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## Oral History Interview on Connecticut Civil Rights (with video)

Eleanor Caplan

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## Caplan, Eleanor Neiditz

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Location: her home in West Hartford CT

Recording format: digital video

File name: CaplanEleanor\_medium20110706.m4v

Length: 1:07:05

Transcribed by: Katie Campbell [with timestamps inserted]

Additional files: see additional citations listed in the text of this transcript

Abstract: Eleanor Neiditz Caplan (born 1928) describes her work with the Connecticut Civil Rights Commission (previously known as the Inter-racial Commission, and today as the CT Human Rights and Opportunities Commission) from 1951 to 1996. She recalls several staff and members of the Commission, including Frank Simpson, Henry Stetler, Arthur Green, Daniel Fletcher, and others named in the anniversary materials that she allowed us to scan. She describes specific incidents regarding the Commission's evolving anti-discrimination policies and powers, such as Fair Employment Practices, public and private housing studies in the 1950s, the education parks bill in the late 1960s, affirmative action, and the Equal Rights Amendment. She also recalls specific incidents of housing discrimination against African-Americans and Jews, and responds to our sample documents of restrictive covenants and housing discrimination complaints to the Commission. She concludes the interview with family memories of growing up as a young Jew in Hartford's North End and the interracial work of her mother, Rachel Neiditz, and her father, Moses Neiditz.

Additional comments: Submitted as part of the [OnTheLine web-book](http://OnTheLine.trincoll.edu) by Jack Dougherty and colleagues (<http://OnTheLine.trincoll.edu>). See also an oral history interview with Eleanor Caplan conducted by Jeremy Ulan and Julie Hirsh for the Trinity College Jewish Oral History Web (Jewish Studies 220), in 2005 (<http://www.trincoll.edu/prog/joh/Caplan/default.htm>).

Speaker key:

EC: Eleanor Caplan

AT: Anique Thompson

JD: Jack Dougherty

[all comments by transcriber in brackets]

AT: I'd like to start with the... with your work with the Connecticut Civil Rights Commission. I understand that it has had some different names over the years, it has gone through some name changes. First it was, in '43 it was the Inter-racial Commission, and then it changed in the 50's to the Civil Rights Commission, and now it's the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities.

EC: Which it became in 1967-68.

AT: If it's okay today, can we refer to it as the Commission?

EC: Yes, the Commis... That's what we always do.

AT: Ok, good. 1968, you said?

EC: mhmm.

AT: All right, so you told us that you began working for the Commission in 1951. How and why were you selected?

EC: Okay, first of all, at the time I entered, there were 12 people in the agency and there was something called the research division in those days, divided into three: enforcement, research and inter-group relations. The head of the research division was a UConn Professor, and he at that point was looking for a typist, believe it or not. I had graduated from a liberal arts college, Mount Holyoke, and the main thing is, "Can she type and take dictation?" So the summer after I graduated I went to business college in town and got speed writing and so I was hired and I knew just to get in on the ground floor in this agency because I had heard Frank Simpson, who was the Executive Secretary at that point, speak at a meeting about this brand new law that had just been passed, the Fair Employment Practices Act. He was with this young commission and they were going to be the enforcement agency. I was looking for, where was I going to work, I was a Political Science major, so what can you do? So I said, "Do you have any jobs?" And he said, "Well, Dr. Stetler's looking for, like a clerk/typist." This was January and he said "Why don't you come over and see him?" and I did and I said, "This is a perfect fit." Not only was Stetler a wonderful person and a very bright man, a Sociology Professor from UConn, but we had ten Commissioners appointed by the Governor and one of them at that time was Elmo Roper, that name may mean something to you, I don't know if it does. There's the Roper Institute at UConn. He was a major pollster in New York so he would set up these research studies and he was really kind of the boss, the overall boss. In those days the Commissioners were very important. So that's how I came to the agency and then I was upgraded after that first year to a research assistant to help on the studies that they were doing at that point. Studies were employment, education, housing and various kinds of things, in order to get laws through. And then I just rose over the years into other things. Representative, which is like the investigator. Then Legislative Liaison, in the last 20 years of my employment. [00:03:25]

AT: So, through those different changes, what were your responsibilities?

EC: Oh, they changed. My goodness. In the beginning...This was... Well you did studies before there were computers and everything was on... oh what do you call those... keypunch cards. So the interviews were set up whatever they were done and they were key punched by some clerks, and then I would work with the research director, and we'd shuffle all the cards through. I did the internal clerical, well I guess it was more than clerical, helping prepare the data for the studies. And there were interviewers who could have been from various colleges and universities, and I was the in-house person. That was for... I guess I was a research assistant until I left in '57, I was

there from '51 to '57. Then Arthur Green became the director of the Civil Rights Commission and I was itching to get back to work of course. When my youngest got to first grade, I called Art, who might have known, were there any job opportunities, but I really needed to work during school hours. He said, "We'd just love to have you back and we'll have you work by the hour if you like," which was terrific in those days, so I'd get there at 8:30 and leave at 3 or something like that. At that point I was hired on as, what did they call us, Neighborhood Resource Workers. They kept changing the state service. Job titles would change and it went from 12 people, by the time it went back, we were over on Farmington Avenue, it must have been about 50, if that many. So I just did a variety of things and I started working with Daniel Fletcher, I don't know if you've ever heard his name. Dan Fletcher was a most marvelous man who worked for the Hartford Housing Authority for years, and he was Director of the Hartford Housing Authority and he was a law school graduate, way back. Dan died years ago, of course he couldn't get the bar, a lot of problems. He came to work for a legislative agency, did he work for Boce Barlow, I don't remember. He came onto the Commission a, among other things, a legislative type person. I worked with Dan and learned the ropes of the General Assembly back in the late '60s, '70s, Dempsey. And the state began employing, for the agencies, Legislative Liaisons. They called us Legislative and Regulation Specialists. You passed various tests as you go through the state service, and they set up a test for Legislative and Regulation Specialists. I passed that, so they promoted me into that position doing the work that I was doing, you know, Liaison helps get your package of bills through the General Assembly and monitors everything that comes out to make sure it effects the agency properly, as you want. In the earliest days of, let's see, '67 and '68, they established something called the Legislative Commission on Human Rights. This was what I used to call the heyday of Civil Rights really in Connecticut was the late '60s, early '70s. A Committee that just dealt with Human Rights Legislation. Now all the CHRO [Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities] bills go through Judiciary, then it was Human Rights Committee, and when they shrunk the number of Committees in the General Assembly years ago, they got rid of the Human Rights Commission... Committee. At this time, there was a major conference called by Governor Dempsey called the, golly what was it, the Conference on Human Rights and Opportunities. It was before they renamed the Commission and it was a major statewide event to try to get some real civil rights legislation through and get all state agencies involved. They stated using the term "affirmative action" back then. So the duties of a Legislative Liaison became much more involved and complicated and that's when all the various new protected classes were added to the statutes. It was originally just race, creed and color, national origin and ancestry. The Commission had very little powers, couldn't even issue affirmative orders, back pay or anything or injunctive relief, all this came along. Then we added sex discrimination. That didn't happen until... late '60s. I had all these dates down in my head because I used to be the keeper of the chronology. Let's see, it was sex and then age and then disability, mental and physical, mental retardation or disability, sexual orientation. I left just after the sexual orientation bill came through. That was the last major effort I think that I had. So my duties did change over the years, I did investigate complaints at one period of my life. When we lived in this house, I worked out of the Waterbury office over the summer when we had a crash to get rid of all the backlog of complaints, and they needed more investigators. We didn't have regional offices, of course, it was one place. Now there are four regional offices: Capitol Region, Waterbury, Bridgeport, New London. So obviously the duties have changed. It actually got to 112 people but there have been terrible cutbacks in recent years. As I understand it, and I do keep up with people, it's down to 75. Under Governor Malloy's plan B [for budget cuts], which didn't

have to happen by the way, the Commission was going to be eliminated, and a few other agencies. It's changed. [00:11:11]

AT: So you mentioned Elmo Roper. I am not sure about the spelling of that name.

EC: R-o-p-e-r.

AT: Okay, and the first name?

EC: E-l-m-o.

AT: Okay, Daniel Fletcher and Arthur Green. Who were some of the most active staff or board members on the Commission at that time and what can you tell us about them?

EC: [Referring to her copy of an anniversary document of the Commission] Oh my God. In the... The very earliest ones, when we didn't have enforcement powers, was a very prestigious group and they were for a long time. Rt. Reverend Walter H. Gray was the Episcopalian Bishop and Reverend Joseph Griffin and Rabbi Morris Silverman, who was my Rabbi at the time I joined the Commission, which was another reason I joined. He was an activist who was appointed by Governor Baldwin, as were all these people in '43. He stayed on until he died, which was in 1960-something. And Reverend John C. Jackson, have you heard that name? John C. Jackson was with the Union Baptist Church on North Main and he was one of the reasons the Inter-racial Commission was formed. He was a very much beloved minister who took a train trip to the South, it was during the war, and I guess refused to go to the segregated car and he was beaten. This is documented if you look it up on the Internet and see. He was beaten and I guess when he got... Everybody was so enraged, something's got to be done. Bill Mortenson, who was the senator from Hartford, introduced the original legislation in '43 and Reverend Jackson's beating was one of the impetuses for it. This is Sadie Carethers, I remember her from Waterbury, she was probably a teacher, and [other name unclear]. Dr. Carter Marshall, he was a well-known Black doctor from New Haven. And Judge Melitz [Hon. Samuel Melitz, Bridgeport]. These were very prestigious people. Frank Simpson was the first Executive Secretary. Edythe DeLoach was his stenographer, she ended up as business manager years later, and just died last summer, I have her obituary. And then at the time, there was a wonderful history that you might enjoy having. It's 1943-1968, on the 25th anniversary of the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, written, believe it or not by a Trinity student. [Greig Siedor, *1943-1968. Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities*. Hartford, Connecticut: Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, 1968, <http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cssp/>.] Yes. Greig Siedor first came on the Commission as an intern then joined the staff and stayed for a while, I think then he went to law school and it beautifully written. He got all the earliest minute books and wrote a history from the beginning. And the Chairman at the time, I don't know if you've ever heard of Dr. Frederick G. Adams, he's so... he died some years back, he was so well known. He became the Commissioner of Health before he died. He was the Commission Chairman back in, I guess it was '68 and Louis Feinmark and Judge Friedman. Reverend Griffin was still on. Doctor Allan Jackson who was the nephew of grandson of the original Doctor Jackson. Sarah Rosenthal. Oh and Igor Sikorsky, you've probably heard that name. Sikorsky, Igor's father was the founder of Sikorsky Helicopter. He was an attorney and a civil rights activist and he was on the Commission at the time. The whole

appointing authority has changed for the Commission. It used to just be the Governor. And when they did a reorganization of the Commission some years back, they made part of the appointments be legislative. They wanted the Legislature to have some control. So you'd have the Speaker of the House, the President Pro Tem, each had an appointment, and the Minority Leader and the Majority. Minority leader of either house so that you have legislative as well as executive control, if you want to use that term. The duties have changed. We used to have our own business office. We took care of our own management. Now everything, I think it's under DAS, Department of Administrative Services. They consolidate and change the way things are operated over the years. You just can't compare what was to what is today. [00:16:49]

AT: Okay, do you have anything else?

EC: No, that's it.

AT: Could you tell me more about Frank Simpson? Whatever comes to mind.

EC: Yes. He's an amazing guy. Hang on a second, I just want to refer to something. [*The Connecticut Human Rights Banquet: A Golden Anniversary Celebration for the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities*. The Connecticut Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities and United Technologies Corporation, June 15, 1993), [http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cssp/.](http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cssp/)]

JD: Anique, you have a photograph of him. You have one also perhaps [to EC].

AT: Yeah, I do. I have a photo of him as well if you want to look at that in a few minutes.

EC: Here it is. Sorry. And we did the anniversary... the golden anniversary in 1993, and here is Frank. I have two copies so you could actually take this. It's biographies of Frank and Art Green and Tom Henry and these are some of the Commissioners I was telling you about. [Points out individuals in a photo]. Governor Dempsey, Sarah Rosenthal, Father Griffin, Art Green. [00:18:12]

JD: We'll make a copy of it and we want to give the original back to you.

EC: Well I have two. Well you can give it back if you want.

JD: You should keep it for your family and all, but we'd love to make a copy and we'll talk about that later.

EC: Sure. Good.

JD: This is great. Anique, go ahead and ask more about Frank Simpson.

AT: Sure. Yeah, could you tell us some more about him?

EC: Yes. He came up to Hartford in the '40s. Well maybe it was even in the '30s. He was born in Alabama, came to Connecticut after graduating from Tougaloo College in Mississippi earned

two Masters degrees from Hartford Seminary and was awarded an honorary doctorate from a college in South Carolina. He came as a social worker, worked in Hartford for 15 years at the Independent Social Club, which was like a community center in the North End. There were two; there was the North End Community Center, which came afterwards, and the Independent Social Center. Became very well-known in Hartford even back in those days in inter-racial activities, believe it or not there were such things in the late '30s and in the 40's. He became the first employee of the Commission in 1943, later joined by Edythe DeLoach. After he left, he went on to the Welfare Department and other places. What was so amazing about him, and how he had such courage. Before there were any laws to administer and it was just, you did work by persuasion. He would go, as we used to say, Mr. Simpson, would go hat in hand to employers, to G. Fox and Company, to the school boards, to ask them to hire what we called Negroes in those days. He had a good relationship with G. Fox and Company, where I think they hired their... through him, and through Mrs. Auerbach of course, who was very civic minded in every way, hired the first, well they had elevator operators, but the first retail clerk. I think I remember who he was. Then he would do the same thing, he would go to fire departments, he would go to school boards, and just by persuading people to hire. Because during the war, and this was another impotence for the formation of the Commission, there was a large surge of employment opportunities for people of color in those days, and for women, as you know, because there wasn't anybody around. But the fear was that when the war was over, what was going to happen to these people? Were they going to lose their jobs? This was also in the time where the National Guard was segregated and that had to be changed by the Legi...and the state got whatever it was, some was changed by the legislature, some by executive order of Governor Bowles. So when Frank couldn't do things by persuasion personally, they also held inter-group relations programs at the state colleges, at Willimantic State College, that's the first one I remember. The whole field of inter-group relations was very young at that time, nobody... It was sort of experimental. Through trial and error, they learned some techniques and some of the first things the Commission did back in those days was to distribute lots and lots of literature, film strips, and it had a film library. I remember we used to send these things out in the mail, I just heard one of them lately. I was listening to public radio and they had "The House I Live In" and I remember Frank Sinatra used to sing it. And "Ballad for Americans". We would distribute these things and it was like do-gooder until the legislature finally adopted the Fair Employment Practices Act. We were actually behind... we were the first Inter-racial Commission or Inter-group Commission in the country. But the enforcement laws, the Fair Employment Practices Act came after New York, after New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, we came in fourth. You know, when things are introduced in the legislature, they don't pass the first year, they don't pass the second year, sometimes it can be five years before they pass and that was true of housing legislation. That took... that was gradual. They introduced it in one session and then maybe five years later it will finally get through. Sort of had to be patient in those days. Now what were you just asking? I got sidetracked. [00:24:22]

JD: You can go to the next one if you want Anique.

AT: Sure. Okay, outside of the Commission what other people or organizations supported your goals?

EC: Oh, let's see. We worked with... well, the Anti-Defamation League. What were the... Oh

well, we worked with the NAACP and the Urban League of course. Oh boy, what were the names? We sure worked with Bill Brown over the years. Oh yeah, he was a commissioner too. [00:25:08]

AT: For the Commission?

EC: For the Commission on Human Rights, yeah. Let me see. I have a list that might remind me. Oh, Richard Battles...Bill Brown...

AT: And what page are you looking on?

EC: He was executive director of the Urban League for years and years and years. Some of the earliest women lawyers were commissioners, you know. There weren't too many back then. That's right, Fannie Himmelstein, Sarah. I mean, there were women on the Commission of course and sex discrimination was not illegal, not until... How can I forget the year? I know the pregnancy discrimination law just came through in 1972. One could fire a women if she showed or was pregnant, particularly teachers. There was a court case and then they passed a law to outlaw, to define pregnancy discrimination as part of sex discrimination. They had to do it that way. So there were Jewish organizations, there was the... which church in particular? Obviously the black churches. Congregational church. The first church up here... Yeah, I would say it was churches and certain civic groups. Oh, the Y. [00:27:09]

JD: That would be the YWCA?

EC: Yes. Well, probably the YM too, but yeah, the YW, that I knew in particular.

AT: Okay, so were there any groups that opposed your work? Or who opposed your work?

EC: Openly? Oh dear. Well I do remember in the General Assembly, that's where we used to have public hearings on bills. The precursor, we had what we called an Educational Parks Bill back in the '60s, and it was the result of a study that Harvard... it was a Harvard study of the educational system in Hartford that definitely preceded the... Sheff and Brown, you weren't even born at that time. The Commission was encouraged by the Legislative Commission on Human Rights and there was also something called the Executive Commission on Human Rights that the Governor was behind to come up with some kind of legislation and what we proposed, with the help of the Harvard Study, actually they recommended it, is that there be an educational park system where you had an enclave somewhere like between Hartford and West Hartford, where you would have an educational park integrated from the beginning. You'd start small and it would all be in one campus, kind of thing. There was a prototype for the way it would look in Hartford and the way it would look. Anyway, there was a massive hearing at the public...at the legislature on this and I do remember being at that and there was so much opposition. It was forced... I don't even know if they called it forced busing... It would lead to forced busing, I guess that was what it was and there were some prominent people that testified against it, I don't even want to mention their names. So anyway, it didn't get anywhere. I think it got a favorable report out of one of the Committees, but it never went anywhere, but we were so proud of that bill and worked so hard for it. Dan Fletcher worked so hard for it. So there really was opposition

to anything that sort of smacked forced bussing. Obviously this was after the '54 decision. That would have been in the late '60s, early... yeah, late '60s. That was major opposition. Now, there was never any overt opposition to sex discrimination, but what I do remember is that when we tried to get the Equal Rights Amendment through the General Assembly, you know that didn't go. A state Equal Rights Amendment passed, but not... we didn't ratify the national. My brother was in the Legislature at the time, and he was a main supporter, I remember, of the Equal Rights legislation, and he got that through. [00:30:37]

JD: Your brother's name?

EC: David Neiditz. He was Banking Commissioner. He died very young, when he was 51 years old, but he was a representative and a state senator. Let's see. Who else would have opposed? I don't think anybody came right out and opposed the housing discrimination. . . . That was very slow in coming. First it was illegal to discriminate in public accommodations. You know, anything that offers goods, services or facilities to the general public, and that had to be defined. And then they said, "How are we going to get housing in?" So it came very slowly. The definition of public accommodation was amended to include certain private housing. Let's see. All owned by one owner. Let me see, I can't remember the rest of it. And then there was, or somebody who owned five or more pieces of property, they would be covered. Then finally it got changed to.... Oh first, it included public housing. First they had to include public housing, which we did a major study on public housing and found that there was segregation within all the projects. Either some were all one thing or another, or they were segregated within the projects if it was... whether it was Bellevue Square or whatever, there were white houses and black houses and that's the way it was. So we did a study on that and show it up and then the legislature would make the change. Now this was the same way we got the private housing bill, which I really want you to see [picks up pamphlet] We did a major study of private housing and Elmo Roper set it up and U.S. News and World Report picked it up and there's... this is really very archival. [“When Negroes and Whites Live Side by Side,” *U.S. News and World Report*, February 22, 1957: 126-134.] They printed most of the study and it's "When Negroes and Whites Live Side-by-Side". That's Stetler's study. And there's even a picture of me interviewing a couple. [00:32:59]

[The two full studies are: Henry Stetler, *Racial Integration in Public Housing Projects in Connecticut*. Hartford, Conn.: Connecticut Commission on Civil Rights, 1955; Stetler, *Racial Integration in Private Residential Neighborhoods in Connecticut*. Hartford: Connecticut Commission on Civil Rights, 1957.]

JD: Oh great!

EC: Yeah, it's a very old photo [00:33:01]

AT: Can you give me the date of this article? Or the issue?

EC: We did the study in... I think it didn't come out... It took years to get it done, because, you know, we interviewed all over the state. We had a questionnaire. Yeah, it finally came out in '56. In '56. But I think we probably worked on it for 4 years.

JD: I've read the study but I haven't seen the *U.S. News Report*. I'd like to look at that later.

EC: Yeah, it's kind of cute, with the pictures and all that. [00:33:39]

JD: Good. Well this is a nice segue into your next question I think.

AT: Yes it is actually. I have some newspaper clippings that I found along with Jack and I wanted to see if those would spark your memory. So, back in the 1950s the newspaper headlines described how it was extremely difficult for African Americans to buy or rent housing in the suburbs. There are some sample articles that I want to show you that might spark your memory and if you could tell us some more about them, that'd be great. [00:34:06]

EC: Sure. Yep.

JD: The first one is very tiny print. She's just going to summarize some names in here and if it rings any bells for you, that's what we're looking for.

EC: Okay. Yep, sure.

AT: So this is a letter to the editor and it was written by Marcia Clinton and she was explaining her predicament ["Though I Have the Gift of Charity...", Letter to the Editor, *The Hartford Courant*, February 4, 1955, p. 22]. She wanted to buy a house in a suburb and she would go out with the real estate agents but they would not let... they wouldn't show her the houses. She would never actually get inside to see what they looked like or anything like that. So she wrote a letter and she basically said that she is a part of the community but she felt very disheartened that she couldn't buy a house with the people that she worked with and saw on a daily basis. So there's that. [00:34:50]

JD: Let's just start with that one. Did you remember this story at all or...?

EC: Yeah sure, I remember Marcia Clinton. I remember the name. And you know we had Jackie Robinson and Rachel. They were complainants, back when housing wasn't covered, you see. That was our first major one. And it was also Jews at that time because I remember we had a complaint from an opera singer from the Met[ropolitan Opera] who was trying to buy a house in Farmington and they wouldn't show him the house either. And it was because he was Jewish. There were certain parts of town, you know, you knew not to bring... certain parts of West Hartford back in those days... you wouldn't show a house. But other places you would. It depends. [00:35:47]

AT: Okay, so the next article that I have is about Samuel Cullers... ["McKinley Park Told to Give Negro a Home," *The Hartford Courant*, June 19, 1956, p. 1]

EC: Oh God!

AT:...who complained that he was denied an apartment because of his race.

EC: Of course, I was at the hearing tribunal thing. That case went to hearing tribunal and it was so awful, it was so mean. The tribunal, I don't remember who was on the tribunal then. And I remember, he lived across the... oh well, why go into it? Sam Cullers was a friend.

JD: So tell us more about him.

EC: Gee. I am losing things because I am getting older. Sam and his wife, we were friends, my husband and I. Whatever happened? Well, he's gone, but... I forgot what his occupation was.

JD: Well, Anique you have . . .

AT: Yeah. He was a . . .

EC: He tried to live on Dauntless... Dauntless Lane. The apartments on Dauntless Lane. He couldn't get in. Filed a complaint. Went to public hearing. The difficult in proving that he was actually discriminated against... I don't know, but it was a terrible situation I remember. Couldn't get justice. [00:37:07]

AT: He was a city planner...

EC: A City Planner!

AT:... for the Hartford Development Agency.

EC: That's right. Oh my god.

JD: McKinley Homes, is that the...?

AT: Yes, you're right, McKinley Homes, McKinley Park Homes.

EC: McKinley yes. Sure. That was serious and true. [00:37:24]

AT: So what was the hearing? How did that...?

EC: I don't know... I... Either they couldn't prove the discrimination or whatever it was but I know it didn't work for Sam. The hearing tribunal, they were appointed by the Governor too. That didn't get into court afterwards. No. It stopped there. Okay. Who beyond Sam? [00:37:53]

AT: The last article that I have about that is a series called "Where Can a Negro Live?" and that was in 1956. ["Where Can a Negro Live? A Study of Housing Discrimination in Hartford," *The Hartford Courant*, August 19, 1956, p. 1A]

EC: That was the study probably.

AT: Yep, so do you have anything else that you want to talk about with that?

EC: No, I have a copy of the study somewhere but you've already got it and I can't find where it was. It was most revealing and most interesting to work on because the questions that framed people. There were... we did have white interviewers interviewing whites and black interviewing black because we thought they would be more honest and open. That's really and truly what I remember. But the reason they had me interviewing a black couple, that was staged for the magazine. [00:38:45]

AT& JD: Ahhhhhh.

EC: Yeah, they had left by then and I was still with the Commission, the interviewers were hired for the study. I was working in-house with that, but normally that's the way they did it. I also worked on the public housing study, where we go to the projects and you would ask the neighbors, "How do you feel about living next to...?" and they would say, "It doesn't matter to me, it's fine with me as long as they are nice people." and others would say, "I don't feel comfortable about it." And they would say this in the private housing study too. They would be honest, some of them. [00:39:24]

AT: So can you tell us a little more about what it was like during this period when there was a lot of housing discrimination and people, Negroes were looking to buy houses?

EC: Well, what was frustrating was we couldn't do anything about it until the law was passed. I've forgotten the date on that one too. I guess it was late '60s. Or maybe it was before because the Civil Rights Act was '64, but that didn't cover housing. The Federals... Federal housing law was 1968. I think ours was... did it precede it? It just preceded it I think. Yes, it must have preceded it, because we usually did precede the federal law.

JD: Let's go ahead Anique with the next set then.

AT: Sure. All right, so we also found some examples of racial restrictive property deeds that were filed in the 1940s for some housing developments in the West Hartford area. In 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that these restrictions were no longer enforceable, but they weren't erased from the deeds themselves. So I have an example of a deed and a map that goes along with it, so I'd like you to look that over and I am just going to read off an example of some of the wording in the deed. It says, "No persons of any race other than the white race shall use or occupy any building or any lot except that this covenant shall not prevent occupancy by domestic servants of a different race, domiciled with an owner or tenant." So you can look that over. [00:41:10] [Shows screenshot and sample document from "Race Restrictive Covenants in Property Deeds, Hartford area, 1940s," interactive map from UConn MAGIC, [http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/otl/doclink\\_covenant.html](http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/otl/doclink_covenant.html)]

EC: [after agreeing and nodding as Anique spoke] Yeah, sure.

JD: We have found several of these in West Hartford, there's a little map that Anique has.

EC: I am not the least bit surprised.

JD: So the question... go ahead and ask the... Some of them actually are not too far from where you live.

EC: Yep.

AT: So the question I have about this is: Have you seen any other deeds like this in West Hartford or elsewhere in Connecticut?

EC: No, I haven't actually seen them, but I knew about them. [00:41:33]

AT: Okay, did you know about some of the neighborhoods that it was targeted towards or anything like that? Like, how did you first find out about this stuff?

EC: Well my family was in the real estate business so they were what was considered liberals even back in those days. So, I mean, you just knew about it. That there were... how would you not know? Let's see.

JD: Why don't you hand her the map and just...

AT: So this is...

EC: Oh, . . . [studies map] Oh, yeah, Trout Brook Drive, my god.

JD: This larger map shows...

EC: So is this showing where the restrictive covenants were?

JD: That's one neighborhood.

AT: That's showing the neighborhood of what the deed is talking about. So in this map its actually pointing out some of the areas where the deeds were in the West Hartford area. So the...

EC: Oh yeah, Trout Brook Drive is right down here. Westmoor. Really. This is now called the... Fernridge Park is right up the way.

AT: About... Have you seen any other housing restrictions like this based on religion?

EC: I haven't seen any covenants, whatever you call it, deeds that say it, but we knew it because we'd get complaints back in those days from, as I mentioned specifically, the opera singer who tried to buy a house in Farmington. You know, if you were Jewish back in those days, you knew which neighborhoods to... And people knew where you could look for a house, and you'd not be surprised if a realtor didn't lead you into that neighborhood. It was kind of expected. It might not be because there was an actual restrictive covenant but just common knowledge. You know what they would say when we would get some of these complaints, "You wouldn't feel comfortable there." That's what it was for black people, Jewish people, and I think we had some from Italians too back in those days. In the various studies that we do that could be unemployment and

education, we had a lot of education studies, we found that there was more discrimination between... Oh and then the Puerto Ricans when they came in a little bit later. Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians. [00:44:47]

AT: Okay. So the Commission investigated discrimination complaints that it received on various issues so we've been looking at some of the housing complaints that have been archived at the Connecticut State Library...

EC: Oh good.

AT: ... and I have some samples with me. I wanted to just ask you if you could tell me some more about the process. In this one, it's an index of all of the housing restriction complaints [Index of discrimination reports, sample page, CT Civil Rights Commission, 1953, CT State Library archives], and this in the '50s and it would have the complaint and then the response, town, allegation and whether it was settled or not.

JD: Just start with one, does this bring back any memories?

EC: Oh, evictions too. Yeah. Oh Golly! Lake Terramuggus, that was... [unclear name] filed that. Purchasing restric... Oh my, the restricted lake-front cottages. That was a very famous case. Oh god, why can I forget these things. Doctor.... A black doctor... tried to buy property... [00:46:04]

JD: I think we've the name. But the story is that you recall, they are trying to buy property on lake-front, right?

EC: Yep. George Jones. [inaudible]

JD: It's just one sample page we found. We just want to see if it just sparked any memories about the process. That's all.

EC: Yep. Well, the process, let's see, was... In '52 we didn't have authority to require... to give injunctive relief or do anything like that. It was persuasion, I guess. [00:46:51]

AT: So you would just take the records so that you would have them?

EC: Mhm, yeah, [reading the document] "how the case was dismissed", see, they would... "Unable to adjust". That's how it would say. "Unable to adjust". "Unable to adjust". That's what they called it in those days. [00:47:05]

AT: And what does that mean?

EC: That means that they couldn't adjust the complaint, they couldn't... First of all, they couldn't find discrimination, anyway. But what they used to do was try to adjust, to try to conciliate, to try to do anything without enforcement authority. But they weren't able to adjust it so that's... that was the final closing until the law changed.

AT: So the next thing that I have here is a report and I wanted to see if that brought back any memories for you, if it was...

[Example of housing complaint report, CT Civil Rights Commission, HR 359 Box 29, Complaint Summary, 1965, CT State Library Archives]

JD: And this is just... we have a few hundred of these... this is just a sample case files.

EC: Yep, oh yeah, I've got some of these too. Referred by Jimmy Harris. Jim Harris was in the NAACP and he also worked for the Governor's office afterwards. Lester [last name unclear] Ballard Drive, West Hartford was the respondent, and filed was Barbara...

AT: The print is really light...

JD: But...

EC: [reading from document] Denied apartment rental on account... Those were quite common.

JD: That's what I was going to say.

EC: Denied apartment rental, that was really tough. Sometimes I almost think it was easier to buy a house than to rent an apartment in some places. [00:48:22]

JD: Why was that?

EC: I guess it was because they were living in the same building or something. You had to have courage to rent to a black family. But people did. You know, it was their own house and they could do what they want. I mean, I knew of people who did it way back. But as far as an apartment, they said "you wouldn't be happy here". Particularly for black families. [00:48:55]

AT: Okay, I am going to move on to the next question.

EC: That brings back, I can't remember how bad those days were.

AT: You told us that you and some other people were included in a CPTV [Connecticut Public Television] video documentary. So could you tell us some more about that, like some dates or anything?

EC: Yeah, it wasn't that long ago, if you called CPTV they'd probably have it.

JD: Anique's been talking with them on the phone.

EC: Oh, did they find it?

JD & AT: Not yet.

JD: But tell us more. Do you think it was just a couple years ago or ten years ago?

EC: Now, let's see, Pat Ritter was still living and Phil Murphy, my head of Legal Department, who I just saw this week, he was interviewed in it. I...It's in the past ten years.

AT: Okay.

JD: And was it about the Civil Rights Commission or Connecticut history in general?

EC: No... Connecticut Civil Right, the growth of Civil Rights in Connecticut, so a lot of it... Quite a bit was spent on the early days of the Commission, because I remember we were asked about Frank Simpson and we talked... We came down to CPTV and were interviewed there. They had some pictures in the state office building cafeteria with Frank [Simpson] in it. No, it wasn't just the Commission, but there was a lot of it in it. I am sure it's the past ten years, they ought to find it. I may even have some records somewhere that would involve...[00:50:36]

JD: We'll look and if we can't find anything we may come back and ask for more suggestions, but this is a good start.

EC: All right.

AT: So looking back, while you worked at the Commission, how did civil rights change or not change during this period?

EC: Oh gosh, where to begin? It was mammoth, the changes have been mammoth. When you just talk about the addition of the protected classes from race, creed and color to where it is today, and you talk about the added powers of the agency and the added anti-discrimination laws, federal and state, and the addition of, at least in Connecticut, the affirmative action law which... People may not remember but...the EEOC, which was before Clarence Thomas, in 1972, they used the term affirmative action and that was under the Nixon administration, and affirmative action before it had the connotation that it had in those days, was in our original FEP law, and shall take... and when they find discrimination.... and shall take such affirmative action as in the judgment of the Commission or the hearing tribunal deems, whatever. Affirmative action just... they took that language out of the NLRB, the National Labor Relations Act. Affirmative action just means that you act in a positive ways to remedy whatever the situation is. Then it started taking on additional meaning. Well, so, how do you implement it? How do you act affirmatively? It isn't just issuing an affirmative order. Affirmative orders are something we didn't have in the beginning, which is you shall cease and desist from discriminating and shall do something. That's what it originally meant. Then in employment in 1972, we started using that terminology for contracting, state contracting and federal contract compliance. Anything that remedied the present effects of past discrimination. That's what it was. You could fashion remedies in an affirmative way. "You *shall* do such and such." "You shall hire..." The next applicant... the next applications that comes in, whether it's housing or employment, the next qualified person shall be hired or something. So that was a major change, and then what I said with the Connecticut law was state agencies had to file affirmative action plans. It was a relatively strong plan and they used to file them with the Commission and we would review the plans, go over it. Whether it was Department of Corrections or whatever it was, and they'd have

to make a plan and say how they were going to do their hiring based on various categories. Then it was up to them to implement over a certain number of years, and if they didn't, there were certain kinds of remedies. That law has been somewhat decimated in recent years but the Commission doesn't review the plans. I'm not sure I'm completely up to date but things have changed in that area. It's changed from the beginning with no powers to lots of powers, but the complaint load is not like it was in the old days. There are more uses of the law. You don't get denial of employment as much as you get discriminatory layoff, firing, that kind of thing, based on... it could be age, it could be race, sex, whatever. People will use... You have to hang your hat on something to say you are being denied and investigating complaints is a lot more sophisticated than it used to be we have so many more powers to... Well, we have the power of subpoena, to subpoena records, which they didn't have before. Interrogatories, depositions, these various tools came over the years that they didn't have originally. For example, you can request all kinds of records and get them. As a matter of fact, somebody just came to me. It was a man who was doing some work in my house and he said he'd been let go from his previous whatever it is, and nobody else was fired for doing the things he did. So I said, "File a complaint." And he said, "You know, I didn't think of that." I said, "Because they'll get the records and they'll ask how... what were the protected classes of the various people who were... did the same thing as you, and how were they treated comparatively?" You know, years and years ago, they didn't do that kind of thing. I mean, it went from the earliest days of persuasion to all kinds of powers, but not easy to prove. [00:56:55]

AT: Okay.

JD: I am going to bring over your plaque here. Maybe you could just... I'll just hold it up in front of the camera for a second and then maybe you could tell us...

EC: It was so embarrassing when I got that....

JD: Okay, well I'm going to do this. And then, you know, it was very special for you here, so maybe you could... if you hold it there, is that good? And tell us about this and what you remember.

EC: Well, it says Inter-racial Commission, showing when I started, and then Commission on Civil Rights and then Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. This was a picture of Rabbi Silverman who was Commission chairman when I came on. This was a couple who are featured in the *U.S. News and World Report* article and I am doing the interview, though I actually didn't interview them at the time. [00:57:40]

JD: It was the staged photo, but still...

EC: Right, right. And this is me, working with... I can't remember what it was when it was Commission on Civil Rights. Oh, and it points out this major case that we had, the Labor Union case, which went all the way to the Supreme Court. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Union case. We called it Tilly and ...Mansfield Tilly and Warren Stewart [spelling??] who were trying to get into the electrical workers' union. There was definite discrimination in the crafts union back in those days, and the industrial unions, obviously, was no problem. They

could not get in and filed a complaint with the Commission and the hearing tribunal ruled in their favor, it went to court. Finally, when it ended up in Supreme Court before there was a remedy. It was Judge Warren [spelling?]. The IBEW took them in, and we were extremely proud of that case, though it... that took years too, like other things. So, they mentioned the case here. That's my husband and me. The Capitol, because that's where I spent a lot of my years, and that's what I did. At my retirement, they had this done. It was fun. [00:59:02]

JD: That's very nice. I had one follow-up question if I can.

EC: Sure.

JD: I'm just curious. You mentioned that your family was involved, you know, sold real estate. I'm just curious, did that give you special information about housing discrimination or did it make life more difficult because it could be a financial pinch for them?

EC: Well you know, even back in those days, they weren't in residential. They were commercial.

JD: Commercial.

EC: So, he... my father and others had developed apartment houses and buildings and stuff, cheap now that I think about it. Yeah, I had special insights into it and if I ever heard anything that I thought they might have been doing or was aware of I said, "Do you know what's going on?" "Oh we wouldn't do that or anything..." Hopefully they wouldn't have. My mother was very involved in the inter-racial work in the '30s and '40s.[01:00:15]

JD: Tell us more about that, and your parents' names also.

EC: There was something called the National Conference of Christians and Jews which became the National Conference in Community and Justice [NCCJ] and what was first formed in Hartford, it was after.... My mother was on the first board, whatever it was. And also on the YWCA Race Relations Committee. She was the first Jewish woman that they ever invited to be on it. She got to know black women from the National Council of Negro Women, and she was president of the National Council of Jewish Women, this was in the '40s, early '40s. I guess it was during the war. My mother was a school teacher originally and taught in the...what used to be called the Brackett School, the old Northeast school, and got to know people over various races and of course I was brought up in Weaver High School and lived in the North End. We had just been raised with, I don't know if the word... we used to use the word tolerance, whatever that meant. So I was the graduation speaker at Weaver and my talk was "Brotherhood: Dream or Possibility?" That's a... we care about those things back in 1946. It was the era of... they say good feeling. It was right after the war, we were world federalists and we were just so hopeful of the great future we were going to have. Then everything changed. McCarthyism and all that. [01:02:20]

JD: Your parents' names?

EC: My father's name was Moses Neiditz and my mother was Rachel Neiditz [01:02:27] .

JD: and she taught...?

EC: She taught, you know, married women weren't allowed to teach. [01:02:38]

JD: That's right, so she taught before she was married.

EC: Yeah, yeah.

JD: Okay, at Northeast Brackett School, you said?

EC: Mhmn [yes].

JD: And just some typical questions we typically ask...

EC: And my father, believe it or not, went to Trinity.

JD: Oh really?

EC: How he did that was under the Student Training Corps [correct name??] which was, or ROTC. So boys... poor boys that lived in the North End, he lived on Pleasant Street, downtown, wherever it was. They would walk from down there to Trinity College. I've got a picture of him in his army uniform at Trinity and the mustering at Trinity. But then when the war was over they had to leave, they weren't funded anymore, so he left. Couldn't afford to go in those days. [01:03:24]

JD: And just some background questions... What year were you born?

EC: 1928.

JD: And you graduated from Weaver High in 1946?

EC: '46. [nods] The old Weaver which is now Martin Luther King School.

JD: Right, yep, and where... did your family live in one place or several different places over time?

EC: Yeah, I was born on Colebrook Street in the North End off of Blue Hills Avenue and then they bought their own house on Pembroke next to Keney Park, right over Keney Park. The old Jones Junior High, which was the Northwest school, and the old Rawson School, which was called Hope Street School. So my brother... my late brother and my living brother and I have always been great, great boosters of Hartford. We feel very, very strongly about the viability of Hartford and we were for metropolitan government, you know, the stuff we thought was going to happen someday, and it didn't.[01:04:31]

JD: Can I ask, what year did you leave the Commission?

EC: 1996, 1996-7. Around there.

JD: Okay, and you've been very patient with our questions today. Your memory is fantastic. You feel like you're struggling but...

EC: Oh, I've forgotten names!

JD: We're very impressed with what you've come up with names. You can tell that we are especially interested in housing discrimination, moving into suburbs. Are there other people around who you think Anique and I should be interviewing who would have more first-hand experience of this? Do any names come to mind?

EC: Yeah, black or white? Doesn't matter. Well, I'm sure you must have... So many are dead. You know, in many years, over the years, I felt so alone. There... Except for my husband. He was... He was like, we met and he was a young lawyer and he worked at the North End Community Center and I worked at North End Community Center. You know, after work, doing things with kids, working with kids. We got to know.... Art Green, oh, may he rest in peace. He was... not Art Green, well yeah, Art Johnson, have you ever heard that name? Art Johnson was with the Commission when I first came on. Yeah, he was an inspiration. Trude Mero [01:06:23]

JD: Trude Mero, we've spoken with her. Yeah.

EC: Yeah, Trude was his sister-in-law. Not sister-in-law, cousin-in-law. Spike was Art's cousin. Who for white people were involved. Charlotte, she's dead.

JD: Which Charlotte were you thinking of?

EC: Charlotte Kotowski.

JD: I haven't heard that name. . . .That's fine.

EC: Yeah.

JD: We've got other leads with other people, but we just wanted to see if there's anyone else on the tip of your tongue today.

EC: Yeah, Okay.