

Rhett Jones
Interviewed by Becky Dangelo
March 14, 1998
At Brown University, Providence

Becky Dangelo: It's March 14, 1998, I'm interviewing Rhett Jones and my name is Becky Dangelo. Where and when were you born and where did you grow up?

Rhett Jones: I was born August 9, 1940 in Chicago and I grew up in Chicago, elementary and high school.

BD: Briefly describe your family and your neighborhood.

RJ: My father is now deceased. He was a machinist. He died in 1991. My mother's still living, she's eighty two. She's a retired postal clerk.

The neighborhood we grew up in was, I thought it was solid working class neighborhood. In fact my brother, I have one brother that's all, he's enough, I called it a solid working class neighborhood.

At that time, we were dealing with women who worked outside the home. My mother didn't go back to work, until my brother was a sophomore in high school. Most of the men tended to have jobs like postal clerks, factory workers, bus drivers, taxi cab drivers, that kind of thing. Very few school teachers, doctors, lawyers, and people like that.

It was an all black neighborhood, though, and most neighborhoods in Chicago were, are, one race or the other. According to the demographers, it's the most segregated city in the United States. That's certainly the way it was when I was growing up. However, if you crossed State Street, you got into an, a middle class to upper middle class neighborhood. And people who lived on the other side of State Street tended to be school teachers, doctors, dentists, although they were black.

One of the things we had every year was an annual football game between the east side of State Street and the west Side of State Street, which could get to be quite rough. Of course at the time I didn't realize, this was a lot of class stuff going on, you know they, we really did define yourself differently from the middle class kids who lived on the other side of State Street. That helpful?

BD : Yep. How were your household chores and duties divided among your family?

RJ: Until my mother went back to work, basically she did all the usual feminine stuff; she cooked, she cleaned, and my dad went to work at night. The only thing that I can recall that was different in our house than most other houses is my mother did train both my brother and me to cook and to sew. My brother's an excellent, he can still do it. I got out of the habit, I got married and got a wife so I could stop doing all that stuff. We used to get teased by quite a bit, by our friends cause we'd get all this female stuff.

And at that time, we didn't have a washer and dryer. My mom had a washing machine in the basement, but the clothes were hung on the line, and we hung up the clothes, and we took them in and that's when we'd get a lot of, a lot of teasing.

My mother's explanation when she was growing up when we would complain about this was she had three brothers, all of whom served in the Second World War. And she said when they went away from home for the first time they complained cause they couldn't do anything 'cause their mother did it all. So she said she was going to raise her sons so that they would be able to do everything that was necessary to do. Years later, when we ask her about this she said that wasn't the only reason, she also wanted some help. But she didn't tell us that when we were kids.

BD: What were your parents' political views and affiliations? Where did you and your family get information about politics and other events?

RJ: Uh, at the time we were growing up um, both of my parents and most black people in our neighborhood were Republicans. Ah, that's because the Republican party was the party of Abraham Lincoln, and the Democratic Party which then dominated the South was a party of segregation and racism.

We got our TV for the first time 1949, 1950, something like that. I might be a little off there, but I was around nine or ten, so it was somewhere in there. Before that we had the radio and the newspaper. Since my parents were Republicans, they tended to, they did subscribe to the *Chicago Tribune*, that's the major Republican paper. Um, they switched party affiliations and newspapers in the 1960's. They stopped reading the *Tribune* and started reading *The Chicago Sun Times*. So they got more, we got most of our information from the radio and from the newspapers, until the television came in.

BD: What did you think you wanted to do when you grew up and how did that change over time?

RJ: I always wanted to be a veterinarian, that's what I really wanted to be, cause I like animals. But one of the things I discovered early on is, what's the word- klutz? You know, like I still have trouble tying my shoes, so I don't think I'd be good at taking care of any animals. I can see myself now trying to do an operation and popping some little dog's eye out or something like that.

Once I realized that I didn't have the kind of manual dexterity to be a vet, then I thought about being a psychologist. When I went to college I actually concentrated and majored in sociology. And I got a masters in, spent three years in a Ph.D. program in sociology too before I decided I really wanted to be a historian and I switched. So I have two degrees in sociology and two degrees in history.

BD: Were you aware of any discrimination against people in your family or neighborhood?

RJ: Well, of course the way the neighborhood was laid out, and the way the neighborhood's were, made it very clear the cities were organized on racial lines. Also, it's kinda hard to describe, most black people in Chicago at the time I was growing up, lived in what's

called the Black Belt. It started just south of the Loop and went out to about 71st Street. And that's where most people in the city lived who were black.

However, there were two exceptions to that. Ah, one was the neighborhood I just described, where I grew up, which was called Lilydale. And then further south, was another neighborhood like that, that was all black, it was called Morgan Park. Um, I went, and the thing about that was, um, we were located around 95th Street, which puts us about twenty, thirty blocks from Black Belt. Everything else except our little neighborhood was white. So, it was like living on an island. And there were maybe two or three thousand people, I guess, ah, in this island place.

We had an elementary school that served our neighborhood, so I went to an all black high school, I mean, all black grammar school. But, when it came time to go to high school there weren't enough of us in the neighborhood to have a high school. So, we had to go to the white high schools. Ah, in fact, what they did so you wouldn't have too many black kids at either high school, was they split our neighborhood right in half. So, half of the kids went to Finger and half went to Calumet.

When I was at Calumet, I was there from 1954 to 1958. It was a school of about fifteen hundred with maybe fifty black kids. So, you were very much a lower race. There wasn't formal discrimination, but you knew which teachers were bigots and which weren't, and unfortunately most of them were. It was a horrible experience.

I was once was in a used book store and ran across, both my brother and I took German in high school. I took German cause it looked interesting, everybody else took Spanish, so it was something different. My brother took German because he was two years behind me and said, "Hey, I can always get help with my assignments." So it was sensible. But, anyway, I was in this used book store and found this German text that we had used in high school. And, my brother now lives in Los Angeles. So, I sent it to him with a little letter and stuff, a bit about high school and stuff.

And he called me up and he said, "Listen, let me tell you something, don't you ever send me anything or mention anything about Calumet High School." He said, "When I started thinking about that place my stomach knotted up and I got sick." And you just you know, "I liked the book," he said. You know, the book was our introductory German reader, so that brought back a lot of memories because the German teacher was one of the few teachers who wasn't a bigot. You know, and of course we black kids all knew. We used to call it, "who was gonna be fair?" And most of the teachers weren't fair, and she was. So you got roughly what you deserved in German. You didn't always get what you deserved in the other classes.

BD: Where did you go to college and what did you study?

RJ: I went to the University of Illinois, as an undergraduate, and I majored in sociology and minored in history.

BD: Did your counselors or teachers encourage you to go to graduate school?

RJ: At the university? Yeah, sure. I did an honors thesis there with Norval Glenn, who is now at the University of Texas. And, he was one of the leading experts in race relations. And so he certainly thought I should go to graduate school. He wanted me to stay at Illinois and go to graduate school. I wanted to see some more of the world. Another four years of Champagne Urbana did not strike me as a good idea.

BD: What were your favorite musical groups, movies and books?

RJ: When I was in college? As an undergraduate I liked to read a lot of science fiction. So I read a lot of stuff by A.E. VanBoat. I read a lot of stuff by Marion Zimmer Bradley, Samuel D. Zelany, who I later found out was black, I didn't know that growing up. He was a science fiction writer who was very well known. And I liked his stuff, and I didn't find out he was black until like six or seven years ago. So, I read a lot of science fiction.

I also used to get on kicks, where I would read, various authors. So I read everything that John O'Hara ever wrote. I read everything that John Dos Passos ever wrote. Some of that stuff is pretty thick and turgid. But I would say, I'm going to read all this stuff, you know. So basically, a lot of science fiction, fiction.

For politics, I read *A New Republic*, regularly. I pretty much liked their editorial stance, as an undergraduate. Finding some of my little money to even get a subscription, cause usually I read stuff at the library.

BD: What about your favorite musical groups and movies?

RJ: Gosh, I don't remember too much about movies which is sort of interesting. I know I went but if you asked for a favorite movie from that time I couldn't tell you.

Musical groups I liked, most of the black groups, what's now called "doo-wops". In fact, I still like "doo-wops" and I still have a "doo-wop" collection. And, my brother claims I never grew up beyond the Fifties which partly might be true in some ways. Ah, that would include groups like "The Spaniels," "The Dells," "The Flamingos," those groups.

BD: What instructor or course do you remember most and why?

RJ: I remember a course taught by a man by the name of J. E. Hewitt, Jr. And, he taught a course in, taught a number of courses I took. One was, the one I remember most was one called Role Theory in the sociology department. The thing about Professor Hewitt is this was a required course for graduation. And you ordinarily took it in your sophomore year. And I went, when I went to the course, I sat down, and Professor Hewitt began to talk. He had this very thick Mississippi accent. I said to myself, I know a Mississippi accent when I heard one cause my dad's from Mississippi. I said to myself, "Oh, god! I'm not going to do this, I don't need this." So I dropped the course and I figured well I'll pick it up when somebody else teaches it.

Well, the whole year went by and nobody else taught it, and it was still required. So I decided, well, I'm just gonna have to take this course with this man even though he's probably a super racist. It turned out that not only was he not a super racist but he was the most interesting professor that I think I had as an undergraduate. And, that was despite the fact that he was not a performer. He would come in, he would sit down at the desk, he would take out his notes which he had type written on yellow paper, and read them. Boring, you would think. It was a boring delivery and a boring presentation, but the ideas were so fantastic that you just, every class was an adventure. Yeah.

BD: Do you recall your understanding of the Cold War and how was it explained to you?

RJ: Well, at that time the Russians were the bad guys, and we were the good guys. It was that simple. That is pretty much the way it was explained. Illinois was not a radical campus, it tended to be very conservative. I'm sure there were probably were Marxist organizations on the campus, but I didn't know anything about them, or know anybody who was in any of them. So, it was pretty much a kind of standard 1950's interpretation.

BD: What did you think about the threat of nuclear war?

RJ: Not a lot, not a lot. I mean, it was sort of something you grew up with and you took for granted, that people might get crazy enough to blow up the whole world. But, speaking for myself, you didn't see that there was very much you could do about it. So you didn't spend a lot of time thinking about it.

BD: Were you affected by the Cuban Missile Crisis?

RJ: Yes, I was in graduate school at the time. And I remember that very clearly because everybody talked about it. I mean, it was mostly in the form of jokes. You know, "See you tomorrow, maybe!" You know, that kind of thing. Ah, yeah, I remember that very clearly.

BD: Did you participate in the Peace Movement?

RJ: In 1964 I was in graduate school at the University of Wisconsin, and, yes, I did mostly participating in demonstrations and going to meetings, and signing petitions and that kind.

BD: Was 1960 and the election of John F. Kennedy an important turning point for you?

RJ: It wasn't so much for me. In 1960 I wasn't yet old enough. Well in 1960, yes, I was, no I didn't, no where was I? I was still an undergraduate. We talked a lot about it, it was important. At the time looking back on it, it's kind interesting because at the time one of the things that surfaced in the election was acceptable religion, which was a big issue. There wasn't, didn't seem to be that much difference between Kennedy and Nixon as most people saw it. Now, later on people got a different kind of view point. But, I can remember that in a lot of the discussions I had with my friends at the time and during the election that people were hard pressed to see a whole lot of difference except in religion.

BD: Did you think that discrimination against people of color was a problem? Or discrimination against women?

RJ: I certainly saw discrimination against black people as a problem. 'Cause really, I've been actually colored my whole life and it colored a lot of the choices you made: Where you went, where you ate, who you hung out with, I mean everything.

I don't think that I got an appreciation really for discrimination against women though, until, 'cause I didn't have any sisters, so I don't think I really had an appreciation for that until after I got married. I like to think that I might not have been part of the solution, but I wasn't part of the problem. In fact, my wife told me that one of the reasons she married me, in addition to of course, my good looks and my money (laughs), that's a joke, was that I was a feminist, and I didn't understand what that meant. And she said, in terms of your behavior you don't have a theory about the way you treat people, but you treat everybody like a person. And that was very important to her.

But, I didn't think much about feminism until after I got married and I started to see some of the things that my wife was up against and doesn't want it. And then certainly after I had daughters, it was really brought up because you begin to see the kind of subtle ways in which women are challenged [... *unclear* - ed.]. So, yeah, I mean, but that was after I had, I had, girls. I don't think as, as an undergraduate that I was aware of it.

BD : Did you follow political and social issues when you were in college?

RJ: Well, the race stuff, and of course this was a time of the Civil Rights Movement, so, of course, you would follow all of that. Chicago is also a very political city, so, you tended to stay up to date on Chicago politics. Everything in Chicago was politics, so, yeah.

BD: Were you involved in any political groups?

RJ: Not as an undergraduate. As a graduate student a lot of the people I hung out with were in the Socialist Workers Party which is the US branch of the Trotskyites. I never joined, but I used to go to a lot of there meetings. I subscribed to *The Militant* which was their newspaper, their weekly newspaper. And I suppose in terms of political line it would've been closest, my political line would've been closest to the SWP. In fact, some of my friends at work who were Trotskyites, used to accuse me of being a Trotskyites. I was never a Trotskyite.

BD: Were there any rallies, teach-ins, demonstrations on your campus or elsewhere?

RJ: Oh yeah. There was constantly. It was constantly called, sometimes called Berkeley East, but we called Berkeley Madison West. So, it was a very radical campus. In 1965 we had a massive demonstration in Madison, about ten thousand people. The government of

Wisconsin called out the Wisconsin National Guard. And a lot of people were gassed, there were two gasses or something like that. So, it was, of the Midwest campuses, Wisconsin and Michigan were by far radical campuses.

BD: Describe your work experience after college.

RJ: After college, well, that gets back to the business of shifting disciplines. I was at graduate school at Wisconsin for sociology, and it got time for me to take my exams, Ph.D. exams, and I couldn't seem to get up for it. So, I went and talked to my advisor and he said, "Well you know this happens quite a bit, to people who go straight through to Ph.D. Why don't you take a year or so off and you'll probably recharge your batteries and come back, and finish up." 'Cause I had done all my course work. So, I did that, unfortunately or fortunately, depending on how you look at it, the year turned into four years and during that time I decided I really didn't want to be a sociologist. I taught sociology for four years in schools in and around the University of Wisconsin. So those, those were my first jobs.

BD: Did you marry or have children?

RJ: I got married in 1968 and I have two daughters.

BD: Was women's discontent becoming an issue in your family?

RJ: My wife was about the same age so, she was sort of, she has three sisters and a brother. So, she was raised in a kind of traditional way. But she wanted to do non-traditional things.

When we got married, we got married she was a social worker in Chicago. And I was living in Madison at the time, working. And she was thinking she didn't want to do social work indefinitely anyway so she moved to Madison. She got a job up there but she didn't like it so I started pressing her to go back to graduate school herself. At that time we didn't have kids which meant we had lots of money. Well, more money than we had after we had kids that's for sure! So, yeah, in terms of, of, traditional career path, I guess still because what she went into there she went into school psychology, so this was still basically a women's occupation.

BD: Was music an important part of your life?

RJ: I still listen to "doo-wops." My wife liked popular music. She liked Frank Sinatra, people like that. So we had different musical tastes.

BD: Did you attend any concerts?

RJ: Concerts. I don't think I ever went to a concert other than a rock concert in my life. Unless I was taken by somebody, I might have been taken by my wife or my brother. He was big on classical music, so he might have gotten me to one or two. But voluntarily, myself, I don't think so [laughs].

BD: Where did you get most of your information about the outside world?

RJ: Newspapers, news magazines. At that time, I read a lot of, I already mentioned *The Militant*. I read, *The Young Communist*. I read *Progressive Labor*. I still read *The New Republic*. I read *Time* for basic information, but *Time* was a little bit too conservative for me. Most of the information I got, I got from the leftist press.

BD: Did you have a sense of the "war in Vietnam" and the "war at home?"

RJ: I had a sense of the Vietnam War. Certainly it was a big issue, a lot of the guys I went to school with were drafted. Some of them went to Vietnam, so in that sense, I was aware of what was going on, I was opposed to the war from 1964 on. Yeah.

BD: How did you feel about the segregation of the public schools?

RJ: Well, looking back on it I thought it was, no, at the time I thought it was wrong having, you know, went right through it. And when I went to Illinois, I also thought it was awful. I mean I had, getting through Calumet was such a horrible experience, that's the high school. And it really, really was terrible, I look back on at what they did to us was just pretty terrible stuff. I can understand how my brother's stomach would turn. I understand now the meaning of the term "push-out." There were black kids who were, literally, they didn't drop out, they were just treated so horribly they couldn't stand it and they left. They would just exit. Illinois was still segregated when I went there in 1958. There were restaurants you couldn't go in, places like that. And so, of course, you thought that was wrong, you know.

BD: How did you feel about Martin Luther King's leadership?

RJ: I think, you know, that Dr. King did a fantastic job. I mean he, the interesting thing about the man is he understood black people as well as white people. He knew which buttons to push on both sides of the racial line. And, he did a good job at it.

BD: What about the freedom rides?

RJ: I thought those were very brave people. It took a lot of, it took a lot of courage.

BD: What about sit-ins?

RJ: Same thing. I mean we did some sit-ins, demonstrations of Champagne Urbana. But after all this is Champagne Urbana this is not Mississippi and stuff like that.

BD: How about Malcolm X and the Black power and Black Panthers?

RJ: Well, everybody was moved by Malcolm X's rhetoric, and a lot of people liked the Panthers because of their kind of confrontational tactics. And, of course, having a kind of leftist inclination at the time, at the time, the Panthers had kind of this blend of Marxism and nationalism in their ideology that was very appealing to people like myself. In fact, I even thought about joining. They actually had a chapter in southern Wisconsin. But I didn't. I don't know. I look back on this stuff, I don't know why I, I don't know why.

I probably if I was gonna join anything, probably would've joined the SWP because I agreed with most of what they had to say. But, getting into all these organizations required adherence to a political line. And, when you're in the organization, everybody had lines, as they call them. And I usually had some problems with some aspects of the line, so, I probably shouldn't've joined.

BD: When did you first become aware of the war in Vietnam? Did you approve or disapprove of the US involvement in the Vietnam conflict?

RJ: In 1964, I can't tell you exactly, I was in Madison, and would've been in the winter, because I remember I went to my first anti-war demonstration in the dead of winter at the Madison State House, and it was cold, really cold, it was cold in Wisconsin. So it would've been 1964.

BD: Did you know anyone who served in Vietnam and was killed in the war or was a POW?

RJ: I don't know anyone who was killed or was a POW but I must of known half a dozen or ten people about my age, all men who served.

BD: Did your opinion of the war change as time went on?

RJ: No, I was always opposed to the war, I thought it was wrong. As soon as I figured out what was going on, it was pretty clear to me that it was not a war that was winnable because most of the people there were not committed to our side. You know that was so obvious.

BD: If you were engaged in civil rights activities, describe them for me.

RJ: Civil rights activities mostly consisted, as I said, of demonstrations, for sit-ins, and stuff in Madison to desegregate things like barber shops and restaurants and stuff, not Madison but Urbana. The time I got to Madison, something very interesting was happening to the Civil Rights Movement and that is that it was being splintered along racial lines. Madison did not have a large black population. Wisconsin doesn't have a large black population. So that a lot of the issues that were real race issues in, even in Illinois and Chicago, were not in Wisconsin. Which meant that what a lot of people did in Wisconsin who were interested in, in civil rights was to support people who were in the movement in the South.

But then funny things started to happen. I know they had a chapter of the Friends of SNCC at Madison. Friends of SNCC was organized to support SNCC's activities in the South. But, what was happening now, I know enough history now to understand that SNCC was undergoing this transformation from a bi-racial organization to a black organization, which of course wasn't fair to us in Madison, we didn't know what was going on. But, eventually of course, SNCC became all black and a lot of the white people who had been active in Friends of SNCC, and civil rights organizations like it, sought the need to go over to the anti-war movements. That's pretty much what happened.

BD: Did you attend any demonstrations, counter-demonstrations, conventions, or rallies?

RJ: Oh yeah, in Madison, yeah. With thousands and hundreds of other people.

BD: Which foreign policy issues other than Vietnam concerned you, like the Arab/Israeli conflict or Cuba?

RJ: I had, I mean, I shifted. I mean, my, my attitude toward Israel was pretty much the standard attitude toward Israel that most people had who grew up in the Fifties: That Israel was this wonderful place and there were all these terrible Arabs. I think I now understand about changes, that it's a little more complicated than that. I think it's a lot more complicated than that.

The Cuban thing, I've always had a kind of interest in Latin America, so it seems to me that the Cuban Revolution and what happened in Cuba afterwards was kind of understandable, if you know anything about Cuban history and historically how this country has treated Cuba, which is good, though, there's no doubt. Cuban policy is very short sided and stupid, in a word. That I haven't changed my mind on.

BD: Did you support the limiting of nuclear testing or think it was an important issue?

RJ: That's an interesting, no, I don't think that was a big issue for me. I mean, I was the demonstrations, I remember the slogans "Better Red than Dead," things like that. But, it wasn't an important issue.

BD: Do you think the US should have used nuclear weapons, nuclear bombing in Vietnam?

RJ: No, definitely not.

BD: When you saw Vietnam vets in wheelchairs, on crutches, or in body bags, coming home from Vietnam, what was your response?

RJ: Well, see, I thought the whole world was wrong. So, I thought that this was awful. It was terrible to ask people to go over there and fight in a war which was essentially unwinnable. And you had kind of two emotions. One was you were sorry for people who had to go through it, and also that other kind of... human emotion, glad it didn't happen to you!

BD: Did you feel veterans were treated with respect and courtesy?

RJ: Not at, well I think the, and I talked to some of my friends who were in Vietnam. And their kind of consensus is that this business of the hostility that the vets faced coming back has been exaggerated, not that they didn't. What they didn't get was the kind of stuff my uncles got when they got back from the Second World War. They didn't get that, but they don't think that they were as nastily treated as has been suggested here. Now, all these people are black, since black people get treated nasty anyway I'm just separating the vet stuff from it.

BD: Did Lyndon Johnson's announcement on TV that he would not run for [the] presidency a second time affect you?

RJ: It didn't affect me in any way, was surprising. As it surprised everybody, in fact my wife and I had actually turned off the TV because we thought he was going to give a kind of standard speech. Lyndon Johnson again, click! And we were very surprised when we got up the next morning to learn that he had actually said he wouldn't, he wouldn't run. But no, I don't think it affected me.

BD: What about the assassination of Martin Luther King?

RJ: Yeah, the assassination of Martin Luther King had a, had a real impact I think it made a lot of us rethink nonviolence. And whether it could be made to work. It had a real impact on triggering out of the riots and you, people like us, were living in areas overwhelmingly white were upset. Most of the, there were a lot of demonstrations in Wisconsin and rallies and things like that. So, it had a real impact.

BD: What about the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy?

RJ: Same thing, same thing. I remember that very well because they came so close together and it was like, "what's going on?" This is after John Kennedy had been assassinated and then there's, and this is not the kind of thing that we grew up with. I mean I grew up with people having political differences and political disagreements but this is not the way it was settled. So there was a real question about what was going on. What's happening to the country if it is the way people are doing things.

BD: How did the Democratic Convention in Chicago affect you?

RJ: I was still in Madison then, and I think we were just stunned. I mean, having grown up in Chicago. Chicago's policemen are, I mean there policemen operating in a big city. So, sometimes they do ugly things, but the scale of this ugliness was so overwhelming, you know, that it was stunning. We just couldn't believe it was happening.

BD: What about the election of Richard Nixon?

RJ: (laughs) Well, that's the only election, the only election, since I was eligible to vote that I didn't vote in. I've never forgotten that because since I, many of us in the anti-war movement were very angry at Hubert Humphrey at the time because he would not denounce the war. So I can remember very well when my wife got ready to vote, she was going to vote that evening and she said to me, "you mean you're not going to vote?" And I said, "no." I had thought about voting for one of the minority candidates, one of the unassociated candidates, but I said, "No, I'm not gonna vote, I'm certainly not going to vote for Nixon, or I'm not going to vote for Alan Reed." And as you know the election was very close, so a lot of us who didn't vote got what we deserved for not voting, we got Richard Nixon.

BD : How did you feel about the campaign of Senator Eugene McCarthy and Governor George Wallace?

RJ: I was surprised that George Wallace tapped something in Wisconsin which was a liberal state, but he had, I can't remember the exact figures, but he polled, polled much larger vote, not the vote but in the poles than most people had expected him in Wisconsin. I remember going into a Kentucky Fried Chicken store, place in Madison where they were passing out George Wallace buttons. So, I remember that more than anything, of course we all admired McCarthy, those of us on the left. We thought that in those of us who were left, thought that this was a, this was a honorable man and he willing to do any decent thing.

BD: What about the expulsion of the Olympic athletes for a Black Power salute during the playing of the national anthem at the medal ceremonies?

RJ: Well see this is something that black people are always caught up in. I mean, the way I look at it is the attachment black people have to our country is an attachment, warts and all. I mean you really see the ugly, coming up in this country you really see the ugly side of it. But, people are still committed to it, most people. So that most people can kind of, most black people anyway sort of identify with that, and on the one hand go out and compete for your country. But, on the other hand your making a statement that in many cases, this is a very ugly place.

BD: What about the Space Program? The circling of the moon by a US astronaut?

RJ: Read about it in the newspapers, but I don't think it had really any impact. It was nice magnificent achievement, but.

BD: Overall, how would you say the Sixties affected you and the United States in general?

RJ: Well, I think a lot of things are, were changed as a result of the Sixties. I, I think a lot of the stuff that we started off talking about, a lot of the traditional stuff, women's roles, men's roles, the place of people of color, the kind of things you can talk about publicly. I think a lot of that's changed as a result of the Sixties.

BD: What were the most important changes in the Sixties and what would you say were the most positive and what were the most negative?

RJ: The most positive thing obviously for me, as a black person, is the end Jim Crowe and the end of legal segregation. The fact that you can go anywhere you want to eat or use the bathroom anything like that. I'm old enough to know that, that was not the case then. So obviously that's positive.

Negative stuff, if you would have told me I would have said this kind of stuff thirty years ago I would've said "that's crazy!" I think however that, how am I gonna put this, well I'll just say it cause it is the way I feel, free speech has gotten out of hand, that's what I think. And I think that there are, as I said one thing about the Sixties was more stuff was opened up that you could talk about.

But now I have two grandsons and I'm really distressed at the kind of stuff I see in the media, see on TV. And I understand these are free speech rights, but it seems to me if I could do it myself, if Americans were creative enough run around talking about the land of the free and the home of the brave, and still have slaves, they ought to be creative enough to support free speech without having all this garbage that young people have to deal with. I think young people coming up today have to deal with stuff. Not that it wasn't there. It was, but it was handled differently.

BD: Some people feel that drug use and the counter culture was the most important aspect of the 1960's and others feel that the aspect was overplayed in the media. What do you think?

RJ: I think it was overplayed in the media, I mean, I know, I think that even in, you know, radical circles people did drop some stuff like that but not everybody did drugs and a lot of people didn't do a lot of drugs. So, I don't, I don't see a big, I think there was a time, you know when stuff like LSD was fashionable. But, I know I don't think so.

BD: How would you compare the presidencies of Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon?

RJ: I don't think Kennedy was president long enough really for us to really assess it. Obviously he stood for some of the things that a lot of us believed in. I think Nixon and Johnson were both politicians, that's primarily what they were. And they operated like politicians. I think and near the end of his career, that Lyndon Johnson began to have, began to be a little less of a politician and a little more moral, I would like to think so. He gave his first talk on civil rights, here he is talking in this thick Texas accent about what needed to be done. I felt he was sincere.

BD: Have African-Americans accomplished the goals of the Civil Rights Movement and is racism still a problem in American society?

RJ: Racism's still a problem, I think, the, what's happened now is that some people have been able to, to make it. But, the majority of the black population is still pretty much where it was before the Civil Rights Movement. If fifteen percent of the black population is middle-class, that's gonna be high. So that leaves eighty five percent of the people still pretty much where they were before the Movement. What happens when people look at successes, they look at the fifteen percent, they don't look at the other eighty five.

BD: Did you attribute any current political problems with strengths of the United States with decisions that were made in the 1960's?

RJ: I think most of our problems that have to do with race, that have to do with gender are old problems. So I don't think they came out in the Sixties.

BD: When the war finally ended what were your feelings?

RJ: Happy. Really, truly, you know, people weren't getting killed anymore. It's that simple.

BD: Looking back at the Vietnam conflict in the perspective of the 1990's has your opinion of the war changed?

RJ: No, I was against the war then and I'm against it now.

BD: Have you visited the Vietnam Memorial or seen a replica of it?

RJ: I've seen a replica of it, but I haven't been to it in D.C.

BD: How do you feel about young people like us striving to answer question about American involvement in the Vietnam War and the whole decade of the 1960's?

RJ: How do I feel about it? Obviously I'm very supportive, I mean, I was one of them, you know.

BD: What advice would you give to us?

RJ: To young people? Gotta stay on your toes all the time. Gotta be watchful. I mean, if I had to, this is what I used to tell my daughters all the time and it's paid off. Because there both, one's twenty six now one's twenty three, they're both questioning women. They question everything. Also having come late to the idea that women suffered this condition and stuff as women, decidedly being black women. You, I've encouraged them to be strong and I think it's paid off, you know. That's, to be alert, stay on top of issues and to stand up for yourself.

BD: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

RJ: No, I think that's a pretty thorough questionnaire.

Lind a Wood: I have a question. Can I ask a question?

BD: Sure.

LW: Who encouraged you to go to college in what seemed like a terrible environment of your high school?

RJ: Oh!

LW: How did you get through?

RJ: I got through because my parents raised us both with the expectation that we would go to college. That's the way we were raised. It's what you had to do, even though they weren't college graduates themselves, in fact, they never even went to college.

And there were some good teachers there. And those were the ones who said, I had an English teacher, a lady, [*Sachar* -? ed.], that was her name, and I remember once, I can't remember what had happened and I went into her office and she said to me, "Ah, don't worry about it. It's just high school and you're a smart young man. You'll go on to university and you'll find stuff like that doesn't happen there. People evaluate you on the principles of your mind."

So I went out to Champagne Urbana. And I told you, they [... -? ed.], I mean go figure, so I didn't [... -? ed.]. I wrote her two, three times first semester. And during the Christmas break, I went out to see her. And I was standing, I was, we were talking to each other, she had been to Illinois as an undergraduate too, and we were talking about the place. And, I remember, I was just getting ready to leave, and I was standing right next to the door, and I was just getting ready to leave, and I said, "You know, Miss Sachar," I said, "you told me that [... -? ed.], you told me that there wouldn't be no prejudice at the University, and there is, there's a lot of it." And she looked at me and she said, "So I lied." [Laughs]. I've never forgotten that. You know?

And what she did, I mean, it worked because it got me through Calumet High. I used to think she singled me out, but she, I mean, she talked to all the black kids that way. So, she got a lot of people to attend, I mean she couldn't do it for everybody, obviously because, like I said, they really [... -? ed.] some people out, a lot of people out. But there's people like her, sure, and you don't forget 'em.

LW: Was there a role model in your community and someone who you wanted to strive towards?

RJ: I had an uncle, really, he went, he was the only one in my mother's family. Well, I had two uncles, one who went to college for a couple years and dropped out. But my uncle Donald went all the way through, he was one of my mother's brothers, and he taught at Lincoln University, an all black college which is in Missouri. So, yeah, I mean, he was sorta, I guess, my intellectual model at the time. It was nice to have someone who [... -? ed.], yeah I could study.

My parents also raised us both to have a, my brother and I, to have, I think, a sense of responsibility. My dad was not one of those people who's given to making speeches and tell you [... -? ed.]. Though he did tell us quite clearly that, I remember, I was complaining about a job I had, I was working in a drugstore. And he told me, "You know if you don't like it, you can always quit." "But," he said, "if you say you're going to do a job, you should do it, and stick with it."

And, when he retired, he had not missed a day's work in thirty five years. It's already too late for me to do that. I mean, I blew that, I can't always be working. But it had its effect

We were really focused, had a sense of responsibility. When you say you're gonna do it, you do it. When you don't want to do it, you [... -? ed.].

LW: So how did you get here from Wisconsin?

RJ: When I made the switch from history to, I mean, sociology to history. I guess Brown was the only place that said you only have to take two years of course work and we'll let you get a [... -? ed.] over at sociology, so I wasn't go to lose all of that I'd done, so that's why I came here.