

BETH ABRAMOWITZ

EXIT INTERVIEW

DAVID ALSOBROOK: Interview with Beth Abramowitz, Domestic Policy Staff, August 23, 1979, approximately 9:30 AM in Room 213 of the Old Executive Office Building. The interviewer is David Alsobrook of the Presidential Papers Staff.

I thought the most logical place to begin, Beth, would be to ask you what position or positions have you held in the White House?

BETH ABRAMOWITZ: I've only held the same position in four different offices. The physical location was part of the initial problem. The position was always the same, Assistant Director for Education. The first few months, and then I picked up women's issues as well when I asked for it. I've been doing education and women's issues.

ALSOBROOK: Do you recall your first day on the job? If you can't remember the exact date, that's OK.

ABRAMOWITZ: I remember generally.

ALSOBROOK: When was it?

ABRAMOWITZ: I think it was the spring, April '77. Right after the first few months.

ALSOBROOK: Do you remember the first day when you walked in the building here?

ABRAMOWITZ: I've been in Washington since Ronald Reagan won his first term in California. That's how I note the time. Back in '67. And I had never been in the White House up until that. The first time then was when I had a call asking if I was interested in being considered for this position. When was that? That was around January of '77, shortly after the inaugural or before the inaugural. Right about that time.

ALSOBROOK: Who called you?

ABRAMOWITZ: The initial call came from Frank Raines, who was on the Domestic Policy Staff as well. One of the early hires. And the only known Republican. [Laughter] He just called. I was working at Howard University as a senior fellow. I was just finishing up another book for them when he called and said, "Would you like to come down and be considered?" And I came.

ALSOBROOK: Came for an interview?

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes, yes. Over here to the Old Executive Office Building, Room 213. Right across the hall.

ALSOBROOK: Did Mr. Raines talk with you?

ABRAMOWITZ: Oh, yes. It turned out he was from the West coast, from Washington state, and we had several mutual friends.

ALSOBROOK: You're from California?

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes, from Berkeley.

ALSOBROOK: Does anything stand out in your mind about the first time you sat at your desk and went to work here?

ABRAMOWITZ: It was a nice office downstairs. That was my first office. The most interesting thing about it was that there was no job description. There were no set procedures. So you presumed, at least I did, that you were supposed to bring you own background of experience and evolve the whole process for yourself. The first thing I did was, after I made a list of everything I needed in the office in terms of supplies, I made a list of the people I needed to talk to right away. The first one being my predecessor, who was very kind and came in. We had a long conversation. He explained how the domestic policy worked in the previous administration, and what he did in the position that I held. That's my most immediate recollection. And I spent my first few weeks holding interviews and meeting all the major education associations I didn't already know. Talking to them about what they wanted out of the administration, what legislation they thought was important. [I talked] with all the congressional people, OMB people, the HEW people. I just spent my first two weeks with at least six interviews, six meetings a day, some here, a lot of them out, just running around like a chicken with its head cut off. And then I did an initial mailing. Made a list of all the major education associations around the country and wrote them a general letter. I think I still have that. Asking them what they saw as the most important priorities. What they wanted to have accomplished. What they were doing in these specific areas, and just any policy statements they had evolved that were appropriate at that time. I sent out about two thousand of those. There are that many groups. It is an overdeveloped area. [Laughter] It really is. For every two people there are at least five education organizations. So we got back tons of paper, absolutely tons of paper, much of which I did read, some of which I did not. All of which I eventually put in a great big box and sent over to HEW, Assistant Secretary's office for education, where they asked to see the stuff, too, because they were working on a comprehensive education policy.

The other thing I did in the first week or so was to get a copy of "Promises, Promises" that David Rubenstein had put together of all the campaign utterances and put them on index cards related to education so I'd know what they'd promised to do, and used that as my yardstick as initial policy guidance. That's how I did it.

ALSOBROOK: Were there other White House staff units you were working with?

ABRAMOWITZ: Initially?

ALSOBROOK: Yes.

ABRAMOWITZ: Within the Domestic Policy Staff, depending on the issue, I worked with some other people. We are all divided into little compartments. Across other units, yes, with intergovernmental people, Jack Watson, especially in the early days.

ALSOBROOK: Did you report directly to Stu Eizenstat on issues?

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes, although it's sort of a funny thing. Depending on the magnitude of it, and that's a judgmental thing. On daily operations and questions like that, I'd talk to Bert Carp. On issues where you're looking for some guidance, especially on how we want to come out with this conflict between Domestic Policy and an agency or OMB, it was always the three players, then you'd sit down with Stu. Grab him at eight o'clock in the morning or after six o'clock in the evening and sort of stand around until we had the moment, and then you'd go in. I used that technique, although I don't like standing around and waiting, or I'd send a note and say, "Check off one or the other."

ALSOBROOK: Has this procedure stayed the same all the time you've been here?

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes, it has.

ALSOBROOK: Looking at the organizational structure in the telephone book, I wish you would explain to me, for example, a couple of things. Number one, I don't quite understand the difference between Associate Director and an Assistant Director.

ABRAMOWITZ: Salary and access to a car.

ALSOBROOK: And those are the two essential differences?

ABRAMOWITZ: To be realistic. I never reported to an Associate Director at all. I didn't work with any, not in any supervisory sense, or anything like that. That wasn't the nature of the work.

ALSOBROOK: How about in terms of, say, staff meetings? How would those be organized? For example, what kind of staff meetings would you attend and who would be there?

ABRAMOWITZ: Oh, Stu's general staff meetings, which were modeled pretty much after Cabinet meetings. We used to meet rather

frequently, early on. We'd sit down in a room with Stu, and everyone would go around and report on what they're doing, bringing up any items that were important to be discussed. On some items of great moment, this hasn't changed at all, Stu would stop and tell the group more about this whole thing because for most of the staff meeting it was sort of a shorthand discussion. You say something like, "Well, the coal slurry bill is still bogged down in committee." Now, unless you happen to know what coal slurry is, what committee they're talking about, it doesn't mean a heck of a lot. Whenever an item was very hot, the discussion on it would be prolonged, and Stu would ask for a more thorough explanation so everyone could understand what was at stake and what was at hand.

ALSOBROOK: So these meetings would cover all types of domestic issues even though your primary interest would be in women's issues and education.

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes, so you'd sit there and you'd learn a little bit about what was happening in public works, what was going on in transportation, what was happening in energy at that moment. The emphasis was on either crises or legislation, either legislation that was pending, awaiting presidential approval, or activity in the congress that required more action from this part to be sure it came out the right way.

ALSOBROOK: Would other people come in and brief you in addition to Stu? Would you have people from Congressional Liaison or other White House units that would come in?

ABRAMOWITZ: No. On what they were doing?

ALSOBROOK: Yes. That maybe touched on what you were doing.

ABRAMOWITZ: No, it was much more informal. The way it has worked when someone else was interested in or doing what you were doing. For example, when Title IX, sex discrimination against women in sports, which is a perennial issue. Even though the legislation was passed in '72, it still is working its way around to implementation. There are some issues which never go away. School desegregation never goes away. College desegregation, which has been pending since Adams v. Richardson, when Elliot Richardson was Secretary of HEW. It's a perennial issue. On those sorts of things especially there will be involvement of Bob Lipshutz. Example. Margaret McKenna called about a week or so ago. She's working on an opinion out of Justice on Title IX. She called to say that she was waiting for this opinion to come back, and she'll let me know when it gets over here so we can all get together on it. There has been no traffic cop to pull the thing together, so it's as often by accident as by design that you find out that someone else is concerned. What has tended to be the style, to the extent that I know it, is that when someone else, say on Jack Watson's staff or Congressional Liaison or First Lady's staff, or

Bob Lipshutz or Midge [Costanza] or Sarah [Weddington], either them or their staffs were involved in something, they would call and say, "Are you doing something in this area?" Try to get some background information on it. Or Ham Jordan's staff, when they got wind of some little crisis. For example, Betty Rainwater would call and say, "We've found out about blah, blah, blah. What's going on here?" That's been the more typical. That's not unique to myself. What I gather is that it's the Domestic Policy Staff's function, in part, has also been imparting information to other people in an area they're also working in.

Generally what happens is you could build up a theory on crisis. Everything finds its own level for solution, so you don't have to get too anxious about it. It will rise to the level, the point at which the solution can be reached. And that's not necessarily presidential level. Very few things rise that far. At least the areas I deal with on a daily basis. They often will not rise any further than myself working with OMB or the agencies, and we work it out. Or if it goes any further it will rise to Jim McIntyre and Stu. Or if it can't be resolved there, they will rise to the Vice President, and he can sort of cool it all out. If it doesn't stop there, it will rise to the President. But what happens is that as the things start moving along and bubbling, the more people become involved, and you have little meetings. "Well, let's invite so and so." And this stuff keeps going. But it's all been pretty much on the basis of, we operate on the basis of folklore. It's the oral tradition. You can't tell by looking at an organization chart who is working on what and who should talk to whom about what. It's all on the basis of walking down the hall and someone says, "Oh, are you working on that? Well, I'm kind of interested in that. Well, let's sit down." It's been quite ad hoc.

ALSOBROCK: You know, it sounds like when you first came you were working on educational issues, and then it's like you've absorbed a lot of other things as you've gone along. New things have arisen. Like the women's issues thing, and they've just sort of given you more and more and more. Would that be an accurate description of how it works when you come in to work in the Executive Office Building?

ABRAMOWITZ: Oh, yes. I guess in part that's true. Except on the women's issues because a major activity on women's issues is Title IX of the education amendments of 1972, which in some ways are the equivalent of Titles IV and VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The intent was supposed to be the same. To provide equity for women, to provide equity on the basis of race. Schools always being convenient and available were selected as the battlegrounds, the turf on which we were going to fight all this stuff out. The economic implications are safer there than in fighting it out in some other areas. [Chuckle] One gets to be cynical about the whole thing. So I was going to work on Title IX, and that's a large chunk of the women's thing. The other women's activities

that fall outside of that Annie Gutierrez, who was here at the time, was doing. She was heading up the Justice Department activity, and I talked to Annie and said, "Well, would you mind if I took over the whole ball of wax?" And she said, "Oh, no. Fine. I haven't done anything with it." So we just made the change. Also it was something I was doing before I came, was personally interested in doing, being a good feminist, so picking it up was rather simple. Stu didn't mind. He liked it since we weren't doing that much, and there was a lot of stuff that we needed to do. So I put it together, created a program, created some priorities, sat down with Stu, went over them. He liked them. That was by May.

The same thing I did with education, I did with women's groups. Whole rounds of meetings, calling up the people, identifying what was important. Looking at stuff that had been hanging around for ages that people wanted to have done, which is the easiest place to start. And all the work and all the arguments have been so well worked out, people can quote them. Trying to handle some of that stuff first. For me, the fun thing was outside the civil service, which was the good place to start, with the federal government as the employer. You can handle that stuff first because you control the employment, so that was easy.

ALSOBROOK: You were working with Midge Costanza's office a lot during those early days?

ABRAMOWITZ: Oh, yes. With Midge, who did the women's issues stuff herself. She kind of held that close to the vest. And Jane Wales, who she had with her then to do a lot of the stuff, take a lot of the abuse. [Laughter] Mostly personal abuse from Midge, but that's another story.

ALSOBROOK: In addition to the civil service aspect of women's issues that you identified, what were some of these other areas that you identified as areas of abuse?

ABRAMOWITZ: Stuff we could do? Cheap things. For me I thought, well, we'll handle for the first thing the federal government as the employer. We'll conceptualize the problem. We'll look at the civil service. We'll look at Defense. We'll look at Foreign Service. That's easy.

Then we'll handle some small policy matters that have been hanging around a long time which are definitely offensive to women. And I put into that category the naming of hurricanes. Now you may laugh, but I loved that little project. We did change it. It was absolutely wonderful. As you well know, we have had a Hurricane Bob that was...[laughter]. I will always laugh for the rest of my life when I think about the first thing we want to do is change the names of hurricanes. This was on the same list as sex discrimination in employment. With everything else, I had change the name of hurricanes. Stu said, "Isn't that a bit trivial to take to the President? We'll work it out at a little bit lower

level."

ALSOBROOK: So you worked that out with the Weather Service?

ABRAMOWITZ: Oh, yes. Events come together, and it makes things easier to do than they might be at other times. First, Juanita Kreps kind of thought changing the names of hurricanes was a decent idea. So I worked with the fellow who was then her special assistant. He's now head of her congressional liaison. We spent time with him. That was before the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration had a head. So we worked with the Weather Service. Just to replay that little piece of history. It was fun. Camp Springs, the Weather Service, had been talking to the people down in Atlanta, which is where they keep the other thing.

I'm talking about two things. First, if you want to know the weather any place around the world when you're planning a trip, they will prepare a personal report on what the weather is likely to be that day. So I would just let them know when I wanted to go some place, and they'd prepare it. Henry Kissinger used to use it all the time. He was a little wrinkled, but he always had to know what the weather was going to be wherever he was going. Now evidently this administration hasn't used that very much.

ALSOBROOK: Is this down in Atlanta? There's a number you can call?

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes, yes. They'll plan your weather trip for you. Kind of fun. Well, anyway, we went through the whole history of how hurricanes got named, and we found out that the UN subcommittee..., so we got wrapped up in the UN to change it. I know people laugh because you think it would be a trivial issue, but there is that subcommittee for this hemisphere on the naming of hurricanes, and we had to straighten out the UN policy going into this subcommittee meeting to do two things. To put male names on the hurricane list. They use decade lists, and they just keep rotating the list. As well as to handle the concerns of the Quebeccois and the Latin Americans which want to have multicultural lists, French and Spanish names as well as Anglo-Saxon names. That was decided over a year and a half ago. We had one more list to run through. Now we are into the multilingual, male-female list.

The more important thing was civil service, of course.

ALSOBROOK: Were there other little things, too? Problems that women have at work, day-to-day. Did you work on issues like that? Sexual harassment and problems that came up? It seems like there's been a lot about that recently.

ABRAMOWITZ: Not really. Mostly because at least in the federal work place the civil service stuff was handling that, the reforms. Before they went forward with the legislation there was a special committee that worked on just the women's things.

ALSOBROOK: You were deeply involved in that?

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes, yes. They were stuck down there in Buzzard's Point, and we worked with them a lot to identify the kinds of things that federally employed women, [inaudible phrase] had been trying to get done. Worked into civil service reform, both through that, and also the items that other women's groups wanted that were being handled by [Congresswoman] Pat Schroeder. Working with these two things, I was working with Steve Simmons, who worked on civil service, primarily looking at the female parts of that.

ALSOBROOK: Now he was working on the overall civil service reform?

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes, yes, yes. And I was interested in the female part of that.

ALSOBROOK: What were some of the other women's issues that you identified during this early period?

ABRAMOWITZ: The International Women's Year. They're still running around at the state meetings. What I asked Stu was, "Well, we don't want to get involved in those state meetings?" And he couldn't have agreed more. First, they were turning into holy battlegrounds. Over abortion, over homosexual rights. Real tacky stuff. It was best not even to try to deal with that. But I did commit us to do, and Stu agreed, what we would do would be to follow up on the recommendations that came in and be sure that they received presidential attention and that they receive action, which we did do. Indeed, what we did do is put together the report which the President sent to the congress. We did that right here. On what he was doing to implement the IWY recommendations. Which has gotten wide circulation. But we did that.

ALSOBROOK: I assume you were working on the ERA during all this time.

ABRAMOWITZ: Oh, yes, yes.

ALSOBROOK: Was that like something that was just going on all the time?

ABRAMOWITZ: Picking on the characteristic of all these other long-term issues on ERA. Although the primary activity on ERA was not really mine. I was not really driving the events. That was Midge [Costanza] when she was here and then when Sarah [Weddington] came, when she came there were only one or two state legislatures that were even going to be in session. So it was not so much state ratification. It was more the extension bill. Heavily involved in straightening out our old policies on that plus the problems out in...the anti-trust suit that was pending against ERA America for advocating economic boycott and the fact that, what state was it,

oh gosh, I can't even remember. Colorado, I think it was Colorado.

The Justice Department has this special program that pays for state attorneys, attorneys general offices. It's supposed to be an improvement program. The state attorneys general were smart enough to drive this piece of legislation, which gave them direct funding, but that state in particular, no it was Missouri, was using that federal money that they were receiving to wage war on ERA America for the boycott. So it got to be a real question of this administration which was supporting ratification of ERA and funding the legal action to stop it. Just in that program. They did have some meetings and talked about the Justice Department Assistant Attorney General over that area to talk to Missouri and explain that that was not really in keeping with the intent of the original money that they received. That took a little doing, because Justice didn't want to get into that at all. But that turned out rather nicely.

ALSOBROOK: Beth, of all the women's issues, Title IX is really an issue that overlaps. It's education and women. Did Title IX begin to occupy most of your time after several months?

ABRAMOWITZ: No. You can let it. I didn't. Let me see if I can explain. You have to determine those issues on which you can achieve closure and those issues on which you just pick up the most recent manifestation of it. Some things will go on forever, but maybe they go on forever because people say things like I just said, "They will go on forever." One of the issues that will go on forever in my view is going to be the problems of sex equity. That is not something that an administration solves in any finite sense. What you do is you play with the most recent variant on the theme. You can let that either consume all of your time, operating on the fallacious assumption that you are going to achieve permanent closure. Or you try to keep it in perspective, some historical perspective, and not be consumed by it. Because it's not too hard to be consumed by it. Chicago school desegregation, sex equity in sports, that stuff can take up all of your energy. The most important thing is to be sure that the people who are supposed to be working with it on a full-time basis are. And you monitor it. To me that seemed more realistic. I was not going to implement the law from here. And it would be inappropriate. That's not what a President does.

ALSOBROOK: Exactly what do you mean by closure? Do you mean solving something?

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes, yes. Now Title IX, women, and sports is the current fight. What you end up fighting about in most civil rights stuff is over procedural arguments. You never really fight over substance. Right now the fight is over whether or not...you see, HEW last January did two things. First they announced that they were not going to pursue dress codes any more in schools. That was an item in the '60s, whether or not boys could wear dashikis and

wear great big Afros and long braids, and whether or not girls could wear blue jeans. What Joe Califano, who is really good on a lot of these things, really very, very good. He was really good. What he had proposed was not to have them move into that area any more.

ALSOBROOK: The dress code area?

ABRAMOWITZ: To get out of the dress code business. That was one issue that set off the women's groups, but not so much on the merits. And one could argue that in some reactionary school districts they will make boys and girls wear different colors when they sing in choirs. I mean different color choir robes. And that is true. Whether or not that constitutes an inferior status or superior status, you can wonder about. You can read that into colors, but clearly I leave it for anybody else to really get wrapped up in. What the women's groups were concerned about on that one was whether or not it was the beginning of a chipping away. You always worry about that, and a retreat however modest, which will be followed by a larger one at some other point in time on enforcement of the law.

ALSOBROOK: By going into these other areas, you mean? Sort of watering it down?

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes, by getting out of it. You get out of this, and you get out of that. You back away. That was the sort of panicky concern. We were wrapped up in that. I personally agreed when Joe announced, proposed to the President to do that. And I agreed knowing what was actually going on in this area in the world. If they didn't spend time on dress codes, they might spend more time on sex discrimination in employment or another aspect of school life which would seem much more useful time. It would be quality time. That did go, and the President did agree initially, and then just a few months ago in response to the women's groups who thought, you know, "This is the last straw. My God, this President doesn't give a damn about us. Look at what he's doing." [Laughter] You know how this stuff goes. So the women's groups did lean pretty hard on Sarah Weddington to go back and have the President reverse it. She did ask him to reverse it. It was sent over here, the decision memo for action.

ALSOBROOK: When was this?

ABRAMOWITZ: This was recently. In the last, on and off this spring and through the summer. Junish, I guess.

ALSOBROOK: Of this year?

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes. Junish. This is a recent thing. Last time through on the dress code business. We were asked to write the decision to take action, which meant to give the President the

final recommendation of what he ought to do. We recommended that he let HEW get out of the dress code business, which meant on this one little, and the President agreed. That was a memo from Stu and myself to the President. He agreed to stay out of dress codes. In that sense, you got closure on a minor issue, on a procedural matter.

The item that is open right now is over women in sports, the athletic business. HEW proposed to tighten up the requirement on colleges and universities on spending programs that women...

ALSOBROOK: Scholarships?

ABRAMOWITZ: Scholarships, on travel. The most egregious thing, I think, is Ohio State. I don't want to malign Ohio, but it was Ohio State, the football capital of the world...

ALSOBROOK: In other words, some of the big football powers didn't want to go along with this equal opportunity for women. Was that the crux of the problem?

ABRAMOWITZ: Well, the bottom line was that they didn't want their major athletic program, the revenue generating sport, at Ohio it's football, at Johns Hopkins it's lacrosse, some place else it's soccer. They did not want those programs considered when one looks at what the expenditures were in the athletic areas and whether or not they are equitable although not necessarily equal between men and women's sports. So they wanted those programs left outside the whole discussion. What HEW had said was that, "No way. Those things are included. That's what you do." And I totally agree.

What happens regardless of the fact that they may have fancier equipment and that sort of thing, but it's the small things. When they travel, a team goes away to play. When the girls' tennis team goes off to play, they get to travel in these rickety little buses. They have to sleep on the bus coming back. The boys' football team goes off, big plane rides, fancy-dancy accommodations overnight in some hotel with fancy steak dinners. They treat them inequitably in small, silly ways that have nothing to do with expenditures in the main.

All of the Big 10 schools marched up on the congress and said, "They are going to destroy higher education." I come from higher education, and I don't regard sports as the crux of what schools exist for. They are not farm teams. It's not the essence of a college. They marched up on the Hill, and said, "You've got to do something." They dug around in the laws and found out that congress could ask to review this proposed rule-making.

And then the fight became procedural again. Whether or not HEW had to send this rule up to the congress, and if they [HEW] sent it up, could they [congress] veto it. The congressional veto. And in so doing inhibit HEW and the administration from changing. Then it got to be does it have to come to the President to see before they [HEW] could send it up? Did he have to approve the sending up of it? We're still caught up in that legalistic fight

over where the thing has to go and who has to say what about it. Does the President have to send it up? Can the Secretary send it up? Can the congress veto it?

That's an open procedural thing. You can let that kind of thing consume all your time and spend all your time worrying about who's about to write a letter to whom, and it'll be played out in a thousand arenas on a thousand issues. That's an ongoing phenomenon. And you drop into it, and you may have to spend a week or two of meetings at some critical point where you have to communicate something, and it'll go away again, and other people will play with it, and it'll bubble back up. Right now we're waiting for HEW to finish. They went out into the field in all the colleges and looked at all the athletic programs, and they're writing a report which they presumably will use as guidance in rewriting whatever it is we're going to ask colleges to do. You have to remember that the law required that in fall, 1978, the colleges are supposed to be in compliance. That now has slipped a whole year, and it'll slip another year. This is a thing that goes on forever.

ALSOBROOK: But it's something you just sort of learn to accept.

ABRAMOWITZ: Not accept. You work on it, and you chip away on pieces, but it always springs a leak.

ALSOBROOK: Could you tell me some of these other things that are on different back burners that you've talked about monitoring various things? For example, what else would you have on your mind now in addition to the HEW thing which you're still waiting on? Are there other little issues?

ABRAMOWITZ: Bubbling around?

ALSOBROOK: Yes, bubbling around.

ABRAMOWITZ: ERA is always bubbling around. That will pick up when state legislatures start meeting. School desegregation is always on the back burner. The Chicago thing.

ALSOBROOK: By the way, before you go on, did you have a lot of involvement in some of the North Carolina desegregation?

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes.

ALSOBROOK: When you finish listing all these other things, could we go back and possibly talk about that a little bit, too?

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes. The Chicago school desegregation, which has been bubbling since [Lyndon] Johnson was President. The thing has got a history to it. That's the whole deal on schools. Ohio is still on the back burner, and Ohio is damn near every school district in the state.

ALSOBROOK: That's tied up with busing.

ABRAMOWITZ: School busing in Cleveland, bilingual education programs in Columbus, just about every major city in Ohio, and that's sort of a perennial issue of whether or not to cut off or grant federal money based on their most recent variation on their last rejected plan. That's a perennial issue. With New York, it's teacher assignments in New York City. That is a perennial issue. They keep sending down plans. They keep discussing them. They negotiate. They're rejected. Eventually you decide when to move from HEW to Justice. It's like the cutoff. These are things you have to keep monitoring because every time the newest decision that's made to reject or accept.... When they keep rejecting, the offending district keeps rewriting, and they go back and forth. At which point you have to decide whether or not to take it to the next level. That's really what's happening.

For Adams v. Richardson, which is North Carolina, oh God, I was studying that back when I was at the Institute, when the whole thing first started. It didn't really even start in '68. It started before that. The NAACP finally got a decision in '68 requiring HEW to enforce desegregation laws in higher education in the South, and it was for all Southern states. Now that has been a perennial issue since then. And every possible split and cut. The most recent variations on it are Oklahoma, North Carolina. Maryland is about to come back again. North Carolina's received the greatest press. We did a good job of raising it to the level of national discussion and debate, which is why North Carolina is so visible, and we did work on that. That was in the first few months, back when the ball was back in HEW's court. Think of this as a tennis match. When Judge [John] Pratt said, "OK, then develop what will be your criteria for determining whether or not these states submit acceptable desegregation plans."

In those days, we were trying to do two things. The primary decision is to keep the issue in the agency and not in the White House. That's an operating principle. It's general. You don't bring controversy in. You keep it out there. So you leave yourself a little wiggle room. So White House involvement, and primarily my own, we did very low key. We never met over here. Not really in the dead of night, but I would go over there. [Laughter] All of our meetings were over in HEW. We'd go over, and it was either meeting with David Brennaman when he was briefly here and was responsible for evolving the criteria, fiddle with it, with Peter Libassi when he was responsible for implementing this stuff. We would review and discuss and look at how they were going to proceed with it. And with Joe's team back in his office when we were at the point of accepting plans and with David Tatel. We'd go over there. We'd talk on the phone when they were getting into accepting or rejecting other state plans.

Most of the states, with the exception of Georgia. Georgia was a problem for a long time. North Carolina. Maryland was separated off in a separate case. That was Mandel v. the U.S.

Government, and the whole separate case got separated off. Pennsylvania didn't fight, and they said, "We will do anything you want. Just don't let us have to associate with Mississippi. Do not put us in that same bag." They didn't want to be known as a recalcitrant state. [Laughter] Oklahoma and these other places.

What we did with North Carolina was, at least from here, we followed it very carefully and very quietly and stayed up with it and made suggestions and kept a very low profile. The White House name never emerged at any time, and that's on purpose. Not because there wasn't a lot of discussion, with [president of the North Carolina university system] Bill Friday, with other folks down in the state, but the purpose of all that was to keep HEW out there on the point on it. It's still unresolved.

ALSOBROOK: Was that one of your more sensitive assignments? Trying to work on that but keep it very low key.

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes, and any other controversial issues. I think especially something like school desegregation, on education for handicapped.

ALSOBROOK: Emotional...

ABRAMOWITZ: Emotional issues that really play up well in the press. I think we were very good at keeping those away. We were not successful in keeping women's issues away. That's because there was a women's person who liked to bring it all in. [Laughter] We could never get it out of the building. So we weren't very good there. In that sense the chance for resolution, I really believe, was a lot greater if you keep it off of the President's weekly press conference and keep it out in the agencies where they can fight about it. It won't attract as much public attention unless it's a deliberate strategy.

ALSOBROOK: Is that essentially what the entire Domestic Policy Staff tries to do with other controversial issues? They try to work on them out there?

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes, yes. When the administration came into office...I just caught the tail end, and it was not my involvement, it was implementation of the 504 regulations which was the equivalent of the handicapped person's civil rights act. They were sitting in in Joe Califano's office, crippled and blind people. That tremendous appeal. They were sitting in very early on. Joe quite rightly surmised you do not throw people in wheel chairs out of buildings. There are some things you can not do without invoking the wrath of God and a lot of bad press. Myself a little bit and Frank Raines a lot more worked on the regs, getting Justice Department approval, very quietly. None of the meetings were held over here. You never once saw an HEW person walk into this building to talk about 504. That was all done out there at a safe distance, and it was all worked out very nicely with a big, flashy

announcement by Joe. Just like when the Adams thing with North Carolina is finally resolved, it will be done with an announcement from Pat Harris that we've worked out an acceptable plan. It will be kept over there.

ALSOBROOK: Would it be possible for you to tell me which of all these issues that have been bubbling around for the last two years has occupied most of your time?

ABRAMOWITZ: Depending on the year, since last Junish, depending on what it is, between February and June last year the thing that occupied the greatest portion of the day was tuition tax credits.

ALSOBROOK: What year was that?

ABRAMOWITZ: That's last year.

ALSOBROOK: '78?

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes, '78. From September when congress went out, we won on tuition tax credits. That took up a lot of time. By that I mean half of every day, which is a lot of time on any one thing, was spent on tuition tax credits. From the congressional strategy to alternative proposals, just the whole thing, that was a lot.

From September until June, the item that took off an equal amount of time was for the Department of Education. A lot, a lot, a lot of time getting support, handling the political work since there wasn't really much to talk about in terms of what was actually going to be in the bill. What was going to be in the bill was anything we could get.

ALSOBROOK: So working with a constituency out in the country.

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes, yes, finding support among groups not inclined to support the bill.

ALSOBROOK: For example?

ABRAMOWITZ: Higher ed community. Building support. They didn't like it, and they still don't. But finding those who do. Building support among non-education groups who have some interest in education, the Chamber of Commerce education committee. Worked with them. Got them to get behind us. The National Conference of State Legislators. The education commission from the states, which is made up of governors and state legislative groups. The mayors never did come, but finding those kinds of groups that have an education interest, with whom we work on other issues, and having them consider the Department of Ed on their agenda. Building that support took up a lot of time. It wasn't that it eroded, but getting it was real hard. Also working on particulars of the bill with the OMB reorganization team. Once the stuff got up and moving, it came to be less one had to worry about. Between

September and about June, over the whole recess from September to January or February it was almost exclusively trying to get this Department through. Nothing but time on that one.

ALSOBROOK: Beth, of all the projects you've worked on, were there certain ones that gave you a great deal of personal satisfaction? Perhaps they are ones you've already told me about.

ABRAMOWITZ: Naming of hurricanes. [Laughter] I love that because long after all this other crap is done, we'll still have Hurricane Bob. [Laughter] On the more serious side, I think for my own personal thing, the time spent on IWY, on the women's issues, bring that stuff in and spreading the notion and dispelling a lot of mythology about women's issues. That I believe I feel good about. Feel good about the report we did off that. Something tangible. Feel good about just the large things, the fact that education as an issue for the President has been successful. I feel good about being a part of that. The education community, and those are a large portion of the voters, that's a college-educated group, and they vote. They will not vote on this issue alone, but they do not have any complaints on what the administration has done in education. The whole spectrum. The money has been good, gone up sixty percent in three fiscal years. The policies have been right. They've been liberal. They've been responsive. It's been good, a real win. I feel good about that. If we get the Department, it will be a good example of the President's ability to get something through congress nobody especially cared about. As a political exercise, it will be a coup for the President. Although in my view it really doesn't make a damn's worth of difference [in] children learning. But for the President, it will be a real plus. I feel personally good about defeating tuition tax credits. I feel really good about that. That was one on which we were not given a dog's chance of winning in February. No one thought we could pull that one off. But we defeated it. That felt really good. Because that was coming from behind on something we needed to come from behind on when a lot of people, even walking around these halls, thought the better thing to do would be to capitulate early and avoid a fight. And I feel good that the President was willing to, and Stu, were willing to say, "No, we're going to fight on this." And we did fight, and we won. We really dug in our heels.

ALSOBROOK: Are all these issues well-documented by your official files? Could somebody study your official files seventy-five years from now and find evidence of the fact that you worked on all these projects?

ABRAMOWITZ: Oh, yes, yes. You don't find the human part. You find all the official documents. I spent my time since I'm leaving throwing away all my meeting notes, which are more cryptic, and I didn't see any point in keeping.

ALSOBROOK: Could you tell me anything about any future plans that

you have, immediately, or maybe in the distant future?

ABRAMOWITZ: My immediate plan as of week after next is to be in private practice.

ALSOBROCK: You were telling me a little bit about your...

ABRAMOWITZ: We're going to go out, and I'm a psychologist, my training. We'll go back and do psychological services, education services, and training and management development.

ALSOBROCK: Where? In California?

ABRAMOWITZ: Oh, no. Here. I'm licensed here. And my husband's here. So we can't move quite that easily.

ALSOBROCK: He's in government, too?

ABRAMOWITZ: No, no, no. He was in the Nixon administration. He's a lawyer, and he acts as a Washington lawyer. Very little real legal work.

ALSOBROCK: You mentioned earlier in the interview about when you were at the Institute. Where? Which institute?

ABRAMOWITZ: My past is long and checkered. Immediately before this I was at the Institute for the Study of Educational Policy, which is a Ford [Foundation] funded thing. I was a senior fellow. My function in life there was to do research on equal opportunity in higher education. For them I wrote books and articles.

One of the bubbling items of that time was desegregation of higher education. Within the community it was a very interesting issue. It was an interesting academic issue. First, because of what it would mean for governance, especially of these little dinky black colleges. In the larger context, what it would mean for students in terms of new opportunities for educational experiences. Not only to get in, which had been happening increasingly, but what it would take for them to be able to finish in a successful manner. Most people had been through school desegregations in elementary and secondary school back in the South in the '50s and '60s. The lesson that they'd come away with is that the people who had to pay the price for it tended to be the black kids. And the teachers who had to close down the old schools. Whether or not they were good or bad, they were closed. And they had to go to this other school and somehow make their way in, develop a great deal of ego strength in the face of some subtle and not so subtle hostility. Just indifference, which can be just as bad as anything else in a school setting.

ALSOBROCK: As a matter of fact, I don't know if you saw the June edition of Southern Exposure.

ABRAMOWITZ: No, no.

ALSOBROOK: They had a special thing on the Brown decision, but it dealt with some of the same problems in the South that you just mentioned. Problems with black kids who went through that first, initial desegregation experience. I thought maybe you had seen that. It was a whole issue. It's that magazine put out in Chapel Hill. The whole issue was devoted to things like that. I may have a copy of it around some place.

ABRAMOWITZ: I'd like to see it.

ALSOBROOK: I'll see that you get it, or I'll send at least the citation to you. Because I think you'd be interested in it.

ABRAMOWITZ: They were worried about that vis-a-vis higher ed because of college students marching off and just being allowed in and having a revolving door. That was a really active concern. That can happen in higher education as well. Quite easily, or you get scared into dumb majors, and out of certain departments. That happens a lot. That kind of stuff. It was an interesting issue in terms of the larger implications for higher education. That was one good thing we did. The Brown reception. The fall of '78 someone said to me the twenty-fifth anniversary of Brown is next May. Aside from the fact that I felt immediately old, I thought we need to do something. So I started playing around with it with Louis Martin. I said, "We need to do something really splashy and special." I said, "Stu, we need to do something for Brown." And he said, "Sure." And I said, "I'll work with Louis, and we'll work something up." And he said, "Fine." And it resulted in that thing they had here. That great big reception with a cast of thousands. That little number. We put that together. We wrote his [the President's] speech with the speechwriters' office. That, I thought, was one of his best speeches. The writing was beautiful and lyrical.

ALSOBROOK: Who wrote it? Did you write that?

ABRAMOWITZ: We edited it. It was written downstairs. It was a very good speech. The prose was good. It wasn't one of those, "We have done X, Y, and Z." It was a beautifully done speech.

ALSOBROOK: Did Rick Hertzberg write that speech?

ABRAMOWITZ: No, not Rick. It was the other one.

ALSOBROOK: Gordon Stewart?

ABRAMOWITZ: Gordon. He had just started. It was one of his first efforts. He has a nice lyrical style, very poetic. Which is rather unusual. Most of Jimmy Carter's speeches are dull as wet paint. [Laughter] But that one was good.

ALSOBROOK: You talked about your checkered past. Could you tell me any more about that? Before you came here.

ABRAMOWITZ: Before I came here? Oh, God, let's see. We seem to work backwards. Before that I was executive director of the National Association of School Psychologists, which is their national group. Worrying about all their protectionist concerns, professional things. Before that I was a program administrator for the College Entrance Examination Board. Before that I was executive assistant to the superintendent of public schools here in Washington. I was in charge of his equalization plan, just a general assistant watching him try to hold on to his job. [Laughter] They used to bounce superintendents every two years. It's a good way to learn about a school system. My God! But the equalization part was interesting. That was Hobson v. Hanson, one of the first cases over unequal expenditures of funds for schools, across schools. It predated the Sorono decision in California where they had to equalize expenditures across the whole system. This was a very early case that did the same thing. I did that, developed a new plan. Before that I was a psychologist and a program planner in the school system.

ALSOBROOK: In California?

ABRAMOWITZ: Oh, no. Here. Before that I was an employment counselor in California and a Job Corps person. I'm going to take all this back to the early days of the War on Poverty.

ALSOBROOK: Back during the Johnson administration.

ABRAMOWITZ: Yes, yes. Even before it was called the War on Poverty. Willard Wirtz was the Secretary of Labor. The whole idea was to worry about youth employment, especially by creating positions called employment counselors. That was sort of a novel idea for the employment service.

ALSOBROOK: This was a federally funded...

ABRAMOWITZ: Oh, yes, yes. It was a combination of federal and state money. The state employment system is tied to the federal employment system.

ALSOBROOK: You were in the northern California area then?

ABRAMOWITZ: In Berkeley. That was fun. That was fun. We got a lot of student demonstrators that went to Berkeley from there. So we saw a lot of people who were either looking for part-time work or looking for full-time work who had been expelled during a free speech demonstration. That was kind of fun.

ALSOBROOK: And the last question I want to ask you. For the use

of the future Library, I need either a legal or permanent address and telephone number where you could always be reached.

ABRAMOWITZ: I can't say always, I guess, but twenty years from now we'll all wonder. My permanent address, and that hasn't changed, is 2344 King Place Northwest, Washington, DC 20007. I'll always be findable under the name of Michael Abramowitz, my husband.

ALSOBROOK: And telephone number?

ABRAMOWITZ: Let's see, ever since they turned to these old digits, I always have to get started. Then I'm OK. 3337-4976.

ALSOBROOK: And if you ever move from there, could the University of California at Berkeley alumni office possibly have an address for you?

ABRAMOWITZ: [Laughter] They could if I ever paid my alumni dues.

ALSOBROOK: But that would be a good place to start?

ABRAMOWITZ: The family is still there, or if Ron Dellums is still in congress, you can find me through him.

ALSOBROOK: Thank you very much for your time.

ABRAMOWITZ: Good luck to you in all this stuff.

ALSOBROOK: Thank you.