

1 John Maguire, interviewed by Karl Grossman, at Old Westbury, NY, on May 21, 2011.
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3 Karl Grossman: Dr. Maguire when you came to the college in 1970, you inherited quite a
4 mess, didn't you?

5 John Maguire: I really inherited a mess when I came in 1970, because there had been a
6 really faltering first start. Harris Wofford had come, and it's always a debate—am I the first
7 president of a real college or is Harris the president? But at any rate, work had already
8 begun on the academic center. So that group of pioneers that he had assembled were over
9 at Planting Fields. And yet there was the work going on here, so since we had a family to
10 move, we moved them into the house because Wofford had left, and left this group, a group
11 with no leader over at Planting Fields. And so Count Taylor, who was a member of the
12 faculty—I think a founding member—was appointed for that one year the director of
13 Planting Fields. Which released us, for that one-year, and that was all we had, 1970-1971
14 to do the planning of what is now Trainor House, the home of Empire State College.

15 Grossman: What happened in those years '68 and '69 that things self-destructed, what is
16 the story you have?

17 John: Well the story simply was that Harris went around and the more radical a person
18 answered his questions the more certain Harris was he needed him here to be a planner.
19 He just had a handful of other planners—some from prison, some from college. It was too
20 far out, and that is the answer in a word. They also ranged in age because when I came in
21 the early summer of 1970 to be interviewed, the interview was going to be held at Planting
22 Fields in that setting. So I arrived there a little late and I was scouring around trying to find

23 a place and a young man said to me, “You think I’m a student don’t you?” And I said, “Well,
24 you could have fooled me.” He said, “I’m not a student I’m a curriculum planner.” So here
25 was a nineteen-year-old curriculum planner and may be forty or fifty others like him and
26 they simply were at each others’ necks.

27 They did not coalesce and it was just an utter mess, and better to start all over again.
28 And it was the one major meeting I had with Governor Rockefeller, because it was getting
29 late. Harris suddenly left to go to Bryn Mawr. The school had no leader. It had Planting
30 Fields and it was April, so what are you going to do? So Rockefeller himself gave me his
31 assessment, which was, “John, just start over again. Integrate them into your planning. But
32 do not try to do something with that group. Start anew and pull together a team as fast as
33 you can, and do it as swiftly as you can.”

34 Grossman: [3:31] What was your background in coming here?

35 Maguire: I had a very conventional background. I had gone to Washington and Lee for
36 college, then married as I graduated, and went for the first year after college to Edinburgh,
37 Scotland for a year on Fulbright, and then came back to Yale, but hated the Divinity School.
38 That is where I was going out of filial piety to my father who was a minister. But just going
39 to Yale was too far north for him.

40 So I was just skulking around the campus one day when Mr. Leiber said to me, “You
41 look awful.” I said, “I feel awful.” He said, “Why don’t you go to graduate school?” I said,
42 “I’d love to [go to] graduate school”. He said, “Well, you have about three days until the
43 deadline for the application. Get on it.” And I don’t think I slept much until I got through to
44 that Friday. I got it in, got admitted.

45 So Yale, interesting enough credited the Fulbright year, the first year after college as
46 one of three years towards—what they called then—the Bachelor of Divinity Degree. I was
47 awarded it, and went straight to graduate school. I ended up being at Yale for seven years
48 from 1954 to 1960.

49 Then went to Wesleyan in Connecticut and again got tapped for administration early
50 on, so that in '67, '68, I was associate provost actually over into the next year as well. Then
51 had an award, I got one of the Danforth awards for being one of the ten top teachers in the
52 nation.

53 I took that award with my family and moved to California, to Berkeley. Was there a
54 year, came back to Wesleyan a year. And it was during that final year back at Wesleyan
55 when the phone started ringing and in 1970 I ended up here.

56 Grossman: Who was calling?

57 Maguire: [5:30] Actually Golding, I believe was his name—I forget—but he was the
58 chancellor.

59 Grossman: Sam Gould?

60 Maguire: Gould, Samuel Gould it was.

61 Grossman: And Samuel Gould had originally envisioned Old Westbury, I mean he was the
62 guy, [who had envisioned it] as an experimental college.

63 Maguire: Absolutely, it was the rage in all-state systems at that time. Wisconsin had tried
64 an effort at it, and Washington State did, Evergreen State, Santa Cruz in California.

65 In fact early on, maybe my very second year here, I went for a week-long powwow
66 put on by the National Science Foundation in which the ten pre-eminent experimental
67 colleges were called together to talk about common problems. And there we were, Old
68 Westbury was one of the ten.

69 It was the challenge from Gould and Governor Rockefeller, who were there together
70 when we talked in New York, was, first of all define what your experiment is going to be.
71 Put some parameters to measure it and go to work trying to create it.

72 Grossman: And what was the experiment under you to be at Old Westbury?

73 Maguire: [6:45] I was preoccupied and remain so today—you should know that about me—
74 with racial and social justice. So I decided we would have a college whose curriculum was
75 utterly interdisciplinary. As it turned out in the early years we had four interdisciplinary
76 fields, and then tucked everything in there but they really were coherent.

77 The theme was “The Riddle of Human Justice.” And I vowed that that would be just
78 rhetoric unless you had people that actually manifested in themselves through their
79 activism, through their action, this passion for social justice. I assembled them as fast as I
80 could get them. We started in the fall of 1971 on this campus with a small group that was
81 prepared to study in that setting.

82 Grossman: How did you collect this group?

83 Maguire: [7:42] From everywhere. I had already been in academia for a good decade. I met
84 the young Turks, so called, in various fields. And I am awfully grateful for the eighteen
85 months I had as an Associate Provost at Wesleyan because it was a time where we were

86 adding faculty so I got to interview a lot. There were several people that were turned down
87 from Wesleyan that were just right for here.

88 I brought some from Wesleyan with me, [a] larger than usual number from the place
89 I came. I brought from Fisk, I recruited them from Morehouse College. It turned out a big
90 source was the University of the District of Columbia, which was heavily black. Again
91 reaching for credentialed African-Americans had led to a group of people from the
92 Caribbean and we took a large number of them.

93 One of the things I had not anticipated was that I gave people about six or seven
94 months to decide if they really wanted to stay for the long haul. Where I really gulped was
95 as the year came toward an end and we were getting ready to open. Many said, "It was the
96 most wonderful years of discussion we've had but we're going back or we're going to this
97 or going to that." So I wondered if we were going to make it. Everybody became a recruiter
98 and there was fiercely competitive recruiting. We did open, got going, and they rest they
99 say is history.

100 Grossman: How did you with a startup college, or what was a re-startup college, in effect a
101 startup college, gather students, you had six or seven hundred students?

102 Maguire: Yes we did. We called ourselves, "The New Old Westbury." Re-startup sounds a
103 little corny, so "The New Old Westbury". I don't know how we did it Karl, except that we
104 did get the right ratios so people weren't hungry for more teaching than they had. They
105 had certainly enough activity going on that way, so it was heady.

106 We fought too. One of the things you know, as a person who has been in the left, is
107 leftists fight each other worse than they fight the enemy. So our faculty meetings would
108 run all into the night. It was a terrifically vibrant acting out. I forget, maybe it was the third
109 or fourth year. We had the first of two major strikes that we had at the college during my
110 eleven years. This one was over—I don't know what it was over. I think it was that the
111 curriculum which I thought was plenty radical and cutting edge—was not radical enough.
112 That was the fight; let's make the curriculum even more radical.

113 Also you can begin to see acted out right in the very midst of it, the special-interest
114 activities. Again, tensions would develop between Spanish-speaking faculty and African-
115 American faculty—those were the two primarily. And the whites were harmless because
116 they were so far left I couldn't recognize them and place them. And yet you had people who
117 were centrists, and yet marvelous, magnificent-hearted people. That was what the struggle
118 was all about.

119 Grossman: You mentioned ratio, what did you mean by ratio?

120 Maguire: [11:25] The ratio was that we should have the same faculty and student sizes,
121 and I can't remember what it was 20:1, 15:1, whatever it was, 25:1 maybe. I don't think it
122 was that high but at any rate we did have our fair share of faculty.

123 Grossman: Because I've heard these numbers 30:30:30:10. Thirty percent white, thirty
124 percent African American...

125 Maguire: And ten was other...

126 Grossman: And ten percent was other. Latino would be thirty percent; the other would be
127 foreign or Native American, and the faculty, my understanding was the faculty was to be,
128 this was the goal, the same 30:30:30:10. When did that start, the 30:30:30:10 business?

129 Maguire: We began in the summer of 1970 with a ten-day retreat. Never have a retreat
130 that lasts—retreats and ten days do not go together. That's too long. But anyway we had
131 ten of the most excruciating planning days and we fought over slogans and fought over
132 names. I mean it was more substantive than that. But I do believe the 30:30:30:10
133 emerged from that retreat. So we could gather around that theme, and that's how that
134 appeared.

135 Grossman: How important was that to have? What is the significance of 30:30:30:10?

136 Maguire: [12:56] It was to try to bring to an end this endless debate over the numbers. To
137 say, "Now wait a minute guys. Let's be fair about it Black 30, Latino 30, Asian whatever and
138 other," and so there we were.

139 Grossman: With 30:30:30:10 no group would be a majority? Is this the importance of it
140 that no one would feel that they were in a minority? Is that correct?

141 Maguire: It was big enough that no one would feel left out, but it wasn't so big that one
142 group ruled the others. I will say with some pride that during my eleven years no one
143 group ever did rule over the others. As you fall along together, side-by-side you begin to
144 say, "He's not so bad, and she's not so bad." And sure enough friendships developed. And it
145 was a remarkable, remarkable group.

146 Grossman: In terms of your background in civil rights, which I think is important because
147 you brought a lot of your own life history to the vision, and working out of the vision. What
148 is your background with civil rights Dr. Maguire?

149 Maguire: [14:12] I am like the biblical description of a convert. I grew up in the Deep
150 South in Raleigh and Montgomery and Birmingham, Alabama. I was absolutely uncritical
151 about race. I used the N-word every fourth word. I just grew up a regular kind of person.

152 When I was in the 9th grade, the YMCA director began very subtly to raise the
153 question about Blacks and his question was very simple, “Don’t you imagine there are some
154 blacks every bit your equal, every bit your counterpart?” Kind of planted the seed, planted
155 the seed. Finally, when I was a senior he said, “John, I’m going to give you a wonderful
156 chance and that’s to go to a national week-long convention of young men, sixteen,
157 seventeen years old, all of them have just graduated from college- from high school and
158 spend that week.”

159 When I got there it was exactly half black and half white. They roomed us together
160 in pairs. It was carefully, carefully worked out. At the end of that period you had no excuse
161 for claiming superiority. Now I still did— I was seventeen years old and had not
162 systematically thought about it. But now the seed was hopelessly, deeply planted. Because
163 by the time I was a sophomore I took a year-long course just called “Race and its
164 Consequences.” Dean [James] Leyburn of Washington and Lee taught it. By the end of that
165 I now believed that—all men are created equal, all women, later I came to expand it. I then
166 went to Edinburgh for a year, and came back to Yale.

167 Got involved the first week back in Yale in a great struggle over housing. At that
168 time the housing bureau allowed people to advertise rooms for rent with the saying, “No
169 blacks need apply.” Bill Kaufman had just come back to school, he was a pal of mine. I said,
170 “Let’s have a demonstration.” So we called the school together, it still was just a day or two
171 before school began. We went morning, noon, and night. And in a week Yale said, “I don’t
172 know why we ever did that in the first place or we’ve done it ever, but we are now taking it
173 off.” That was my first success, heady success in 1954 with a public demonstration.

174 Then of course the preeminent thing for me, it’s the one you find on Google or
175 wherever to this day. 1961, when the original Freedom Riders came down from
176 Washington in May through Atlanta then on through Birmingham and Montgomery got just
177 beat up hopelessly in every place. And were succeeded in a matter of days by this group
178 from Nashville, Tennessee and they got beat up again but collected themselves to go. It
179 looked as if it were over, and the people in Birmingham and Montgomery certainly thought
180 it was. But we had decided—Kauf’ and I—to quickly gather a group, black and white, five
181 of us, we added two more in Atlanta, and set off to Birmingham and then to Montgomery—
182 where we were ourselves arrested. And then it was on, from that point on. That summer
183 of 1961 was filled with people coming from all over the country to challenge segregation in
184 interstate commerce. [Segregation in public transport crossing state lines.]

185 That was my first teaching year at Wesleyan and I continued to be on the side of
186 righteousness all the way through that period to accept appointment by President Kennedy
187 to the Civil Rights Commission of Connecticut. Every state has eight or nine commissioners
188 and so I did that for a while.

189 In a way I was truly ready and what was beginning in myself was that kind of
190 radicalism, I thought why not in curriculum? Why this way of organizing the way we do?
191 In single little narrow bands, silos of knowledge. Why not more open, more discussion
192 and—the significant thing for me—more involvement with the surrounding community.

193 I think if you look at the original charter papers of Old Westbury you'll find this
194 emphasis on more student and faculty engagement with the surrounding community just
195 underscored. In fact many of the questions that we imagined people would take as their
196 presenting questions were questions we said would come from the community. Now little
197 did we realize we would be settled on a six hundred acre estate under the trees with all the
198 greenery, with the beauty of Old Westbury.

199 But we recruited students that came from Harlem that came from the southern part
200 of... all over, from New York, who came out on train, from all over. It's very interesting,
201 going back to 30:30:30:10. You might say "Well where did you get 30 percent of white
202 people who were willing to gamble on that?" Answer—wonderful women in the
203 community right around the school who had gone to Vassar a year or two way back when.
204 Got married, got pregnant, but had never finished their degree and said, "Here's this
205 gorgeous place right here in my community. I'll just go over and finish up my degree." So
206 even the student body was just vastly, vastly varied and it was a simple—it was a
207 marvelous thing.

208 Grossman: I found in my thirty some odd years here, that because of this mix, the people
209 mix. Was that your reflection in your years here?

210 Maguire: [20:13] Oh, absolutely. That's what makes Old Westbury special—there is just
211 nobody—yesterday when I arrived someone told me just talking about what's happened in
212 these thirty years, this woman squared her shoulders and said, "And I want you to know
213 that *US News and World Report* says that we and Evergreen State which is our sister school
214 are the most varied and diverse colleges in the country."

215 Now how they knew that, I don't know but it was a nice placeholder, it was a nice
216 fact. All the teachers I think, because many came from very ostensibly straight situations,
217 Florence Howe came from Maryland, Al Raybould came from the University of Chicago.
218 Sam Von Winbush came from Fisk University, he had been at Wesleyan. John Caughlin had
219 come from Haverford College. They did come from everywhere and they were a marvelous
220 group.

221 Grossman: In terms of your family background now, maybe my recollection might be
222 wrong, was it your grandfather who was involved in politics in the South?

223 Maguire: He was the shortest-served governor of Alabama—I think maybe still in history.
224 I think he served seventeen days because whoever he served under went to jail, or got
225 called away or died. I don't remember the detail. But for seventeen days Lieutenant
226 Governor Merrill became Governor Merrill [Perhaps Hugh Davis Merrill.]

227 He by the way was a modest man, and so he never strutted or claimed that much for
228 himself. But I certainly claimed it for him as I went on about where I came from. That
229 meant of course, you could not imagine a more conservative—racist man—even though he
230 was a gentle man he was simply a radical segregationist.

231 Grossman: How did your family take your path, which obviously was diametrically
232 opposed to their path over many generations, regarding race?

233 Maguire: [22:20] It was one of the hardest things they ever did. My mother told me that my
234 father who had moved up through the ranks in 1944 became—they call them executive
235 secretary rather than bishop—effectively a bishop for the Baptists of Florida. He had such
236 amazing immediate post-war success in having Baptists streaming to Florida, all these GIs.
237 He would say, “We created four churches last week, three churches last week.” It was in
238 constant motion. And he would impute that to the Holy Spirit.

239 I would say to him, “Did you ever hear of demographics?” And he would glare at me.
240 He also was a segregationist. Everybody was a segregationist in the South. He had worked
241 his way to the point where he was going to give a talk to the entire Southern Baptist
242 Convention that by that time after the war had reached out to the west coast and included
243 Arizona, California, Oregon. It was a big thing, perhaps ten or twelve thousand people. It
244 was a large, large gathering.

245 The news that we had been arrested in Montgomery for going down and trying to
246 share a cup of coffee, we thought we were going to be arrested in Jackson. We had bought
247 our tickets and were on our way we were just sitting there waiting for the bus when in
248 swept the Army guy, because the place was still under martial law as you recall. It was so
249 tense at that time.

250 Later in the trial by the way he was asked, “Why did you do that? You beat up
251 everybody, but in this case you just arrested these people.” He said, “We just had had

252 enough, we just thought if we get them through and out of here and on their way that's it,
253 that would take care of that." That was just too much for them, and we got arrested.

254 But the word got to my father just ten minutes before he was to address this group,
255 the largest most important speech he had ever given. And my mother said he turned
256 absolutely grey, matched his grey suit, he was ill and he went on and did it. When they got
257 home, to Jacksonville, Florida a cross had been burned in their yard. It was very, very
258 serious.

259 Here's the significant thing; that was now 1961. In 1964, in May of '64 Dr. King was
260 involved in a big campaign, a very significant one in St. Augustine, Florida. And among the
261 people who came down were Mrs. Peabody, the mother of the Governor of Massachusetts,
262 Endicott Peabody, whose father had been the rector of St. Paul's School—it really had a
263 number of very distinguished people. Martin was invited to leave and come east, up east
264 for a weekend to receive a degree from Wesleyan from Yale and from Jewish Theological
265 Seminary.

266 About a week before that, Mrs. Peabody had arrived; a phone call arrived to my
267 house. It was my mother saying, "John we've been watching the news, dad and I have been
268 looking at your friend Dr. King and he's about to collapse he is just so tired and wan. Would
269 you tell him he can come to our house and spend the night in our guest room?" Now that is
270 like moving—in a matter of those few words—she was prepared to say she would have
271 opened her home—if nobody knew that he was coming—if he came quietly and slept and
272 went back. I presumed that I had an understanding at least with my mother, that she

273 wasn't going to countenance what I was doing, but neither was she going to inveigh against
274 it.

275 A few years later, when we were here at this place my father said to me, "John, we
276 should put this behind us, let's go forward, move forward." But I only had a few years with
277 my father—he died at 87 in 1987—of having his blessing. It meant a lot to me and it was a
278 hard time getting it. My mother never said much more. At least in the last years of their
279 lives, my father said to me, "I've never told you this but your mother and I are proud of
280 you." Now this is [to] a grown man who is now the president of Old Westbury College, it
281 has taken that long, but at least I had it.

282 Grossman: The friendship you had with Dr. Martin Luther King when did that begin?

283 Maguire: [27:27] That began when in that same period of transition in college. When I was
284 a sophomore I had gone to college quite early. I was only nineteen years old. I saw one day
285 in the kiosk at our college a sign that said come to the seminary—the seminary involved
286 was Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, right outside of Philadelphia—
287 and explore with us for the weekend being a Christian minister.

288 Since my roommate and I had never been north of Richmond, we suddenly became
289 both interested in the Christian ministry even though I really didn't in my heart have it. We
290 went there and when we arrived that Friday morning, the person said, "We're going to have
291 you sleep and be billeted with our own students. Maguire you're from Alabama; we have a
292 student from Atlanta, Georgia. Why don't the two of you get together? He's a second year
293 student here. And you'll like him because even though he's only a second year of a three

294 year program, he's already been named the president of the student body." And it was
295 Martin Luther King Junior of Atlanta Georgia.

296 He had just come from Morehouse College. He, like I, had come young, sixteen years
297 old to college. He was three years older than I was. So when I was nineteen and Dr. King
298 was twenty-one we met and then began a series of things that got tighter and tighter and
299 tighter. So that finally in what turned out to be one year before King's death in 1968, I had
300 agreed, since I was then Provost of Wesleyan University, at that time Associate Provost, to
301 get started a Martin Luther King archive in Atlanta, Georgia not realizing that before the
302 year was out in fact, having worked out the details of it in the summer of '67 in April of '68,
303 he would be killed. That was a long friendship and it was a glorious friendship and again
304 another transformative element—no doubt about it—in my life.

305 Grossman: What kind of person, it's rare to find someone with a personal relationship with
306 Dr. King. Can you elaborate on what type of human being Dr. King was?

307 Maguire [30:00]: Yes, Dr King—I saw myself in him—nothing big and dramatic like King
308 but in the true man. He had been born middle class, never thought he would get involved
309 in the Civil Rights movement even when he came to his first pastorage in Birmingham,
310 Alabama. I'm sorry, Montgomery, Alabama, at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. He was
311 just going to be a middle class Baptist preacher, a fabulous one but, nevertheless a
312 middle.... He hadn't been there four months when Rosa Parks in December refuses to go to
313 the back of the bus. That sets off the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

314 The Montgomery Improvement Association had been in existence for a number of
315 years. They had a President who was a sleeping car porter named Mr. E.D. Nixon. Nixon

316 was wonderful, he said, “I can organize but I can’t speak. We’ve got to have the best public
317 spokesman in all of Montgomery to represent the Montgomery Improvement Association,”
318 and they leaned on King to do it.

319 Here’s this young guy, just out of his seminary, just actually short of his doctorate by
320 that time, who decides reluctantly that he will take it. And I watched him get drawn deeper
321 and deeper into it. I watched the philosophers—he was particularly intrigued with Hegel,
322 loved existentialism, Gandhi influenced him, as well as Thoreau a great deal. The whole
323 issue of passive resistance as it was called became his technique and I just identified and
324 identified with it.

325 I do believe that along about 1965—you already had Birmingham by that time, you
326 had the Voting Rights Act, Johnson had begun this thing. Just after they signed the Voting
327 Rights Act, King went out to Los Angeles because you had the first of the great rebellions, as
328 it was called—riot—huge thing. Thirty something people, I believe, were killed by that. He
329 went out there and he went into a pool hall. Now by that time King had already been in
330 Atlanta, Albany, Montgomery all these campaigns. The young men said, “Who the Hell are
331 you boy”. He thought somebody was pulling his leg and realized that these young people—
332 in 1965—didn’t know who he was.

333 That meant that the faith-based religious vocabulary that King used to guide his
334 work in the South—that he had to embark now on a perspective that involved a language
335 that was not solely dependent on faith. He never abandoned the faith language but he had
336 to now develop an alternative or an additional or expanded vocabulary, and that he did.
337 Then he became deep. He went to Chicago and had a terrible time there, struggled and

338 struggled and was really given to mild, but slightly protracted, several weeks, depressions
339 that began to show up more, but so did his thought become deeper.

340 By that time the Vietnam War was upon us so he began to think how does the
341 Vietnam War relate to the work I'm doing here. He began to expand the vision and make it
342 worldwide. Though it may be a little hyperbolic for me to say, I do believe at the end—at
343 least, I catch people's attention by saying—I believe that in the end King was the most
344 important social visionary of the twentieth century, and I do believe that. That was a
345 searing, searing loss in April of '68.

346 Grossman: You had regular contact with him through the years.

347 Maguire: Absolutely, he came frequently to Wesleyan where I was during the sixties. We
348 became wonderful, fast friends.

349 Grossman: You have two doctorates? Two graduate degrees?

350 Maguire: No, I have one degree in two fields. When I was in Yale, Yale was so enamored
351 with the success the University of Chicago had had with its Committee on Social Thought,
352 which is as you know is interdisciplinary which I'm sure absolutely had something to do
353 with the decision about interdisciplinarity here. By the way I just want to pause a minute
354 to say, at Old Westbury the mission statement you must have it or can find it somewhere
355 but it's "Old Westbury is an interdisciplinary—interdisciplinary came before racial—is an
356 interdisciplinary college for all people that has as its rough goals 30:30:30:10, and has as its
357 mode of instruction multidisciplinary work," something like that. So we had gotten that far,
358 and in a way there was a framework.

359 I'll jump ahead if I may a little bit. After I had been here about four years I was
360 called to a meeting and I knew something was up because the Chancellor Ernest Boyer at
361 the time said, "I want to come up with my best vice chancellors and meet you, and talk to
362 you, and get to know about Old Westbury." But it turns out it was a hot box meeting
363 because word had come that we have got to have some single disciplinary subjects, not
364 interdisciplinary. We could have two kind of—you could continue interdisciplinary but you
365 must begin to add single disciplinary work. Fields like education and business, when have
366 you heard that before. So reluctantly we did begin those right alongside the
367 interdisciplinary, and they've existed to this day somewhat along side each other there. I
368 don't know the exact mixture of those things by now. Then sociology was added but taught
369 by interdisciplinary kind of sociologists.

370 The spirit of Old Westbury pulsed through the whole place, but the curriculum after
371 only four years, or maybe five at most, could no longer remain interdisciplinary, it just
372 wouldn't work. It was one of the first of the Great Recessions it was about '75 at the time.
373 Young people who had been going to community colleges here on Long Island, in
374 Farmingdale, Suffolk, and Nassau, then going off to Binghamton, Albany other upstate
375 schools public and private, Syracuse, Colgate, could no longer go. And they wanted a place
376 to finish their junior and senior years. It was like an iron poker that just pumped you on the
377 head. They said, "I don't care what you think President Maguire." And I could see in that
378 very meeting—that tense meeting—nobody ever said but the message was, "Listen my
379 man, either you add these fields or two things; One, You will not grow, we will just freeze
380 you and we'll freeze you [to] death."

381 Now if I had been really smart and money had been plentiful, I would've said, "Well
382 give it a try because there's plenty of room to grow here its not as if we were constrained
383 by physical surroundings." So that was it, "Either you grow, if you get our approval in
384 growth you will grow in disciplinary fields" and implicit underneath that, "If you don't—
385 farewell."

386 Grossman: I was asking about the two focuses of your graduate work because one is
387 divinity correct?

388 Maguire: [38:33] Correct, I actually studied in three fields. I mentioned the University of
389 Chicago—I did an interdisciplinary doctorate. It was about the uses and abuses that the
390 theologians had made of psychoanalysis. So primarily the dissertation was about theology
391 and psychiatry, so I myself have always been interdisciplinary.

392 Grossman: That's why I'm asking you. It seems like an odd combination to many people,
393 psychiatry and divinity—not psychology and divinity but psychiatry and divinity. If you
394 read some of the work by Freud he was a secular person.

395 Maguire: Sometime I knew about it, of course I even knew in college about work in
396 psychology and religion. So there is a long history of uniting those two, but sometimes I did
397 inner-outer. I had a rationale that accounted for why I did it but I was so grateful for the
398 work on the individual self, which was the psychiatry part, and the theology part, which
399 was work on the community, the corporate, the collective.

400 Grossman: How did you get into that combination, did some professor inspire you, and did
401 some reading?

402 Maguire: [40:06] Yes, curiously enough the psychology side was not inspirational. But
403 there was a young teacher of psychology of religion, so it was not just psychology vs.
404 theology. He was right in the divinity school. He was straight on the latest thing. He had us
405 first of all in the first weeks of the course read Freud, Jung, and all the classics. Then he had
406 us go to the latest things from Chicago, Mayo Clinic, wherever in psychiatry and somehow
407 that stuff ignited me. I began to see some connection between the two and finally went to
408 my teacher and said, "Can I write on that?" He said, "If you do it if you set up your
409 discipline right, your problematic, yes you can give it a shot." Three hundred and seventy-
410 seven pages later I turned in a dissertation.

411 Grossman: So the degree was what kind of doctorate?

412 Maguire: A Ph.D., awarded by the Graduate School of Yale, not the Divinity School, the
413 Graduate school of Yale.

414 Grossman: And it was in?

415 Maguire: Theology and psychiatry. I actually got so deeply involved in that side of it that
416 for an entire year I donned a white coat every Tuesday and actually saw people under John
417 Doller's supervision, these were people who were going to be clinical psychologists or do
418 psychiatry as a part of medicine.

419 Grossman: The other thing, which always intrigued me, when I read, that was the
420 combination was that so many religions reject psychiatry and so many people in psychiatry
421 reject religion.

422 Maguire: But you know this is where the Old Westbury vision proves itself because, today
423 the boundary at the leading edges of contemporary thinking, in fact in my place in
424 Claremont I moved beyond it and came to call it trans-disciplinary. Interdisciplinary still
425 means you got this and this, and the problem is, how are you going to put the two together.
426 But trans-disciplinary uses concepts— notions from as many fields as possible but they
427 move them beyond single disciplines to the solution. Trans-disciplinary thinking I do
428 believe is the call to arms of the new way of thinking.

429 Grossman: Trans-disciplinary, and that would be again different from interdisciplinary?

430 Maguire: Yes, interdisciplinary is just a stage on the way.

431 Grossman: Western intellectual thought and process really developed this disciplinary way
432 of learning, of understanding. Was that a mistake?

433 Maguire: No, it was absolutely a necessary phase. I absolutely do believe in stages and
434 therefore have no embarrassment of having called the work at Old Westbury
435 interdisciplinary. Actually trans-disciplinary is a challenge too. If you try to say we're
436 today—characterize the graduate higher education enterprise it remains overwhelmingly
437 disciplinary. It gets narrower and narrower, and deeper and deeper. I have no doubt.

438 But the trans-disciplinary is gaining ground. It's beginning to challenge that. In a
439 little place like Claremont Graduate University where I was present for seventeen years; it's
440 a way of doing graduate work in an individualized basis, and the projects, dissertations are
441 amazingly varied and I think much more productive.

442 Grossman: The other thing too are in these academic cubbyholes, those who are in that
443 cubbyhole saying, “You have to see the world from the point of view of a political
444 scientist...”

445 Maguire: [44:39] Trans-disciplinary helps break down this rigidity regarding the rightness
446 of one’s own discipline.

447 Grossman: In terms of your accomplishments at Old Westbury, you were here eleven
448 years, what would you regard as the most important things you were able to do here?

449 Maguire: I do believe that the foundations that we started, and I look back thinking that
450 was an amazing time, the year of planning. I mean just every morning we started at 8:30
451 and went to 6. We were like office workers in that regard, and then would have evening
452 meetings. That was an exhilarating year.

453 While it’s nibbled here and changed radically there that vision of a much wider age
454 range than usual, much more diversity in the histories that the students bring with them, a
455 faculty that is overwhelmingly interdisciplinary in its thinking—even though they’re
456 disciplinarians—there’s no doubt about it on the Old Westbury faculty. I do think that we
457 got it started the right way.

458 I do worry about radical cuts and financial support for higher education generally.
459 I’m thinking or hoping that the Governor Cuomo of New York goes back and rekindles a
460 little bit of that if he possibly can. In California just in the last week, headlines have said
461 Governor Brown finds billions he had not counted on, not enough to do twenty-six billion
462 dollars in deficit, but six, seven, eight billion. Brown is talking about, “Let me use that then

463 to take back some of the horrific cuts that I have proposed for the California state college
464 system.” I hope Cuomo would do the same. The balance between public and private is still
465 very different in New York. The number of public school vs. private schools is still heavily
466 skewed towards private in New York, overwhelmingly skewed toward public in California.

467 Grossman: The kind of approach you’ve taken to diversity and to experimental or
468 interdisciplinary or trans-disciplinary education—is public education more compatible
469 with both visions or can these things be as successfully done by private institutions?

470 Maguire: To the contrary—again setting is everything. I think when you answer a question
471 like that you have to think, first let’s talk about context. The state of California and the state
472 of New York are two radically different contexts. The economics are different. There are a
473 number of factors that are involved. I will say in my own situation small private colleges
474 within California are able to move more swiftly than the big public behemoths. It is reverse
475 here, because under pressure, when there is pressure for higher enrollment —it’s the
476 public that must respond here in New York to that. That’s where the change is made. I
477 guess the answer is, find where there is the greatest opportunity for change, whether it’s
478 public or private and put your energy there.

479 Grossman: We’re speaking at a time, its thirty years since you’ve been here, the United
480 States has for the first time a black president. Your central theme of dealing with the riddle
481 of social justice, now in certain ways has, well the acceptance of an African-American as the
482 President of the United States wouldn’t have been conceived when you were a boy in the
483 South in the 1930’s. On the other hand there are streams of racism in this country, which
484 persist, and sometimes one wonders whether everything can flip back.

485 Maguire: It is flipping back. I would say that Barack Obama is mixed race. And of course
486 you may recall in the campaign one of his great challenges was to convince people that he
487 was black. John Payton who is the Director of Council of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund
488 tells of being in Washington, on the days of the inaugural, cold as it could be for Barack, so
489 getting inside as soon as he could and going in and seeing groups cheering and carrying on.

490 And looking twice, and realizing those groups were white and they were not
491 cheering Barack's inauguration, which had occurred earlier in the day. They were already
492 planning to get him. For every revolution there is a counter-revolution and right now we
493 are experiencing all around the counter-revolution to Barack Obama.

494 I do believe the extent at which the Tea Party and Republican Party swept the last
495 off-cycle election was really against Obama. Again very few presidents—he lays low, he's
496 not you think about Bill Clinton or somebody else who is a Democrat president but who is
497 not black, so Barack Obama lays low generally. He will now have to bring out the speaker
498 in him again and may again gain re-election. No election unleashed such pride in our ability
499 to do it and at the same time crystallized such negative opposition it seems to me as Barack
500 Obama. It's something to be living at this moment because the history is not told. Obama
501 may be a one-term president.

502 Grossman: In terms of what is described as racial tolerance at long last, do you see a
503 potential significant reversal?

504 Maguire: Yes, I do absolutely and it's been going on a long time. After the first plateau of
505 success of the Civil Rights Movement—and I would take that to be in the seventies or early
506 eighties, the time we were discussing now for Old Westbury—there started the backsliding.

507 There is the push ahead, but there is the going back. Sometime they've been about an equal
508 tension still push ahead, a little sliding back.

509 Right now we are not pushing ahead and we're vastly sliding back. I do not believe
510 in circular history, if anything it's a spiral but it comes back around again. I think that right
511 now this period is a time where progressives more than ever, ever before have got to stand
512 up and be counted, have really got to go on line in support of a—new American Revolution.

513 Grossman: Which would be about what, a new American Revolution?

514 Maguire: I'm going speak about that tomorrow in my commencement address. I will talk
515 about it tomorrow. New American Revolution is actually a phrase of a friend of mine, but
516 her big emphasis is it is also international. I think that is a new theme that technology
517 makes international, just accelerates internationalism. I think it should just be called the
518 next world revolution probably. I don't have a title for tomorrow so I don't have to say the
519 phrase.

520 We are quickly coming to a point where people of all ages are being really called
521 upon to make a decision. Look if you are a progressive re-affirm it—assert it, live it—as
522 you've never, ever done before, even if you are seventy-eight years old.

523 Grossman: The key to Old Westbury in this regard was and has been about mixing people.
524 Creating contact between people coupled with them not just being in ivory towers
525 studying, but with activism, engagement, on a global scale. But you have to wonder here,
526 despite living in a more global society, we involved the United States in civil wars, and

527 we've been for several years, there seems to be even as the world gets smaller, some very
528 growing divisions.

529 Maguire: [54:46] Absolutely, well the fact of the matter is I do believe not only in the United
530 States we have greater disparities than ever before. I keep in a folder that when I see an
531 arresting statistic, and I'll just give you one right now, that 1% of the United States
532 population controls 30% of the wealth. 10% percent of the US controls 77% of the wealth.
533 So that means that 90% of Americans are living on 23% of the wealth.

534 That's ultimately undoable for the long haul, unless people really just do gulp and go
535 backwards vis-à-vis the kind of lifestyle that their own parents knew. Yet at the same time
536 the economy is becoming ever more global. So here's the paradox, I guess the way I'm
537 saying is the next world revolution is going to be full of paradoxes and one of them is—the
538 call—is to begin the Old Westbury way, with people right around you, in this neighborhood
539 on Long Island, in New York and yet know that it reaches to Cairo, to Benghazi, Indonesia
540 wherever. That's the paradox, how do you make your life assume meaning in a world that
541 has that paradox. That what you do impacts all over the world and yet the place to do it is
542 in the local—local, global.

543 Grossman: So many peoples think their way and their culture is the right way and the right
544 culture...

545 Maguire: You will see more of that because the more we do get global the more people will
546 just feel pressed and pressed. I think that ultimately despair, the sense that my life doesn't
547 add up too much—I don't affect big policy changes—that kind of spirit brooding, spirit of
548 being disconsolate is afflicting the entire United States.

549 Grossman: Your dream for Old Westbury as the years of the future unfold, where having
550 really laid the foundation for this place, what is your dream for where it goes?

551 Maguire: [57:40] To become a community, I'm repeating the original mission. I do think
552 that if you make the adjustments to harsh reality to some measure, but keep underneath
553 that original, original vision I swear I do believe that is the way to go.

554 Grossman: And the original vision being?

555 Maguire: Of an institution that would be radically mixed, trans-disciplinary in its mode of
556 study, work on projects and those projects need to emerge around you, to give you a hand
557 at it. Understand how at this time, and here would be a big difference in thirty years, the
558 awareness of the international, global dimensions of things. I must say that computing—
559 and that is a whole new world—opens up possibilities to be engaged in ways we weren't
560 thirty years ago. It is somehow to move with the globalization but to keep the sense of life
561 spent together.

562 One of the things about the phones, a paradox I think, is that everyone's talking to
563 someone on the phone but they've never been more disconnected from the whole reality.
564 To recover that global sense of community is with everything that was there to begin with,
565 is I do think, the way I think we all ought to go.

566 Grossman: But how to get there?

567 Maguire: Right at the corner of where you are, just, just take on this growing understand of
568 how far ranging your insights may go and be, but keep working on them just keep working
569 on them.

570 Grossman: Thank you, that's all we need.