

Richard J. Condon

Oral History Interview
with Richard J. Condon

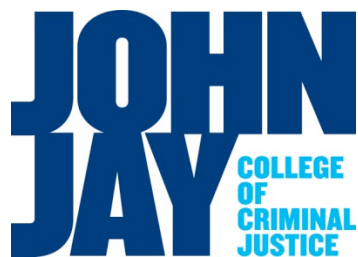
*Interviewed by Jeffrey A. Kroessler
on May 26, 2010*

Oral History Interview
with
Richard J. Condon

Interviewed by
Jeffrey A. Kroessler
May 26, 2010

Justice in New York: An Oral History

No. 11



Justice in New York: An Oral History

Preface

President Jeremy Travis initiated Justice in New York: An Oral History in 2006. Based in the Lloyd Sealy Library, the project was made possible through a generous grant from Jules B. Kroll, President of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice Foundation. The goal was to interview criminal justice leaders – district attorneys, police commissioners and members of the department, elected officials, defense attorneys, and advocates, individuals concerned with the workings of the system.

Each interview is recorded on cassette tapes and/or a digital recorder. The original is deposited in Special Collections in the library. Each transcript is bound and the volume is cataloged and placed on the shelves. A digital copy is available through the library's web site, as are selected audio clips from the interviews (<http://www.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/>).

Oral history is a problematic endeavor. The interview is only as good as the questions asked and the willingness of the interview subject to be open and honest. Some remain guarded, others become expansive. Sometimes memory fails, and details, names and dates are confused. Some individuals have their own set story, and an oral history will add little that is new or especially insightful. Other individuals use the interview as an opportunity to sum up a career; on occasion that means gliding over unpleasant or difficult details. Our purpose was to allow each individual to tell his or her story. In each case, the final transcript has been approved by the interview subject.

Even with those caveats, what emerges from these interviews is more than a collection of personal reminiscences. The interviews shed light on controversies and policy decisions of a particular historical moment. At times, the interviews verge on the philosophical, as with discussion of capital punishment, race relations, or the decriminalization of controlled substances. Always, the interviews contribute to our understanding of the many facets of the criminal justice system – law enforcement, prosecution, incarceration, prisoner re-entry, and electoral politics – and reveal how New York has changed over the decades, as have social and cultural attitudes.

Justice in New York: An Oral History stretches across more than half a century, from the 1950s to the 2010s. Those years saw an unprecedented rise in social unrest and violent crime in the city, and then an equally dramatic drop in crime and disorder. If the interviews have an overarching theme, it is how the city – the police, courts, elected officials, and advocates – addressed and, yes, overcame those challenges. These men and women were actors in that drama, and their narratives stand on their own. The truth or mendacity of the story is for the reader to assess.

Chief Librarian Larry E. Sullivan guided this project from the start and participated in several interviews. Interim Chief Librarian Bonnie Nelson oversaw the creation of a new website for Criminal Justice in New York, a portal for the oral histories, trial transcripts, images and documents from Special Collections, and other resources. Special Collections librarian Ellen Belcher, cataloging librarian Marlene Kandel, and emerging technologies librarian Robin Davis contributed to the success of this project.

Jeffrey A. Kroessler
2013

Richard J. Condon
Chronology

1935	Born in New York City
1955-1957	Served in the United States Marine Corps
November 1957	Joined the NYPD
1964	Promoted to Detective.
1965	Received B.A. from Pace University
1968-69	Intelligence Unit of NYPD, responsible for surveillance of Hugh Mulligan, a bookmaker linked to organized crime who bribed many police officers.
1972	As Captain, attended the British Police College at Bramshill under a grant from the New York City Police Foundation to study why the British police are so "efficient and courteous."
October 20, 1972	Police Commissioner Patrick Murphy announced a major shake-up in the upper ranks of the NYPD; Condon assigned to the First Precinct in Lower Manhattan (100 Old Slip, now the Police Museum).
1976	Retired from the NYPD with rank of Deputy Inspector.
1976-1982	Director of Investigation in the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Corruption in Criminal Justice System in New York City.
1978	Received M.A. in Criminal Justice from John Jay College.
1982-1983	Deputy Criminal Justice Coordinator in the Koch administration.
April 15, 1983	Appointed by Governor Cuomo Commissioner of the Division of Criminal Justice Services; had been deputy to Lawrence Kurlander, Director of Criminal Justice.
1985-1986	Member of the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Police Management and Personnel Policy; John Zuccotti chairman.
May 1986	Appointed First Deputy Police Commissioner under Ben Ward, following the resignation of Patrick J. Murphy.
October 1986	Scandal at the 77 th Precinct in Bedford-Stuyvesant.

November 1986	Commissioner Ward's plan for widespread rotation of patrol as an anticorruption measure brings confrontation with PBA.
1987	Commissioner Ben Ward admitted to the surveillance of black radicals, specifically the so-called New York Eight, in violation of the Handschu Agreement. Condon was a member of the NYPD's Handschu Authority, established to oversee the NYPD's surveillance of political activity.
October 22, 1989	Following the retirement of Ben Ward after Mayor Ed Koch lost to David Dinkins in the Democratic primary, Condon was appointed Police Commissioner. Though Governor Cuomo and others urged that Condon remain, Dinkins named Lee Brown his Police Commissioner. Condon stepped down in January 1990.
November 13, 1989	Detectives Richard J. Guerzon and Keith L. Williams were shot dead by Jay "Stoney" Harrison, a prisoner they were returning to Rikers Island. Though handcuffed, Harrison had taken a gun from a police locker in the Kew Gardens Courthouse. He was captured hours later. Condon said that the men were in some ways responsible for their own death: "In this business people make mistakes, as these detectives did, and they paid a terrible price."
1990-2001	Director of Administrative Services and Worldwide security for Paine Webber.
June 18, 2002	Appointed Special Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City School System.

Richard J. Condon

May 26, 2010

JK If you could just identify yourself for the tape.

Condon My name is Richard Condon, and I'm currently the Special Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City Schools.

JK That is a difficult job.

Condon Yes. It is. The Department of Education is the single largest city agency. It has an operating budget of about nineteen billion dollars, and does business with everyone in the City of New York, every vendor there is. Every large, small, intermediate vendor. And this office, which is part of the Department of Investigation, but it's sort of off by its own because of the size of my staff and the scope of what we do, we investigate anyone who does business with the Department of Education, if there are allegations of corruption. We investigate sexual misconduct in the schools that involves students as victims. We never investigate students, but we investigate teachers, guidance counselors, paraprofessionals, custodians. The custodians are our sort of a mainstay of investigations in the city schools.

JK The custodians alone could occupy an office, or at least in the past.

Condon You know, it's a strange, well, because they still have their own budget, and they still hire their own employees. The custodians themselves are employees of the Department of Education, but their employees are not employees of the Department of Education – firemen, cleaners, people like that. So, having their own budget, they have the freedom to manipulate monies. For example, we just had two investigations almost back-to-back, where custodians had ghost employees on the payroll, and they were paying people who did not work for them, and then they were being kick-backed to them. One fellow had, I think, four different people, including his sister, who he was paying. Unfortunately for him, she was working full-time somewhere else while she was supposed to be working for him. So, custodians are there. A week or two ago, we had maybe three hundred twenty active investigations, and I only have forty investigators and six attorneys. So, it's a lot of work for a small staff.

JK I wish we didn't have to have so many of you doing it, but I'm glad that we do. You joined the NYPD in 1957.

Condon Yes. I was just out of the Marine Corps. I came out of the Marine Corps in September of 1957, and I went into the Police Department in November.

JK I take it you're a New Yorker?

Condon I'm a New Yorker, but no history of my family of anyone ever being in the Police Department.

JK No kidding?

Condon No.

JK You were the first?

Condon I was the first one.

JK What brought that on?

Condon I had an interest in police work. I thought that I would find it interesting and that I would like to do it. And so far, I haven't been disabused of that notion.

JK You've held a series of interesting positions.

Condon I've been very lucky, yes.

JK Yes. But right out of the Marine Corps, it's a different force than it is today. It's a completely different force.

Condon It's a completely different force. It was just starting to change when I went in, but the real changes didn't take place for another ten to twelve years, you know. But it was starting to become more part of the 20th Century rather than, for example, when I went into a precinct, you did not speak to the captain unless he spoke to you first. I mean, it was like you didn't exist with someone of that rank. Then, that gradually changed, and at that point, in a precinct, the precinct I was in, there were four radio cars, and everyone else was on foot. Bob Maguire spent most of his time as Police Commissioner, trying to find enough policemen to fill his radio cars, because he was there during the fiscal crisis, in 1975 or 1976, around there.

JK Yes, well, there were massive layoffs.

Condon Massive layoffs. I was running the Manhattan D.A. Squad for Bob Morgenthau at the time, and I had a fellow in to congratulate him on how well he had done on the sergeant's exam, and I had him in the next week to tell him that he was being laid off. It was a strange time. It was the first time that that ever happened. It changed, I think, the nature of labor negotiations between the unions and the Police Department, and probably other departments, too, because it was almost like a sanctity to civil service. You were never going to make money, but you were never going to be laid off. You were always going to have a job. That was part of the underpinning of labor negotiations. But once that was no longer true, you didn't have that underpinning, so you couldn't say, "Look, you're always going to have a job," and I think that changed it.

JK It was unprecedented.

Condon It was.

JK The layoffs throughout the city. Five thousand police officers laid off in one day.

Condon Yes.

JK They did not take it well immediately, as I recall.

Condon No, no, they did not take it well, no. They lost a number of policemen who never came back, because by the time they started to re-hire, some of them had found other careers. So, it really hurt the Police Department.

JK And that's the time that you retired, also.

Condon I retired in 1976. Yes. Well, what happened was that John Keenan, who is now a Federal Judge in the Southern District of New York, had been appointed by the Governor to become the Special Prosecutor. Maurice Nadjari had been his predecessor, and he had been fired by the Governor.

JK To the relief of many.

Condon To the relief of many, yes. So, the Governor appointed John Keenan, and he asked me if I would go over to the Special Prosecutor's office and become the Director of Investigations there. And I did.

JK But you were able to retire with twenty years plus the Marine Corps? Did that count into it at all?

Condon No, no. I actually had, I guess I had just about twenty years, because I didn't retire immediately when I went over there. I took a leave of absence, and then when I had twenty years, I retired.

JK Because I noticed, for someone with your career trajectory, it seemed odd that you would retire so quickly when you were able to, because everything about you said a "lifer" so to speak.

Condon Yeah, and it was funny because I ended up coming back and becoming Police Commissioner. I guess that was not part of any kind of a plan, but it just happened to work out.

JK What was your career in the NYPD? Where were you assigned first and how did you get into the Intelligence Unit?

Condon I actually started as a foot patrolman in the 8-0 Precinct, which was in the Crown Heights-Bedford Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn. It ran from Eastern Parkway to Fulton Street, and it ran from Vanderbilt Avenue to New York Avenue. It was a small precinct. At the time, it was still, the Eastern Parkway end with all those beautiful apartment buildings across from the Brooklyn Museum and the Botanical Gardens. And then, as you got closer to Fulton Street, you were really getting into poorer Black areas. So, this was a mix in the precinct at the time. When I came out of the Police Academy, I had won a scholarship to Pace University when I was in the Police Department. So, I was working nights. Pace didn't have a night program like John Jay did. There was no John Jay at the time. So, I was working midnight to eight A.M. so that I could go to school during the day or the evening, whatever. In fact that's how I met Ben Ward, because he was going to Brooklyn Law School, and he was working a foot post in the same precinct from midnight to eight in the morning, so that post adjourned and we would talk whenever we saw each other. So, I wanted to do something else. I wrote a letter to the Police Commissioner asking for an interview. Probably a year or more went by without hearing anything, and then I got a call to go to the Police Commissioner's office. I went to the Police Commissioner's Office. It was Steven Kennedy at the time. John Walsh, who was the First Deputy Commissioner, came walking into the area where I was and said, "Come with me." It turned out that they had this investigation into police corruption that was going on, and they wanted to recruit me to take part in that investigation. I ended up going into the First Deputy Commissioner's office at the time. But the unit didn't even have a name, and it was people just pulled from different parts of the Police Department. I spent the next probably three or four years working on this one investigation. In the end, the Manhattan District Attorney at the time wouldn't indict anyone because a lot of what we did was based on wire taps. Although New York State didn't have a law against it, we were legally wiretapping under state law, the federal government did not permit wiretapping. That was before they came out with their Title 3. So, the District Attorney was reluctant to use the wiretaps, although we had sixty or seventy police officers and gamblers, and we had thousands, forty or fifty thousand dollars a month was coming into Police Headquarters, and we had records that would show all of this. We would show how much the Division was getting paid every month, how much the Borough was getting paid every month, how much the Chief Inspectors Investigating Unit was getting paid every month, how much the Police Commissioner's Confidential Investigating Unit was getting paid every month. There was this elaborate system. There were people who were actually hired, who sat in rooms and had a list of every policy location that was on the pad, every wire room that was on the pad, where the floating dice games were, things like that. And there were codes. Each unit in the Police Department had a code name. The Chief Inspector's Office was Schaeffer. So, if Schaeffer, if the plainclothesmen in the Chief Inspector's Office got a complaint that there was a policy operation on 125th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, they would call up the guy sitting in the room who had the list of everything. They would say to him, "Do we have a salesman at 125th Street and Amsterdam Avenue?" And he would either say, "No," or he would say, "Yes, that's Spanish Raymond's place." Spanish Raymond Marquez or Shepperdson's Place or something, the plainclothes cop would say, "Okay. Tell him he's okay today and tomorrow, but he has to move by Thursday." Because Thursday would be the day they were going to go out and do their surveillance. So, then, the guy in the room would call

an answering service, and he'd say, "Have Mr. Marquez leave a number where I can reach him," because they never gave any of the gamblers the number of where all the locations were. So, an hour or so would go by and he'd call the answering service again and the answering service would say, "Mr. Marquez is at such-and-such a number." And then he would call him and he'd say, "Look, you're okay today and tomorrow, you have to move by Thursday." And he'd say, "Well, where is my problem?" He wanted to know whether it was the Division or the Borough or the Chief's Office. And then guy would tell him it's Schaeffer. "Okay, can I meet him somewhere?" And they'd set-up the meeting and all. There were people that went around every month and collected all the money. They were not plainclothesmen, so if you watched the plainclothesmen, you would never get them going around, meeting with the gamblers and collecting money. They were cops who had been plainclothesmen at one time, or retired cops who were no longer in the Police Department. It was probably forty or fifty thousand dollars a month, which was being collected. I would collect, if I was one of them, and I would collect for the Division, the Borough and the Chief at one location. You would collect at another location. So, if you were following me, you wouldn't get me going from one place to another place. Then once a month, all the collectors would meet and they'd divide up the money, and then the money would go to the different units. I worked on that for a bunch of years. Then, in 1968, long after I left, I was a sergeant in the Village then, the federal government, when they passed their wiretapping statute, they said that any state wiretapping that conforms with ours, is okay. So, all of a sudden, I got called back and we indicted sixty-some-odd people.

JK Because originally, the wiretaps, your unit, it wasn't an official unit, really. Your unit had placed wiretaps on gamblers?

Condon Gamblers, collectors.

JK Police officers?

Condon Police officers, yes, once we identified them. Yes.

JK Police officers at their homes or the precinct?

Condon Different places. I don't think we ever had, we had a couple of collectors, we had their home phones wiretapped. But we had orders from Supreme Court Judges, State Supreme Court Judges, so under the state law we were okay. Under the federal law, we were not. So, then, when the federal law said if your wiretaps conform with the federal wiretap laws, you can use them, so then we indicated these people. And then there was a motion to suppress, and all the wiretaps were suppressed because they didn't comply closely enough with the federal statute. So everyone walked. Out of that came a Supreme Court decision. An ex-plainclothesman, a man by the name of Bob Gardner, who was one of the people we arrested, and we put him into the Grand Jury and he had to answer the questions in the Grand Jury, but we were able to fire him based on that. He got a Queens lawyer, no one that anyone would ever know, and they went up to the Supreme Court of the United States and they actually won. It's Gardner vs. Broderick, I

think, the decision. When he was back in court, it's a typical, I remember saying to him, "Congratulations." And he said, "You know how much it cost me to get seven Supreme Court Judges?" I mean, he was totally.

JK That is a ballsy guy!

Condon That was a ballsy guy! And I said to him at one point, because we were spending a lot of time together, "If you had it to do all over again, would you do this? I mean, all the trouble and all that?" He said, "I made so much money and I had so much fun. If I had to do it starting tomorrow, I'd do it again." I mean, he was perfect for that job. There were other people we arrested who committed suicide.

JK These were police officers?

Condon Yes.

JK This was organized crime gambling?

Condon Oh, yes. Oh, sure.

JK Organized crime gambling operations that were being protected by police officers? This is after the whole Harry Gross business in 1950?

Condon Oh, yes. Yes, yes.

JK My assumption had been that after the Harry Gross business, which had its own arrests and trials and suicide, resignations, that that kind of was stamped down for a while. But it sounds like that is not the case at all.

Condon No. We would take the policy and work would go from the Black section of Harlem, it all ended up at the Triborough Republican Club on East 116th Street and 2nd Avenue, which was where Fat Tony Salerno hung out, and people like that. It was a pretty sophisticated operation. Brooklyn was not involved. I don't know whether they had their own, I was told that they had their own scheme, but we never came across Brooklyn. We had Manhattan, Staten Island, the Bronx and Queens.

JK Well, like crime families, carving up their territory, I guess the Police Department did the same thing.

Condon Yes, yes. In fact, Huey Mulligan ran some of the wire rooms, and he had someone who sat in a room and had the list of all the locations.

JK Did Huey Mulligan get off?

Condon He got indicted, and then I think he died. When we served him, I served him with the grand jury, he was hiding out in a motel up on 10th Avenue in the forties or

fifties, Skyway Inn or something. We got him going into the motel one night and I started doing the grand jury subpoena and he said to my partner and me, "You served Red McGinnity, you served Huey Carroll, you serving me? Don't you guys know it's the Guineas that run organized crime?"

JK "Yeah, but we got you!" This is not comforting to hear, that the corruption was so widespread through the Police Department. Through all ranks.

Condon Yes. We did our first arrest in 1964. Then the indictments, actually, came out in 1968 because of the wiretap statute. And then I left. In 1965, I got promoted to sergeant. I was a uniformed sergeant in Greenwich Village for the next three years, and I loved it.

JK Sergeants have to be in uniform, don't they?

Condon Yes, on patrol they do, yes. I had basically the Coffee House District. I covered McDougall Street, Bleecker Street, Washington Square Park, Sheridan Square, that part of the Village.

JK This is when Hippiedom is beginning to break out.

Condon Oh, it was big. Sure. The Mamas and the Papas were down there. Woody Allen was just getting his start. You had Café Feenjon, you had the Bitter End, you had Upstairs at the Downstairs; Art D'Lugoff had his Village Gate still going. Figaro. I mean, you'd have thousands of people there on a Friday or Saturday night in the summer.

JK Yes. And what trouble did you anticipate and what trouble did you find in that precinct?

Condon We had a lot of runaways. A lot of runaways, so we would have parents coming down, giving us pictures of kids and asking us if we've seen them and all that. We would direct them, generally, to, you might try this place, you know? The bouncer there might recognize the kids and all that. So, we had that, and we just had crowds. You would have a thousand people trying to walk down McDougall Street at one time. But it was generally, it was the crowd type of crime. It was fights, arguments, people drunk, things like that. There were so many people, it was really hard to rob someone. You needed a certain amount of quietude and it wasn't there.

JK This is also when drugs are becoming more widespread throughout the youth culture, in particular.

Condon Oh, yes. Marijuana, some of the stronger drugs. Yes, this was peace and love. I did that for three years.

JK So, 1965 to 1968. How did your precinct deal with the changing drug culture?

Condon Precincts don't. Precincts deal with crowd control.

JK Kids smoking pot in Washington Square Park?

Condon Yes. We had narcotics people who would arrest them for doing that. They had to be pretty dumb for us to arrest them in uniform, you know? Frankly, there were so many people down there that the last thing I wanted was any of my cops making an arrest if they could avoid it, because I needed them there to deal with the people. I didn't need them in the station house with some kid with a cigarette. So, we tried not to make arrests. But every now and then you get someone with a gun or something like that, and you have to arrest them. I got involved with one shooting down there, where what it looked like and what it turned out to be were two different things. I turned the corner with a Police Captain, and there was a Black guy with no shirt on, no shoes on, just pants, with a gun, standing over two kids he had just shot.

JK That does not look good.

Condon That does not look good. And so, I drew my gun and this other fellow, the Captain drew his gun and we told him to drop the gun and he did and we arrested him. And it turned out that he picked up some girl in a bar, they went back to his place on Sullivan or whatever it was. They had sex. They were drinking. They got in an argument. She ran out of the ground-floor apartment, saying she'd been raped and she was naked. She was also out there when we got there. And so, the local young kids decided to exact revenge, so they were breaking into his apartment and started beating him up, and he retreated to a bedroom and he had a .22 pistol, and so, he started shooting and he hit two of them, and they all ran out, and then he came running out, and that's when we walked into it.

JK I don't know which is a worse story. It's not good for everyone involved.

Condon No, it isn't. It is not good. We had to stick him in a store until we could get help so we could get him out there. Everyone was outraged that he shot these two kids. Neither of them died.

JK It's still somewhat of an Italian neighborhood in there.

Condon Oh, yeah. Oh, sure.

JK So, you've got the Hippiedom, the new residents, a Black guy moving into an Italian neighborhood, which isn't a normal thing, even in 1965.

Condon No, no. St. Anthony's was the church right on Houston Street there. And I had been a sergeant, I think I was a sergeant there for three years and then when I became captain of the 1st Precinct, I took over the original 1st Precinct, and I took over the 4th Precinct, and combined them into one precinct. Now I went all the way up to Houston Street. I went to a community meeting at St. Anthony's in the basement, as the captain of

the precinct, and I started to talk, and some old guy and woman raised their hands. Now, this is 1972. And she said, "Weren't you the sergeant in the 6th Precinct on MacDougall Street?" I said, "Yes." She said, "He's all right." And that was about as good as you could do. "He's all right." When the women worked in the Italian restaurants on Sixth Avenue and all, and those restaurants would close at two or three o'clock in the morning, I always tried to have policemen in that area so that the women could walk home without getting molested or bothered. That's why I was okay, I guess.

JK You have to adjust to the specifics of the community, no matter which precinct you're in.

Condon Yes.

JK It's not appropriate to move in and say, "This is how we do it. Sorry, we can't assign a patrolman just because you're getting out of your restaurant."

Condon Right. No.

JK You put a patrolman in there. So, you had not expected to get involved in investigations and police corruption?

Condon No.

JK This is after you got your degree at Pace University?

Condon It was during the time I was getting my degree.

JK I'm still, you just, out of the blue, as a patrolman in uniform, wrote to the Police Commissioner and said, "I want a better job?"

Condon Yes.

JK When you were Commissioner, did you get letters like that?

Condon I never saw them. But that was one of the procedures that was in place back then. Any police officer could request an interview with the Police Commissioner. I mean, it might take a long time before you got it, but you got it. And that's in the old Police Headquarters, with the old Police Commissioner's office. The Victorian Fox Hole, they called it.

JK The Victorian Fox Hole? The one that was bombed?

Condon Well, the building was. They never got the Police Commissioner's office. It had the old gas lights on the wall. In fact, they were going to move it to the new Police Headquarters intact, but it would have cost too much money. But if you ever see the old Water Mattheau movie *The Taking of Pelham 123*, not the Denzel Washington one,

there's a scene in that movie that takes place, supposedly in the District Attorney's Office, and it's actually the Police Commissioner's old office before it became luxury condos.

JK On Centre Street?

Condon Yes, on Centre Street. It's a magnificent office, and the waiting room had all mirrors. It was like an old room, a waiting room, and the walls were all mirrors. So, if you were sitting there, waiting to see the Police Commissioner and you had done something wrong, you couldn't escape yourself!

JK It sounds like your career took off from the time you were involved in this investigation of police corruption.

Condon Yes.

JK Were you surprised when you got into that investigation at the extent of what you were finding?

Condon Oh, sure. Sure.

JK I mean, there must have been a pad in the precinct.

Condon Well, first of all, the 80th Precinct was a poor precinct. And where it wasn't poor, it was residential. So, I never saw any of that in the 8-0 Precinct. I'm sure there was minor petty corruption, but there was nothing like that. And when I went into this investigation, even when we went into it, we were sort of looking at the gambling end of it, the money going from Harlem to the East Side, and that sort of thing. And then it took us a long time before we were able, we knew about this guy, they called him 'The Mechanic' and we had phone taps going, and we could never get that phone number. They were very careful. They would never give that phone number over any phone that they were using, and they would move him. And when they moved him, he couldn't give the number. He couldn't say on Tuesday, "I'm moving tomorrow. You can get me at such-and-such a number." He would just be gone. And then, unless you had the contact with the corrupt police officers, you couldn't get in touch with him. So, it was a fairly sophisticated system. But we were actually, once we were able to follow him. By the way, when we were doing the grand jury investigation, he disappeared and so did another fellow. The other fellow showed up again five years later, but this guy never showed up anywhere again. So, we just assumed.

JK That he was never going to show up anywhere.

Condon That he was never going to show up anywhere, yes. So, yeah, we had no idea the extent, and when we started getting the calls, and we started to realize how all of these people were being paid, were paying every plainclothes unit, the Division, the Borough, and it was just a lot of money for those days.

JK Yes. For those days, forty or fifty thousand dollars is a lot of money, still today.

Condon Now, I don't know how it was distributed. I don't know how much a share was for each person

JK But it went up through Captains to Inspectors?

Condon Oh, yes.

JK To Chiefs?

Condon Yes.

JK And no one was brought down by this because Frank Hogan would not?

Condon Hogan wouldn't allow the wiretaps to be used. And then, when he did allow the wiretaps to be used, because it was Hogan who did allow them to be used, and everyone was indicted, I forget how many people, probably fifty or sixty people, then the court threw out the wiretaps.

JK The court threw out the wiretaps?

Condon Yes. So, we had some people who we convicted in the trial room, but then we lost that because of the fact that it was based on wiretaps. In fact, there was a great old lawyer by the name of Victor Herowitz, who was defending two of the plainclothes police officers. We charged them with conduct unbecoming a police officer and prejudicial to the good order and efficiency of the department, and tending to bring disgrace on the department. Actually, it turned out to be funny because I was testifying, Herowitz was the lawyer, Ben Ward was the Trial Commissioner. He was the Trial Commissioner in the Police Department at the time, and Herowitz said at the time, "I'd like to make two arguments. The first one, you're going to reject. I would argue that the wrong people are on trial here. Lieutenant Condon and Lieutenant Compariati should be on trial, because it's obvious that my people did everything in their power to not bring disgrace on the Police Department. Whereas these two lieutenants, by their investigation did bring disgrace."

JK That's pretty good!

Condon Especially since everyone just laughed. But he knew. The evidence was overwhelming. He said, "If you want, I can identify the voice on the telephone. I've known him for so long." He said, "And you're going to win the trial, but then I'm going to go into court, and I'm going to win in court." He was one of those very unusual lawyers. He cross-examined you for two or three hours, and at the end of that, you'd still like him. He was just an unusual guy.

JK But it is unusual, especially in a corruption case like this.

Condon Yes.

JK So, it seems like a natural for you to be involved with the Knapp Commission.

Condon Yes. We ended up, my partner and I ended up.

JK Who was your partner?

Condon A fellow by the name of Joe Compariati, who actually went on, he stayed at the Special Prosecutor's Office after I left there, and he ended up investigating the French Connection case. The theft of the narcotics. Which was a very interesting investigation.

JK And the person who was suspected ultimately committed suicide, didn't he?

Condon Yes. One of them. But there was another one who did not commit suicide.

JK Did they think he did it, or was he just?

Condon He was involved. I don't think he was the mastermind. And they did everything. I mean, the investigation was interesting. They found bugs in whatever they put in the powder to replace the narcotics, and they brought them to entomologists at the Museum to try and determine the lifespan of these bugs so that they can figure out when the theft would have taken place. It was a very interesting investigation. I had nothing to do with it. I would have loved to have been involved in it, but I wasn't. But he would tell me the stories about it.

JK As a police officer, as an investigator, I'm sure it would be more satisfying to be involved in investigating a drug case and the theft of drugs and all, rather than widespread Police Department corruption.

Condon Yes.

JK But there were you were when the Knapp Commission broke.

Condon When the Knapp Commission broke, we ended up running Bill Phillips.

JK You did?

Condon Yes. My partner and I. He would be wired, going in. But Phillips had a short lived success. It became very clear, apparently very soon, that he was working for the Knapp Commission.

JK You mean it became common knowledge very quickly, before he could get, he got some information.

Condon He got some information, and then they were trying to get him back into plainclothes. And it was so unusual for anyone to ever go back into plainclothes, that I think it just raised suspicion, and no one wanted anything to do with him. And then he ended up getting convicted of murder. He's out now. But I arrested a cop who had worked with him, and I said, "Did you ever work with Bill Phillips?" He said, "Yes." And some of these cops were corrupt are not shy about it.

JK Yes, that's the surprising thing.

Condon Yes. He said, "Yes." I said, "Well, what was he like to work with?" He said, "There was no one you would rather have backing you up in an alley in a fight than Bill Phillips. And there was no one that you would do a deal with like Bill Phillips, because he'd screw you every time." It was a very strange world that these people lived in.

JK How, actually, did it happen that you became attached to the Knapp Commission, and how did you encounter Mike Armstrong?

Condon I met Mike Armstrong in 1968. There was a big fight going on between the Knapp Commission and the Manhattan District Attorney's Office. Joe Phillips was in the Rackets Bureau working for Al Scotti. Armstrong was coming to meet with them because there was some kind of a jurisdictional dispute over something, and I was present at the meeting. Armstrong was talking about corruption and Phillips, who didn't really know my background, and I had already done all these other things, he turned to me and he said, "How many precincts do you think have a pad?" I said, "Seventy-eight," because there were seventy-eight precincts at the time. He was shocked, you know? But it was still the culture of the Department. Based on that, I had some conversations with Armstrong, and then he asked the Police Commissioner to assign me and my partner to work with them on Phillips, so that's how we became friends. Then, when he became, everything involved around corruption. When Mackell got indicted out in Queens, and the Governor asked Armstrong to go out there as the Queens D.A., he called the Police Commissioner [Donald F.] Cawley, and he asked Cawley to assign me to the Queens D.A. Squad.

JK Did they need special running at that point? The Queens D.A. Squad, was it, I mean, on the one hand, Mackell seemed to have gotten railroaded by Nadjari.

Condon And Bob McGuire was his Defense Attorney, and he actually won the case.

JK Yes. But not before he had to resign.

Condon Oh, yeah.

JK Not before all sorts of personal and professional problems, a career in ruins.

Condon Sure. Over some Ponzi scheme.

JK Yes, that everyone lost money on.

Condon Yes.

JK But going out to the Queens D.A. Office, did it need shaking up, when you were there, or were they just functioning and had the spotlight turned on them?

Condon Actually, most of the detectives who were there, I kept. I brought in a few people who I knew and trusted, but most of the detectives who were there stayed there. I had no issues.

JK That's the impression I got, that it wasn't that it was an office in shambles or disarray, it was just Nadjari was going after them, and it puts everyone in a bad light.

Condon Yes. And, in fact, when Armstrong went out there, he brought John Keenan out as his Chief Assistant. He asked me to take the Squad, and he brought a woman out to be his Assistant or his Executive. But he didn't make any other changes. The place was relatively intact. And Armstrong, who knew he was leaving, he wasn't going to run for election. Keenan wanted to go back to Manhattan. And I, of course, had no intention of staying there. Actually, it was almost a demotion for me because I was running a big precinct and then I ended up, and they asked me to do it and I did. So, we all left at the end of the year and went back to our lives.

Side 2

JK What was the effect when the *New York Times* started running these stories? The political establishment in New York suddenly is playing hot potato, like, "You take it."

Condon Yes.

JK And suddenly, they have to do this investigative commission. What was the sense in the Department at the time? Was this a, "Yeah, nothing's going to happen?" Or, was this a, "Boy, we ought to really take this seriously?"

Condon I think it was probably mixed. I think some people thought you should really take it seriously, and I think other people thought that nothing was going to happen. And probably, some of what the Knapp Commission did, never really came out as part of the Knapp Commission, you know? It ended up with the U.S. Attorney's Office of the Southern District of New York. Leuci, Bob Leuci for example.

JK That was really the big score.

Condon But it wasn't a Knapp Commission score because they couldn't expose what they had found. Phillips was a big witness in the Knapp Commission hearings. Then you had Serpico and Durk. Serpico, I mean, actually, both of them, well, Durk went on and did some things after that. I think he became Assistant Commissioner in the Tax Department or something. He did a few things. Serpico just sort of was lost.

JK Yeah, he went off in peculiar directions, in a lot of ways.

Condon Yes. And Phillips, of course, went to prison.

JK But it's interesting. There wasn't any widespread shake-up in the Police Department?

Condon Oh, there was. Leary left and Murphy became Police Commissioner, and Murphy forced a lot of people out, a lot of the Chiefs.

JK What was it? It was some phenomenal, like eighty-five or ninety percent of the Chiefs were gone. So, it was a wholesale turnover.

Condon Yes. Because anyone above the rank captain served in that rank at the discretion of the Police Commissioner. So, you can be an Assistant Chief and he could call you in and say, I want you to retire. And if you don't retire, you're going to a Captain or you're going to be a Deputy Chief or you're going to be an Inspector. So, a lot of people did leave under that.

JK It's interesting, the Knapp Commission itself didn't really result in many prosecutions?

Condon No, not that, I had a limited role with the Knapp Commission. I had the Phillips end of the Knapp Commission. I didn't know about Leuci. And some of the other stuff was petty corruption and things like that.

JK They did highlight a lot of petty corruption.

Condon Oh, yeah! Oh, absolutely. Yes. Yes.

JK But did they highlight the links between the petty corruption by the patrolmen and the Captain in the Precinct? Or was it simply the patrolmen on the beat?

Condon It sort of ended up scattered. You had the Phillips stuff, dealing with the corruption and the plainclothes, and even in the squads. You had the petty corruption at the precinct levels. You know, the big thing that didn't come out until the Feds did it. But it sort of gave a lot of people a reason not to engage in the petty corruption. Who didn't want to do it, but now they could say, look, the department had changed. And a lot of

commanding officers knew that their careers were in jeopardy if this stuff was going on in their command. So, actually, the culture changed.

JK That's what Mike Armstrong says in summing up the Knapp Commission. He uses the formula ten percent of the police are absolutely corrupt, ten percent are absolutely honest and eighty percent are corrupt but wish they could go straight.

Condon Well, straight, because they think that the punishments of not being straight outweigh the rewards of not being straight. I mean, there's probably a whole host of reasons why people are not corrupt or are corrupt.

JK Twenty years later you had the Mollen Commission investigating police misbehavior, but it didn't focus on the same kind of issue. It sounded like the kind of corruption you discovered when you first were doing investigations, up through the Knapp Commission and Serpico and all the rest, that that seemed to have really diminished as part of the police culture.

Condon Yes. Now, what became important and is still probably, to a large extent, important is the narcotics corruption. And the narcotics not only corruption, but the narcotics where you get police robbing the narcotics dealers, or setting up the narcotics dealers to be robbed. You get that, but that's sort of, there's nothing organized about that.

JK That's a criminal enterprise.

Condon Yes, that's a criminal enterprise.

JK You were simply discovering police who were accepting bribes to not report on gambling, organized crime gambling.

Condon Yes.

JK They weren't setting up their own rival gambling operations.

Condon No.

JK Whereas the narcotics corruption that gave rise to the Mollen Commission and all, was really scary.

Condon It was! And it was different. But the Mollen Commission, I had nothing to do with the Mollen Commission.

JK Right, I know.

Condon The Knapp Commission, I knew about, and I was involved in it, and the other investigations I was involved in, but Mollen I was not.

JK So, what about Patrick Murphy's shake-up with the Police Department? He was the Commissioner during the Knapp Commission hearings, and Mike Armstrong talks about having meetings with him and discussing how they're going to handle people like Bill Phillips and the rest. But the end result was, he completely shook up the upper ranks of the Department.

Condon Yes. Well, when they put me in the 1st Precinct, there was a specific corruption investigation going on in the 1st Precinct, and it had to do with, of all things, these peddlers who are out here, who are, believe it or not, apparently, there was a lot of money to be made by the police from these peddlers because they would all, in the 1st Precinct, the corruption was organized by a sergeant and a captain, as far as I understand. And they were getting paid by the peddlers and it was sophisticated enough that when the investigation started, they actually had the peddlers picket the police station, claiming that the police were too hard on them, to try and sway the Department from thinking that they were being corrupt.

JK That's pretty clever.

Condon It was pretty clever, yes. So, they had this thing going on, and they were about to close the investigation, and I was supposed to be at the Police Academy. I was supposed to be writing about the six months I spent at Bramshill and the differences in leadership and things like that. I got a call that said, "We want you to go to the 1st Precinct and clean it out." I was Captain. So, I went to the 1st Precinct. And I no sooner got there than they called and they said, "Don't do anything. We've turned someone and the investigation is active again." And I'm thinking, "Here they put me in this cesspool, and they don't want me to do anything."

JK How does that make you look?

Condon Yes, if this investigation goes on for a year, without me doing anything, when do I become part of the regime that allowed this to happen, you know? So, I was not very happy about that. But it didn't last too long because the corrupt people figured out who was turned, and they weren't dealing with him. And they called the investigation with what they had. And, at that point, I transferred the whole precinct. I transferred almost everyone in the precinct, and I kept one sergeant and one lieutenant. I just sent everyone. Then I merged the precinct with the 4th Precinct, and then I got drafted to go to Queens. And then I came back, and, of all things, they put me in charge of crime prevention.

JK Crime prevention?

Condon You know, you'd go on TV and you'd go on the radio and you'd go to groups and talk about.

JK That's not being a cop.

Condon No, that's not being a cop. It lasted one year and then Morgenthau got elected D.A. in Manhattan and he asked me to take over the Manhattan D.A. Squad, so that I got rescued from crime prevention, and then went back to doing what I did. Conduct investigations. And I spent almost two years there, and then I went to the Special Prosecutor's Office.

JK That sounds like a great gig, being the head of the Investigative Unit for the Manhattan D.A.

Condon It was. We did some very interesting investigations because we would have people down in what were then called the 'Tombs.' They also got named after one of my successors [Bernard Kerik].

JK That's true.

Condon And then unnamed. But if someone was in, and they wanted to talk to a policeman, they would notify us and I would send a detective down there. And so, we would get information on schemes that hadn't happened yet. We had an armed robbery in Sloan-Kettering Hospital. Sloan-Kettering Hospital was one of the last places that paid its employees in cash, and so, we actually set-up in the hospital, and eventually, when these guys came to do the robbery, we actually caught them right in the act of doing it. And we had another one where they were going to kidnap a woman out in Hawthorne, New Jersey, because she owned a gold and jewelry store on 47th Street, and we took those people out in New Jersey. I mean, it was an interesting place. We even had an author who wrote a book about Bebe Rebozo, and he had the manuscript stolen from his apartment.

JK That's an interesting crime.

Condon So, that was interesting. I remember Morgenthau and I were having a conversation. He said, "What can we do?" I said, "Why don't you, you know the people in the *New York Times*." This is going back some years. And the *New York Times*, in the Book Review Section, they used to have a little section underneath the Best Seller List, talking about books. I said, "If you can get a blurb in there saying that although this fellow, a literary thief stole this guy's manuscript, but fortunately he has another copy and he's just putting the finishing touches on it and it should be finished in a couple weeks." And at that point, we then set-up, I had wiretaps on the phone and I had bugging in the apartment. We had surveillance in the street. We were sure we were going to get someone from the CIA or somewhere, coming back and doing it again. It didn't work. What a great plan, it's a shame that we didn't get.

JK It was a plan that didn't work, but it was a great plan.

Condon It was a great plan, but it didn't work.

JK But that is an interesting question: who would want a manuscript about Bebe Rebozo? I can't see it being a best seller.

Condon No, I think he had written one other book, *Coogan's Bluff*, but not the old Clint Eastwood movie. This was about the Giants, baseball.

JK Before we get to you as Police Commissioner, what did you do at the British Police College in Bramshill?

Condon They had their Senior Command Course, and it was designed for those people in the British Police Service, who they thought were going to be eventually running the major departments. And it was pretty interesting. About twenty people on my course. The Deputy Commissioner of New Zealand was on. He became Commissioner. A fellow by the name of Kenny Newman was on the course with me. He became Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. Other people became Commissioners or were Chief Constables. Bob Bunyam became her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary. So, either the course, they saw the course identified people who were going to go to the top. I think it was the other way around. I think people who they thought were going to go to the top, they put on the course. So, it's a little bit different. It was mostly about leadership. They showed this great old movie, *Tunes of Glory* with John Mills and Alec Guinness. If you've never seen it, it's a marvelous movie. It's about a new commander of a regiment and how the fellow who thought he was going to get it, Alec Guinness, just totally undermines him. It's a wonderful movie. And we actually did some joint exercises with the British military. Like a riot in Hong Kong, and how the police reacted differently from the Army. There was one thing where they were going to put people on the roof of a building, and I said, "How are you going to get them off?" They said, "Well, we don't worry about that." I said, "Well, you don't worry about that but we worry about that."

JK Yes, if I'm putting my guys up there, I want my guys to be able to come down.

Condon Yes.

JK The Army is, "We put you out there, and if you don't come back, well, you were in the Army."

Condon Yes. It was just very interesting.

JK You were the first American police official to go to Bramshill.

Condon There was one fellow before me, from Chicago, I think. I think his name was Johnson. I never met him.

JK So, you were the second?

Condon I was the second, yes. And I was the first New Yorker. New York sent people for a number of years after that.

JK The program still has a connection with John Jay College. A coordinator from Bramshill came into the library, and I gave them a tour of the library and what our resources are and what his person will have access to while he's here, that kind of thing.

Condon Yes. I mean, it was wonderful for me. It was an experience I never expected. That was in 1972. Then I came back and went to the 1st Precinct, and then Queens, and then the D.A.'s office, and then out of the department. And I stayed out of the department until 1986. I was the Commissioner of Criminal Justice in the state, and had been doing that for three years, when I got a call from Ben Ward, asking me when I was going to be back in town, in New York City, and could I stop by and see him. So, I went down and he told me that Pat Murphy was leaving, and that Pat Murphy had recommended, this was the other Pat Murphy.

JK I know, there are two Pat Murphys. I didn't know there were two Richard Condons. Now I know there are two.

Condon Yes, there are two Richard Condons. And Murphy had recommended that Ward take me as the First Deputy Commissioner. Ward made it very clear. If Pat decides he's not going to retire, there's no offer. But if he retires, I want you to become the First Deputy Commissioner, which was sort of funny because Pat was weighing an offer from Merrill Lynch, and I had gotten a call from Mike Armstrong saying, 'I don't know if you're interested in private sector or not, but you should call the General Counsel at Merrill Lynch,' who eventually became the Deputy Commissioner of Legal Matters for the Police Department. He said, "He might want to talk to you." He wanted to talk to me. So, I'm being interviewed by Ward and he's telling me if Murphy stays, you don't have the job. And if Murphy goes, I want you to be the Commissioner. I'm sitting there thinking, "If Murphy stays, then I've got to decide whether I want to go to Merrill Lynch or I want to stay." And Murphy was a friend of mine, yes! But it was interesting with Ward. I found Ward to be a fascinating person. He said to me, "I can't interview you because I know you and I know who you are." He said, "But why I want you to have this job is because when I'm in a room with all my Commanders, if I say 'charge' they're all going to say 'charge.'" He said, "I want someone in the room who is going to say, 'Well, maybe you shouldn't charge. And I think you'd do that.'" He said, "And I may never listen to you. I may never pay attention to you. But I want that voice in the room." That was his philosophy. And then when I got there, of course, here is another very interesting thing. There was a time when he was sort of feeling me out and not sure, my judgment, maybe. And then when he sort of decided that I was really his First Deputy, what he would do is he would have a meeting. He would tell me, "Don't come into the meeting until I call you." And he would wait until everyone else was in the room, and then he would go on the intercom and say, "Dick, can you come in? We're ready to start." And then, as the meeting ended, he would say, "Okay, all of you can leave except Dick. I want you to stay." And with just those two things, he made it clear to everyone in the hierarchy of the Police Department that I was the person that they had to contend with because I was the person he trusted. He just made things very easy.

JK “We’re going to have a group discussion and then everyone is going to leave, and I’m going to discuss it with the person who is going to help me make the decision. Thank you very much.”

Condon Right. Yes.

JK You need someone who can give you that kind of support in a position where you can be so easily undermined.

Condon Oh, yes. Yes.

JK He could have just put you out there and said, “Here, go take care of it,” and then not backed you up on decisions.

Condon Right. He knew what he was doing. Of course, toward the end, he had very bad asthma, and he started to spend time out sick and in the hospital and all that, and then eventually, he didn’t resign until after Koch lost. But I don’t think he would have stayed anyway. I think he was starting to feel, you know, his health was not good.

JK He stuck around until the primary, when David Dinkins beat Ed Koch in the primary.

Condon Right. When Yusef Hawkins got killed, in Bath Beach. Until then, it was funny, Koch was so convinced he was going to win the primary that he got Dinkins to agree that the loser of the primary would not run as an independent. Up until the day that Yusef Hawkins got shot and killed, and that was a tragedy.

JK That was just horrible.

Condon He was going out to buy a car. He was a hard worker. A kid. He went to school and everything. These jerky kids killed him. And that cost Koch the primary.

JK It cost Koch the primary, but it put you into the Commissioner’s office for a couple of months.

Condon Yes, yes. And they were a very interesting couple of months. A lot of things happened during those months.

JK Well, if you’re Police Commissioner of the City of New York, a lot of things are going to happen, no matter what you do. On your watch, the one interesting was the murder of the two detectives who were transporting the prisoner.

Condon The Queens D.A.’s. Squad, yes. What happened was that they brought this guy in from Rikers, I guess it was, because they thought he was going to be a witness in a homicide. They left him in the room by himself and he was handcuffed, one wrist was handcuffed to a table, and they left him in a room where all the detectives had their

lockers. He went into one of the lockers and found a gun. When they were taking him back, they put him, again, because they were trying to kind of cultivate this guy, and they let him sit in the back seat of the car by himself, and they were sitting in the front seat of the car, and he forced them over, he took the gun out and said, "pull over to the side of the road." He could have gotten out of the car, handcuffed them, anything. But he executed them. He just executed them. I think it was the next day or maybe it was two days later, we caught him. I went to the Queens D.A.'s office to announce that we had caught him, and on the way in, I was told that the press, in fact, I know it was Mike Taibbi, that someone had told the press that the two cops had left this guy alone in a room, that he got another cop's gun, and they left him. So Taibbi said to me, "Isn't it true that this fellow was left in a room all by himself?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Isn't it true that he got a gun out of a cop's locker that wasn't locked?" I said, "Yes." He said, "And isn't it true that they let him sit in the back seat of the car?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, isn't it true, then, that they were partly responsible, that their mistakes contributed to the death?" And I said, "Yes, but when you make a mistake you say 'cut' and you start over again." "When we make a mistake, someone dies. And they died as a result of their mistake." *Newsday* the next day there was a big headline, "We goofed," which was something that wasn't in quotes. It was something I didn't say, would never have said.

JK But it's hard, because the public perception was, "What were these guys doing? What were they thinking?" It sounds like they broke a lot of rules, but within their thinking with this particular guy, they were not breaking rules.

Condon Yes. They were trying to cultivate him, I mean, no one thought they'd get murdered. And it was such a senseless, he didn't have to do it. It's not like he was in a gun fight with them or anything. He was totally in control.

JK And it was just murder?

Condon It was just murder. Unfortunately, well, I spoke to one widow. The other woman wouldn't speak to me. But I went to see the one woman, and I said to her, "Do you think that I would say something like that? I'm a policeman, I've been a policeman all my life." She said, "I don't pay any attention to that."

JK But it's an event that, unfortunately, put you in the center of what it means to be Commissioner.

Condon Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, sure. Yes.

JK You have to deal with the mistakes of your guys as well as the –

Condon And you can't lie to the press. You cannot lie to the press. In fact, the guy from the *Post*. He called me up, and I didn't even know him, and he said, "You know what? You did the right thing. You had no choice. If you had lied, they would have crucified you." But anyway, that happened. When Hoban and Buczek got killed, Chris Hoban and Michael Buczek, it was the only time in the history of the Police Department

that two police officers were killed in the same day in separate incidents. And I don't think it's happened since then. And they were both, well, Hoban was an undercover narcotics cop. He got killed, shot in the head by a drug dealer trying to make a buy. And Buczek got killed, him and his partner were chasing a drug dealer, and he got shot and killed. But with Buczek, we're in the hospital and the chief surgeon, who was a fellow by the name of Greg Fried, and he came in, I had been with him at the other hospital earlier. It was like one of those strange nights. And he took me aside, Ward was not there, Ward was sick. He said, "That cop, had he been wearing a bullet-proof vest, he'd be sitting up talking to you now." And he wasn't wearing a bullet-proof vest that day. I called the Chief of the Department and I said, "Put out an order, effective midnight tonight. I will suspend any cop, any uniformed cop who is out on patrol without wearing a bullet-proof vest." "You can't do that. The Union will fight you." I said, "Fine, if the union wants to fight me for keeping cops alive, that's a fight I'm very happy to have." Ten minutes later, the number two guy in the union came in, he said "Can I talk to you." He said, "We'll back you a hundred percent. We're not going to, this is crazy." The theory on the union's part was that if you're mandated to wear a bullet-proof vest, and you didn't wear it and you got killed, we might not consider it in the line of duty. Which was totally stupid. What are you going to do? Say, "Well, we're going to fine him. I know he's dead, but we're going to fine him because he didn't wear a bullet-proof vest." It was sort of a silly thing. And the Department went from, remember, in the beginning, the Department wouldn't pay for bullet-proof vests. So they went from that, when I put that order out, that's when it changed. And still.

JK Still, everyone is wearing them.

Condon Everyone is wearing them.

JK You see in the subways, ninety-eight degrees, they've got the armor on.

Condon Yes. They have them on. And every now and then, it's funny, because every now and then Fried will call me, the surgeon, and he'll say, "I see another cop got shot, and he had his bullet-proof vest on." So he was really the --

JK That just happened recently.

Condon Oh, yes.

JK Just within the last couple of weeks, an officer was shot, and he was sitting up in the hospital.

Condon Yes. That was a big thing. And then the near-police strike over the 77th Precinct. That was a funny thing. I'll tell you a funny story. The police were going to march across the Brooklyn Bridge.

JK Which they have done on other occasions.

Condon Right. Ward and Johnson, who was Chief of the Department, were determined that it wasn't going to happen. I was not really involved in that aspect of it. And I'm thinking, this is crazy. We should be negotiating with the unions.

JK This is Ben Ward deciding that, in the wake of the 77th out in Bedford Stuyvesant.

Condon All the cops were going to be transferred. All the cops that live in Long Island were no longer going to be in Queens Precinct.

JK They're going to be in the Bronx, Staten Island, everyone's going to rotate at random.

Condon Yes. Yes. That was the thing.

JK I can see where that's a union issue.

Condon Yes! So, that escalated and there was going to be a march the next day. I went home that night and, it's funny. My wife would very rarely comment on the Department, but I was telling her, "Everyone has got this hard fast position, and it makes no sense at all." She said, "Well, what can you do about it?" I said, "I can't do anything unless they ask me to get involved, but I think I can." She said, "What kind of people are you dealing with if you're the peacemaker?" They must really be bad. I said, "Well, that's what you think of me!" So, what happened later that night, Johnson called me at home and said, "You know, this is going to be very bad for the Department. We're not going to get over this." I said, "Bob, tell that to Ben, and if he calls me, I will reach out to [Phil] Caruso." The good thing was, I was not involved in any back-and-forth. He said, "Okay," and ten minutes later, Ward called me and he said, "You know, Johnson said, Can you do anything," and I said, "I'll call Caruso." I said now, "I'm going to tell him, not that you're rescinding the order, but you're going to delay issuing that order, and that I will negotiate with Caruso to change the parameters of it." I called Caruso up. Caruso was a very sane labor union person. He didn't want this anymore than anyone else did. I said, "We're not going to implement the order. Call off the march, and then I will with meet you in the hotel in the World Trade Center." I met with him a number of times. I said, "I'll meet you and we'll work this out." And that's eventually what happened. There was no march. There was no strike. There was no confrontation. There were some transfers, but it was much, much smaller.

JK It wasn't the widespread random distribution of officers who spend six months in the Bronx and six months on Staten Island. It was pretty much the status quo.

Condon Right. And Caruso was a pain to negotiate with.

JK He's a pain in the ass to read about in the press.

Condon Yes. And I said to him at one point I said, "I have two fears." He said, "What are they?" I said, "The first fear is that you and I are not going to agree, and we're

going to have chaos.” He said, “Well, what’s your second fear?” I said, “That you and I are going to agree, and I’m going to be stuck negotiating with you on everything that comes up in the Police Department.” That was an interesting event, was that 77th Precinct. And the bullet-proof vests, when I look back on all my time in the Police Department, that was just, you know, making something good happen out of something bad, which you don’t often get a chance to do. So, that was gratifying.

JK As a New Yorker living in the City, I was a young kid in graduate school in the late 1970s. The City was really a mess. It was really in chaos.

Condon We’re still talking about that now. It’s come back into vogue again, it’s about the 1970s.

JK Are we coming back? But in speaking with Mayor Koch and others about that time, the impression I got was, despite the fiscal crisis and the layoffs and everything, the Koch Administration was really intent on taking the City back.

Condon Yes.

JK That we’d bottomed-out, and the Koch Administration really tried to get the police to re-establish order in the streets of New York and the subways.

Condon Yes. But you also had the assassination of Eddie Byrne the police officer.

JK That was one of the worst moments, one of the lowest moments.

Condon Yes. And out of that grew TNT, Tactical Narcotics Team, where we put, I think, a thousand or more, policemen into those neighborhoods. And I remember that because the Governor was involved. And the Governor said, “What do you need?” He got us the armories. We got an armory in every borough that we could use to house these people. I remember the Commanding Officer of the Queens Armory, we were having a meeting there and the Governor turned to him and said, “You’re going to be able to accommodate the police, aren’t you?” He said, “Well, I’m not sure.” And he said, “Well, if you can’t accommodate the police, I’m going to get another head of this Armory.” So, being the First Deputy Commissioner, I said, “What about funding?” And the Governor said, “Don’t worry about the funding.” And Koch said, “Don’t worry about the funding.” And so, I got the budget director, and he didn’t say, “Don’t worry about the funding.” What are you going to cut in order to get the money to do this, Commissioner?” That was it. Almost every killing, and I had a lot of cops killed in the four years I went back. Almost every killing had to do with narcotics.

JK It was all narcotics.

Condon It was all narcotics. And it never ended. I remember coming home. I guess it was the night of Hoban and Buczek. And I had gone out that night to have dinner with my son who was up at Fordham University. I never had dinner with him. In fact, it was

funny, having dinner with him, a priest by the name of Brian Frawley, and his brother, who was the Commissioner of Investigation, Kevin Frawley. I got to the restaurant, my driver came running in and said, "A policeman is shot. They think he's going to die." I said to the priest, "Come with me." Then, when we finally finished, a couple hours later, my son and this other Commissioner and the priest were all waiting, we were still going to go out and get something to eat, and we were still in the hospital and a cop came up to me and said, "We've got another cop shot. It looks very bad." So, I took the priest with me again, and I sent my son home. I sent him back to Fordham. Buczek's wife, they lived up in Rockland County somewhere. So, I sent this priest up to comfort her when the police went to notify her. She was a young girl. So, we did the whole thing in the hospital and everything, and I get home, and it's like three o'clock in the morning. Two things. My wife said to me, "You can't tell me that this is the same police department that you were in ten years ago." I said, "You're right. I can't tell you that." Just killing cops. And then the phone rings and it's Operations and they say, "Hey, Commissioner, we hate to bother you, but there's some guy up in Rockland County who says he's a priest, and he has no way to get home. "What should we do?" I said, "Yeah, he's mine," and so, I sent a car. We became good friends after that, but it was just funny. Funny, some of the things that happened.

JK Well, thank you very much for your time. I will get you the transcript. It's been almost an hour-and-a-half. If we want to re-visit some topics, I hope you'll give me another hour or so.

Condon Yes. Let me tell you one other thing that I think you'll find very interesting, when I was Police Commissioner, the Chief of Police of Moscow came to see me, and he said, "I have two questions. When you don't have a confession, what do you use to convict someone of a crime?" And so, I went into the various things.

JK Evidence, being one of them.

Condon Yes. And the second thing he said to me was, "How do you police a peaceful demonstration?" And we had some conversation about that. Two weeks later, there was a picture on Page One of the *New York Times* of a million people in Red Square, demonstrating and it was the beginning of the end. He knew it was coming. They knew it was coming.

JK How do you do this?

Condon Yes. They knew that this, that they were no longer going to just suppress everything.

Tape 2, Side 1

JK My question is this: since so many of the crimes and the violence against police officers and the violence in the streets is narcotics related, and you just mentioned a book

about national prohibition, and the violence that came out of that, do you think that drugs ought to be legalized, or that we ought to have a de-criminalization of some of this?

Condon I would say no to the first and I would probably say yes to the second. There should be some, I think they started with the harshness of the Rockefeller drug laws, and changing that. The problem is, though, with so many into narcotics crime, what you plead guilty to is so different from what happened. You may plead guilty to a narcotics charge, and yet, there was all kinds of violence and other things, in the original indictment. So, you have to be careful when you're talking about that. What are we really talking about when you're talking about someone dealing narcotics, and what level are you when you're talking about it? And it's very different at every level.

JK It's the violence against police officers, police officers risking their lives or losing their lives under-cover, over marijuana.

Condon It shouldn't be.

JK One of the recommendations of the Knapp Commission was to legalize gambling, and I mentioned to Joe Hynes, when I interviewed him, I looked forward every year at Super Bowl Sunday for your press conference that you busted another Gambino gambling operation!

Condon That's right.

JK And he always says, "And we ought to legalize gambling."

Condon Yes, yes. Except OTB is a failure.

JK Well, I put the tape back on, but we can turn it off. I just wonder if there's anything else you want to mention before we close out.

Condon Actually, the only other thing. You know, I did appoint a woman as the first Deputy Police Commissioner. That was the first time in the history of the Police Department.

JK And I'm looking forward to a day when it's not necessary to mention any of that – the first 'this' or the first 'that' in this position.

Condon Well, it was also the last! So, you can put it that way! You cannot say the 'first'; you can say the 'last.'

JK Yes. But in my professional career, there's no surprise as to who is in what position. Some people are there for cronyism, some are promoted through the ranks, some people are there because they're the best person, and I know they're better in that job than I would be. So, it's not a matter of gender, race or this. It's just the work world. Has the Police Department, when you joined, it was still largely Irish?

Condon Oh, yes. Oh, sure. Irish and Italian. They were basically the two groups.

JK Very Catholic.

Condon Irish and Italian!

JK Yes, but it's interesting that it's the culture of the Department, being Irish, Italian, Catholic, and now.

Condon The culture of the Supreme Court of the United States.

JK Today, that is indeed the case. But it's not the case any longer, the New York City Police Department.

Condon No.

JK Just a few years ago, they had the first minority - majority class, and it's been a minority - majority class in the Police Academy ever since.

Condon Yes. And I think the Police Department has really learned, because they didn't do that with Blacks. They were very slow to actively recruit in the Black community. And they're not that slow when it comes to any other, the Black community now, and any other community. I think they've really done a magnificent, even if you compare it with the Fire Department, it's like two different worlds. And they've really done a good job with that. And the population is just so different. New York is such a different place, so many Middle-Eastern people, some of the Island people, so many Russians and European Eastern block people who are in New York now. It's really a very, very different city now, and it's still a very good place for people to come to. It is almost always better than where they were. It's interesting. I pointed out to my wife the other morning, we were going somewhere, where I live in Staten Island, all the lawn work is done by Mexicans. You turn the corner, and there was one of the big, you know, they have these big trucks that have all the equipment in them. And it was Camacho Landscaping, and it was the first time I saw what I took to be a Mexican name, as the owner of one of these enterprises, rather than just the workers. That's New York.

JK When I interviewed Dan Donovan, the D.A. in Staten Island.

Condon Yes, I know Dan.

JK He said that one of his initiatives was to reach out to the Mexican community, the immigrant community, and have them report crimes, because they were not, and they were victims of crimes. And I thought that was a really innovative approach to his borough, as opposed to looking at St. George as a bunker.

Condon Yes, yes. We have a large Mexican population on Staten Island. It's funny because the Italian restaurants, the Albanians are being replaced by the Mexicans.

JK Yes! The Italian restaurants were Italian, run by Albanians, who are being replaced by Mexicans!

Condon Yes.

JK Well, ethnic succession.

Condon Yes.

JK Well, thank you very much.

Condon You're quite welcome.

End

Richard Condon
Index

Armstrong, Michael, 17-18, 24
Bramshill, 21, 23-24
Bullet-proof vests, 27
Byrne, Edward, 29
Caruso, Phil, 28-29
Comparati, Joe, 15-16
Drugs, 11-12, 16, 20, 27, 29-31
Fiscal crisis, 6-7
Gambling, 8-11
Gardner v. Broderick, 9-10
Greenwich Village, 11-13
Hawkins, Yusef, 25
Keenan, John, 7, 18
Knapp Commission, 16-20
Koch, Ed, 25, 29
Murphy, Patrick, 19-21
Nadjari, Maurice, 7, 17-18
New York County District Attorney, 22
New York Police Department, 5-6, 8-15, 19-22, 25-32; corruption, 8-11, 14-17, 19-21
Organized crime, 10
Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, 27-29
Phillips, William "Bill," 16-17, 19
Press, 26-27
Queens County District Attorney, 17-18
Rockefeller Drug laws, 31
Special Commissioner of Investigation for New York City Schools, 5
Tactical Narcotics Team, 29
Ward, Ben, 8, 15, 24-25, 27-28
Wiretaps, 8-9, 15