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Nathan Rothstein Transcript

ROSALIND HINTON: This is Rosalind Hinton interviewing Nathan Rothstein at his apartment at 4603 Chestnut in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is July 22, 2007. I'm conducting the interview for the Katrina Jewish Voices Project at the Jewish Women's Archives and the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Nathan, do you agree to be interviewed and understand that the interview will be video recorded?

NATHAN ROTHSTEIN: Yes.

RH: OK. Let's start with what year you were born and your Jewish and general education.

NR: I was born February 21, 1984 in Boston, Massachusetts at Beth Israel Hospital, and when I was one and a half, my family moved to Israel and we lived in Sde-Boker in the Negev, and my dad was doing research on Arab Jews and their migration to Israel. And after a year of living there, he moved back. He was getting his doctorate at Harvard, and we moved to Somerville, Massachusetts, and then we were living in Arlington, Massachusetts. And I went to Rashi Day School. And when I started there it was the third class, I think. And I went there from kindergarten to fourth grade. It was a Reform Jewish day school. And after fourth grade, I started going to Hebrew School, and I was bar mitzvahed at Temple Emunah in Lexington.

RH: What's the name of the temple?

NR: Temple Emunah.

RH: In Lexington. So is your Hebrew pretty good?

NR: No. No, I used to speak fluent Hebrew, Spanish, and English, but my English wasn't working out so my parents stopped speaking the others to me.

RH: Oh really? Wow!

NR: Yeah.

RH: So, have you been able to pick up the Spanish back?

NR: Yeah, I mean, I've always had trouble with languages, so my Spanish -- I just spent two weeks in Mexico City, so I definitely -- once I'm there and hearing it and speaking, it gets better. But, it's not that good.

RH: So, do you feel you've had a pretty good Jewish education?

NR: Yeah. I think in my house, the Jewish -- the reason why Judaism was taught, and why we were -- you know, why we were told go and why we were told to be active or to be involved, was the real moral understanding of Judaism. I mean, early on, my dad would -- we would do social justice events with the Jewish community. I mean, I remember pretty young, going to homeless shelters, going to after school programs, or food banks, and that being part of being Jewish is that outreach to the other community, and helping others in who are in need. So that was -- and my parents really -- I always remember coming downstairs in the morning -- Sunday mornings -- and listening to, for two hours on the NPR station they had, Israeli music. And my mom went to a Zionist school in Mexico City. So she grew up listening to all these songs telling people to go to Israel, so that was always something that was around. And I left the Jewish day school because the class was too small, and I needed to be around a different group of people, but I remember very clearly the day they all brought us in to one room to watch the -- when Arafat and Rabin signed with Clinton. And I remember that very clearly. And, you know, I could read Hebrew pretty well, and I did a full Torah trope in my bar mitzvah. I read Torah and Haftorah, and throughout high school, I did a lot of social justice

programs connected to the Jewish Community Center, and different Jewish programs, so it's always been something that I've been proud of and been a part of.

RH: Was your community integrated, or did you primarily mix with -- I mean religiously and racially -- both your community, but then your networks, also.

NR: Well my father works. He's a director of a non-profit organization called The Right Question Project. And it helps low income people advocate for themselves using question formulating techniques, and it started in Lawrence, Massachusetts with all these parents who wanted to know why their kids couldn't read and they were in tenth grade. So, early on, I was exposed to very low income people, and you know, I was always, always taught to be very respectful and to not judge, and to really have an understanding that people come from different backgrounds, and that people don't start at the same starting point. And I remember one time when I was 12, and I was at McDonald's and my -- the person didn't speak good English, and I was getting frustrated and my dad -- you know, I said something. I don't remember exactly what it was, but my dad got really angry at me, and he said -- he said something like, never talk to someone like that again. Always be very patient. People are coming -- like he just gave me the whole spiel, and I remember that moment very clearly. And I remember I had a -- one of his coworkers -- it was this black woman from New York City, and she used to baby-sit us when I was little. And I went to Lexington High School, which is supposed to be one of the top public schools in the state, and it had the Metco program, where they would bus black kids from the inner city out to the suburbs. And the program worked when there was the support networks to really give people the chance to succeed, but it was -- I felt it was more of a class difference than a race difference. I mean, they had to wake up at five in the morning in small apartments while all these Lexington kids would drive their BMWs down five minutes, wake up ten minutes before school started. It was just like a different -- it was a different world. But, I grew up with all these Jewish kids that loved hip-hop and we would go into the city, and -- so there was always interactions between -- I had friends

who were Blacks, Latinos, Indians, Asians, different religions. But my closest friends were Jewish kids.

RH: What -- you said you went to high school in Lexington. How about your college?

A: I went to UMass, Amherst. What I really enjoyed about that was that a lot of people who were there were first generation college students, and didn't have the sense of entitlement that the kids I went to high school did -- had. It was tough for me in the beginning because I was around -- I was on the floor with all business students, who a lot of them came from pretty working class families, and if not, a lot of them were heavily Republican. And I was -- you know, I knew right away I was going to be a History major, and I had -- when I came to college, I had no interest in money. Because, I mean, that was part of the privilege of growing up, not having to worry about it. Money just was not on my radar at all. So, I had trouble that first semester really fitting in, but in the end my best friends in college were my suitemates that freshman year. But, I had a -- I got a great education at UMass. It as actually -- it was the only school that I applied to. And they had a great honors program. I took small classes, I took classes at Smith, Mt. Holyoke, Amherst, and Hampshire. And I got a lot of -- I had a lot of great professors. One of my best professors was this Israeli poet who was just fascinating, and she -- I took her Hebrew class at Smith, and she would pick me up every morning and take me there, and we would have these great conversations about literature, politics, history, women, and it was -- I mean, that was one of the best -- that was one of my best experiences. So, I'm really glad that I went there and I got a lot out of it. My freshman year, I did a -- the alternative spring break program, and we went to Atlanta. We drove down to Atlanta and we were staying at a Baptist Church all week and we volunteered at homeless shelters, and we talked to a lot of different religious leaders, and we spent every day at this after school program in one of the poorest areas of Atlanta. And that left a strong impression on me, and the next year, I led a trip -- I led and taught a trip to New York City called homelessness and poverty in New York City. So I remember really

enjoying putting together the course packet. It was like 200 pages, and I selected the students. It was ten students. And then we -- I organized a trip to go to the city and everyone got a lot out of it. And it was a really great experience.

RH: That sounds pretty amazing. How did you get involved with New Orleans and Katrina?

NR: I remember when Katrina happened, I was just sitting. I had gone to school a little bit earlier, because I was just wasting time that summer, and I just needed to get away from Lexington, so I went to school a couple weeks earlier, and I was just hanging around just playing basketball all day, not doing anything. And just waiting for my girlfriend to get to school, and I remember just -- my mom calling me and telling me that something was going on New Orleans, and I had to turn on the news, and I really couldn't comprehend it, and I really didn't care. I remember just like not caring. Because you're just so caught up in your social life and what you have. Senior year was supposed to be the best year ever. And I remember it just -- it not really registering. But the next semester, I read -- I remember I just read Michael Eric Dyson's book on Katrina, and I heard about this Hillel trip that was going to go down to Gulfport in March. I had been active in Hillel in freshman and sophomore year, but junior year I really hadn't done that much, because I really enjoyed hanging out with the older people. So I signed up for the trip and I went down in March, and I remember I almost didn't go because I had this really bad tooth infection, and I was not going to go, and then I just said, well, it's only a week. I can make it. So, I went down and I was just amazed. I was just shocked by what had happened, what had not happened. It had been seven months after the storm and it still looked like a bomb had gone off. And there were all these black women just sitting in their homes, just waiting for someone to help them. They had nothing, they were promised money from FEMA and their insurance company. They had been paying money to their insurance companies their whole lives, and then when they needed something they didn't get anything. And I just -- it was outrageous. And I was angry.

But, while everyone was doing the roofing -- I would do it too -- but I would also just go walk around the neighborhoods by myself, and just ask people, you know, what had happened. What money did you get from FEMA or from the local -- or from State Farm or whatever. And person after person would just say, I didn't get anything. Or I got 2,000 dollars, and I have 60,000 dollars worth of damage. What am I supposed to do? And I was sitting with one woman for like three hours outside of her trailer, and she was crying, and she was telling me how she was on antidepressants for the first time, and that she put her two children through college, and that she worked at the daycare provider and she had seen the kids that she took care of float -- their bodies floating around. And she told me about this black guy who had been killed by the police a couple weeks before in jail, and they had just put a bag over his head and just started beating him. And it was like some minor arrest. And they were -- there was going to be a meeting that week, in the NAACP meeting, where people could testify if they'd ever been brutalized by the Gulfport police. And she asked me to come, and the Hillel almost didn't let me go.

RH: Why not?

NR: I don't know. You know, rules. Everyone's got their rules. But, I was able to go. So I went there, expecting like 20 or 30 people to be there. And I show up there, and there's 800 people lined up all around the gym, waiting to testify that they've been brutalized by the police. And that moment right there -- and to see the pastors get up and start talking and the anger, and it's like -- you know, it's been 50 years since the civil rights movements, and I didn't see any difference from what I read. It's just not -- it wasn't all right. And it was funny because I -- there was a picture that some woman was holding up that said "No Justice. No Peace," and my face was right behind it, so I was on the cover of the Gulfport paper the next day. So when I went back to school, I couldn't really get it out of my mind -- what I had seen. And I remember I had this Monday night class at Mt. Holyoke and I went to open the door, and I just couldn't walk in. So I went back to the library, and just started writing about everything I had saw and had

experienced. And those are the first stories that are actually on the Jewish Women's Archive. And, I tried to find different ways of getting back down there after I graduated. My first idea was to -- just go and interview people. Just listen to their stories, because people had no idea. The rest of the country just has -- I mean at that time, I just -- I had no idea what really had happened. And if a person like me who reads the paper and is, you know, involved in a college setting -- if I haven't heard about what really happened, then the rest of the country just has no idea. So, I wanted to go down there and kind of showcase what had happened, and let people know that this was not all right. But, you know, that would have been a lot of work to find the funding for, and to get connected on that. So, I also interviewed for this job in Boston. It was basically fundraising for the Democratic party, and I got the job, and I was supposed to let them know if I was going to take it on Monday, and then on Sunday, I heard back from this small relief organization in New Orleans called Phoenix of New Orleans. And they told me, you know, I could have their AmeriCorps grant. I thought this was this really established organization and I was being chosen from hundreds of applicants, and when I got down there I realized that that was not the case.

RH: So what kind of organization is it?

NR: It's a relief organization and a neighborhood association. And when I first -- so I ended up going there, and when I first got down there, there was like three people working there. The director wasn't even there. It was in the poorest area of the city, right outside the French Quarter. I was living in volunteer housing with -- it was a long shotgun house with 12 people in it. And I had -- I was sleeping in a bunk bed with a girl that I actually went to school with was on top, and I was on the bottom. We didn’t even know that we were both coming and working for the same organization.

RH: Well that's a coincidence.

NR: Yeah. So, when I got down there, I just started -- it was like, the end of June of '06, and it was hot. It was very hot. And the woman who picked me up at the airport was a friend -- her mom was a coworker with my mom. And she picked me up and she dropped me off, and she was like, Nate, you got to move. This is not a safe place for you to live. But, I remember just feeling last summer, just like, not worrying about safety at all. I mean, it just didn't cross my mind. And it probably should have because the first week I was there, I saw a shooting. I saw this guy -- it took 15 cops to get him in the car. And he was -- he had been beating a white prostitute the whole night. And when they finally came and they got him in the car, he was banging his head against the door and he was calling out for his mother. And I knew his family. I had spent -- I had a conversation with him already. I knew his mom. He was bipolar and a crack head, so it's not a good combination. And there was just a lot of -- I mean, this was an area that had dealt with neglect and poverty for years. I mean, this wasn't just a post-Katrina thing. The average family income was about 16,000, and there was no organizing done by the community because it was 80 percent renters and it was a real transient community. So, it was very hard. I didn't realize how stressful it was until I left. But when I first got down there, I was just gutting homes, landscaping, like cleaning yards for the church, and older women in the area, and raising money for homeowners, and facilitating meetings for the citywide Unified New Orleans Planning process. So early on I met a lot of people who were involved in urban planning, architecture, real estate, and I was -- I mean, one of my most exciting moments here -- the last summer -- was the first UNOP meeting -- July 31st at the Botanical Gardens, and it was just really exciting to see all the energy. All these people from all over the country, coming down and presenting their plans for what the future of New Orleans should look like. And there was real progressive thought about how, like, this is not all right the way it was. It's not all right the way it had been for years, and we're going to find ways to change it. And I just dove right in when I was down here. I was working 80 hour weeks, and I mean, I didn't know anybody, and I just -- you know, I was just trying to do as much as possible. The director and I -- you know, we became

friends and we all -- we both were big, big idea people. Thinking big. And we had so many ideas for how to make changes. I mean, we were cooking meals for the carpenters to get -- to make extra money so we could use it for sheet rock. I mean, we were just pulling every stunt you could. Just scheming, like trying to do something, because it was just -- there was so much to be done. When I got down there was probably about 200 people out of the 5,000 people that lived there, and all these homes still needed to be gutted. There was just so much to do. And there was also this planning process that was going. It's well, what do you want? And I remember I was appointed head of the Open Space Committee, which I had -- I had no idea. And I remember I went -- I would walk block to block, like taking pictures of every open space, and then just writing ideas for what they could turn into. And, I had to get more information and present it to the committee, so I typed in "urban open space" on Google and I found this Urban Open Space Foundation in Milwaukee -- in Madison. And I just called them up. I did that to places all over the country. Just like, called them up, said I'm in New Orleans, we need help. Can you help us? But the Urban Open Space Foundation was the first to -- they brought it to their board and they really considered it, and they ended up coming down with a team of landscape architect, an urban planning professor, and the former mayor of Madison. And they were staying in our little volunteer housing. You know, and I would -- I just pitched to them about all the things they could do, and help us with, and what we needed help with. And I remember the last day that they were they were kind of like saying, well, what happens if LSU just builds a whole medical center all over here, or what happens if the film studio takes over all this? What's going to happen? I'm like, well you can help us, or I'm going to find someone else to help us. And that really registered with them, and they helped -- I mean, they would talk to me every week about what I can do. They brought students down. They did a whole student project on our neighborhood. The University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. So that was -- they were definitely really helpful. But, last summer still -- the city was still really abandoned. And I remember the first time I kind of felt the city was coming back was, I would have to go

drive up Bank St. to go get water from another volunteer housing for our workers in the morning, and I saw a Jesuit football practice, sometime starting in early August. You know, it's like mid-90s at 8 o'clock in the morning and these people are in their full uniforms. It was amazing to me. But, what was exciting about working for Phoenix was there was really no organization. There was no money. And so I got to help develop it. I was the research and development coordinator. So I raised thousands of dollars, I recruited 15 AmeriCorps -- new AmeriCorps members to work there. And now it's like, there's 25 people working there, and it's still having money problems, but the people that I recruited had -- I recruited this woman who was a TV anchor in Las Vegas and had her own non-profit getting people who were in -- writers who were in exile, and getting them to the United States. I got her to come down to New Orleans and to do fundraising for us. So, I don't know how I did that, but she did it. She's been raising a lot of money.

RH: She's still here?

NR: Yeah.

RH: Really? Wow.

NR: So the organization is still going, and all the people I recruited are still there, but it was just a fascinating experience, and I learned so much so quickly. I mean, I was in city council meetings. I was meeting with the biggest banks in the city. I was meeting with different PR firms and architecture firms, and then I helped facilitate a lot of different spring break trips last March.

RH: Did anything come to fruition from like the Madison, Wisconsin things? Open Space?

NR: Yeah, they worked on a plan for our neighborhood -- like a proposal that we put into the Unified New Orleans Plan. They specialized in -- it was a real innovative look, and we met with Steve Bingler and people at Concordia to try to get them on one of the

teams, but they didn't have money. Our planner ended up being Frederick Schwartz, from New York, and he took a lot of the stuff that we had come up with and he put it into his plans, so it worked out. But, it was also a fascinating learning experience to be inside those -- in those neighborhood meetings, and listening to all the stories about different developments, different problems. I mean, I learned early on the history behind St. Thomas. I remember someone started yelling at Andre Duany at a meeting, and that was the first time I was like -- I saw the divisions that there were in the city. And then every meeting being, you know, like the first question people asked me was, are you from New Orleans, and then if you're not, basically, you don't count. And then a lot --

RH: You've had that happen to you?

NR: Yeah.

RH: From who? What kind of people, I mean. You don't have to give me names.

NR: Different people. I mean, some black, some white. You know, I think it had to do with my age too, because I was -- last summer, I spent three months basically with my mouth shut. Didn't say anything. Just tried to take it all in, because I saw the way that people came down here and just started opening and running their mouths, and started telling people who were from here what to do, what to build, and that wasn't the right way of doing things. So, after three months, I finally started contributing some ideas to the neighborhood meetings, and being a little bit more vocal, but I really wanted -- I didn't want to -- I mean this -- these meetings -- these planning meetings were really for the neighbors. They were for the people who were from here, and my role was just to help facilitate them. It was tough and I was also living and working at the same place. And last summer was like a non-profit Real World, where you had all these people in their 20s, all living together, all kind of -- you know, some people were there to really make a difference, some people were there because they had failed wherever else they were and had come down. It was like the Wild, wild, West or the Gold Rush. So, it had to -- it

was quite a motley crew that I was around. I mean, you had some serious alcoholics, serious drug users. You know, I had my -- you know, some of the people I worked with, we had -- there was a whorehouse down the street, the Asian Health Club, and they would go there like every night, and then wake up in the morning and work with us on the gutting. But it's funny. There's Betsy's Pancakes on Canal St. You know Betsy's?

RH: Yeah.

NR: And then there's a barbershop and then there's a whorehouse. It's the Asian Health Club. And George Bush came in -- I think it was August -- and we were -- I was actually going to breakfast, and we couldn't go in because they had sealed it off because Bush was there. But, I don't think he knew that there was a whorehouse right next to where he was eating.

RH: Is it still there?

NR: Yeah. It's still there. It just says "Asian Health Club," and the windows are all tinted.

RH: What do you think of the Unified Plan and that? Because you've been really one of the first people I've talked to who is really on the ground, you know. I've talked to a few architects. They seem to have a different kind of vantage point. Do you think it's -- is it going to work? Is it --

NR: Well, what I saw, which was very effective was that there was a type of organizing going on in the city that my understanding was didn't happen before the storm. I mean, so many more people were engaged in the political process, and the democratic process than ever before. And that people really felt energized by what had happened, and they were -- they felt that they could actually make a difference, and that is -- I think that was a great thing that happened. That you had these big citywide meetings where you had thousands of people come to them, and you had people -- everyone contributing their ideas, and it was the type of way that people got engaged that, you know, Concordia

should really be commended for. But, they also were way over their heads. I mean, this was such a big undertaking and it was very -- there wasn't the transparency that there was supposed to be. You know, every date was pushed back. The biggest thing that made me angry was they did this voting where everyone could vote on who they wanted their planners to be. And that vote didn't matter at all. I mean, they picked who it was, and it really didn't count. And when you do stuff like that, you know, it's not going to -- it's not kosher.

RH: So did you find that at first there was this energy, but did people start to get deflated after awhile, when things were going -- maybe you could describe that to me.

NR: Yeah, I mean it was -- I would listen to a lot of the people who were going everyday to meetings while trying to rebuild their house, and people were just getting more and more frustrated as it went along, and then they hired Blakely to kind of take over the recovery -- the Office of Recovery Management. But they hired him in December, and you know, the storm happened in August of '05, and you hires someone to take over the recovery in December of '06. I mean, it just didn't make sense to me. And so then, there was this whole process of kind of training him and getting him accustomed to what was going on, and he's doing a million other things. He's in China, he's in Australia, he's got projects going on in California.

RH: Not for the city you mean? His private --

NR: Yeah. Private.

RH: -- his own kind of consulting things.

NR: Yeah. And he's the highest paid official in the city. And he -- I saw him -- the first time that I saw him was at this meeting at UNO, and he spoke for about 20 minutes and then told everyone that he had a fire drill that he had to go to. The mayor was calling a meeting, and he said he had time for two questions, and the first question was, of course,

about public housing. What are you going to about public housing? And he said, well I'm going to go to Washington to figure it out. Done. And then the second question was this middle aged, poor, black woman who asked him you know, there's all these people stealing copper from me. What are you going to do about it? He's like, take a picture of them, and I'll arrest them. And I was like, oh no. Oh no. Good God, you're not going to do that. And you could just see how that was the moment where I knew he was going to start stepping on toes, which he has done -- he has been another person that's polarized the city. I mean, he's smart. I mean, he's sharp and he knows how to get stuff done, but then he starts running his mouth about, you know, Louisiana's problems with birth control, and how there's all these buffoons running the city. I mean, you're not going to make connections. You're not going to get stuff done if you do that.

RH: How was -- how has your neighborhood group, the Phoenix and all of them -- are they still positive. That neighborhood?

NR: The people who -- that neighborhood is dealing with a lot, too, because LSU just got -- the VA just got fast tracked 70 million dollars to start acquiring property all over the area and the way they have it planned is it would go all the way up to where Phoenix and New Orleans has volunteer housing in different places. So, no one know what's going to happen with that area. I mean, it's probably the toughest area in the city to organize, because the Lower 9 has identity. I mean, it's on the national media. People know about the Lower 9. I would say Tulane/Gravier. No one would know about, not even people from New Orleans. But with the UNOP, the other thing that was a problem was, the neighborhood -- there were these neighborhood planners, and ours was Schwartz, and he was for District 4, which was mid-city Bayou St. John, the Carrollton area, Hollygrove, and a couple other places.

RH: It's not a small amount of land.

NR: No, and this was probably the toughest area to plan, too, because it had five housing projects in the area. It had some of the biggest income gaps in the city. And he did a pretty good job. I mean, his team was pretty good. He made a lot of partnerships, and I felt he did a good job, but -- and there were -- if you look at that plan. The 130 page plan for District 4, it's good stuff. I mean, if any of those projects get funded, I mean, it would work well. But the problem was that while this was going on, there was this citywide group that was made up of, you know, the same backroom deals, the same usual suspects who were making the decisions of where the real money was going to go. And we finally saw it in March -- the priorities list of where the money's going to go, and it didn't correlate at all with what the neighborhoods had wanted. So there's was just no -- there was no transparency in these -- these district leaders started meeting as a breakfast group and started to kind of put together legislation to have a governing body of neighborhood leaders, but a lot of these neighborhood leaders were former political people, or people who had failed at running for office and no wanted some power. And they couldn't come to any consensus, and that kind of -- that fizzled. So, it was tough.

RH: Wow. So, the citywide group, did it have a name? Do you remember?

NR: It was led by Steve Villavaso at UNO, and it was led by their Urban Planning Department, but no one knows exactly who was on it, and --

RH: Was this through the mayor's office?

NR: No, this was supposed -- this was through the UNOP. This was like -- it was the neighborhood planners, then the citywide planners. And the neighborhood planning was done very -- it was very transparent. And maybe I'm just not well informed, or I don't know, but the citywide was -- they did three meetings, and they were these big meetings with America Speaks facilitated. And I mean, I -- you know, my personal feeling was that it was very corny and it was very fake. And they didn't really show how your -- I mean, people said, well we want the housing projects to come back, and you know, there's

maybe like 200 housing project units that are back in the whole city. Or some people say, you know, we want public transportation to be improved. It's not improved at all. And so -- and there hasn't been any talk about that in the papers, about public transportation. So, what's hopefully going to happen is in August there's going to be the boom. The Blakely boom. Blakely's talking about how we're going to see construction sites, we're going to see, you know, all the banks are going to be backing up on their loans, the bonds are going to be coming through, and that's what he's saying. And I want to believe that. I want to say that there will be a boom, because there is basically free money coming into the city. No other city is getting this type of money. I mean, this could be -- you know -- if this was done well, this could be the new deal, where you have all these -- all this government money that's going to be starting to fund infrastructure, and then fund -- and then create jobs. So, if it's done right, you know, you can have a second WPA. And it's funny, because in mine -- the Tulane/Gravier neighborhood, all the roads were paved by the WPA, and you know, that was the last time where -- and a lot of the housing projects were built by the WPA, and those were some of the most well-built infrastructure in the city. I mean, those can last Category 5 storms. And they're in perfect condition. I've been inside.

RH: So is that Lafitte?

NR: Lafitte, B.W. Cooper, St. Bernard's. I mean St. Bernard's was, in my opinion, just -- there were too many people in that one area. I mean, it looks like a shtetl, like from the way the German's would put all the Jews in one area. I mean, it looks horrible. But Lafitte looks good, B.W. Cooper looks good, Iberville is being redeveloped, but you know, people can live there. But, I remember just how passionate people were about this issue. Should we reopen the housing projects or not? And I remember one woman said at a ULI conference, she said, you know, what about St. Thomas? That's a good example of positive redevelopment, and like 30 people just like started attacking her. I mean, just like started screaming at her. And she was like, poor woman. Like, some

woman from the Midwest who was just there for a conference. And she just got her head ripped off.

RH: Who is the ULI?

NR: It is the Urban Land Institute.

RH: So was it people from the community who were very unhappy with how St. Thomas was? You said 30 people started to chew her out.

NR: Yeah, well what happened with St. Thomas was, it was a Hope VI project. You know, Clinton's redevelopment of housing projects, and all these planners from all over the country came down, looked at it, Duany was given the contract for it. And they turned his whole idea -- his new urbanism, making walk-able communities. You've seen the movie Pleasantville. That's his town in Florida. I mean, that's a real town.

RH: Oh, really?

NR: Yeah.

RH: OK. And what's this guy's name?

NR: Andre Duany. He lives in the [Marin?], he's from Cuba, he's a real conservative architect. So what they told people -- the residents of those housing projects -- what they told them was that there would be one to one replacement. And that didn't happen. Two years later, they opened up and it was like four to one replacement, and then there was a huge Wal-Mart where housing projects used to be. So, that was where there's a lack of trust. And I'm not saying that -- my personal opinion is that, you know, those concentrations of poverty don't work. Especially when there's no programs to help people. There's no -- they don't get the right education, they don't get the right health care, and they don't get the right social services. So, you can't just stick people into a

house and tell them, go live your life, if you don't give them any of the other services. Those housing projects were built for people returning from World War II, with BI bills who could go off to college, and they were segregated. I mean, they were built for middle class people. But that lack -- you can see where the lack of trust comes from. You know, I spent a lot of time with the poorest black communities in this city, and the conspiracy theories that are come up about -- you know, that the levees were bombed, that the -- and you know, when you're listening to it you're, you know, you can't say oh yeah, that must have happened, but you also see why they don't trust anyone. You can't say well, I mean, I don't know, personally, it didn't happen. They don't know, personally. And they've been given no reason to believe that anyone in power is looking out for them.

RH: Let's go back to your story. Because I diverted you on your timeline here. And so, you were around August of 2006, I think, you were still with Phoenix.

NR: Yeah, I was there until April.

RH: Oh, April of 2006.

NR: No, I was there from June '06 to April '07. So I finished -- it was an AmeriCorps term. So I finished there, and I came home -- I went back to Boston for Passover and reevaluated what I was going to do. And then I had been working with the University of Michigan on different projects, and they invited me to go up there and speak to people about what was going on in New Orleans, so I did a series of workshops there for a week. And then I got a job with New Orleans College Prep. It's a charter school -- new charter school starting up in Central City. And then I had also been trying to propose to the Jewish Federation and different Hillels to allow me to go on this speaking tour, which I kind of did in Michigan to kind of tell people what was going on, and then what opportunities there were for people to come down here, and you know, contribute. So they asked me to do -- to work part time with their newcomer program, which is now

about to kick off.

RH: So, tell me what you're doing. Are you still at the New Orleans College Prep?

NR: Yeah. I'm going to leave there soon, because --

RH: So did you teach there?

NR: No, I've been -- it's a brand new school, so I've been recruiting students and doing marketing, and writing grants and different startup stuff.

RH: And who's -- who's got that charter school? Do you know?

NR: Yeah, the chairman of the board is Hal Brown. He's a real estate developer. Black -- black guy from (inaudible) St. John. He went to Xavier, and then did a lot of stuff in DC, and then came back and is very involved with lots of different projects, and I met him through Phoenix of New Orleans, and he asked me to do this, and then the school director is Ben Kleban, who's --

RH: Beth who?

NR: Ben Kleban. And he went to Tulane -- I mean Harvard Business School, studied the most effective charter schools in the country, and then was working with new schools in New Orleans, and then started his charter, and now all the teachers are there, all the staff is there, and the students -- all the students are almost there. So once the students are there, I'm going to be done.

RH: Wow. That's an interesting project, too.

NR: Yeah. I really liked it because it was kind of, you know, it was brand new, you were helping to start something, and that's why I like doing it. But I was planning on doing -- of helping them with their enrichment program throughout the year. But this NOLA Europe

stuff is about to take off, and I'm going to probably -- I'm going to be the director of that, and we're putting the board together right now, and I'm going to need to start spending a lot more time on that.

RH: So, why don't you tell me exactly what this is, how it came to be, how you got on board like that.

NR: In March, I started speaking to all these -- the Hillel groups that were coming down 200 people at a time.

RH: Coming to New Orleans?

NR: Yeah. And I would bring my friends -- the Jewish kids that I had met who were down here. All off them -- actually all of them were not from here. One was working for one of the planning firms, one was an architect, and one was Gil, who works for the Neighborhood Partnership Network. And we would go -- we would drive out to Slidell, and we would just be talking about, you know, different stuff. And after the second time that we did it, I would just like -- you know, we need to create a website that features all these young people that are down here, and shows what opportunities there are job-wise to get down here. And it started off just as simple as that. We put up a website -- a stagnant website that just had featured like 12 people, had their stories, how they came down to Katrina. Or how they came down to New Orleans after Katrina. And then it had a bunch of links to different resources, and it had some job postings. And I just designed that myself. And from that, I got emails almost every day, and people were just like, you know, what is this? I want to be involved, I want to join, let's talk. Last couple months I've just been meeting one person after the other. So, it also came from -- one of my friends writes for the Times-Picayune. Her name's Molly Reed and she wrote this brain game article, and she coined this term, YURPs -- Young Urban Rebuilding Professionals. And that came out in the beginning of March. And that article got a lot of attention early on. I remember walking in supermarkets in different stores and just

hearing people talking about this brain game. So I worked with her on the site, just kind of -- I was just talking to her about what we should put on it. And then I've just been meeting lots of different people, and now I've been working closely with Zach Coverman (sp?) on it. And he's helped out a lot. He's probably going to be -- he's going to be on the board. And we just launched our new site that's really interactive. People can create their own profiles. People can post events on calendars. People can post jobs. People can discuss different issues. People can show who they're connected with. Like which businesses, which nonprofits. And we launched it this week, and we already have over 180 members, and we're getting -- I'm talking to the NBA tomorrow, I'm talking to different banks this week about, you know, what we need right now is some capacity building money so that I can take this on, and you know, plan for the next three years and put it all together. So the nonprofit would be to take all this energy that's coming from the website and do programs at lectures, panels, discussions, and then doing a mentorship program where you link young people up with the older generation, ambassador programs where you have young people going and speaking to colleges, talking about what's going in New Orleans, and then what we want to get to is what the Jewish community has of the financial incentives. And even if we start out small where it's like free cable for a year from Cox, or free membership to, you know, different places. So those are going to be our major programs in the next year. And I've just -- I'm just trying to go out and make as many partnerships as possible. That's what I've learned early on in this city, that if you want to get something done you need to go out and get everyone on board. What's great is that everyone kind of gets this. That we need a way to retain young professionals, and we need a way for people to network, we need a way for the Newman crowd to network with the McMahon crowd, we need the Ben Franklin crowd to interact with the St. Augustine crowd. There's all these different pockets in New Orleans, and if we don't unite the young people right now, it's going to be the same problems that there are right now, where everyone has burned a bridge and people, you know, when a job comes up it goes into one small circle, one firm gets all the contracts every single time, and it doesn't

work out. So what I'm trying to do is really spread the resources, really let everyone have access to the resources they need for young people to actually feel valued in this city, and to actually start thinking about, well how do we start developing the future leaders of this city? Because we're talking about building the infrastructure, we're talking about building better schools, better health care, better health institutions, but who are going to be these people that are going to be here 20 years from now? And if we don't think about then we're going to lose this window of opportunity.

RH: OK. I think we'll take a break for a minute and start on this tape 2.

NR: OK

[END OF AUDIO FILE]

RH: All right, I'm with Nathan Rothstein. This is tape 2 for Katrina's Jewish Voices. So Nathan, you were talking about a creative class. And could you kind of tell me what you mean by that, and what you're trying to do when you say, we don't need to duplicate the problems of the past?

NR: Yeah, I mean -- we're focused on the positive. We are really trying to really focus on what our generation can do, but there is an understanding that -- or there's this consensus that what's being done right now is not alright. That from the local to the state to the national level, there is not -- the people in power aren't just -- just aren't doing the right things, and there needs to be a completely different new way of doing things. And I'm -- I mean, I grew up in a very political family, but I'm trying to focus in on a way to unify people. That there's all these issues that people get passionate about: gay rights, civil rights, social justice, AIDS. I mean, there's all these different issues, but everyone needs a job, and what I'm trying to do is show how everyone can connect with each other over their professional network -- or to expand their professional network, and that if we have a city where there's a job that needs to be filled, it's posted on this site, and

everyone has access to it. It's not closed off to anyone. And then you're creating this community that's constantly sharing resources, and then we're starting to develop a city that has more events than just going out and drinking. I mean, there's nothing wrong with that, but it needs to be balanced by other stuff. And it also needs to be balanced by jobs for college-educated people. And for the first time, post-Katrina, there's this interest by the academic community, there's interest by the college educated to come down here and contribute. I mean this graduate school heaven, because it's how does an American city rebuild itself from zero to something? I mean, 80% of the city was wiped away, so there's no precedence for this, and everyone who's down here is making history. So, there's a way to really unify yourself and say we're all in New Orleans right now, we're all sacrificing. I mean, you can't get great healthcare here. It's not safe. If something bad happens to you, I mean, you have to just sit in a hospital for eight hours, like -- you know, it's not comfortable living, but it's also where -- a place where people can come down and really prove themselves and say, this is -- America will not be rebuilt, America will not change unless New Orleans can be rebuilt. And that's the way that I look at it, in that you can build a national movement around rebuilding New Orleans. That is the same way that civil rights leaders, Jewish people came down to the south to help out. I mean, Jews died down here fighting for the civil rights movement. And with all the divisions there was a unification between the Black community and Jewish community. And if it wasn't for either one, you know, we wouldn't have the civil rights that we have right now. So I think there's this window of opportunity right now to use New Orleans as a showcase for the rest of the country, that there are other cities that are important other than just New York City, DC, Boston, and San Francisco, Chicago, and LA. So, we want to show the rest of the world that there's all this talent in New Orleans right now, there's these young people who are really dedicated to rebuilding this city, and that we want to be open to creative thought, we want to be open to movies -- new movie screens, we want to encourage filmmakers, we want to encourage artists, architects, we want to take all the music that's down here and really make a business out of it. Working with the architecture firms on

designing really interesting infrastructure, and then also building housing -- moderate income housing for young people. Other cities have pockets of area where young people live, and here it's all scattered all over. We want to find places where young people can live comfortably and can have that expendable income that they can use to get the economy going as well.

RH: So this organization that your designing for the board, is it just Jewish? Or is it -- how do you conceive of it?

NR: I want to include everyone in this process. I mean, this -- I've learned a lot from the Jewish community about how they've been able to get resources, and really provide for their own, and since I think there's a window right now to unify all young people. And since we're all young, we're all fighting for our careers, there's no job stability. There's not the job stability that there was 20 years ago. There's the first chance that young Generation Y will not be more successful than their parent's generation. I mean, with the rising costs of student debt and health care there's -- I mean, there's some major problems that our generation is going to have to face, and there's that -- that we can unify over that, and I want to -- what I'm trying to do, is involve as many different people -- socio-economically, racially, religiously, to get behind this idea. So I'm going out there and trying to find the right board. I mean, it's like playing matchmaker, but you have to go out and just pitch it. And we're having our first event on Wednesday where I'm bringing together about 60 of the most influential young people in the city. And we're going to sit down and all talk about how do we keep young people here, and out of that 60, I'm hoping to find some people that would be great board members. So we have -- I mean, there's a bunch of young people who are running for State Rep. There's current State Rep members, there's current people -- there's people in their 20s who've started charter schools, there's people in their 20s who are the director of their nonprofits. People are in real estate businesses, marketing, PR firms, I mean it's a real talented group, and the Washington Post is coming, the LA Times is coming, CNN may come, Times-Picayune is

doing a big photo shoot. I mean we're showing people that we can get stuff done as well.

RH: So, what -- tell me about how you're connecting to the Jewish community.

NR: Well, I've met a lot of Jewish people who have moved down here post-Katrina, like myself, and there's a -- you know, we're all from different places, and you know, you can really come together because you're Jewish, and there's that nice bond. And then I've been connecting with the local Jews who are from here, and there's this real strong community here, there's also a really strong sense of history. A lot of the major institutions were Jewish founded or Jewish funded, so it's great to be a part of. And I've learned a lot -- like I said before -- I've learned a lot from how the Jewish community has taken care of itself, and how it's trying to rebuild itself. And it's been great to be around a lot of Jewish people who are -- have been very successful at what they've done, and to learn from them, and to keep finding different ways to work together.

RH: Are you guys affiliating with synagogues or anything? Are you working through the Federation? How is that going?

NR: Well, I've been working with the Federation on their newcomer program, so I'm kind of like the first person that newcomers talk to. That they -- I get them situated, I help them with whatever they need to move down here. And then Jewish Family Services administers the grant. So I've been very involved with that, and I've been going to different synagogues. I haven't picked one to go to, but I've been going to them every now and then.

RH: Is there any -- now that -- I mean, you've been -- you just talked a little bit about the nature of this Jewish community. Have you found it open to you? Do you find pockets closed? Do you --

NR: No. They've been -- it took me a while -- it took me longer than I thought to kind of break into it, but they've been very receptive. And, you know, I've been featured in

different publications, and they've made a real effort to kind of reach out to me. And I'm used to a very progressive Jewish community from Boston, where social justice is a big component, and there's a lot of race relations, there's a lot of working with other communities, and I think that this community is working towards that, but since it was so, you know, destroyed by the storm and then 40 years of white flight, it needs to really take care of its own right now.

RH: Can you tell me what you think -- can you kind of characterize this Jewish community? What are some of the plusses, and what are some of the -- let's call them challenges -- that this community faces?

NR: Well, I think that people who are very active -- you know, there are some who are very set in their ways and what they want to do. And it's hard to kind of bring new ideas. And there's a bunch of other people who are very receptive to doing something completely different. I mean, just the fact that they hired Michael, who's not your normal type of director of a Federation, and --

RH: How is he different?

NR: He's -- I mean, he's an economist, he's an urban planner, he's worked at think tanks, you know, he has this real wide -- he has a much wider scope, and -- because it's exciting to learn from him, as well. And I think -- and one of the reasons that I was brought on was because they -- you know, I was telling them how they really need to target young people, as well, because those are the people who are going to be able to move down here. Because it's an adventure. I mean, it's not easy. So now their major focus is on young people who want to start something new, who want to make a career, and want to try New Orleans. And then it's just amazing to see -- there's such a small Jewish population, but they own -- I mean they own some of the major businesses, they're behind the university, the hospitals, the -- you know, so many different institutions, and it's just amazing how they've been able to do that with such a small population.

RH: So their impact has been a lot bigger than their size [is big?].

NR: Yeah. Right. But you see such a strong division between the political sphere and the Jewish community.

RH: Explain that.

NR: Well, just talking to a lot of people, they're just like -- such hatred for the mayor's office and for the city government, and for me -- I mean, I understand that. I would be -- if I was living in DC and I was face to face with George Bush everyday, I would be pissed off too. But the problem is, is that it's white and black. And when black people hear how much -- you know, if they heard the way that some people talk about the mayor's office, I mean, it could sound -- it has racial undertones. And it's scary to see just how deep that hatred is, and there's just this disgust. It's like, anything in the mayor's office is not efficient. Or anything at City Hall. You can't get anything done at City Hall. It's just sad. It's sad that there is that divide.

RH: So, it's a perception, then, that's really running deep that you don't even think is true? Or --

NR: Oh, I think it's true that the city politics here is not all right. And that there needs to be a new way of doing things. But, the way to get it done is to keep working on partnering, instead of isolating.

RH: So one of the -- you think one of the challenges or the real problems for the Jewish community is that it kind of isolated itself. Tell me how you think the Jewish community's done in the recovery process. How have they -- are you proud of them? Or are you --

NR: Yeah, well I mean, whenever there's a place in need, there's a disaster, I mean, the Jewish community is always one of the first to get behind it. I mean, they've -- you know, just the fact that the Hillel trips, I mean, where they rally thousands of college students to

come down here and organize that. And, you know, United Jewish Communities and a bunch of other Federations from all over the world just donated millions of dollars and Jews for Justice, Jewish Family Services. I mean, the Jewish people really rallied around in the same level as the other faith-based organizations. You know, there's no major Jewish rebuilding group like Catholic charities or the Presbyterian Church, but money is just as important. So, I think it's great. I mean, I just -- when I tell people that I'm doing work with the Jewish Federation who are not Jewish, I mean they just -- I mean, they really have no idea about what Jews have done. And I think what happens in this country with the Jewish community is, there is a lot -- a lot of people hear about the Jewish community that just supports Israel blindly, and the rest of the people who are -- it's the majority don't get the attention they deserve, because -- that the extremes take over. And it's always been difficult being a liberal and then being supportive of Israel, but not supporting everything. And I feel very uncomfortable when people support Israel blindly. I mean, I believe it's a racist country where you don't -- where people don't have their equal rights, and you know, things can change. But, it's not apartheid, it's not -- you know, there's the whole other history that other people don't understand, so I personally -- being around Jews -- I get uncomfortable when Israel comes up, because it's such a -- like for people that are just so -- they're so passionate about it, and people start running their mouths about it, and they start dropping lines about Arabs and it's just disgusting. But then on the other side, the Jews who hate anything that Israel does, and feels that Israel is just as bad as every other Middle Eastern country, and it's just not the case, either. But I feel it's a very divisive issue to the Jewish community. Especially here.

RH: Really?

NR: Not as much as here, but the people who are very active, a lot of them are just very supportive of Israel.

RH: So, does it get divisive, not just amongst Jews, but divisive with the larger community? It's an isolating factor, you think?

NR: Yeah. It's sad that that's the way it is, but it makes -- because people don't really know the facts, and then there's always this, you know, perception that's like, the Jews only are a small amount of people, and then they have most of the money. And that is so -- that example is just so evident here, where there's only 7,000 Jews in the city right, but they own, you know, so much of the wealth.

RH: So how do you overcome that?

NR: It's tough because I'm not -- what I've been -- I'm not the norm -- what people see is, like, me as working with Federation, I'm not the usual person that'd be working at the Federation, so -- and I know a lot of people outside of the Jewish community, so hopefully they see me, and you know, they know me and they know where I'm working and it starts to change their views on what their perceptions were.

RH: Are there any Jewish concepts that -- as you go through with your work, and when you talk to other Jewish communities of the students who come down -- that come to your mind [that you?] stress to them?

NR: It's really the social justice component. And, you know, this real -- also, teaching that learning is valued. I mean, the Jewish community is just -- everything is about, you know, really having a better understanding of everything you do, and to really try to process and evaluate and question what you're told. I mean, the whole idea of Passover is perfect for me. I mean, that's always been my favorite Jewish holiday because, you know, you're asked -- you're forced to ask questions that why is this night different than every other night, why is this city two thirds -- why does two thirds of this city live in poverty every day? Why? I mean, that's these -- asking those questions is, you know, comes from Judaism. And being taught to not -- I feel like Judaism is being taught to not

trust anything blindly, and to look at -- I mean if you read, like, the laws of different, you know, the Bible, where people are talking about how do we split up money that's coming in? How do we split up land? I mean, there's just so much thought behind it. And there's so much reasoning behind -- and that's the way I feel government should be, is like, you know, you're thinking about different sides, you're thinking about how people should act, you're thinking about, well what's -- what does it mean if I let this person take two cows from that person's land? You know, how is that going to affect all the other people? And that type of thinking in a larger way is, you know, what I try to do everyday.

RH: You've been to any prayer breakfast while you've been here?

NR: Prayer breakfast? No.

RH: It's a leading question, because I guess I've been to a lot of prayer breakfasts here, and everybody does things in the name of Jesus. And, sometimes when people come from out of town, they think it should be more PC. So, I was kind of wondering how you work on issues of God, what your concept of God is, and working with inter-religious groups that identify so heavily as Christian.

NR: Yeah I mean, I was around -- you know, all of our meetings were at churches, and I remember one of my colleagues suggested that maybe we don't do our meeting at a church, and how they got laughed at. That's what always strikes me, is in the poorest areas, like you know, in Central City where I work, you know, there's a church on every block, and there's the most crime. And they go hand in hand.

RH: Do they?

NR: I think -- I mean, if you look at areas of this country where there's not necessarily the most crime, but where it is the poorest people, and yeah, I don't want to allude to -- but poverty -- I mean, I just -- I remember being in Gulfport and, you know, when we would -- when we were on the roof and after we were done, like, people just thanking Jesus, and

talking about how great Jesus was, and I, you know, I think to myself, well, Jesus wasn't there when the storm flooded and you didn't get any money from FEMA and the insurance companies. And then just, Jesus just happened to be there when a bunch of Jews came and fixed your roof.

RH: What do you do with that? In your own head?

NR: Yeah, I mean, it's very -- it's difficult, and it's sad, too, because I feel, personally, that if government provided for people more, there would be a less dependence on Jesus. And I think having faith, and having a more, like -- religion really teaches you morals, and that there's not much else in this country that still values morals. I mean if -- like what other institutions other than a religious institution really talks about morals and how to be good and how to not be bad? And I think that's important. You need to be taught those things. You need to be taught what's good and what's bad. But, I do feel that if government provided more for people, there would be less dependence on Jesus.

RH: How do you conceptualize God?

NR: I have to have some understanding of why -- you know, why there are trees, why there's -- you know, why people die everyday, why people live every day. I mean, it doesn't make any sense to me, so it's humbling to have this greater being that you know that no matter how big you get, no matter how successful you get, there's always something that can just take something away from you right away, and you have no control over that. So, you know, there's -- I do respect that power that God has.

RH: OK. Are there things you'd like to see more of in this Jewish community?

NR: I think more Jews getting involved with different members of the community, more, kind of, teachings, more -- I mean, I did this in high school, I would do these interfaith Passover Seders, where we would work with homeless -- the homeless community, and do kind of a modern day Passovers. Like, what's modern day slavery? And, you just

don't see many programs like that here. And that needs to change.

RH: I'm going to ask you a few, kind of just -- a few more personal questions that kind of reflections on your past -- really two years here, now.

NR: A year.

RH: A year?

NR: Yeah.

RH: OK. Are there any things after this year that you're more grateful for than perhaps you were prior to being here?

NR: Yeah, I think definitely family. That I had two parents in the picture. I had two parents that loved and supported me, and I have two parents that, you know, put up with my bullshit. So, you know, you see -- you just, you see so many families here that just do not have a man in the picture, and you see what that does to the children, and it's scary. And then you see, you know, people who have two parents but that they're miserable. So, the family -- I definitely have a greater appreciation of my family, and you know, what my parents sacrificed to raise me. I also have a greater appreciation for how difficult it is to be a leader. Everyone -- once you start getting in the paper, once you start getting in -- you have people who know you and you don't know them. You know, you're on a different caliber and it's easy when you're not in that position to complain and to say that you're not doing something right, or you're messing up, but I really see now how difficult it is to be in the public spotlight, and I'm glad it's happening now because it'll teach me how to do it in the future.

RH: Are there things that you took for granted before that you may not be taking for granted anymore?

NR: I mean, I always -- I think I always took for granted, like, how the little things to live: health and education, and you know, paying rent, buying food, buying supplies, I mean, that -- you know, I've learned how to be a human being this year. It's like, all of those other things that you have to deal with on top of everything else that you have to deal with. And you can really see how stressful it is when you have to deal with your children, you have to deal with your job, then you have to deal with rebuilding a house. And all these people have promised you money, promised you different stuff, and they're not giving it to you, and you're still living in a trailer which apparently now just had, you know, high levels of --

RH: Formaldehyde (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

NR: -- formaldehyde. Yeah.

RH: Is that it? Yeah. Toxic.

NR: And, you know, that's going -- it's like the same as what they told the 9/11 workers. Just like, you know, just go clean it up. It won't be a problem. And you know, 10 years from now, there's going to be all these people in New Orleans who are dying from cancer at like a huge -- at a much bigger rate. So, you really identify how stressful it is to live here right now.

RH: Well, what have you learned about yourself in the past year or so?

NR: Well, I think I used to be a lot quicker to judge. I used to be a lot quicker to see things in black or white. That this is wrong, this is right, and there's nothing -- there's no gray. And I see the gray a lot clearer now. I also -- I'm more tame than I used to be. I used to just run my mouth whenever something was wrong, or when -- I would complain about it, I would confront people right away, I would tell them that -- what's wrong with them, and I've learned how to be more -- really more of a connector. Really trying to get people on board, and finding ways for people to agree, and not finding ways for people to

disagree.

RH: What are your ambitions? What kind of directions do you want to head in the long term?

NR: I want to be making the decisions that affect thousands of people in government.

RH: So does that mean running for office?

NR: I don't know what it means right now. At some point, you know, I want to be in the room where -- I mean, I could argue that, you know, if you're going to cut welfare, well you need to increase childcare programs. I mean, I want to be in the room when those decisions are being made.

RH: Has your worldview changed any in this past year?

NR: Well, I had to be very careful to remember that there's another -- there's a world outside of New Orleans. I mean, I think that people get trapped. And you're down here and every day the news is -- really affects you. I mean, you read the paper, you open it up, and you know, there was a murder down the street from you, or you know, their deciding to cut money on the FEMA trailers, or their deciding to give -- subsidize private schools, which is going to affect public schools. I mean, every day the decisions that are being made right now are so critical and crucial that you can get wrapped up in just what happens in New Orleans. I have to be careful that I have to read the New York Times, and look at what else is happening. But my sister is working with the John Edwards campaign, so she keeps me in the loop about what's happening on the -- in the 2008 race.

RH: In the political world. Was she down here last week with him?

NR: No, she's a -- I mean, she's just an intern. She's at Yale, but she came down. She helped run a trip for the -- a [Yale?] group of students came down -- 30 of them worked with Phoenix of New Orleans, and did -- met a lot of different people, and I brought different people to go speak to them, and it was a really great trip.

RH: You still running those trips?

NR: No, I mean I'm -- what happened now, is my name has gotten out there so that when people want to come down with a trip, I mean, they'll contact me and I'll refer them to different places.

RH: Is there anything else -- you know this is going to be at the Library of Congress. Is there anything else you want to say or talk about?

NR: No, I think I covered a lot.

RH: Let me ask you, actually. I do have another question that I ask a lot of people. Do you have a different understanding of the kind of help people need than you used to have?

NR: Yeah.

RH: Can you kind of describe that?

NR: What I see one of the biggest things people need here is financial literacy. And that's such a key thing. That's, I mean, preventing people from -- I mean, you really see how big access to information is, and education is when you're here, and what I've learned the last year, and that really looking at how do we make education more, like, great education more accessible to a wider scale of people. That’s going to be the biggest difference. I mean that’s why other countries are, you know, racing past us. It's because, you know, they've found the ways of reaching out to different people and

educating them in a more up to speed way, and in a more balanced way. So I think financial literacy and literacy and the encouragement of that learning is something that can lead to this, this, and this. That will go so far. And then, also finding ways of keeping -- of showing people how they can keep the people in power accountable. Real micro-democracy.

RH: What do you think about charity?

NR: I think that in the last eight years with our current president, you know, charity -- it's just seen as something you do in a more faith-based type of way, where it's part of -- you know, you make a lot of money, you donate it to Habitat for Humanity or a food bank, and you don't think about well, what led to these problems? Why is this person that doesn't have this house. Why isn't this person not able to eat? Why do we have millions of people or child -- children who don't have health care? You know, there's a lot longer systematic problem. So, I think getting people to start thinking that poverty affects everyone, and that you can't just throw money at a problem -- that you got to start thinking about preventive care, and that crime -- it's a poverty issue. I mean, one of the reasons crime is so bad in this city is because there's such a huge income gap. Like, people see everyday. People in Central City walk one block and they see mansions. And then they see that they don't -- you know, they don't have A/C, they don't, you know -- they can see right there what they don't have. And there's just got to be a different way, you know -- different way of doing things. I mean, what's great about Edwards in that -- is that he's bringing poverty to the national media again. I mean, he's -- you know, whatever you can say about him, he's doing what Robert Kennedy did, and making poverty an issue again.

RH: What you seem to be saying that poverty an issue that can't be solved by just throwing -- by charity.

NR: Yeah. I mean, there needs to be -- there needs to be a different way of looking at it. I mean, I don't know the answers, I don't know how to solve it. But I do think that when you start educating people, you start giving them financial literacy programs -- you know, why was I -- I was in college. I never got one financial literacy class, you know, throughout college. And even though I'm a History major, I need to know how to pay bills, need to know to balance my checkbook, you need to know about mutual funds and stocks, you need to know about real estate and housing, and I need to know that stuff, if I'm going to be contributing to this society. And why am I not taught that in college? And I went to college. It doesn't make sense to me.

RH: I think that's all the questions I have. And I appreciate it. OK.

[END OF INTERVIEW]