



Transcript of interview with former New York City Mayor, John Lindsay
Interviewer: Gerald Markowitz

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Transcription: Ted Houghtaling

Gerald Markowitz: Mayor Lindsay, how were you aware, in the early years, of John Jay College of Criminal Justice?

John Lindsay: I was delighted to see that among the many, many institutions of higher learning in New York City, of which there are more than eighty, that there was one that was devoted to the business of police science—and I discovered that shortly after the college of John Jay had started, which was about the time of my first election as Mayor of New York.

GM: And were you concerned in your administration about education for police and the development of police professionalism?

JL: And how. When I was first running for mayor of New York, I decided that two things were impossible— and I felt sorry for the next mayor, I didn't think it would be me—that Abe Beame would beat me and to my surprise, I won. I came back and said the issue of relations between communities and police is at rock bottom—I don't know how it's going to be repaired. I really don't. The second was schools. It seemed to me that the public would tear down the school system brick by brick—it was that horrible – the community versus the institution relationship. And it was a tough one. I discovered—[unintelligible] discovered that there was an institution of higher learning which no one knew about, which was especially for police and that was one of the great reliefs I had, and I'll tell you why later.

GM: Your police commissioner, Patrick Murphy, was one of the, not real but practical, founders of John Jay College when he was Commander at the Police Academy and he was very concerned about education of the police. When you were mayor, did you find that the police department's lower ranks supported education for police?

JL: Well, in my early days as mayor they did not know about it too much and I kept pushing, along with people like Commissioner Murphy, that the importance of going on to getting education for police. It seemed to me that police being generally isolated as it is, police talking mainly with police, which is how it mainly is, [unintelligible] that outreach programs were

essential for police. You can understand why they did that. They are the uniform people, uniformed people tend to stick with each other, they see with each other, they carry guns, there's a whole police science attached to it. The outreach programs were very, very important and the notion that it would be possible to get a degree of higher education at the same time as being a police officer was very, very exciting to me and, as far as I know, the first in the country. So we pushed it hard. I had learned something about it before I took office as mayor because a person I knew quite well in my congressional days, in the early stages of it, was one of the first professors in this subject and talked to me a lot about it. So, I knew about it from the very beginning.

GM: Did you think that a course in police science for the police was especially important, or a broad liberal arts education?

JL: It didn't matter. Going out and getting an education was the most important of all. Broader or better education – broader reach for that kind of degree that is recognized the world over as a passport. It's usually a BA or a BS degree as a general rule. It also gives you—the discipline of it—gives you breadth that you probably wouldn't have before, just like a post-education gives you breadth that you didn't have before. And that to me was the important thing, the outreach to get that specialized, extra educational discipline, to march forward as a result of that—it was all-important and I was thrilled to learn that there was such a place where policemen could go and get the special training.

GM: Do you think that police can be professionalized in a way that doctors, or lawyers, or engineers can be professionalized?

JL: Yes, they can. Don't over-professionalize them. Use common sense, a sense of community and values and what-not, and after all, in the old days when there were no schools the policemen on the beat just said hello to everybody and knew everybody and it was a very important thing. He may have carried a gun—probably did. But he was their friend. That's what it's all about. You create more discipline and orderly conduct through more sugar than salt. You put salt in the wound and exacerbation happens. There's a fall-down in discipline. You put sugar wherever you can and people begin to pay attention. It's not necessary, but in today's world, particularly when it comes to a particular science that happens to be confining, it is very important to have that outreach.

GM: Why do you think the respect for the police reached such a low-point in the late 1960s?

JL: Way back. Way back. That's because the police didn't realize that they were in the frontline and that they were the nursemaids and had to pick up the pieces for the failures of society in general. And society was angry, frustrated, there were not a lot of services to speak of, they didn't relate to people, there was no communications, you couldn't talk to City Hall; and the policemen got all the brunt of that. And he resented it and for good reason too. They're not supposed to pick up the un-met needs of society. That's what they had to do and it got worse and worse, particularly as there was more hostility, there was more removal and there was an

element of crime, and then you had black communities and non-white communities where blacks were not welcome in police departments, the police departments were all white and you had that division as well. It got to be a serious matter.

GM: Do you think that the police resented that you had made it clear that black children should not be killed in New York City?

JL: Well, I not only made it clear that black kids were not to be killed but also that it was very important to establish programs where qualified people who met the test, but were black, were accepted in the police department. We didn't have any non-whites in the police department—very few. That changed. And we had to get that changed. We had even a Police Review Board battle. So both subjects had to be addressed. Naturally it was resented because the hostility grew up in those early days before I was mayor. So the hostility began to grow and grow and grow. Police, all white cops, etc., etc., quite naturally, tended to be by themselves and isolate themselves and be away by themselves. Anything that suggested there was another course was bound to be a point of resentment.

GM: Of course in your administration, the great educational innovation in higher education was Open Admissions. Could you talk a little bit about why you supported Open Admissions in 1969, 1970?

JL: Yes, the real reason was—first of all, it was a very dangerous thing to do because we could have no diminution in quality. Standards had to be not reduced, ever, ever. That was very hard to articulate and overcome. Right now I think that's accepted. It's believed, and I don't think you can ever get away from the idea of Open Admissions even though the necessities of budgets and what not, require the State of New York under Rockefeller—and you don't fault him for this—to propose tuitions as a City University system. The idea was to reach for that goal whereby if possible you'd have an education as a matter of right. No person should be deprived of going on to higher education if you can't pay the freight. That was the whole reason for it. Secondly, to get away from the danger and the falseness and what-not, of the entrance requirements. They're now beginning to discover that the whole business of marking is faulty and you miss so much by doing that. So the idea was to say that any person who was a graduate of the universe of the primary system—who got out of it and graduated, could go to college if they wanted to. That was the idea. Now, the fact is that there were people graduating from primary schools and secondary schools who should not have graduated, who were not competent in reading and other skills and what-not—was not not necessarily the fault of the college, that had to be addressed as strongly and very hard at the high school level because again, nobody should take advantage of the open enrollment system who was not qualified.

GM: Of course, the open enrollment system was a great boon to John Jay. It doubled in size in 1970 and doubled again in 1971. Was there any concern in your administration that its focus on the police might be lost with that expansion of its interests and concerns?

JL: A little bit, but it didn't bother me so much because there was no reason for it to be entirely thought of as police. Again, you had this business of isolation all over again and it was wise to have people who associated with John Jay who were not of the police world. Heaven knows that a lot of professors in the John Jay system who didn't come out of police and what-not, who have different notions and different values and different emphasis, here and there—and I think that's important and good.

GM: Mayor Lindsay, thank you very much.

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