

Judith Martin

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Interview with Judith Martin

**Interviewed by Professor Clarke A. Chambers
University of Minnesota**

**Interviewed on August 29, 1994
University of Minnesota Campus**

Judith Martin - JM
Clarke A. Chambers - CAC

CAC: This is Clarke Chambers. It is Monday, August 29, 1994, a lovely, beautiful late summer's day. This is the nicest we've had in a long time.

JM: It is. It's gorgeous.

CAC: I am interviewing today Judith Martin, who came here originally to do work for American Studies and has since participated in many kinds of departmental and interdepartmental programs. The interview is being conducted in my office in the Social Science tower.

Judy, as I have with almost everyone else, a little autobiography to begin with . . . How did you know as a young girl that one could be in a university, what a university was, and what you wanted to study?

JM: I didn't have a clue. [laughter]

CAC: It has to come sometime.

JM: For me, it came very late. As you know, I grew up in Chicago in a sort of traditional working class, middle class community where people grew up to be pretty much what their parents were. For me, the decision to go to college was a beginning effort to break out of that because mostly people didn't go to college. When I was in college, I discovered in my senior year, which I spent not at my own college but at the University of Chicago for a quarter . . .

CAC: What was your own college?

JM: Rosary College, which is a little Catholic girls' school on the west side of Chicago, actually in the suburbs.

CAC: But a pretty good school?

JM: Oh, a good school, yes. I got a great education there. It really was terrific.

CAC: Was it staffed primarily by nuns?

JM: By the time I got there, it was about half nuns and half lay people. Many of the nuns were really interesting characters, some of whom had been to graduate school at places like Madison [Wisconsin] in the 1930s; so, they were on very close terms with people like John Kenneth Galbraith. They were sort of plugged into a much larger world, which was interesting to learn. I spent the senior year of my college career at the University of Chicago because Rosary had owned a house there and it enabled Rosary girls to go take some courses at the university.

CAC: This was an all girls' school?

JM: Oh, yes. At the University of Chicago, I took a bunch of history courses and it was an interesting introduction to a world that I had no idea about. I heard people talking about going to graduate school and I said, "What's that?"

CAC: [laughter]

JM: The more I heard about it, the more I thought, Gee, I can keep on going to school. That seemed like a fine idea in the spring of 1970. When I went back for the winter term to finish up, I talked with my adviser. This nun was doing a graduate degree at Minnesota in American studies.

CAC: Heavens.

JM: She told me about the University of Minnesota. I knew about the University of Chicago. I thought, Why not apply and see what happens? This is the only place I applied to.

CAC: I talk with very few people who have had a single sex college experience. Did you, in any way, see that as an opportunity for a woman to take leadership? Did you have more elbow room or less? What was that experience?

JM: For me it was really not a conscious choice, but more a progression because I'd gone to a single sex high school that was six blocks away from my college. Going to college, I saw as a continuation of what high school had been at a higher level. The choice about going there as opposed to anyplace else . . . I suppose the other place that I seriously considered was Loyola.

I had an Illinois State scholarship, which meant that I could go to any college in the state of Illinois and it was mostly paid for.

CAC: Full tuition, plus room and board?

JM: No, full tuition. It was a stipend. Because it wasn't enough to do room and board, I had to live at home; so, I did that. I decided on Rosary as opposed to Loyola because I knew an awful lot of people that were going to Loyola and I didn't want to be part of that scene anymore; so, Rosary seemed a way of getting out of that a little bit.

CAC: Good enough. Did you participate in extracurricular things?

JM: No, I worked twenty hours a week.

CAC: I see. So many women say, looking back on it, that they had a chance to develop their leadership qualities.

JM: Not at all, no. I was too busy.

CAC: What kind of work did you do?

JM: Oh, I worked in a dime store and I worked in a fabric store . . . clerical stuff.

CAC: Bravo. Good.

JM: Minimum wage, uninsured benefits, and all of that sort of stuff. [laughter] I really didn't have any idea about what I could be or what I wanted to be. I didn't have a clue because there wasn't anybody that I knew who was doing anything that I wanted to do.

CAC: No one in your family who had gone to college?

JM: No one in my family who had ever done anything like that, yes. I suppose the closest I came to having some sense of what might be possible was a guy who taught at Rosary—in fact, he's still there; he's a good friend—who was a real new Ph.D. at that point and who was probably in his late twenties, about ten years older than me and he really seemed to have what seemed to me an interesting life. I suppose, in some way, Lew was kind of a model for what I thought maybe I could be, except I wasn't a guy, right? He was very encouraging about that. He really sort of said, "If you want to go to graduate school . . . if you want to do something other than just go downtown and go to work, there's no reason why you can't." That was the first time I had ever heard that from anybody.

CAC: By the end of the 1960s, the women's scene was pretty heavy. You must have read about it at least?

JM: Yes and no.

CAC: But, it wasn't a major thing?

JM: It wasn't a major thing for me.

CAC: Was the anti-war movement?

JM: Yes and no. Philosophically, it was. Emotionally, it was, but not in terms of how I spent my time because I had to work.

CAC: Would the same thing be true of counterculture?

JM: Yes . . . sort of on the edges of it but not really thoroughly involved in that. I came from a very straight background and I suppose in many ways, I was kind of getting away from it in some degree, but not completely.

CAC: You were still living at home so still with the family?

JM: I was living at home until my senior year, right. That may or may not have been a restriction. I had a lot of freedom at home. I had a car and pretty much kept my own hours.

CAC: But, there were expectations of values and behavior [unclear]?

JM: There were expectations of values and behavior that I didn't necessarily disagree with, I suppose. I stayed at home and that was fine. It was cheap. It was not pleasant, but that's how that goes.

CAC: Did you inquire beyond the courses that you were taking?

JM: In terms of?

CAC: About how things are put together.

JM: I thought I had a pretty good sense of how things were put together. I spent a lot of my time, when I was growing up, with other people in my family, with grandparents, aunts and uncles. I was told by my grandmother, when she was still alive, that I was always asking questions about stuff and just annoying them totally. I had a sense partly because I spent a lot of time talking with my one grandfather, my mother's father, who was a real working class guy. He delivered milk for forty years and, then, he was a bridge tender for Cook County when he retired. It was a political appointment. I always talked to him about politics. He was a precinct captain. I had a sense from the time I was a pretty little kid . . . I kind of knew something about the way things worked. I was very, for example, conflicted when the riots were going on around

the convention in Chicago because I knew some of those cops. There's part of me that says, "These are nice people that I've known my whole life." Then, there's part of me that says, "But, they're beating up on people and doing things they shouldn't be doing." There was this kind of method of analysis that was emerging at that point. I thought I had a sense of how things were put together, at least in Chicago. My world was pretty much limited to Chicago. We didn't travel. When I was a kid, I really hadn't gone anywhere much outside of Chicago and southern Wisconsin.

CAC: Was the church a serious affair?

JM: Church was serious through high school . . . not after that.

CAC: You were allowed to drift?

JM: There was nothing to stop me. It wasn't encouraged, but there was nothing that would necessarily say I should [unclear]?

CAC: You had no siblings to help you prepare that way?

JM: No, because I was the oldest. On my mother's side of the family, I was the oldest grandchild so I was sort of the leader, in a way. My brother, who is ten and a half months younger, was not far behind. [laughter]

CAC: You had a nice sister at your college who was working at Minnesota and that seemed like one possibility? Did you know what American studies was from her?

JM: I was doing an undergraduate degree in American studies.

CAC: Okay.

JM: I had done that, in part, because I spent my freshman year and sophomore at Rosary running around taking all sorts of courses and getting very excited about a whole bunch of different things. At one point, I was very excited about Spanish. At another point, I was very excited about chemistry. I was pretty interested in history and, at one point, this nun, who was actually my Spanish teacher, sat me down one day and she said, "Miss Martin, you really should be an American studies major because then you can do all this stuff and you'll actually have a place where you can belong."

CAC: [laughter]

JM: I thought, Okay.

CAC: That's the reputation American studies had at Minnesota in 1970 when you came?

JM: Yes, absolutely. It was a place where you could have very broad areas of inquiry and there wasn't a direction that you were pushed into. I came without any sense at all of what I was going to do or be. You know that because you taught me my first year here. I suppose it was, in part, a sense of there not being a profession that you were being trained for. This was more liberal arts. This was more general inquiry and sort of mind expansion. It was also a sense of my having come here with all of this stuff about Chicago in my head that was mostly what I knew growing up there.

CAC: You're suggesting this is an origin for urban studies?

JM: It is for me, I think . . . yes, very definitely. When I came here, the first quarter, there were all these courses and you were to take Mr. [Paul] Murphy's this and Mr. [David] Noble's that. There were all these things that were advertised as being good things. I took some and didn't take others. I suppose it was in the second quarter I was here when I discovered there was an Urban History course. I thought, Wow! Sure! Why not do Urban History? That's something I might know something about and it might be interesting, so I did that. In American Studies in 1971, that was considered a little unconventional. I actually had to have a little discussion with Mary Turpie about whether or not it was okay for me to do. She didn't know Mr. [John] Modell. She was a little worried about it.

CAC: Mr. Modell was reasonably new on the faculty.

JM: He was brand new, yes. He had just come that year, too. He was not a known quantity. I had to argue a little bit that this is what I really want to do.

CAC: You didn't know what urban history was going to be either?

JM: I didn't have any idea. It sounded interesting. I was in graduate school to be entertained, more or less. I thought that being entertained about urban things would be reasonably interesting. That was really what kind of got me going. That opened up a world of research, and reading, and ideas that really clicked for me.

CAC: Where else did you find, in the faculty of American Studies or the adjunct faculty, support for that interest in urban studies?

JM: I got it from you, in part . . . certainly from John, David Cooperman, and Roger Clemence . . .

CAC: You discovered Roger that early?

JM: Oh, sure, yes.

CAC: Not many people in American Studies would have seen that.

JM: I took a course with Roger, actually, my third or fourth year here. I had taken John Borchert's American Cities course my third year.

CAC: Ohhh, good. There you are . . . geography, architecture, history, sociology.

JM: Yes, I began to see that there were ways of putting these things together. There were these people that were spread all over the place; but, they were all sort of interested in things that I was doing.

CAC: Relatively few of our graduate students—this is a conversation not really a cross-examination—exhibit that kind of nimbleness, finding where you could put together a program that would make sense in urban studies, which hardly existed. Was there a program in urban studies at that time?

JM: There was an undergraduate program, which began here in 1969 as an experimental program within the old Social Science curriculum . . .

CAC: Oh!

JM: . . . which I didn't know anything about. It became a regular undergraduate offering in 1972. I didn't have any idea about it. I didn't know that it existed when I came here. I didn't know that urban studies existed as a field of any sort until I was just about done with my graduate program. It was probably Roger Clemence who looked at what I was doing. When I showed him my program and asked him to be on my committee, he said, "You're doing urban studies kinds of things." I said, "Oh, really? There's a label for what I'm doing?" [laughter] I thought I was just going around taking courses that were interesting.

CAC: You're outlining a course as a graduate student in American Studies that partook less of the old alliance between literature and history than most?

JM: Yes, I was not interested in that.

CAC: But, you were clever enough to work the system to do what you wanted it to do?

JM: I suppose in a way I had an advantage because I'd done American Studies as an undergraduate so I'd had that, the history/literature thing, as an undergraduate. It was interesting. I learned a lot. I enjoyed it; but, I wanted to do other stuff or figure out if there was other stuff to do.

CAC: The core program, at that time, was structured that way?

JM: The core program was structured in a way that you had to take X number of courses. You had to take the Introductory sequence and you were supposed to take Material and Methods,

which I never took, and you were supposed to do the Ph.D. seminar, which I did do. I was kind of obstreperous as a student because there were things that American Studies wanted people to do, which I didn't want to do. I actually talked my way out of the Materials and Methods course by telling Mary Turpie that I never had any intention of ever teaching American Studies so there was no reason for me to take it. [laughter] I was kind of adamant about what I wanted.

CAC: It was a quality that was not hostile. You were getting around things; you weren't fighting them?

JM: I wasn't fighting, no. It wasn't an argument. It was just that I was presenting reasonable alternatives, I guess.

CAC: You ended up doing your dissertation with what subject and with whom?

JM: It was very strange because when I came here, I did my master's degree. The day I arrived I had my introductory interview with Mary Turpie and she said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I'm going to do a master's degree, and I'm going to do it in nine months, and go home." She said, "You can't do that." I said, "Why not?" "It has never been done before." I didn't think that was a good enough reason, plus, I had no support, and I was paying out of state tuition so i couldn't see any good reason to hang around.

CAC: Were you working that first year here?

JM: No, I took five courses a quarter and finished all the course work in nine months.

CAC: How did you pay the rent?

JM: I had some savings.

CAC: So, you were living off your hard labor?

JM: Yes, exactly.

CAC: That's a good American story.

JM: Absolutely. I finished the master's degree in nine months and, then, went away and, then, you called me and asked me to come to work for you.

CAC: Really? You did go away?

JM: Yes.

CAC: I hadn't realized that.

JM: I went back to Chicago, yes. I had no idea what I was going to do. I suppose I was going to look for a job eventually. When you asked me to come back here and go to work for you, that seemed reasonable; but, at that point, I could have gone on and done a Ph.D. Here I was all of twenty-four years old seeing these people around American Studies at that point who were doing Ph.D.s who were thirty, thirty-one, thirty-two . . .

CAC: [laughter]

JM: . . . and I thought, Ah, come on! This is not how I want to spend my life. At that point, I switched into the History Department and did another master's degree in History because I thought I needed some grounding in a field. I did that and I did a master's thesis.

CAC: What was that M.A. thesis on?

JM: It was on the neighborhood in Chicago that I grew up in, which, strangely enough—I've gone back—I'm using pieces of now in something I'm working on. So, that was the third year I was here. I'd done the first master's degree in nine months and, then, did the second one. That took a little longer because I was writing the thesis. When I was writing my thesis, John Modell, at some party at his house, asked me if I wanted to do a study of Cedar Riverside. I said, "No, why would I want to do that?" He said, "They'll pay you." I thought, Oh, okay; there's a thought. [laughter] It turned out that he'd been contacted by Warner Shippee, who was running the housing office at CURA [Center for Urban and Regional Affairs]. They had decided they wanted somebody to do some documentation of what was going on at Cedar Riverside. I didn't have a clue what Cedar Riverside was. It was sitting out the door; but, I didn't have any idea. I talked to Warner and he said, "You can do this study." I said, "Fine." I talked with John and I said, "It could be a thesis." He said, "It could be a thesis." There were a bunch of people in the History Department who apparently thought that current history wasn't sufficiently historical; so then, I went back to American Studies.

CAC: Ohhh.

JM: I just had the dissertation seminar stuff to do.

CAC: Did you, indeed, turn this into a dissertation?

JM: Yes, it was my dissertation.

CAC: With John Modell?

JM: John and David Cooperman were my co-advisers. I got paid by CURA to do my dissertation.

CAC: I thought Id called you to hire you. How did you get over to CURA?

JM: [laughter]

CAC: This is the unreliability of the spoken word. I have no memory of calling you.

JM: You did. You called me in Chicago and asked me to come to work for you.

CAC: I know that I needed someone to do what you were able to do. For posterity, I had just become chair, and there were certain things I didn't know, and I didn't really want to call on inside folks to do it.

JM: Right; so, you hired somebody who knew less than you. [laughter]

CAC: I hired somebody who was nimble.

JM: I worked for you for a year and, then, was a TA [teaching assistant] in the History Department. Then, I went to work for CURA the next year.

CAC: Okay.

JM: Then, I came back and was funded by the History Department for one more year.

CAC: The Center for Urban and Regional Affairs was created in . . .

JM: It was probably created in 1967 or so.

CAC: Now, it's 1972, 1973. It's only in existence five years. As a graduate student, did you know about CURA?

JM: I didn't have any idea, no.

CAC: How do you get that contact?

JM: That was through John Modell. Warner Shippee had contacted him.

CAC: Although, John Borchert was very active in CURA.

JM: Right. John was the director of CURA, but he was in Geography. CURA was supporting a lot of geography students. There weren't American Studies students that were going looking for research support at CURA, so that was a little unusual. I got hired by Warner to do this study, and got the agreement of Modell and Cooperman and, then, the other members of my committee that this could be a dissertation, and just did it.

CAC: Where did the initiative come from for this particular study? What did they want done?

JM: They wanted a history and a current analysis of what was going on. I suppose the reason I got asked was that I'd just done this community history of this neighborhood in Chicago, which John knew that I was working on; so, he thought this would be a nice kind of transfer of those sorts of skill to a different subject and a different area. I didn't know at the time that this would lead me into all sorts of intricacies about urban policy, and finance, and politics, which is what it did. I thought of it as documenting a community history that was in transition, which was part of it, but it was a lot more than that. It was really the getting started in that direction that pretty much led me down at least some of the path that I've gone on.

CAC: What agency was it that wanted it done?

JM: CURA wanted it done and I don't know why.

CAC: They usually farmed out things. This was CURA initiated?

JM: This was CURA initiated. It was a little unusual. There were a variety of different ways in which one could get into being funded by CURA and they had gobs of money at this point in time.

CAC: Where did that money come from?

JM: A lot of it was federal research money and state research money. Grants were pouring.

CAC: [unclear] central university funds?

JM: Yes, it's a state special.

CAC: Ohhh, all right.

JM: One of those sorts of deals. CURA was a place that, unbeknownst to me and lots of other people, had a lot of resources available and didn't particularly care how they spent them. There wasn't a lot of oversight. I was formally working for Warner in the housing office. I think really, it was Warner's initiative. He wanted this study done, wanted somebody to do it.

CAC: Good enough. For posterity, we should say that Warner Shippee was the son of a former chairman of the History Department [Lester B. Shippee] [unclear] historical . . .

JM: Warner had a good sense of documenting this stuff while it's happening. There was a little housing office that Warner ran that had maybe five or six graduate students that were working on really very different kinds of projects and I was just one of those people.

CAC: What did you perceive as the core staff of CURA at that time?

JM: It was very mysterious because they were off in Walter Library and John Borchert was the only person I knew there. I knew Warner and I knew John Borchert; that was it.

CAC: They had a lot of floaters?

JM: They had a huge number of people, yes. At that point, CURA's main office was in Walter Library, but CURA offices were all over the campus and off campus. It was very dispersed. I didn't have any sense of CURA as an organization.

CAC: That was the kind of chaos that you really thrived on?

JM: It was fine because it was one of those things that gave you a little niche that you could do your own thing without anybody watching over your shoulder, and just kind of go at it, and do it.

CAC: You weren't aware in detail of other things that were going on at CURA at that time?

JM: No, not at all. I knew that there were other graduate students working on other projects, but that was about it.

CAC: What I'm getting at I suppose indirectly is . . .

JM: I didn't have a grand plan.

CAC: . . . there's no sense of a community of persons engaged in this outreach of Urban and Regional Affairs?

JM: There wasn't for me, at that point. I think there probably was for the people that were working at that level. I was a graduate student grunt. I was not connected to the mysteries of the outreach of the university, whatever that might have meant.

CAC: [laughter]

JM: I was out there in the community. I didn't have a clue that there was a name for that. You walk across the street, and sit in on community meetings, and talk to people, and that's a kind of outreach, right?

CAC: You had to do a lot of listening, a lot of field work, so to speak?

JM: My dissertation was a combination of a modest historical description of Cedar Riverside as a community and the transformation of that community over time; but, most of it was really, in a sense, a kind of ethnography of what was currently going on.

CAC: Was the high-rise apartment there then?

JM: It was just being built.

CAC: You could observe that?

JM: Yes, absolutely. It was interesting because I was granted access to the files of the developer—unlimited. I sat in Keith Heller's office and read through company documents. At the time, I didn't have much of sense of what I was looking at—it would be much more interesting now. They just pretty much gave me free rein to look at whatever they had.

CAC: To what do you accredit that degree of trust in some young graduate student?

JM: I have no idea. Warner told them I was okay, I think.

CAC: I see. That helps.

JM: I think that was about as much as it took because Warner had been very involved . . .

CAC: Did you have to work closely with Keith then, in his office?

JM: I sat in his office and read through all of this stuff.

CAC: He was a pretty controversial figure or came to be.

JM: Oh, yes, absolutely. He gave me a little corner of his office that could just wander into whenever I felt like looking at things. It was kind of extraordinary in a way. There was that and, then, there was a more formal survey research piece of it that Cooperman and I did together. He had a Graduate School grant to do a survey of the residents within the first year of when they moved in. We actually ended up working on that together. That ended up being a joint survey. Then, I did a lot of just sitting in on community meetings, and talking to people, and trying to understand what the process was all about. It was a muddle. [laughter] It was definitely a work in progress.

CAC: At this point, you didn't realize there was, except perhaps casually, a field of Urban Studies?

JM: Not really, no. I knew that there was planning because I'd been exposed to the literature of planning history. I knew that there was this formal kind of structured activity of city planning. I suppose, if I'd thought about it at all, in terms of what I thought I would end up doing, I probably expected to be a city planner of some sort because that was what I had learned about. It wasn't what you learned as a graduate student in American Studies, but it happened to be what I learned.

CAC: This wasn't a scandal to the faculty in American Studies? This was a rather unusual turn.

JM: It was a very unusual turn. Mary Turpie didn't have a clue what to do with me. She really didn't. But, because I seemed to be able to manage to find support and had a few faculty people that were willing to back me up, she pretty much left me alone. It is sort of surprising. I was not doing anything that she would have imagined an American Studies person would be doing; but, she didn't really block me very much.

CAC: I had said, just a moment earlier, that the program you were mapping out was quite different; but, this kind of elbow room for many people in American Studies at that time was being taken down different avenues by different [unclear]?

JM: True, true.

CAC: For example, I'm thinking there was a lot of bootlegging of Women's Studies into American Studies at that time.

JM: Right. Absolutely.

CAC: There was no place else to put it. It wasn't real American Studies in a classical, traditional sense.

JM: No, not as real American Studies was understood. Right. This was a time when people were using American Studies as a route to do pretty much what they were interested in and this was a way of formalizing it as a degree option before those other kinds of degree options, either regular degrees or minors like the [unclear] minor, existed.

CAC: What kind of a committee did you put together for the final dissertation?

JM: It was a little peculiar. It was John Modell, and Cooperman, and you, and Roger, and Kent Bales because I had to have someone from English. Poor Kent . . . I had taken the English courses at the University of Minnesota . . . Marty Roth, Joe Kwiat. I'd done that for my master's degree and, then, I had to take two or three more for the Ph.D. and I thought, Oh, god! I'm washed up here because there's nothing there I want to do. I talked with Modell about that and he suggested that I go and talk with Kent Bales. John said, in his nice way, "You have to do this. What would you like to do?" I said, "I want to read urban novels."

CAC: Ah!

JM: He said, "Go talk to Kent"—he and Kent were neighbors and pretty good friends—"and tell him, 'This is what I want to do,' and see what he says." I went and talked to Kent and I said, "You don't know me from Adam; but, here's what I want to do." He said, "I don't have a clue about that; but, if you want to read those things, that's fine." I constructed a two-quarter . . .

basically a reading course with Kent to read pretty widely in things urban that were literary. Kent was the English person.

CAC: You're describing a program which wasn't very well structured.

JM: It wasn't structured at all, except that everything about it was urban. There was a thematic structure.

CAC: You were taking American Studies beyond that. Lots of people were using the system for their own [unclear]?

JM: Sure. That's true.

CAC: You knew fellow students in American Studies?

JM: Yes.

CAC: Were they self-conscious? Did they see this clearly when you were going through it and your friends, peers?

JM: I was not very closely plugged into the American Studies graduate student network after the first couple of years; so, I didn't really have much of a sense of what I was doing compared to other people, except I knew it was kind of different.

CAC: You had that sense from History as well?

JM: Yes, right. The students who were, in a sense, my peers and contemporaries by the time I was finishing were all Humphrey [Institute of Public Affairs] students.

CAC: Ohhh.

JM: I'd kind of gotten pulled over into that arena.

CAC: Your friendship circles and network was out of CURA and Humphrey?

JM: Yes, and not much in American Studies by the time I was done. I wasn't checking myself against anybody else in American Studies. When I finished my Ph.D.—I started in 1970 and I defended in December of 1975—I still didn't have any clear sense of what I was going to do. There wasn't a career that I was looking for. At that point, I was pretty sure that I didn't want to be an academic because there was a lot that I'd seen around here that I didn't like very much.

CAC: Like what?

JM: Students didn't get treated very well by most people.

CAC: Evidence of that would be what? What do you mean by not being treated very well?

JM: It's probably more an intuitive thing than anything that I could point to objectively. By the time I finished, I'd done a little bit of teaching in the History Department and in Urban Studies and my sense of, particularly, what was the experience of undergraduates at this university was that it was pretty negative. No one much was paying attention to them for the most part. Because I didn't have, at that point, any sense of wanting to be involved in graduate education . . . I thought if I was going to do anything academic, it would be at some college with an undergraduate focus. I hadn't even really thought it through that much. I really didn't have any idea.

CAC: That's all right. You were busy. To get a Ph.D. in five years is faster than most manage.

JM: Especially, when you figure that I did a second master's in between on a completely different topic. [laughter] Yes, I was busy. I wasn't really sort of plotting a life strategy. It was just moving along from day to day and seeing what turned up.

CAC: Did you perceive then the academy in terms of your own experience, that you could work the system, and get a pretty good education?

JM: That was my experience; but, I'm not sure that I perceive the academy as a place that promoted or encouraged that. I guess I saw it as something that was an option if you were clever enough to figure out how to do it.

CAC: And had just a couple of people to help you?

JM: Yes. There's all this mumbo jumbo about community of scholars and all of that sort of thing, which seemed to me to be not very realistic. One of the things I figured out early on was that the Graduate School had rules about what you had to do. As I read it, there were five people you had to convince that what you were doing was legitimate.

CAC: [laughter]

JM: What anybody else thought really didn't matter much because it was those five people that had to sign the form finally that would get you the degree. My sense was really one of figuring out what I had to do, and doing it, and not worrying about all the other stuff. I know that there were people in American Studies, at the time, who thought that the kind of program I'd put together and the kinds of interests that I had were really very peculiar. I didn't care what they thought; it interested me.

CAC: You couldn't see a long run possibility in the kind of thing that Urban and Regional Affairs did?

JM: I didn't have a sense of that. I had a sense that I'd pretty much burned my bridges in American Studies, that that was not an option for me. I didn't know what else there might be.

CAC: You get your degree and, then, you have to pay the rent. You had to have a job. What happens then?

JM: Before I got my degree, the summer I was writing my thesis, the summer of 1975, I had been encouraged by Roger Clemence to go and talk with John Adams about the possibility of doing some teaching in Urban Studies. At that point, I didn't know John at all. I knew John Borchert; that was my only contact with the Geography Department. I went and had a conversation with John Adams. He looked at my list of course work and what I'd done and asked some questions about where I'd gone to school. I think because I'd gone to Rosary College, which he knew something about, he figured I'd gotten a good education. He asked me if I wanted to teach a course in Urban Studies. I thought, Sure why not? I'll do that. But more than that, he said that if I finished my writing my dissertation, basically a draft by the fall of 1975, I could direct the Urban Studies program for a year while he was gone because he was going away and he needed to find somebody to fill in.

CAC: And there was no core staff there except himself?

JM: There were a couple of graduate student advisers, but that was it.

CAC: That's not core staff.

JM: Right, there was none. I went from this very peculiar situation of being a graduate student to running a program within a quarter. [laughter] It was a little strange. I thought I could do that. Why not? It didn't seem all that hard.

CAC: It probably wasn't. What did that consist of? What did you do that first year?

JM: It consisted of making sure the advising staff were doing what they needed to do and making sure that pieces of paper went where they needed to go and that a few people go hired to teach courses. There was nothing all that mysterious about it.

CAC: How many courses did the program stage at that point?

JM: At that point, it was a lot bigger. There were probably seven or eight courses a quarter.

CAC: Taught by what faculty then?

JM: Taught by graduate students and some faculty. There was a guy from Sociology, Brian Aldridge, who was teaching. Tom Doer, who was a relatively new person in Humphrey, was teaching some stuff. There was a reaching out in a variety of different directions to drag people in. My job, that year, was to do some teaching and to make sure that everything that was supposed to happen . . .

CAC: You had a core budget to hire these people away from their own departments?

JM: Right, exactly. That was a very quick jump into the mechanics of how things actually worked at the university. I had some sense of that from having been around the History Department when I was a graduate student because I was very good friends with many of the people that were the staff in the History Department. I had some sense of how the process worked. It was a little unusual to go from being a graduate student to being in charge of a program immediately.

CAC: Yes. These adjunct folks weren't borrowed, they were paid? You rented them?

JM: They were paid in some form. They probably weren't paid the going rate. Some of them were doing overtime teaching. It was a variety of different kinds of methods that had been worked out.

CAC: There were a lot of cross-disciplinary programs at that time that pieced it together in that fashion, including Humanities, including American Studies.

JM: Absolutely, yes. It was very much in that model of drawing, as widely as you could, as many people in and milking them, basically.

CAC: Then, you taught a basic Introductory course, I would imagine, yourself?

JM: No, there was no basic Introductory course.

CAC: Ohhh.

JM: I invented it several years later.

CAC: Tell me about that.

JM: I taught a couple of courses in Urban Studies that year and, then, John came back and took over the program again. I continued to teach one or two courses. I had, in the meantime, gone back to CURA as a research associate, basically because Tom Scott, who was then running CURA . . . Tom had been the chair of the Urban Studies committee during the year that John Adams was gone so I got to know him pretty well. When I announced to him, at some point in the spring, that I was going to spend the next year, the summer of 1976 . . . I was going to go

sit in my backyard and read novels. That got a lot of people really upset because here was this person that had finished the degree not just on time but pretty quickly and done a few other interesting things, basically saying, "No, I'm not going to do the traditional academic thing," and thumbing your nose at that, and saying, "Too bad." That upset a whole bunch of people and it, eventually, resulted in Tom Scott arranging a job for me at CURA, which he had to do very delicately because I didn't want to work more than half time. I was really kind of pushing this stuff away.

CAC: It was half-time Urban Studies and half-time CURA then?

JM: No, it was half-time CURA with a little bit of extra Urban Studies stuff. For a couple of years, that was what I did. I was half-time at CURA doing research stuff and teaching a course here and there in Urban Studies.

CAC: Once you got your degree and you were director of the program, such as it was, you continued your relationship with CURA?

JM: Yes.

CAC: Did they pay you part of your salary then?

JM: Yes. It all got worked out.

CAC: You were really a joint appointment?

JM: I was a joint appointment for a long time, yes. For a couple of years, I was a research associate at CURA and, then, taught a few courses in Urban Studies. In 1979, John Adams, who had been not just the director of Urban Studies but running the Public Affairs program, which was in the process of becoming the Humphrey Institute, decided that he couldn't do all of that anymore. He gave up the Urban Studies piece of it and suggested to Fred Lukermann, who was the new dean of CLA [College of Liberal Arts], that I would be an ideal person to step in and take that over. Wa-la!

CAC: Done!

JM: Done, pretty much. I don't think there was a search. [laughter] It just kind of evolved that this is where I landed without ever intending for it to happen.

CAC: At that time, bureaucratically, you really were in limbo.

JM: I was completely in limbo.

CAC: There's no possibility of having a tenure track?

JM: No, absolutely not. I was completely in limbo. I wasn't particularly concerned about that at that point. I should have been, but I wasn't. I liked doing the work and I enjoyed the Urban Studies students and the program. I got to do some things. I invented the Introductory course, which I still teach twice a year.

CAC: Tell me about that.

JM: It seemed to me that there were kids that were doing Urban Studies degrees . . . there was a big group of Urban Studies students. There were probably eighty or ninety majors.

CAC: Ahhh.

JM: It was a hopping thing.

CAC: What would the size of the majors be now?

JM: It's now about forty-five or fifty.

CAC: It's cut in half.

JM: Yes. It's been lower than that so it's kind of up and down. It's entirely in response to what happens out in the real world. When there's money for things urban, kids do this and when there isn't, they don't; so, in the early 1980s, the numbers of majors . . .

CAC: It's market sensitive.

JM: For sure. Basically, the structure of Urban Studies was a pretty loose one so that there were topics courses and the topics change from quarter to quarter so those were the kinds of courses that I had taught. It seemed to me that it would be reasonable for Urban Studies students to have a uniform introductory thing that said, "Here's what urban studies should . . ."

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Tape 1, Side 2]

CAC: . . . to an initial course. You had cross-disciplinary work presumably in American Studies and CURA? What did you do?

JM: I decided that what these kids needed was some sense of the range of things that contributed to making a city; so, I put together a course that, initially, drew on an awful lot of faculty coming in and talking about what the perspective of their discipline was on the city. It was urban history, urban geography, economics, sociology, political science, social welfare . . .

CAC: You borrow faculty for one shot affairs on this?

JM: Right. It was, basically, just using the Urban Studies committee, these people who were there who were . . .

CAC: Give me a for instance of who came in.

JM: Modell came in and talked about urban history. I had John Adams talk about geography. Esther [Wattenberg] came and talked about social work. Joe Galaskiewicz came and talked about urban sociology. He was pretty new here at that point, but he was happy to do it. Roger Clemence came and talked about urban design. Initially, the course that I put together was bringing in the Urban Studies faculty to talk about the perspective of their discipline on the city. For a couple of years, I did it that way. Then, for a variety of reasons, I began to change it and not use the faculty so much and do more of it myself, in part, because it seemed a little disjunctive to have all these bodies sort of showing up one time. I figured out that with respect to most of what they were saying, I knew an awful lot anyway, so there wasn't any point to bother them. That was the structure and, to a certain degree, it still has that structure. I still talk about politics and social organization and I still talk about the spacial organization; but, it's evolved much more from what this discipline has to say about cities to how cities reflect these different kinds of interests.

CAC: Did you draw on field practitioners?

JM: Yes, I've always had somebody, at least one and sometimes more than one, from the community, typically a planner, come in and talk because many of the Urban Studies' students have some notion that they want to be planners; but, they don't have a clue what planners do. I thought it would be useful to have a Minneapolis, or St. Paul, or a local community planner come in and just tell them what it is that a planner does.

CAC: Neighborhood organizers?

JM: Some neighborhood organizers as well, yes. I do less of that now, but that was a big thing early on.

CAC: Why do you do less of it now?

JM: Because it's much more formal now. It's all part of this city governance process for the most part.

CAC: I don't understand that.

JM: Neighborhood organizing was free-lance [unclear] stuff in the late 1970s and early 1980s and, now, it's all a structure of city government for the most part. Groups are paid to be organized by the city. It's more of the bureaucracy and not quite so interesting as it used to be.

CAC: Can you still draw on the same kinds of person within the faculty? You say you don't draw on them as much.

JM: I don't as much. I still have Roger come in every time I teach it and do an urban design thing. He's probably the only one of the old group that's still doing it.

CAC: Of course, Modell is gone and Cooperman is near retirement.

JM: Cooperman's doing other things. Esther is retired. Most of the people that were available ten, fifteen years ago aren't so available now.

CAC: You were the young kid on the block.

JM: Yes.

CAC: The others are all twenty, twenty-five years older than you.

JM: Right, right. They were happy to help.

CAC: Oh, yes.

JM: It was terrific. It was a really good arrangement for me. I learned a lot from them; but, I got to the point where I felt the need to make it more my course so that's what I eventually did.

CAC: It won't surprise you—let me just join a conversation for whomever will be listening to this—that a lot of people comment, even when they weren't in interdisciplinary programs, about the versatility they could introduce in the courses in the 1960s and 1970s. Somehow, things became more formalized later on and more difficult to sustain. I wish this were on video tape because there is obviously a kind of excitement as you recollect those initial . . .

JM: Yes.

CAC: You were creating new stuff.

JM: Yes. One of the things that was very nice about Urban Studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s was that there was this executive committee that was drawn from throughout the university. It was something that was genuinely interdisciplinary.

CAC: Even across college?

JM: Across college, yes. We had somebody from architecture outside of CLA. We had somebody from the Business School. We had somebody from the Ag[riculture] School.

CAC: Oof! Who was that?

JM: Phil Raup.

CAC: What did Phil do for you?

JM: Phil was on the committee and he was very supportive. He came in and he'd give lectures about urban economics. He'd talk about clear cutting Richfield.

CAC: Oh, I see.

JM: It was great. It was just fabulous. What I had was this committee that was very broadly reflective of lots of different parts of the university where there were individuals that were interested in things urban, not that the Ag School was interested in it.

CAC: Sure, sure. The university somehow gave a green light to lots of people to do these things in the 1960s and 1970s.

JM: Right. I don't think that same sort of green light is there anymore.

CAC: Remember that. I want to come back to that.

JM: Okay. I stepped into this situation. This committee was already created. I stepped into a situation where I inherited this great committee that was from all over the place and they were so happy to have somebody who was young and energetic, who just wanted to do this thing. They would do pretty much anything I asked them to do. It was terrific. It was really a wonderful time to be doing this sort of thing. As I say, I had just a hugely supportive group of people that were very encouraging. At those times when Urban Studies would get into a little bit of trouble or people would want to chop the budget, I could get John Borchert, and Mahmood Zaidi, and Phil Raup, and Esther Wattenberg to write letters to whomever to say, "Wait a minute."

CAC: [laughter] Where did Mahmood Zaidi get into this?

JM: He was part of the deal; he'd been on the committee forever. It didn't always work, but it was very useful to have heavy hitters that were supportive of what I was trying to do.

CAC: You're naming all senior men.

JM: And Esther. Oh, yes, they were all senior men. That's who was running the joint for the most part. [laughter]

CAC: This was the story of the 1970s. You were really concentrating on Urban Studies, plus the CURA research.

JM: Right.

CAC: What kind of research did you do for publication for them, for example?

JM: I was sort of a generalist person at CURA so they threw lots of things at me. The first year I was there, I mainly worked on reworking my dissertation so they could publish it—which they did. Then, I worked on putting conferences together and things like that.

CAC: I see. It was largely, not entirely, liaison work?

JM: Yes, mostly.

CAC: [unclear] networking and you were pretty good at networking by that time.

JM: Right. By the end of the 1970s, I had developed a research proposal that I wanted to work on. By 1978 or 1979, CURA was now supporting me to do the work that David Lanegran and I did on our book on neighborhoods [*Where We Live: the Residential Districts of Minneapolis*] and also the thing that Lanegran, and Borchert, and [David] Gebhard, and I did on preservation in Minneapolis [*Legacy of Minneapolis* (1983)]. All of those things began to flow out at that point. I was having fun. I was doing all sorts of things that were interesting to me. To get back to the issue that you raised earlier about this being insecure, it was very insecure. I was on a year-to-year contract; but, I didn't think anything of it because I was really enjoying what I was doing.

CAC: You didn't see other young women who were terribly concerned then with establishing and getting their careers going in ways that were leading towards security?

JM: Yes and no. I finished my Ph.D. in the middle of the 1970s when there weren't very many jobs. People would go out on the market and come up with something in some rural place in Montana or something like that. My sense was very strongly that even if I could get a tenure track academic position, it was more important to me to be in a place where I wanted to live and could do work that I wanted to do rather than just get on the treadmill, and go off, and start climbing the ladder. In retrospect, that may not have been the right choice to make; but, I couldn't see any other choice for me, at that point. The fact that there was work that I could do here that people were supportive of seemed the more reasonable thing for me to do than chasing off half way around the country to teach five courses.

CAC: In a way, that made you a sport.

JM: Yes.

CAC: You knew that you were?

JM: Yes.

CAC: While you were doing this Urban Studies and CURA work, you were not actively engaged with the American Studies students or program?

JM: Not much in the period from the time I finished my degree in 1975 until six or so years later. In the early 1980s, I got kind of reconnected.

CAC: How did you get reconnected?

JM: American Studies had never felt very comfortable for me because what I was doing was so far off the beaten path from where everybody else was. By the early 1980s, Mary was retired. Most of the people that had had big time involvement in American Studies were either pushed aside or had drifted aside. There was now a small core of faculty. I was contacted by Ed Griffin who was the new chair of American Studies in the early 1980s. He asked if I would be willing to think about having something to do with the Introductory seminar—which blew me away. [laughter] I'd never had Material and Methods, of course. What did I know? What he had in mind was something that was a serious interdisciplinary effort at the beginning for American Studies graduate students. I absolutely don't even remember how it happened; but somehow, John Modell and I ended up being the two people that were going to teach this.

CAC: Oh, good.

JM: I think it was partly that Ed was interested in having something like an urban and contemporary focus in the Introductory seminar and, then, began casting around for names. He didn't know me; he got my name from somebody. We talked and I said, "Here's what I would think about doing. It would be nice if there were somebody else to do it." He somehow managed to talk John into doing it. What John and I did the first year—it was absolutely experimental; it was very peculiar—was we taught what was the equivalent of a two-quarter graduate seminar in one quarter. We met twice a week, three hours a day. It was a killer; but, it was in the nature of an experiment. We tried very hard to expose the students to a variety of methods of analysis and, obviously, John and I sitting in the same room . . . two completely different perspectives. We're both in a sense urban scholars, but have very, very different approaches to things.

CAC: You both have good antennae.

JM: Yes, I think so. Sure. The first year, we did this mega thing. I'm not sure how it worked. I think it traumatized half the students that were there. It certainly traumatized us. Then, we did it again the next year in a more conventional format, one quarter after another. Then, John left. Then, there was the question of, "Would I continue to do the American Studies Introductory seminar?" I wasn't getting paid for this; this was more service stuff.

CAC: Sure. To whom were you reporting all this time . . . directly to the dean?

JM: Yes, right.

CAC: No intercession at all?

JM: No. I'd go and have a conversation once a year with Fred and he'd say, "What are you doing?" I'd tell him and he'd say, "Fine. Continue."

CAC: [laughter] Was there any point that he was concerned about your lack of foundation to stand on?

JM: I did mention it occasionally.

CAC: You really are a free floater.

JM: Oh, yes. After I had been in this funny position for a couple of years, I mentioned to Fred that since I was directing a program, and teaching undergraduate students, and, at his encouragement, teaching graduate seminars, it seemed to me I was pretty much being a regular faculty and maybe we should make that happen. We had to have that conversation for a long time.

CAC: Then, you find a home to get that?

JM: Yes.

CAC: Why did it end up Geography? It could have been History or American Studies.

JM: The way that whole thing finally played out . . . I continued to teach in American Studies for a few more years. I dragged Harvey Sarles into it; so, Harvey and I taught together for a couple of years. That was pretty interesting.

CAC: Where did you run across Harvey?

JM: I was assigned in 1977 by CURA to work with Harvey because they had given him some money to work on a project. I don't think that they entirely trusted him; so, they wanted somebody that they knew who would actually make sure that the thing got done.

CAC: What was it, do you remember?

JM: He was looking at the decisions that people were making about whether or not to send their children to public schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul. It was very interesting.

CAC: That was an expression of his early interest in education?

JM: Yes, absolutely.

CAC: He was then in Anthropology.

JM: He was in Anthropology. He was an associate professor. He has this kid that's sort of attached to him. It was very peculiar. We got along just fine. When I was to continue teaching American Studies, I thought it would be nice to have somebody else here to do this. I certainly feel thoroughly interdisciplinary myself . . .

CAC: Sure.

JM: . . . but, it's just better to have two bodies. I asked Harvey if he would have any interest in doing it and he did. We did that for a couple of years and that was great fun. After this went on for awhile of me doing all this research stuff—I had two books published in 1983 with a bunch of other people that I'd worked on these things with—I was beginning to be a little restless and would go over and say to the dean occasionally, "You really should fix this." I was feeling that I was being taken advantage of, more than a little.

CAC: Yes, I understand.

JM: We talked that through for more years and, then—it took a long time—I had to mention lawyers. Eventually, the dean's office agreed to, basically, create a position in Urban Studies, which had never existed up until that point, that would be the director of Urban Studies with tenure in a department yet to be determined, depending on who the person was that would get hired. I got to go through a search for the job that I'd been doing for more than ten years.

CAC: Did they really advertise?

JM: Oh, yes, they really advertised. Oh, yes. I got calls from people all over the country saying, "Where are you going?" I responded to them quite honestly. I had no intention of going anywhere.

CAC: I won't say that there were a certain large number of . . . I was debating to say "fictional" or "fraudulent" searches.

JM: This was not a fraudulent search; it was a real search. It was intentionally made a real search because the quarter that it went on, Fred was out of the country so the whole process was run in the dean's office by Craig Swan.

CAC: Whomever was hired, you or X, Y, or Z, had to have also a departmental home?

JM: Exactly. The way the thing was put together was that it was a search with a departmental home to be determined. It was not specific.

CAC: It might have been in Sociology or anywhere?

JM: Or it could have been in History, or Political Science, or whatever. The issue of what my departmental home would be, if it were me, was one that Fred, I think, thought some about because the obvious thing would have been to put me in American Studies because that's where my degree is. He decided, for reasons that have never been clear to me, that he wanted me in Geography. His argument was that, basically, I'd been doing geography for a good long time even though I didn't have a formal degree in it and he saw that as a better home for me than American Studies.

CAC: So, that's the way it turned out?

JM: Right. There was a short list of people. The search process was very funny because I really did get calls from people from all over the country who were going to apply and said, "What's the deal?"

CAC: Sure.

JM: I assured them that they had as good a chance as I did. When it got down to the final cut—this is being very cynical but realistic . . . this was 1988 or 1989—of the committee, there were five people on it: myself and four white men. I was pretty confident at that point.

CAC: Would this have been true of Urban Studies generally that it would be male dominated still by then? Were that many women attracted to that kind of work?

JM: There are but . . .

CAC: Urban Studies is pretty macho stuff, right?

JM: Not really. Women can cut budgets as well as guys can.

CAC: They can. I'm talking about perceptions in the early 1970s. [unclear] available market.

JM: The reality by the end of the 1980s would have been that there were a fair number of women who could have applied for these things. Women, in general, are not as mobile and it was because it was designed as a position with tenure, it meant that you had to be far enough along in your career to be tenured.

CAC: I see. [unclear]?

JM: Yes, exactly. It was pitched to a different group of people. It ended up that there were these four guys and myself; and I was, at that point, reasonably certain that if they didn't choose me, they would be in court. [laughter]

CAC: This is another interdepartmental thing. Here you are in Geography now and they had to dream up something for you to teach in Geography in addition to the Urban Studies thing.

JM: They didn't have to. I had a discussion with Dick Skaggs who was the chairman of the Geography Department and Dick maneuvered this whole thing through the Geography Department. The final vote, as I've been told since I obviously wasn't there for it, was that it was something like fourteen to one in favor of my becoming a member of the Geography Department. I'd hung around the Geography Department for a long time so they all knew what they were getting.

CAC: Sure, of course.

JM: The reality was that I had a talk with Dick when it was at the point of negotiating what I would do. I said, "Look, you've got a whole bunch of Urban [Studies] people in the Geography Department. It doesn't seem reasonable to me to try and be yet another Urban person. I can obviously teach the Twin Cities' course; that's no big deal. In terms of what I do at the graduate level, I'm much more interested in doing space and place kinds of things because, let's face it, Yi Fu Tuan's been gone for eight years and nobody has done anything of that sort.

CAC: Was he gone that long by then?

JM: Yes, he left in the early 1980s.

CAC: Isn't it interesting? He had such an authority in the university while he was here that I assumed it was longer than that.

JM: Yes. The thing that was worked out was that I would teach the Twin Cities' course and I would do space and place courses, which had been lacking from the Geography curriculum since Yi Fu's departure.

CAC: You called it the Meaning of Place?

JM: I teach a course called the Meanings of Place, which Roger Clemence and I teach together.

CAC: Back to team teaching again?

JM: Yes. I like team teaching. I've always liked it. Roger and I had been teaching a course together in some form since the late 1970s. One of the teaching things that I was doing while I was doing American Studies, while I was doing the Urban Studies, was something in architecture.

CAC: Whatever the rubric?

JM: Right. Roger and I had taught together since 1978 or 1979 and the Meanings of Place was a course that evolved out of another course that we taught and got shifted pretty dramatically. The TV course was part of it changing.

CAC: The listener doesn't know about the TV course.

JM: I was asked by Continuing Education and Extension to do a television course on the Twin Cities in the middle of the 1980s and it seemed to me the Twin Cities wasn't very interesting to do a television course on. That wasn't something I really wanted to do and in the course of a conversation with Roger about doing this Twin Cities thing, we got to talking and he was very excited about it. So, over a series of conversations, we ended up with something called the Meanings of Place, which we put together and it is still running in 1994 after eight years or nine years.

CAC: And so is the course. As opposed to the introductory course you invented for Urban Studies . . . I looked that up in the catalog and I didn't think it had a plural on it but you teach it as the Meanings, plural?

JM: Yes.

CAC: I thought it was the Meaning of Place.

JM: No, it should be plural.

CAC: Had you ever studied with Yi Fu Tuan directly or just kind of by osmosis?

JM: No. I'd read some of his stuff; but, by the time I encountered Yi Fu, I was done with my course work.

CAC: But as a colleague, you didn't go to his seminars or work with him in any way?

JM: No, no, no. I had talked with him around the department. We didn't overlap in the department; but, obviously, I knew him.

CAC: He's one person I wish I'd known better.

JM: Yi Fu is an interesting guy, yes. I didn't think that in any way, shape, or form, I could be Yi Fu Tuan. I can't do that.

CAC: Sure.

JM: What I thought I could do, in the context of the Geography Department, was to bring in a kind of cultural perspective because of my American Studies background. It seemed to me that that was something that could usefully be offered. I thought there was no point in my being there if I can't do something. There's no point in my doing yet another Urban . . .

CAC: What kind of students do you attract to that?

JM: The Meanings of Place course attracts a bizarre eclectic group of people. It's cross-listed in Geography and Architecture. We go through a lot of different kinds of configurations of students; but, there are always some Geography undergraduates, occasionally a Geography graduate student, a number of Architecture and Landscape Architecture [LA] undergrads and graduate students, and, then, these really interesting people who come from Studio Arts, and Theater, and Photography. Every quarter, we have some off the wall person that's just kind of found this, that turns out to be terrific. It's a course that we have a really good time with. It's one that we really work the students very hard in. We have them do lots of different things. They do a lot of writing.

CAC: Do they do field work?

JM: They have to do a team field project.

CAC: You teach by teams then?

JM: Yes.

CAC: How does that work? That's a pedagogical invention . . . not of yours I know; but, not very many people use it.

JM: It's wonderful because one of the things that Roger and I know, because we've taught together for so long, is that you learn a lot from one another. If you just maximize the number of people that you're interacting with, there's lots more learning potential there. In every course, that we've ever taught, we've always had a group field project.

CAC: You knew that this was a pedagogical device used occasionally in other disciplines?

JM: Oh, absolutely.

CAC: You know that [unclear]?

JM: Yes, and I know it's difficult . . .

CAC: Profoundly.

JM: . . . particularly at an institution like this where everybody is coming at different times and has different schedules.

CAC: Each has his own agenda.

JM: Yes. One of the things that's very interesting is the process of putting together the teams of people for the Meanings of Place course. I'm in charge of that. The first day, we have a list of all of the students and we have them say something about themselves so that I know something about what their academic background is and what their growing up experience has been. I put together the teams in such a way that, insofar as possible, there is no more than one person from any discipline on it so that they are forced to bring different perspectives and sort of throw them out.

CAC: Of those undergraduates, not many of them have a high sense of discipline in any case.

JM: They do amazing things. There's amazing stuff that comes out of this course. It's really quite extraordinary. Part of that is that they're in this environment where they're throwing things up against what other people have to say. It's wonderful. It's probably the best teaching experience. Roger says flat out, "It's the best teaching experience he's ever had."

CAC: How do you work the logistics of who takes leadership? These are teams of three, four, five?

JM: These are teams of four or five usually.

CAC: How do they work out their own agenda of work?

JM: It depends. The first few years that we did this course, it was pretty structured. We said, "The field project is going to be parks," or "The field project is going to be shopping malls, and you have to go pick one and go and do it."

CAC: Oh, good.

JM: Nah, nah. Those were okay.

CAC: Oh, sure.

JM: In the last two years, partly because I got tired of figuring out what they should do, I said, "Let's put the teams together and let's have them come up with their own project."

CAC: Fair enough.

JM: That's been so much better! It's been amazing the kinds of things . . .

CAC: In one quarter, that's hard to pull off.

JM: It's hard to pull off, but they do it.

CAC: Name me a couple. What do they come up with?

JM: This last spring, we had one group that wanted to investigate the airport—so they did.

CAC: How would they know what questions to ask about the airport?

JM: They are looking at it as a space and place so they're asking people about how they use it, how they spend their time . . .

CAC: Oh, I see.

JM: The economics of the thing don't matter.

CAC: I had a colleague who used to go out and watch the planes come as a chief recreation.

JM: Sure.

CAC: There was also a good bar there.

JM: Another team did an extraordinary thing looking at the railroad edge of downtown. They walked the railroad edge of downtown from about Cedar Lake to the river. All of these teams photograph things. They talk to people. They do terrific work. It's just fabulous!

CAC: How many students do you have in all . . . twenty-five, thirty?

JM: It's limited to twenty because we don't want it to get too unmanageable. That's a course that continues to be a delight to teach. The other thing I do is a graduate level Space and Place seminar because it seemed to me from having taught the Meanings of Place course with Roger

that there are graduate students in there who take it who really want more than what they're getting. They learned something and they enjoyed the experience; but, they really want to learn the literature. What I do in the Space and Place seminar, which I teach every other year, is explore the literature much more.

CAC: Then, you can do Yi Fu formally, [unclear]?

JM: Exactly. Precisely.

CAC: Do you do landscape architecture in that, then?

JM: We do landscape architecture in the Meanings of Place course more than anything else. That comes in because there are always LA students that are in it.

CAC: Do they read [John Brinckerhoff] Jackson?

JM: Oh, we always read Jackson, sure. We read Jackson, and [D.W.] Meinig, and all the old stalwarts. The thing that doesn't happen in the Meanings of Place course that I know needs to happen in the graduate seminar is that because we're doing so much in the Meanings of Place, and it's all coming very fast, there isn't a lot of time for critical analysis of what they're reading. That's really what happens at a much higher plain in the graduate seminar. Some people do take both. I've had students that have done the fun one and, then, want to come and do the hard work one.

CAC: This is a very engaging story you tell.

JM: A structured career, right? [laughter]

CAC: I guess I would like to ask you to reflect, therefore, on certain themes. When I came here in the early 1950s, 1951, there was a Social Science program, a Humanities program, an American Studies program, a Natural Science . . . a lot of interdisciplinary things. Then, you get the Urban Studies breakthrough. Then, you get Afro-American Studies, which has to be. Then, you get Women's Studies; that has to be interdisciplinary. Now, you've been describing a number of things here that are really cross-disciplinary. I'm going to make a statement, but it has a question mark at the end. I have a sense from talking with others and from having lived through these things myself with a different home base, of course, that the kind of teaching that you do, and the kind of research that you do, the kind of outreach that you do is not as powerful now in the university as it was twenty years ago? I'm thinking not only of your career but of . . .

JM: I guess I would say, "Yes and no." There's not much institutional support for doing this sort of thing; but, there never really has been. Most of the cross-disciplinary, interdisciplinary units have had to fight for everything they've got. I don't think that that is necessarily a change. There's a change in the sense of there being fewer faculty now who are willing to step outside

a pretty narrow career path that they've identified for themselves. I find it interesting that the people, historically . . . I suppose if I tried to do the same thing right now, the people from other parts of the university that I could draw into conversations about Urban Studies would be people who have been around here a long time, not people that are relatively new or just getting started because there isn't encouragement in departments to go someplace else, and find out what's happening, and work with other people. We've become a much more careerist kind of institution, I think, than this place was when I was a graduate student here. I sense that when I was a graduate student, whether it was you, or whether it was Paul Murphy, or whoever, people could come over to American Studies from the History Department and there wasn't a penalty for that. There may have been; but, it seemed that there was a kind of largess that was available. I don't think that that's the case institutionally anymore. I'm not even sure I could point to when exactly it changed.

CAC: Do you think it's part of a national trend?

JM: I suspect it is because interdisciplinary stuff . . .

CAC: Why? What's gone out of the excitement?

JM: I'm not sure that there's any less excitement there. When I go to Urban Affairs' meetings, the national organization, it's a terrific group of people and they're doing great stuff and everybody is lively and excited. That doesn't happen when I go to the Geography meetings. There's a kind of attitude in people who are interested in and have some level of commitment to cross-disciplinary work that doesn't happen among people that are just doing straight, down the path, follow the red line kind of things, I think. I've always thought that. It's always seemed to me that people that are stepping outside the boundaries of the thing that they've been trained to do are people who have questions, and who have interests, and who have the ability to take in new information, and process that, and add it to what they already know as opposed to just closing off right here. I know this piece of thing and that's all I'm ever going to know.

CAC: You know a lot of departments right now and you know them historically. In how many of those line departments, Geography, History, American Studies, is this, indeed, the case that there's a willingness to dare and to experiment?

JM: Not very many.

CAC: You attribute that primarily to careerism?

JM: I think it's careerism. I think it's the general temper of the times that we've lived through in the last decade of so.

CAC: Why would that force people back to the discipline, away from cross-disciplinary asking of questions?

JM: I think it probably got to the point where a lot of the questions that were getting asked were either very hard in the sense that they don't have obvious answers . . .

CAC: Never did.

JM: Right . . . or really challenging the status quo. That's certainly the case with Women's Studies and it's certainly the case with Com[position] Lit[erature] in terms of rattling the cages and saying, "Pshaw. No, it's deconstructionism, and semeiotics, and all of that and you folks don't know what you're talking about." I think some of it is that; but, people just get tired of doing more than they have to do all of the time.

CAC: The rewards aren't in it.

JM: The reality is the rewards are not there for doing interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary work. There aren't very many people in regular departments whose departments think that they should be rewarded for doing something someplace else.

CAC: In the meantime, you're rewarded or not for doing work in the community as well?

JM: I do a lot of work in the community and I always have. My sense is that that's not taken very seriously inside the university. There's a lot of rhetoric in the university about outreach and community service. I think it's rhetoric; I don't think it's real. People that are out there doing things get very little recognition or reward for whatever it is that they're doing.

CAC: Tell posterity about the kind of work you do in the community.

JM: I've always been available as a resource to community groups. I do lots, and lots, and lots of lectures.

CAC: When you say community groups, what do you mean?

JM: Sometimes, it's neighborhood organizations or, sometimes, it's groups of people like Elderhostel. I do these Elderhostel lectures all the time. I probably have done eight so far this year with six more lined up.

CAC: Ahhh.

JM: I'm very popular on the Elderhostel circuit.

CAC: We old folks like you.

JM: [laughter] I also serve on panels and commissions at the city level or the Metropolitan Council. For the last three years, I've been on the City Planning Commission for the city of Minneapolis.

CAC: What does that do?

JM: It gets them a really good head thinking about their problems.

CAC: Do they listen?

JM: Sometimes, not always. It's politics, right? You do what you can.

CAC: You don't think you're back in Chicago?

JM: Oh, I'm not back in Chicago, no. If I were back in Chicago, I'd know who is the person to talk to get the thing done. That's not how it works here. It's an interesting thing for me to be as involved as I am in the community. It's escalated a lot in the last few years since I got appointed to the planning commission three years ago.

CAC: How many folks serve on the planning commission?

JM: There are nine members on the planning commission.

CAC: That's pretty small.

JM: Five of us are appointed by the mayor and the other four serve as a consequence of their other appointments with the city council park board and like that.

CAC: Ex officio.

JM: Oh, no. They're very official. They vote. They're members.

CAC: But, they're there because they are on the park board or . . .

JM: Exactly. Because of my involvement with the planning commission, my visibility in the community has increased pretty dramatically; although, my visibility has been at a pretty high level for awhile. When people call the university, for example, if there's something going on in the cities and they want expert analysis, they want a ten-second sound bite or something like that . . . I've been getting those sorts of calls for ten or fifteen years. When a reporter calls the news service and says, when something is happening somewhere, "We want to talk to somebody." They give them my name. I end up talking to reporters all over the country about a variety of more and less interesting things.

CAC: The department [unclear] your merit, that is your salary, are not deeply moved by this?

JM: They are not deeply moved by that. Exactly. [laughter] I think that's fair to say.

CAC: But, it enriches the teaching that you're doing on the campus?

JM: Enormously. Absolutely, yes. I have a sense of that, but I also have, in a way, interesting sort of external validation. One of the things that Roger Clemence and I do as part of the Meetings of Place course every quarter is I lead a walking tour of downtown Minneapolis. Roger made the comment this past spring that since I've been a member of the planning commission, there's just more stuff that comes out. You just know so much more and there is always this anecdotal stuff that naturally would happen.

CAC: Yes, of course.

JM: My sense is, yes, the students' education is being enormously enriched by the kinds of activities that I do off campus; but, I don't think that there's much appreciation or validation for that inside the university—that's not the reason you do it.

CAC: Sure. I'm pausing. We've covered a lot of territory and I'm wondering whether you have any—not ultimate, you're too young to have ultimate reflections— . . .

JM: [laughter] I think not ultimate reflections. It's interesting to me to think about; I was thinking about this a little last night . . . I think of myself as someone who grew up in Chicago but, in a way, I also grew up here.

CAC: Oh, yes.

JM: I've essentially spent my entire adult working career at the University of Minnesota, which is a little peculiar, given my age and what's gone on in the world for people my age . . . changing careers four or five times. To have that kind of stability is really unusual. It's sort of funny when I talk with people who have been around for a long time. There are a bunch of people in my department who are not retiring who came in 1965 and I think, I came in 1970 and I still have twenty-five more years to go. [laughter] So, what makes you so special, right? I have the perception of this place both as a student and as a non-student and there aren't very many faculty members that have that kind of perspective. It's changed so much in the twenty years since I was a student here that I would in no way, shape, or form say it's the same; but, I have some sense of the kinds of things that the kids are complaining about when they're complaining and the kinds of problems that they have because I was close to that at one point.

CAC: How about the complaints and grievances of your fellow faculty members?

JM: [sigh] Oh, well, they're so myriad and various.

CAC: I'll make a statement again and ask you to respond to it. Many people say, "The last four or five or six years morale is not very good among faculty."

JM: I know that people say that and I know that when you walk around the university or just look at people in this building . . . If you were an objective analyst who was just coming onto campus and had to judge something about how good people felt about where they work by how they looked as they're walking, you'd think this is a place full of manic depressives. There aren't very many people that appear to enjoy much what they're doing. I think part of that is that there's relatively little recognition for most things that people do. It's not that you need to be patted on the back all the time . . .

CAC: It helps.

JM: It's not a big deal if a colleague has a book published or something like that to say, "Congratulations. Good for you." That kind of thing doesn't happen much anymore. I've heard from a variety of people, not just here but at other institutions, about the way things used to be, so when it was the old boys' club and the old boys all kind of kept tabs on one another . . . that kind of civility. It may have just been a veneer, but there was something of that sort there. Now, my sense is that people are so busy and so dragged off in different directions, and everybody is sitting with their own little computer, and there's not much interaction of a personal nature going on that that has changed the institution.

CAC: It's a kind of fragmentation that shows up in the difficulty of staging cross-disciplinary [unclear].

JM: Sure, sure. Absolutely.

CAC: That's kind of a persisting theme.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[End of the Interview]

Transcribed by:

Hermes Transcribing and Research Service
12617 Fairgreen Avenue, Apple Valley, MN 55124
(612) 953-0730