK: Well just let me know. I mean I've based my questions on kind of my research at Hopkins and on what I can find out about you –

MC: I'm impressed that you did so much research.

JK: Yes, so if there's anything that I didn't really touch on it's not because I don't think it's important. It might be that I just didn't know about it. I'm sorry, are we on?

Videographer: Oh, I've been on. We're running low on battery, so – I can always put a new battery in.

MC: Okay. I'm running low on batteries too, but [laughs].

JK: Let's just see if you have anything left to add and then we can go ahead and –

MC: There must be a hundred things that I would like to mention that won't occur to me till tomorrow.

Videographer: They'll occur to you when you have your coat on and you're outside.

MC: That's right [laughs].

Videographer: It won't even take till tomorrow. It's always the case.

MC: Well, one thing that's changed with the faculty, it used to be you didn't get tenure until you were a full professor and that could take ten years. So you had this sort of externally imposed drive that you would internalize by the time you got tenure so you could never stop.

[1:15:00]

I don't know how the new system works but we're now getting a lot of people who get promoted to associate and just don't go anywhere, and I think that's unfortunate. The good reasons to have a new system because almost every other university in the country operates on the tenure of the associate professor system, which means if you want to hire somebody it's very difficult to do if you won't give tenure to a full professor. But it did create a different kind of atmosphere here.

For one thing, you could figure out whether a faculty member was a one-book wonder or whether they really had something more in
them. And the result was I think that we had – I remember the people in some of the departments that I was close to in history and sociology and the kinds of giants that they had I think partly because of this policy. One of them of whom, John Baldwin, has just died. A very impressive guy. I happened to run into him on a train in Paris.

JK: So some of the things you're talking about as you said they're sort of common across academic institutions in the U.S. Is there anything that you think comes to mind that makes Hopkins unique as an institution?

MC: Well, it used to be a lot more unique than it is now. In fact, my experience is biased because Hopkins and the University of Chicago are very much similar kinds of institutions in their structure in that they were highly decentralized. And still are to some extent financially. I mean they're supposed to support themselves. There's no big pot of money in the president's office that he splits up. I think that was a good thing because it engendered a kind of intellectual diversity and ferment that was a healthy thing.

Of course, but what it also did was to limit interdepartmental and interdisciplinary initiatives which were also a good thing, so that represents a departure for Hopkins. There were very few sort of interdepartmental programs when I started out. The only one was one from my own international studies and I think it was very popular. In fact, at the time it was the biggest, largest undergraduate enrollment in arts and sciences because it provided something that Hopkins has never provided and that's a liberal arts education. We don't have a core curriculum here and never have.

Programs like international studies gave them a menu of courses in economics and history and political science with distribution requirements in the sciences and things like that, so to give them a kind of liberal arts background and now there are several programs that do that, public health being the most recent. I think now it [public health] has the largest undergraduate enrollment. I mentioned before that the students of my era seemed to be more independent and rebellious. I think we could do a little bit less for the students and they would be better off.

Of course I haven't taught actively for six years – seven, but they seem to be getting more passive. It gets more and more difficult to listen, participation in the class and maybe my colleagues may have a different experience. I don't know. But do we really need
to have a rock-climbing wall? The dormitories across Charles Street look positively lavish compared to what used to exist and there are all sorts of programs for improving their morale and reducing their stress at exam time. Sometimes stress is a good thing. Okay, well feel free to email me if you think of something and maybe I'll do the same.

JK: Yes. Thank you so much for your time. This is really great.

MC: Oh, good. I'm glad I helped.

[End of Interview]