Interview with **Albert Shanker**
Date: November 15, 1988
Interviewer: Louis Massiah
Camera Rolls: 3072-3075
Sound Rolls: 334-335
Team: C

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Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in ***bold italics*** was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #3072]
[sound roll #334]

00:00:12:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:00:14:00

Interviewer:

OK. We're gonna begin in the spring of '67. The Ford Foundation, with the UF—and, and the UFT come together and, with a proposal which leads to the Ocean Hill-Brownsville experiment. It's, it's a very unique coalition of, of labor, a community group, foundation and government. What did, what did you hope that this coalat-coalition could achieve?

00:00:37:00

Albert Shanker:

I'd hoped that we could develop a kind of cooperation between parents and community groups on one hand and the, and the union on the other. We were moving along trying to get something that we called the More Effective Schools which was a plan which had very small

class size and kids could enter in the morning and, and, and have care and education all day. And there were summer programs and there were, it was just very rich in facilities, and we, we were trying to get support for this. At the same time, of course, there were movements for greater parental involvement and community involvement, and we had a, a kind of a shootout at IS201 just before this where some community groups, who wanted a Black principal fell into conflict with the school. And what we were tryin' to do is show that we didn't have to have conflict all the time, that we could support greater parental involvement, and we hoped that, that the parents would support the things that we wanted, because after all they were basically good for education. And we thought that this could be done in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, that we could show that parents and teachers could support each other in these goals.

00:01:53:00

Interviewer:

OK. Now, fall of '67 there, there's a strike that's, that, that happened. It's called in September. I, I'm interested, what was your reaction when McCoy, Rhody McCoy and the Governing Board decided to keep the schools open during that fall '67 strike, particularly in light of this coalition that, that you had been trying to achieve?

00:02:14:00

Albert Shanker:

Well, I, everybo—the whole management of the school system was tryin' to keep it open. Now, it was kind of silly because—Mayor Lindsay was tryin' to keep it open. Mayor Lindsay told me most teachers are not going to go out on strike, this is a good salary increase. And he said only thirteen thousand showed up to vote, the other people are gonna go in, and he didn't understand the union. But, nevertheless, the position of the Superintendent of Schools, the Board of Education, the Mayor was, during all strikes, that we're gonna keep our schools open. And so I was not surprised when, when Rhody McCoy said the same thing, after all he was an administrator in the school system, as far as I was concerned. What did shock me were, was that in, in other schools, it just meant we're gonna open the door, we hope the teachers will come in, but we're not gonna go out and threaten them, and any kids who are around can come in, and then the principals were given the right to close the schools if it was dangerous, that is if all the kids were there and there weren't any teachers there. But what happened with McCoy was it was not just a routine following of the directive to, to have the school door open and hope that some teachers would come in, or even to try to hire, all the schools tried to hire parents. The parents worked for one day [laughs] and then they left very, very quickly. But the, the problem with, with McCoy and his district was the, the threats against teachers, If you don't come in, we don't want you back. We're gonna call the local draft board, your job here is keeping you out of Vietnam. You got out on strike, your choice is, you either scab and come in here or you're going to Vietnam. So, it was a kind of bitterness, a kind of pressure. It wasn't just the, the bureaucrats saying, Yeah, we're gonna

keep the place open. It was, it was the kinda stuff that the worst anti-union employers used, which had by and large just, you know, this was not the first strike in New York City.

00:04:16:00

Interviewer:

OK. But particularly in light of this coalition, were you particularly, were you surprised that, that this, this community, Ocean Hill-Brownsville, should react so much to, to break the coalition?

00:04:27:00

Albert Shanker:

Well, it wasn't the community. There's no evidence that, that the parents wanted the schools to be treated any differently. I mean, all parents basically are against strikes. They want their children to be able to go to school. It's also inconvenient for many of them, they have to go to work and they haven't made provisions. So, you can't blame parents for being angry about it. But there's no evidence that the community in Ocean Hill-Brownsville wanted Rhody McCoy to do any of these things. There wasn't the co—I never viewed that as a community expression. It was Rhody McCoy decided to do it, or the Governing Board, but they were never elected by anyone.

00:05:06:00

Interviewer:

OK, that, that, that's an-another area. How would you evaluate the job that the commu-community board was trying to do in the beginning? And talk about the process that, how the community board came about. What, what's your evaluation of the community board and the job they were tryin' to do, the job that they were doing, I should say?

00:05:26:00

Albert Shanker:

Well, I would say that, in first place, it's, it's important to note they weren't elected. In the second place, I, I, I wasn't, you know, part of, of all of the discussions and trials and tribulations, but they had support from the central board and they had support from the union at the beginning. And over a fairly short period of time they really managed to lose a good deal of that support, and I believe they also lost a good of deal of support that they might have had within their own community. The fact that they were, there were discussions about employing Herman Ferguson, who was part of the Revolutionary Action Movement, was indicted for conspiracy to murder civil rights leaders. It, it obviously, in a fairly short period of time, became something that moved away from the notion of education and moved very

heavily into, into politics, a type of radical and perhaps violent politics. So that was, that, that was a, I would say, a major shortcoming.

00:06:42:00

Interviewer:

OK. Now when Rhody McCoy was, was chosen to be the unit administrator, actually this happened during the summer, what was your reaction? And there had been another candidate, a guy named Jack Bloomfield, who was a principal and was, had been favored by many of the teachers. What, what was your reaction when, when McCoy was chosen to be unit administrator?

00:07:02:00

Albert Shanker:

I had no problem. Rhody called me either just before or just at the time he got the job, and I remember that we were in negotiations and he came in and we had breakfast together at a hotel where the negotiations were taking place. And he was very friendly, he'd reminded me that we had met several times before. As a matter of fact, he ended up teaching in the school where I used to be a kid, and went to that elementary school. And we chatted and I offered him, you know, cooperation and support. I didn't know him, really, and I didn't know Jack Bloomfield either. There might very well have been a stronger feeling on the part of teachers in the district for Bloomfield 'cause they knew him, but as far as I was concerned, it really didn't make any difference to us. My view was that we represent the teachers and we should not play very much of a role in selection of management. We'll work with anybody who, who is management, provided that they're not out to destroy us or break the union or anything like that. But the, we never played a role, for instance, in, in those days, in, in tryin' to pick who the Superintendent of Schools was, not our job.

00:08:11:00

Interviewer:

OK. Just backing up. You had talked about this element of radicalism somehow affecting this Governing Board. Where, where was this coming from? What, did, you saw it coming from the Governing Board. When, when, when did you first see it, and, and where did you think it was coming from?

00:08:27:00

Albert Shanker:

I didn't know where it was coming from. There were, there were flyers. When this experiment started, when the demonstration dis—district was created or, teachers were

divided. The union centrally was very much in favor of it, supported it very strongly. There were some teachers in the, in the district who supported it very warmly, who had had very close relationships with many of the people on the, on the community board and who worked closely with them. There were other teachers who were kinda wait and see. And there were still others who were just sort of shell-shocked. I mean, they, they did not want to have a community board. They didn't wanna have a, they want, didn't want to have a selection of principals, and, and there were a number of things that happened during that first year. There was literature that was passed around, mostly unsigned. Some of it was hate whitey types of stuff, or anti-Semitic literature, some of it was anti-union. So, there's, you could not tell where this was coming from, nobody knew. Is it, now obviously the teachers who were very much against the experiment were saying, Look, this is coming from the Governing Board, and the other teachers were saying, No, this is some, any nut can print this sorta thing. We don't know where it's coming from. But there was a good deal of unease. And I would say, for some teachers, there was a good deal of hysteria during that early period. And one of the roles which the union played was that we actually, we, we, we helped the district to say, Well, if you don't want these teachers and they don't want to be here, let's find a way of transferring them because we would like to have people who feel comfortable with and who support the experiment. And during that first year we actually assisted a number of teachers who were opposed and who were hysterical, we, we assisted them transfer to other schools, to other districts.

Interviewer:

OK. You were very much in—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Just checking the [unintelligible] three minutes.

00:10:24:00

Interviewer:

You, you were very much involved with the civil rights movement in Selma, the pool integration at the University of Il—Illinois, the March on Washington. Did you see this effort in Ocean Hill-Brownsville for community control as part of this movement, or was this a divergence?

00:10:40:00

Albert Shanker:

Well, at the early stage I didn't see it particularly as part of the movement, and I didn't see it against the movement, I just saw it as an effort to try to get parent and community and union cooperation. I saw it, in a way, as kind of a backward move. And that is that this was a period of time in which there was a good deal of frustration about whether it was possible to

integrate schools especially, and other institutions as well. This came after coining the, the, the—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Albert Shanker:

—slogan Black Power which in a sense is, it, it's part of the development of the Black movement, but I would say it's not a development of the integration movement, and—

00:11:23:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's cut. I'm sorry.

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK, that's rollout on camera roll 3072.

[cut]

[camera roll #3073]

00:11:32:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:11:35:00

Interviewer:

OK, you were talking about the Meredith March and what was, that point, that time in, in the movement and how that affected you.

Albert Shanker:

Well, to me, this was, this was in, in a sense a result of the frustrations that came. To me—

Interviewer:

Rephrase, just say what you're talking about again. Once again.

00:11:55:00

Albert Shanker:

Well, the, the, the issue was whether this move of developing a community school district in Ocean Hill-Brownsville was part of, whether I saw it as part of the civil rights movement. I must say at the time that I, that I didn't see it as part of the civil rights movement. To me, the civil rights movement was the movement for integration and the movement to eliminate desegregation [sic]. In a sense, this represented a kind of backward step. It represented a step by, by people in the community saying, We've given up on integration, so we want to take hold of our own schools. And it represented a move by the union saying, OK, we're willing to work to help you improve your own schools. So, it was, at the—I, I just viewed it as, as being something which was a very different turn, a ver-very different from what the civil rights movement had represented. I, I didn't, I didn't feel that it was, it was part of that movement. And in its, in its most extreme manifestation, such as, such as IS201 which had taken place just before that, I felt that it ran counter to the civil rights movement because it was a movement that demanded that, instead of demanding integration and demanding kind of a, a movement away from color consciousness, that decisions were about to be made on the basis of color, except that here, a person who is White couldn't be principal. [laughs]

00:13:25:00

Interviewer:

OK. Remember just to look, look at me rather than the camera. The process that the Governing Board had set up for selecting teachers and principals, how did you feel about that, their, their process for hiring?

Albert Shanker:

Well, we, there was a good deal of unease about that, but we were willing to—

Interviewer:

And you might just rephrase, the process for hiring.

00:13:48:00

Albert Shanker:

The pro-the process for hiring teachers and principals, first of all, there were teachers there already and they were, by and large, they were staying. We had been quite critical of the Board of Examiners, because the kinds of examination and process they had was not a, a very

effective one. For many years we supported the process because we didn't want to revert to a political process. The reason we had this civil service bureaucracy was that you wanted to prevent jobs from being bought and sold. And it was also a way of trying to prevent discrimination, if people took an exam and it was scored by somebody who didn't see you, that was supposed to assure fairness. It might be irrelevant, but at least it was fair. But we were willing to make the exception here and we did make the exception as an experiment to see how, how it would work out. Although, again, as I said, there, there was a good deal of unease about it.

00:14:42:00

Interviewer:

OK. Now, in November of '67 McGeorge Bundy, who, who led this commission, empowered by John Lindsay, they issued their report for recommendations for decentralization. What, what was your personal reaction to that report, seeing how you didn't have an involvement with the Ford Foundation at that time?

00:15:05:00

Albert Shanker:

Well, my personal reaction was that it was, my, my personal reaction was that the recommendations that were made were, were very bad recommendations. They were going to, they were gonna permanently build segregation into the system. They were going to create governance structures around the city. I mean, ori—the original Bundy Report recommended a much large number of districts as I recall. I don't remember if it was sixty four or, or maybe even more than that. It was, I felt that it was going to be very, very destructive of, of education in the city. And I, matter of fact I had a meeting with McGeorge Bundy, I had several of 'em, and at one point I, I asked him, Do you really think that dividing the city up into sixty four districts and having parents pick boards and principals and teachers that, is that gonna make Johnny read? And he said, Well, no, but they won't blame you and they won't blame the mayor. It was kind of, Well, we couldn't do it in Vietnam, either they do it themselves. It was sort of the Vietnamization program except it was bring brought to, to Ocean Hill-Brownsville. I wasn't happy with that kind of an answer because I felt that it would result in a kind of political turmoil in almost every district in the city. It would drive professionals out, and that it would result in the deterioration of education.

00:16:45:00

Interviewer:

OK. Now, May of '68, the Governing Board chooses to transfer the teachers and, in all nineteen people. How did you find out about this May, these May '68 transfers and, and what was your reaction?

00:17:01:00

Albert Shanker:

Well, you ask me about the transfers, but they weren't transfers because the Governing Board had no more right to transfer these teachers out than I have the right to transfer you to the Soviet Union. That is, transfer is something that's accomplished by a high authority who has control over School A and School B and I say, I'm transferring you from School A, because I'm the superintendent, and I'm transferring you to School B where I'm also the superintendent. But how can somebody say, I'm transferring you out of this district? To where? Rhody McCoy didn't have any control over any schools out of the district. So, if I say, I'm transferring you out of the United States, [laughs] what am I doing? I'm not transferring you, I'm firing you [laughs] because there was no place that he had the right to, to send them to.

00:17:49:00

Interviewer:

And how did you find out about this, this action by the Governing Board?

00:17:53:00

Albert Shanker:

I received a phone call from one or two of the teachers who'd had—the teachers got letters in their boxes. And one of the teachers got the letter but it was meant for someone else, but he happened to have the same name, and they said, You got the letter, you're the one who's being transferred, even though the wrong person got it. By the way, not all the people who got these letters were White. The majority were White, but there were a number of Blacks among them. But we have, since the purpose of pushing them out was punishment, it was really, We're either firing you or this is a punitive, we don't want you. You're no good, so get out. Our answer was very simple, Look, we live in a democratic society and if somebody, if you claim that somebody's done something wrong and oughta be fired, those people have a right to due process. They have a right to arbitration. They have, first of all they have a right to know why. Why do you wanna get rid of these people? What are the reasons? We got no answer. Once you get the reason why, you take it to a judge or you take it to an arbitrator and say, OK, you present your case and these people present their case, and some impartial person makes a decision. But the, Rhody McCoy and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Board said, No, we're not giving you the reasons. We have, we have total power. We have total community control. We have, we're gonna do this. We're not gonna let anybody else listen. Well, from my point of view this is, you know, this, in, in any other part of the country it woulda been called mob rule, taking the law into your own hands. I mean, if somebody says, Look, I'm gonna fire you or I'm gonna shoot you or I'm gonna do this, I'm not telling you why and there's no court and there's no jury and there's no appeal or anything else, I'm just telling you, and that's, that's, that's what I was faced with there.

00:19:46:00

Interviewer:

OK. Why was it necessary to strike Ocean Hill-Brownsville in May of '68? Why, why, why did it have to come to that?

00:19:52:00

Albert Shanker:

Well, we didn't strike Ocean Hill-Brownsville in May of '68. First we asked for reasons. We were refused the reasons. Then we were asked, we asked for hearings and we didn't get the hearings, and then we struck those schools because we said, Look you're violating the law. We, by the way, we called on the mayor. We took ads in newspapers. We took radio things. We called on the Central Board of Education saying Look this is, this is a country which has laws, it has rules, it has regulations. We have a contract. Give us access to a peaceful way of handling this and that's all we want. We're not saying these people, these teachers have to remain here. But we're saying, we're not gonna make the decision and neither is Rhody McCoy, it's gonna be handled the way it's always handled in a democratic society. When all these doors were shut, that's when we said, Well, we have no choice. You're acting strictly on a basis of power. We have to act strictly on that basis 'cause we have no other doors open to us. You won't even tell us why. And that's when we shut down the schools in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Now, we did, the next month, however, these teachers did get a hearing before Judge Francis E. Rivers, a Vice President of the NAACP and prominent person in the civil rights movement. And Judge Francis Rivers dismissed the charges against all these teachers, said that they, that they oughta be sent back.

00:21:19:00

Interviewer:

OK. During the summer of '68, did you think some accord could be reached? Did you think it was possible to sort of put the experiment back together again?

00:21:29:00

Albert Shanker:

Well, I was hoping that the, that the city would exert authority and would say to Rhody McCoy and to the Governing Board, Look, you've got a good experiment going there. The union will still work with you, and we will work with you, but, you know, this is a democratic country and you can't say you're gonna take the law into your own hands. These teachers have been declared innocent, and sometimes we don't agree when we try to fire somebody, but the union has to live by the law, and the Central Board and the President of

the United States has to live by the law, and you have to live by the law too and take these people back and we can continue. If you don't, we're gonna suspend your rights and we're gonna see to it that the law is enforced. That's what I was hoping would happen.

00:22:18:00

Interviewer:

Now, now what about your negotiations with John Lindsay, the mayor of New York? What, what, what was he saying to you at that time?

Albert Shanker:

He was saying, You're absolutely right, Al.

Interviewer:

Could you just say—

00:22:27:00

Albert Shanker:

John, John, we had many talks with John Lindsay, and John Lindsay was saying, You're absolutely right, Al. Terrible thing.

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Albert Shanker:

These teachers should not have been bounced.

00:22:37:00

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

Camera Crew Member #2:

That's rollout.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yes.

[cut]

[camera roll #3074]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Roll 3074. Time code fourteen fifteen.

00:22:44:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:22:46:00

Interviewer:

OK. Could you talk about your conversations with Mayor John Lindsay during the summer of '68 period?

00:22:53:00

Albert Shanker:

We had, I had many conversations with John Lindsay and, and hoped that he would use his influence as mayor to pressure the School Board, the Superintendent, and indeed to pressure Ocean Hill-Brownsville and, and to say that, Look you've, these teachers have now been before a judge and he has ruled that they have a right to go back and you've gotta take 'em back. Otherwise, we're gonna have act against you the same as we would against a principal or anybody else in the school system who's violating the law. He didn't do that. All I ever heard from John Lindsay is, Al, you're absolutely right. Those teachers are innocent. This never should've happened, it's terrible. But think of the city. I can't force those teachers to go back there 'cause otherwise the city will burn down. They will burn the city down. We've got to keep the city cool. Look what's happening in other cities across the country. So, the whole thing was kind of a, it was always, You're right, but you're not lookin' at the big picture and the big picture is violence. And, and I said, Mr. Mayor, you can't govern a city on the basis of constantly being threatened. I mean, what's the next thing that's gonna happen? What's the one after that? You can always have a threat hanging over you that the place is gonna blow up or be burned down. I can't run a union that way. You can't run a city that way. And that's precisely why I'm gonna stand up here, because if I don't stand up on the issue in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, there is not a principal in the city who won't say, I'm transferring you out,

meaning transferring you to where? This will be copied all over the place. And what, what kind of a school system do you have, what kind of a society do you have if everybody can go around doing this without, without any decency and without any procedures and without any rights?

00:24:34:00

Interviewer:

OK. And also, what about your negotiations with the Governing Board? Did you meet with Rhody McCoy and, and people from the Governing Board like Reverend Oliver or Father Powis or any of the parents during that summer period?

00:24:47:00

Albert Shanker:

We met. There was an effort to mediate the dispute by Theodore Keel, and there were meetings with members of the Governing Board in his office where we were trying to work out a procedure. All right, you don't like Judge Francis E. Rivers, let's have another panel which will make these decisions. And so, we were in the same room there. I should say that just before this whole thing happened that, that I met with Rhody McCoy in my office and that he said he needed help on educational programs, and we—this whole thing was a shock because Rhody came and asked for help and we were about to put together a conference with members of the Governing Board and with educational experts and with our own teachers. But we had a, we, we made a few efforts to put it together but they did not work. The, the Governing Board refused any efforts at any other procedure that might result in any turnaround of what they had done.

00:25:44:00

Interviewer:

OK. Fall of '68, what effect is the strike having on teachers within the union? What, what's, what are they saying to you dur-during that time?

00:25:54:00

Albert Shanker:

Well, I had more support from teachers than I'd ever had in any previous strike. It was, it was very effective. And they supported the, the reasons for the strike and they saw it very clearly which was kind of interesting 'cause there wasn't any direct money involved, and also basically they were, they were out in order to defend certain basic principles. The idea that you have a right to a hearing and you have a right to a, to a reason for why you're being discharged. After the strike went on for a little while I met with a number of the Black

leaders within the union and said, Look, this obviously has to be creating some special problems for, for Black teachers because you have people out there saying it's a Black-White issue and here you are, you're out. And I urged them to hold a, a special meeting where they would be able to—of Black teachers, where they'd be able to discuss the special problems and special concerns. Sid Harris, who was one of our officers and Black, strongly argued against it. He said, Gee, if you have such a meeting, it's a, you, you don't know where it's gonna go and it's gonna be pretty bad. Well, there was such a meeting and at that meeting there were leaders of, of Ocean Hill-Brownsville and other Black teachers who were opposed to the strike. And the result was that there was a, at that time, a split, that is Dick Parish, who was one of our officers, came out saying, saying that it was a racist strike. And when I saw Dick I said, Dick, how could you urge Black teachers to go in? He said, I didn't urge 'em to go in. I'm not going in. I'm a loyal union supporter. And I said, Dick, if I believed this were a racist strike, I would go in. And, so we, we continued to have that, that argument. And, and, and Black teachers, of course, were very torn, as was, as were some Whites. And there were, there were some who did cross the picket lines and some who stayed out but who disagreed, but I would say that of all the strikes we've ever had, that even with that division, that the, the support was overwhelming and, and it was overwhelming among White teachers, but it was also majority support among Black teachers.

00:28:16:00

Interviewer:

What, what role in Ocean Hill-Brownsville do—does anti-Semitism play in the, in the development of, of events? Do you think it's a key ingredient to, to what was happening in terms of the, the resistance to certain teachers in the schools?

Albert Shanker:

Well, it beco—it became very important as the strike went on.

Interviewer:

If you could just rephrase it, "anti-Semitism."

00:28:36:00

Albert Shanker:

Yes, anti-Semitism was not, it certainly had nothing to do with starting the strike, and it had nothing to do with keeping the strike going, it had nothing to do with the settlement. It had an awful lot to do with how people came to see the strike in public terms. During the year before the strike, there were some anonymous materials that were put out. During the course of the strike, several of the leaders of the Afro-American Teachers Association distributed—and as a matter of fact some of the official literature of the Afro-American Teachers Association contained anti-Semitic pieces. And this then, the issue of anti-Semitism became a very

important issue in terms of its identification with an organization which at that time had not been a very active or strong organization, and it's circulation within Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Now, also there were, as these teachers had tried to return to their schools or as they walked the picket line, there were, there were a substantial number of anti-Semitic incidents, not just during the strike but befo—before the strike as well. So, that anti-Semitism was, was one of the issues, but I would say that the issue wasn't essentially anti-Semitism. The issue became, will those Black people who are prominent in this particular community, is this a district that's going to run on the basis of prejudice and discrimination? Is it gonna, i-is this part of how the, the Governing Board operates? And then one of the principals was a person who made remarks not only against Jews, she made remarks against other ethnic groups so that you had the beginnings of an identification of support for Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Now, of course, Ocean Hill-Brownsville was not responsible for what was put out by these groups except that usually, if you have somebody supporting you who makes racist remarks, you should repudiate them. And they weren't repudiated. These groups were embraced, unfortunately.

00:30:50:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut. We're just gonna change tapes.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Cut, you said?

Interviewer:

Yes.

[cut]

[camera roll #3075]

[sound roll #335]

00:30:53:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:30:55:00

Interviewer:

OK. Just, just to finish up on that anti-Semitism. The, the anti-Semitic leaflet that was reprinted by the UFT, why was that printed—

[microphone problem]

Albert Shanker:

—was a mistake because I think—

Interviewer:

Just rephrase the question.

00:31:09:00

Albert Shanker:

Yes. The anti-Semitic leaflet, which was circulated in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, was reprinted in large quantity by the UFT and was distributed around the city. And it was distributed because the, the author of the l-leaflet was, was playing a prominent role in, in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community, and it was around the Governing Board, and was indeed teaching in the schools of Ocean Hill-Brownsville, was not repudiated by Rhody McCoy or the Governing Board. In other words, this was considered to be acceptable behavior by a member of the faculty. That was an important issue for the people of the City of New York to know that this was, that there was a good deal of anti-semitism and racism involved on the side of the, of the management in that district.

00:32:06:00

Interviewer:

OK. And, and did that bring you greater support from the city once they saw this leaflet attributed? Was it easier for, for Lindsay to support you? Was it easier for—

00:32:15:00

Albert Shanker:

Oh, Lindsay never supported me. We, we received great support. I just felt throughout the whole thing that it was necessary to put everything on the table, and, and we did. We, we, we didn't hide the fact that there were some teachers who were unsympathetic and who left. We didn't hide the fact that, that there were teachers that should be removed, or to be procedures to do that. We, and we also weren't about to hide the fact that there was anti-Semitism there. The best way for people to make a decision when you've got a conflict like that is to put it all

out there and let people make up their minds. And we were in a very tough fight and that's what we did. We didn't, we put it all out there.

00:32:55:00

Interviewer:

OK. In, in the fall of '68, I believe, you, you went to Albany basically arguing against the, the centralization program that was taking shape. Was, did you now have a fundamental belief that community control could not work, which seems different from the, the initial, you know, coalition?

00:33:13:00

Albert Shanker:

I did not at any time lobby against decentralization. I lobbied against one decentralization plan, and in favor of another one. I'm not opposed to community participation or even community control. I am against what in those days was called total community control, which means that we can do anything we want and people don't have any civil rights or human rights or anything else. So we've gotta be very careful with what words mean here. Yes, I don't favor a decentralization plan where local community boards can do anything they want, unregulated. We don't have that in our country. A mayor can't do anything he wants, a governor can't do anything he wants. I didn't want school districts who could do anything they want. We ended up supporting a decentralization plan which resulted in the creation of, it's there right now, thirty two districts, people elect—

Interviewer:

OK.

Albert Shanker:

—the members of their boards,

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

Albert Shanker:

—that's decentralization.

00:34:12:00

Interviewer:

OK. One thing I'd like you to restate is the, the notion of transfers. The, the community board said they transferred the thirteen teachers. Could you talk about the difference between transfers and firings again?

00:34:20:00

Albert Shanker:

Well, they weren't transfers. If I say to one of my employees, You're transferred, the first thing he's gonna say is, Where to? [laughs] I can only transfer people to other parts of my own operation, and since Rhody McCoy was really saying, Hey, don't come back to Ocean Hill-Brownsville, you're transferred. Well, if I say to an employee who works for the American Federation of Teachers, You're transferred. Don't come back to the American Federation of Teachers, I'm firing him. I'm not saying, I'm not giving him another job anywhere else, 'cause I can't. The only place I can give him a job is right in my own place, which is exactly what Rhody wasn't gonna do. So it was a firing, and the very fact that they were called transfers was an indication of the kind of a, of a lie, the whole thing was. I mean, he should've said, I'm firing you. He should've been honest and above board.

00:35:07:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut.

[cut]

00:35:11:00

[slate]

00:35:13:00

Interviewer:

OK. The constitution of the Governing Board. Could you talk about that election? I understood that a third of the, the families did vote in that election. And why did you, just your, your view of how its authenticity and—

00:35:25:00

Albert Shanker:

Well, there was no election. The election was…so-called election was conducted by having people, members who wanted to be elected to the Governing Board knocking at the

apartments of people saying, Do you vote for me? Well, what kind of an election is that? That's not an election. The fact is that no—that the members of the go—when, when there finally were elections under the decentralization law, none of them chose to run, and they chose not to run 'cause they knew damn well that they couldn't get elected. They were self-selected. They were, they were active people in very militant groups who had a point of view, but they were not willing to really subject that point of view, to go to the people and say, Look, here's what I believe, vote for me. The minute there were real elections, they ran away. And that's the proof of the pudding. Anybody who really believes he represents the people is not afraid of re—of standing for a real election.

00:36:21:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:36:28:00