

Interview with **Sandra Feldman**

Date: October 31, 1988

Interviewer: Louis Massiah

Camera Rolls: 3052-3054

Sound Rolls: 325-326

Team: C

Interview gathered as part of *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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Interview with Sandra Feldman, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on October 31, 1988 for *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

**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 #3052]

[sound roll #325]

00:00:12:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Sound roll thir—three, twenty-five. Team C.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:00:18:00

Interviewer:

OK. Would you give a, a little background on the condition of schools, the quality of education? You were a teacher, a member of the union. What kind of opportunity did the experiment in Ocean Hill-Brownsville present for the students?

00:00:33:00

Sandra Feldman:

I think that there was a hope that if parents and teachers could work together that we could build a coalition that would enable us to get the kind of resources [car horn] that were necessary for the schools and also that it would be helpful in general to the kids, as it always is even today for the teachers and the parents to work together. If we're gonna successfully educate kids, there has to be a partnership between teachers and parents. And that was what a lot of us hoped would happen then.

00:01:01:00

Interviewer:

OK. We're, we're back in, in '67. Why were you chosen to be the, the field representative in Ocean Hill-Brownsville? And I wanna get a little, get a little bit of your background.

00:01:12:00

Sandra Feldman:

Well, I had just started working for the union as a field representative, but I had come out of a, out of an activist background. I had been very active in the civil rights movement. I was a member of Harlem Corps. I had been, taken part in the Route 40 Freedom Rides. I had been arrested right outside of Baltimore on those freedom rides. And I had spent the summer of '63 [truck passes] as a volunteer organizer for the March on Washington working closely with Bayard Rustin up in the headquarters in Harlem. So, I knew a lot of people in the city and in the, in the community, and I suppose that that was the reason why I was sent out there. Also my, my philosophical bent was the same then as it is now, which is that we've got to work together. That, that the teachers and the communities that they serve have got to be on the same wavelength for the sake of the education of the kids. And I, I've always felt very strongly about that, and I suppose that having a background in the civil rights movement, having friends and, and relationships in the community, and having that activist approach was, was the reason...those were the reasons I guess, why I was sent out there.

00:02:30:00

Interviewer:

OK. The notion of parents having a, a major say in how the schools were run was something that was very new. How, how did teachers react to that?

00:02:40:00

Sandra Feldman:

Well, you know, it wasn't new. It's not new in middle class communities, and we're, and we weren't talking about parents making the decisions that should be left to professionals. We weren't talking about parents writing the curriculum or deciding on the methodology that

teachers would use to teach. We were talking on...about parents [truck passes] having a voice in the, in the general policy making areas of the way schools are run, which ultimately did happen with the centralization and the community school boards. And that's what happens in every middle-class school district in the United States.

Interviewer:

OK.

Sandra Feldman:

And it wasn't happening around the city of New York because you had this huge school system that was totally centralized, that was basically run out of 110 Livingston Street, and there was no opportunity for a voice either for teachers or for parents. And remember, that was a period of time when everybody was struggling for a voice. [truck passes] Teachers as well as parents. The union was brand new, and there was a need to get the school system to be [car horn] more responsive at the local level and to try to create a situation where people would pull together for the sake of the kids.

00:03:56:00

Interviewer:

Could, could you just answer that question just once again. Just a little bit briefer. The notion of, of, of parents being involved in schools. That was something new. How, how did the teachers react to this?

00:04:09:00

Sandra Feldman:

It wasn't new for schools. It was something that wasn't happening enough in, mainly in poor areas. And, and it wasn't happening enough in New York City because of the huge, centralized nature of the school system. I think that teachers want to have a relationship with parents. And I think that, that they understand that it's important [car horn] for parents to be involved in the education of their kids. When it comes to decisions that are professional decisions, I think the teachers want to reserve those for themselves.

00:04:46:00

Interviewer:

OK. We're in the fall of 1967 at Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Can you remember, what was the reaction of, of teachers when Rhody McCoy was chosen to be the, the unit administration of this new experiment?

Sandra Feldman:

Well, I, I couldn't say what the reaction was to Rhody McCoy. Rhody McCoy was basically not known. I don't think it was Rhody McCoy who created a reaction. So, I'm not sure if that's the right question...

Interviewer:

I, I—

Sandra Feldman:

...if you wanna ask that question. Because...

Interviewer:

Well, OK. What I—

00:05:16:00

Sandra Feldman:

Rhody McCoy wasn't, I mean, we—nobody knew who Rhody McCoy was. He, he had been the principal of the, of the 600 school.

00:05:24:00

Interviewer:

Yeah, you, you had said on the phone that he was a principal of the 600 [car horn] school. Did people feel that he was going to be able to, to run this new, new...?

00:05:31:00

Sandra Feldman:

I, I don't, I don't that when he first was picked, I mean, it was just a...I think one of the ways that people felt—people were surprised because he hadn't been there. He hadn't been in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. He hadn't been a player. He hadn't been a principal of one of the schools of Ocean Hill-Brownsville. No one knew him. And I think that people had been promised involvement and felt that now this major decision had [truck passes] been made without any involvement, and there was some consternation about that. Not about him personally but about the process.

00:06:08:00

Interviewer:

OK. I, I know he was probably one of the first Black unit administrations or superintendents if that's the sort of equivalent term. Was there any sort of particular reaction one way or the other because of that that you remember?

00:06:20:00

Sandra Feldman:

Not because he was Black, no. I don't believe so.

00:06:23:00

Interviewer:

OK. Very, very soon on the, the governing board bypassed the civil service exam and, and put in five principals. What was the reaction [car horn] among the teachers? Did they feel threatened when...?

Sandra Feldman:

They did? They bypassed the civil service exam? I don't remember that. Who were the five principals they put in?

Interviewer:

David Lee...Ferguson, Fuentes.

00:06:48:00

Sandra Feldman:

Oh.

00:06:50:00

Interviewer:

And a few others. Anyway. What, what was the reaction when the—do you remember what the reaction was when those five new, new principals were appointed?

00:07:00:00

Sandra Feldman:

I, I don't remember the specific action, reaction to the five new principals, but I can say that there was a, a lot of wariness on the part of teachers [truck passes] when things started to happen that they had no awareness of that suddenly new principals or a new superintendent appeared on the scene. [truck passes] And there was, there seemed to be no process involving them, which they had been promised involvement. *It was supposed to be an experiment and involvement of teachers and parents. And suddenly decisions started to get made, and no one knew how they were made or where they were made. So, there was a lot of wariness on the part of teachers.*

00:07:41:00

Interviewer:

OK. What was your specific role? And did you have to con...try to convince teachers to, to go along with things? What—

Sandra Feldman:

Well—

Interviewer:

—was your specific role at Ocean Hill-Brownsville?

00:07:47:00

Sandra Feldman:

—initially when I was asked to go out there, I was asked to go to one of the schools where a community group [car horn] had been agitating about improving the school. And when I went to meet with the teachers, first of all, I saw that the school was in bad shape. The school...unfortunately we, we, we have these conditions even today. The school needed a lot of, in the way of repairs, and maintenance, and cleaning, and supplies. The discipline in the school appeared to be out of control. And when I met with the teachers, I urged them not to be defensive. This was a very integrated staff, a junior high school in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. And they had immediately felt defensive because this community group was agitating about the school. And of course I had come from a background [laughs] of nothing but agitation and organization, organizing and the civil rights movement. And I said, Look, you know, there are problems in this school. It's obvious that, that there are resources needed here, that there are changes needed here. Why don't we try reaching out to work with this group and see if we can make it a positive experience? And teachers did, teachers thought about it and said, Yes, let's try to do that. Teachers generally want to have a good relationship with the communities that they serve. They don't, they...and especially in a period when teachers are in great demand, when there are, like today, lots of other options, places for them to be, jobs for them to get. Teachers can't do a job if they don't have parental support, if they don't have community support. And they want that kind of support, and

they're willing to try to work towards getting it. And I found that the teachers at Ocean Hill-Brownsville, even though they were wary, this was something very new. They had been used to working in a very centralized system where the orders come from on high. They were willing to experiment with voice, hoping that there would also be voice in it for them.

00:09:52:00

Interviewer:

OK. So, so then when, when did the, the teachers begin to lose faith in the experiment? What was the event, or what was the, what, what happened to make them lose, lose faith?

00:09:59:00

Sandra Feldman:

Well, there were a number of things that happened. First, [car horn] you know, the Ford Foundation was very involved in all of the discussions that were taking place. And there was an implicit promise of resources. And we had talked about every school being a more effective school, which was a program that was in place at that time in a few schools, which was a wonderful saturation program for kids. It had smaller classes. It had support services. And we had...we, the parents and the teachers, in the experiment in the discussions [car horn] had agreed that if we were gonna make a difference, it wasn't just a question of having a governing board. It was a question of being able to provide the kind of resources. We saw our coalition as a coalition which was gonna enable us [car horn] to get re-resources for the kids into the schools. And [car horn] there was a point at which we were quite far along in, in all of the discussion of arrangements when the Ford Foundation said, No, there isn't gonna be any extra money here. We want to show that just the involvement itself is going to make a difference. And everybody very worried about that because involvement is fine. It's important. But these were schools in tremendous need. These were schools that had great shortages of supplies, of res...of textbooks—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Sandra Feldman:

—that needed smaller [car horn] class size. That had kids who needed services.

00:11:32:00

Interviewer:

OK. We, we're running out of film. We just have to change mags.

Sandra Feldman:

Oh. [laughs]

[cut]

[camera roll #3053]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Timecode thirteen, fifty-three.

00:11:37:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:11:40:00

Interviewer:

OK. Did, did it ever seem like the experiment might be a success? What—do, do you have memories of going into the school and seeing collaboration—

Sandra Feldman:

Yes.

Interviewer:

—between teachers and parents?

00:11:51:00

Sandra Feldman:

Yes, at the beginning, the teachers were, were excited and enthusiastic about the possibility of really working in a creative way to change the schools. And even though it was very new, and people were feeling their way, and, I wouldn't say that they were ready to plunge into [laughs] something totally different. But there was a feeling that if we could really have, have the, the possibility of the support, the parental support and the community support for, and get the resources that we need to help the kids that, that this could be a very exciting thing. And so the teachers were interested in this. And there was a lot of hope at the very beginning.



00:12:32:00

Interviewer:

Can, can you remember walking into any of the schools? IS 271 or any of them and just what you saw in the beginning.

00:12:40:00

Sandra Feldman:

Well, there, the schools varied. The IS 271 was a school where teachers were very dedicated, trying very hard to do a good job. And in a lot of instances were doing a good job. [car horn] They had good relationships with the kids. This was true in some of the elementary schools.

Interviewer:

OK. [car horn]

Sandra Feldman:

Now that was—

00:12:55:00

Interviewer:

Just start that again about IS 271. Walking into IS 271, I mean, [car horn] what, what did you see?

00:13:01:00

Sandra Feldman:

IS 271 you would see, you saw a good school. [car horn] A school with dedicated, caring teachers. It was a well-run school. It was a clean school. There was learning going on at IS 271. That wasn't true of every school in the district though. There was another junior high school whose num, num, number escapes me now, which was the school that I was invited to when the thing first started which was a school that had obvious problems the minute you walked into it, where you, you'd walk in, and the kids were out of control. The hallways were, were wild. They were dirty. You could see that there was a dinginess and a drabness about the place. You could see there was something wrong, as you can see if you're a school person or anyone can see. There is some schools you walk into, and you can tell that there is learning going on. There were some schools you can walk into, [car horn] and you know that they're in trouble. [car horn] So, there was a mixture of that—

00:13:59:00

Interviewer:

Did you see any [car horn] change in this school? This, this other high—junior high school that you walked into at the beginning of the experiment that you can, can remember?

00:14:08:00

Sandra Feldman:

Well, I think the teachers began to feel that the school [car horn] itself didn't change. That was a school that was going to be taken down, and it was, the population was gonna be moved into a school that was being built across the street at that [car horn] time, IS 55. And the teachers began to get involved in developing the program for the new IS 55, and there was, you know, some feeling of, of excitement and hope at the beginning.

00:14:36:00

Interviewer:

OK. Did you get a sense of the, the broad [car horn] variety of teachers involved in the school? Some, some of them may have had backgrounds like yourself. Some of them may have had backgrounds not, much more conservative backgrounds.

00:14:47:00

Sandra Feldman:

I think it was quite a mixed group of teachers from lots of different backgrounds. It was...there were a lot of experienced teachers there. The teachers were, it was an integrated group of teachers. There were teachers who had had a lot of experience. There were a lot of new teachers, substitute teachers. It was a, a very mixed group of teachers. And I think that there was a willingness on the part of most of them to [car horn] reach out and to do something new. There were teachers there who were very wary of it, who, you know, wanted to...who were afraid to do something new. But we were making allowances for all of that. [car horn] And there were efforts to accommodate, you know, all of the problems that people brought up on every side of the equation.

00:15:36:00

Interviewer:

Now, on, on the telephone you had said that some teachers were initially rather frightened about, about the prospect of, you know, parents coming in. Could you talk a little bit about that and what you said to them?

Sandra Feldman:

[car horn] Well, you know, the school system [car horn] had not been really welcoming to parents, as I [car horn] said. It was, it was a centrally runned bureac—run, centrally run bureaucracy. And—

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. Could you just begin that once again? Just to—

Sandra Feldman:

[laughs] OK.

Interviewer:

All right.

00:16:01:00

Sandra Feldman:

The school system was not designed to be welcoming [car horn] to parents. It was a centrally run bureaucracy where edicts were handed down from 110 Livingston Street. And there was very little relationship in the local school between teachers and parents. In fact, teachers had very little to say about the school in general. Just as little to say about the school in general as parents had to say. So, they were used to basically just being in their own classroom and doing their thing in their classroom. And they were, some of them, wary of the notion that there would be more involvement of parents in the school [car horn] itself. And that is something that, by the way, also happens, you know, in middle class communities where parents are very active. Some-sometimes teachers will say, Well, I wish they'd leave me alone. You know? You would get that attitude. But on the other hand, you had a lot of people who believe that if teachers and parents work together that we could do something about the problems in our schools, that we could help the kids because we were getting shortchanged. We didn't have what we needed for kids. We didn't have the supplies. We didn't have the [car horn] support services. We didn't have the resources that we should have had in those schools. And we had seen schools that work, that were given a little bit more in the way of resources, the more effective schools, and we wanted those kinds of schools in Ocean Hill-Brownsville.

00:17:34:00

Interviewer:

OK. How—when things began to sour, how—the, the transferring of the, of the teachers, how did you find out about that? I mean, and what, what was your reaction when you heard the com...the community governing [car horn] board has transferred nineteen teachers out?

Sandra Feldman:

I was told about it at, at the union office. I guess teachers had called the union. I'm not, I'm not, I don't remember exactly. But well, I thought it was a terrible mistake, that it had very little to do with anything real.

Interviewer:

Can we just start that again [car horn]? And make sure you rephrase it. Don't say "it." You know, the, the transferring, or the firing, or whatever you're gonna say. How did you find out about the, the, the transfer...?

00:18:22:00

Sandra Feldman:

I really don't remember how. I honestly don't remember how I found out about it.

00:18:22:00

Interviewer:

And, and what was your reaction when you heard about it?

Sandra Feldman:

I felt it was a, a political act that had absolutely nothing to do with anything [car horn] that we were trying to do in the district between teachers and parents working on, on improving education. I was shocked and upset when I heard about it, and I did not understand why it was done.

Interviewer:

Just once again, but make sure you say the transferring of the school, of the teachers.

Sandra Feldman:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

What was your reaction [truck passes] when you heard about the transferring of the teachers?

00:18:51:00

Sandra Feldman:

Yeah. Well, first of all, most of the teachers felt that it really was a dismissal, not a transfer, because the local authority had no right to transfer them. They could only say, You're not working here anymore. And I was, I was upset and shocked because I thought it was a political act that had very...had nothing to do with what we were trying to do in the district in terms of, of creating better relationships. Obviously, it was a move in the exact opposition direction. [clanging in background]

00:19:19:00

Interviewer:

Stop camera.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Speed.

00:19:25:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it please.

[slate]

00:19:26:00

Interviewer:

OK, the nineteen teachers have been dismissed, transferred. There's a strike called. Can you talk about the change in atmosphere that begins to happen in Ocean Hill-Brownsville between the 60, the, that May of '68 and Sep-September.

00:19:46:00

Sandra Feldman:

Well, it was a devastating change. It went from a situation the year before where there was an effort to do [car horn] something hopeful for kids to a terribly polarized and painful situation. So, it was a, a total sea change.

00:20:06:00

Interviewer:

In terms of the personalities and the influences in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, what, what are you beginning to see in the fall of '68?

00:20:13:00

Sandra Feldman:

Well, the, the people who be...who, I mean, the, the two sides, first of all, were very clearly drawn, which had not been the atmosphere in the year before. There were new people who had not been involved. Some of the people who were involved in the discussions were still around, but then there were new people who came into the situation who obviously had a different agenda, we thought. And it was a, it was a very, very painful, it was agonizing for the teachers. A lot of the teachers especially who had taught in, in that school district for many years and who were committed to the kids. And it was especially painful, of course, for Black teachers, and it was very painful for White teachers who had spent their careers in, in schools in, in Ocean Hill-Brownsville and who really wanted I believe, wanted the best for the kids.

00:21:05:00

Interviewer:

Who were those other people coming in, that, you said new voices [unintelligible].

Sandra Feldman:

Well, suddenly it was, you know, I think what happened is that the, the conflict attracted everyone under the sun. And it, it just became a, a terribly adversarial situation. Now, Rhody McCoy, for example, had not been involved the previous year. He appeared during the summer before the...I believe he was—

Interviewer:

He actually was there, but—

Sandra Feldman:

He was there. I remember his being there.

Interviewer:

He was there the previous year.

Sandra Feldman:

That's right. He was there in the spring of that year. But he, he was someone who initially I think tried to work with—

Interviewer:

Could you just begin that again and say, “Rhody McCoy was someone who initially tried...”

Sandra Feldman:

Yes, even Rhody McCoy was someone who... [laughs]

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. Once, once again. You, you were saying...

00:21:54:00

Sandra Feldman:

I think that Rhody McCoy, while he was not there at the...he was not involved in the initial discussions which took place with a group of parents from that community, when he did come in, he came from a totally other community. He came from some place in Manhattan. Initially was involved [car passes] with sort of carrying along the effort, which was a cooperative effort. But something happened. I don't know what it was. [car horn] And then he became the spokesman for a very adversarial situation with the teachers. The, the dismissals, or transfers, or whatever you wanna call them took place, and then strike and reaction to that when the Board of Ed. would do nothing about it. And I mean, there were rules and regulations—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Sandra Feldman:

—which weren't followed. And I guess the union felt it was just a—

00:22:42:00

Interviewer:

OK, we just ran out of film.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Rollout.

Sandra Feldman:

Why is the film—

[cut]

[camera roll #3026]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Timecode thirteen, fifty-four.

00:22:51:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it please.

[slate]

00:22:52:00

Interviewer:

OK. You, you were just saying that the two sides were very clearly drawn. What, what were those two sides of that [unintelligible]?

00:22:59:00

Sandra Feldman:

Well, in that community where we'd been working for a year or more, we had had a relationship between the community groups and the teachers in the union there. And now suddenly there was this division between the community and teachers in...I'm talking now in Ocean Hill-Brownsville itself, which is where I was, trying to work at, at building a relationship. It got severed. And I think it was terrible for the schools and terrible for the people involved.



00:23:32:00

Interviewer:

OK. Fall of '68, there, there are a number of strikes in, in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. What is your day to day work? Could you just talk about what, what you were doing now in terms of—

00:23:43:00

Sandra Feldman:

Well, I was simply assigned to go out [truck passes] and stay with the teachers. I was out there with the teachers, a union presence. [laughs] I guess I was protecting them or something. And it was very difficult because it got, you know, it, it got very volatile in the streets. And teachers were frightened. They were on the picket lines, and they would get yelled at and called names. And, and I basically stayed out there on the lines with the teachers and left when they left. That was basically what my assignment was.

00:24:20:00

Interviewer:

Are there any particular incidences of, of violence that you remember and any one day that really stays in your mind as really being pretty striking?

00:24:27:00

Sandra Feldman:

Well, there were a number of days when there were a lot of, of volatile moments. When there were crowds being kept away from the school by the police, when the teachers had to sort of walk through a gauntlet of, of shouting, jeering people. And it was, it was very painful and very frightening. And it...there were a number of days like that. And I used to meet them at a certain point, and we'd just sort of walk together to the school where the picketing took [truck passes] place. And I think I provided some feeling of well, protection somehow. [laughs] I don't know exactly how. But I wasn't as afraid as they were.

00:25:19:00

Interviewer:

OK. Once again, where would you meet them at? Do you remember and what...?

00:25:22:00

Sandra Feldman:

Well, a few blocks away, sort of on the avenue, and then walk over to the school. And it was, it was [car horn] very difficult because these are teachers who, you know, [car horn] had spent years and years coming to the school and suddenly found themselves so pilloried, you know, so, so [car horn] much anger out there at them. And it wasn't really anger at them. You know? It wasn't, and it wasn't fair in a sense because these, these teachers had really tried to do their best for kids. Most of them. You know, not everyone is perfect obviously. But they tried to do their best. They had worked there all those years. And there was a tremendous conflict taking [car horn] place, and here they were in the maelstrom of it. And it really didn't have anything to do with who they personally were. You know, it's like a lot, this, the teachers who were supposedly dismissed or transferred, that...those charges had nothing to do with who they specifically were. I mean, they were just picked to be symbols. And you know, you shouldn't pick people to be symbols. I mean, whichever way it works, it's bad.

00:26:30:00

Interviewer:

OK. How, how, how did you feel to be on what some might say the other side? I mean, you had, you had always it seemed to be, been—

Sandra Feldman:

Yes.

Interviewer:

—fighting for communities. And how did it feel to be on the other side?

00:26:42:00

Sandra Feldman:

Well, I didn't feel like I was on another side. I mean, I have never felt any ambivalence or wavering about where I stand on issues of race and integration. I mean, it's, you know, that's just who I am. I was very, very pained by the, by the overall conflict. I thought that it was a terrible setback for [car horn] relationships, that it was a, it was an agonizing experience to go through. I thought that whatever could be done to try to [car horn] preserve some communication between groups I would do, so that whenever this was over we could start the healing process and the rebuilding of relationships process. That was what was important to me. It was a very difficult and painful time.

00:27:29:00

Interviewer:

The issue of anti-Semitism has come into Ocean Hill-Brownsville. What is your, your, your memory of it? Of, of, of the incidences and, and the importance. Was that central to what, to the division that you were seeing?

Sandra Feldman:

I don't believe it was central. It was made central in the city wide—

Interviewer:

OK. Could you start again? And make sure you say, talk, say "anti-Semitism" rather than "it."

Sandra Feldman:

OK. [laughs]

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

00:27:50:00

Sandra Feldman:

I don't think that anti-Semitism was central to what was happening in that community. It became a major issue in the overall conflict city wide for a variety of reasons. [sirens] But in that community, there—

00:28:07:00

Interviewer:

Let's [car horn] just stop the camera one second.

Camera Crew Member #1:

The traffic is [inaudible]

Sandra Feldman:

[laughs]

[cut]

[sound roll #326]

Camera Crew Member #1:

New c—new sound roll three, twenty-six.

00:28:14:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it please.

[slate]

00:28:17:00

Interviewer:

OK, the issue of anti-Semitism. How important was that in terms of [car horn] what was going on at Ocean Hill-Brownsville in [truck passes] terms of the divisions? Was it, was it central? Was it something you felt?

00:28:24:00

Sandra Feldman:

I didn't feel that, that the issue of anti-Semitism, which became an important issue citywide, was really a major issue in the, in what was happening in that conflict itself. Although it did...there were things that happened that led teachers to feel that, that they were being treated in an anti-Semitic manner. For example, the fact that teachers who were charged were mixed up in terms of who they were. Teachers with the same name. One teacher was charged who was not even in the school that he was supposedly being charged in. And, you know, there, there were feelings, they were, they were both had the same name, and it was Jewish name. So that there were some of those overtones. But I think that the basic, you know, what [car horn] happened out in Brownsville on the street and on the picket lines was the, the overlay of citywide bitterness and the racial divisions including the anti-Semitism, you know, became palpable in the air way beyond the, the control or the feelings of the people there. It got bigger than, than they were.

00:29:42:00

Interviewer:

What, what about the, the leaflet that was distributed, I guess printed by the UFT? What...?

Sandra Feldman:

It was reprinted.

Interviewer:

Oh. OK, talk about

Sandra Feldman:

It was distributed, yeah.

Interviewer:

All right, once, OK, that, that leaflet that, that was reprinted by the UFT. I [truck passes] know you were not in a policy making position.

00:29:56:00

Sandra Feldman:

Yeah.

00:29:57:00

Interviewer:

But what was the impact of that? Do you think that was a mistake?

Sandra Feldman:

Yes.

Interviewer:

All right. Let's—could, could you just rephrase that?

00:30:03:00

Sandra Feldman:

I think that, there, there was a leaflet that was an anonymous leaflet that was quite ugly, and it was an anti-Semitic leaflet. It had been put in the mailboxes of a school. And it had, it was reprinted and distributed throughout the city, and I believe it was a mistake to do that. I mean to this day, I don't think anybody knows exactly [truck passes] where that leaflet came from

or who put it in the boxes in, in that one school. And that did add to what was already a very difficult and, and divisive situation.

00:30:39:00

Interviewer:

OK. Was, was there any point in that fall of '68 that you thought some sort of rapprochement or [bus passes] some sort of, some sort of peace could have been made between the community and the teachers? Or was it too far by then?

00:30:51:00

Sandra Feldman:

No, there were, there were several times, there were lots of efforts being made, quiet efforts, behind the scenes. I mean, it was never difficult, for example, for me to talk to Rhody McCoy. We had a, you know, a friendly relationship. And there were efforts that were being made. I was making efforts to try to talk to people, but I know that there were efforts being made at other, you know, at other levels that I was not involved in. [car horn] And there were times when it seemed that, you know, [car horn] that maybe something could be done. But from my perspective, what was most difficult in that situation was there didn't seem to be anybody in charge. I mean, here was this, you know, terrible fight taking place, and there was no authority figure anywhere. No one at the Board of Education. No one at, at, you know, at city hall seemed to be able to say, Look, we're gonna stop this. We're gonna pull people together. There was no leadership there. And I think that was a major, major problem that if there had been a [car horn] leader either in the school system or in the city who could work at pulling people together, I think people wanted to be pulled together. That was my sense of it. That this was not a conflict that was being enjoyed [laughs] by the people involved in it. There may have been some people who, you know, [laughs] got off on it in some way. But most of the people involved in it wanted it to end, and it was very difficult to see how it can be ended without some overall, some overarching credible authority pulling it together. And we just didn't have that.

00:32:24:00

Interviewer:

OK, stop camera.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Yes.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Speed. Timecode fourteen, eleven.

00:32:27:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:32:30:00

Interviewer:

The anti-Semitic leaflet, was, was that a mistake? Could you explain what happened with that?

00:32:35:00

Sandra Feldman:

Well, I'm not exactly sure what happened. I understand that there, there was a leaflet that was an anonymous leaflet that was distributed in a school that was a terribly ugly leaflet. And it was later reprinted at union headquarters and distributed. [truck passes] And I believe it was a mistake to reprint and distribute that leaflet.

00:32:54:00

Interviewer:

And what had happened about the teachers that were mistaken?

00:32:59:00

Sandra Feldman:

Well, the, the overall conflict brought out all sorts of divisiveness. And within the context of what was happening citywide, you, had, you had asked me how did the teachers in that area feel. And I would say that the issue of anti-Semitism was not a major issue in that local situation. Although there were sensitivities to it, and there were some teachers, for example, who felt that it was anti-Semitism which, which resulted in a teacher being charged whose name was the same as another teacher when the, the first teacher wasn't even in the school that he was, you know, the charges were being brought against. So, so, I mean, there was a feeling I think in general—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Sandra Feldman:

—that people were misunderstanding each other.

00:33:53:00

Interviewer:

OK. We just ran out of time.

Sandra Feldman:

[laughs]

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:33:56:00

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