A TEI Project

Interview of Sondra Hale

Table of contents

1. Transcript

1.1. Session One
March 8, 2011

McKIBBEN

Hello again.

HALE

Hello.

McKIBBEN

It is March 8, 2011, and this is Susan McKibben. I'm interviewing Dr. Sondra Hale for the Center for the Study of Women and the UCLA Oral History Archive Project on women's social movement activism in Los Angeles. First let's just start off with the beginning. Can you tell me when and where you were born?

HALE

I was born December 30th, 1937, in Des Moines, Iowa, specifically Mercy Hospital.

McKIBBEN

Who was in your family? Tell me a little bit about your family and your household when you were a child.

HALE

Well, it's complicated. It's not just Mom and Dad and kid. It's a little complicated. My mother [Norma Badger] was married quite young, sixteen or seventeen, and divorced her first husband, and then a year later married the man who was actually the person that I claim as my father, who adopted me officially after about a year, name Thomas Dungan, Thomas Abraham Dungan, actually. So even though I'm not blood-related to him, it's his relatives that I grew up with and his background that I absorbed and so on. Anyway, my relatives of my mother's first husband attempted to have custody or part custody of me, and my mother went into open court in Des Moines, Iowa, one of the most narrow-minded places that I could imagine on Earth, at least in the [United] States. So, in a way, I came into the world with a custody battle, and I guess that's not unusual for Hollywood kids, but might have been a bit unusual for my generation and for the Midwest.

McKIBBEN

Because all of this would have been happening when you were still very young, right?

HALE

Very young.

McKIBBEN

Late thirties, maybe.

HALE

Right. So I was an only child until I was sixteen, but I won't skip all those years. My adopted father died when I was thirteen, of kidney disease, and my mother remarried very shortly afterwards, a year afterwards, and we moved to Omaha [Nebraska]. But back to an earlier period, I came from what we would politely call working-class family, although Marx would have called it lumpen proletariat. These were people who, on my adopted father's side, lived in the Ozarks. Have you seen the film, Winter's Bone?

McKIBBEN

Yes.

HALE

Those are probably my ancestors, people from the Ozarks. I was told that they were from what was called the Missouri

Flats, so they were Creole-speaking. My adopted father, Tom Dungan, dropped out of school in the sixth grade, actually, because kids made fun of his accent. He could hardly speak English, standard English. But I had grown up thinking of them as hillbillies, and I remember my mother, who we'll go to in a moment, was an urban person and prided herself in being a sophisticated urban person, and I think his hillbilly roots embarrassed her. She made it pretty clear to me that she wanted me to kind of rise above the hillbilliness of the family.

McKIBBEN

How so?

HALE

Oh, she trained me in all kinds of ways to pass as middle class. We could go into that. She had very clear techniques that would reveal that I was middle class and conceal my working-class background. But anyway, Tom Dungan's family, they were tenant farmers, some of them, and they were pushed off the land during the [Great] Depression, and immigrated north to Iowa, to Des Moines. Some of them worked in the mines and so on, as my mother's father did. They were miners. I remember I was struck by my grandfather saying that he would go for six months sometimes without seeing sunlight. Hearing that story as a child just stayed with me, just really struck me. So I always had a feeling for miners. My adopted father was a laborer, and the last good job that he had, he'd been a tire changer, big trucks, big tires, a tire changer. That's the first job I remember. No, the first job I remember was a guard for a munitions plant in Des Moines, because he was what was called 4-F. He had a kidney ailment and wasn't allowed to be drafted. At that time during World War II, that was a humiliation for a man, not to be well enough to be drafted, so I think it was one of the reasons why he was kind of a masculinist kind of person, always trying to make up for it, and one of the ways he tried to make up for it was to get a job as a guard in a munitions plant, and he got to wear a uniform and be close to the military and so on. It's a little pathetic when you think about it. Anyway, the best job he

had just before he died was a glass cutter who fit car windshields, and that was a skilled job and a union job. We were a union family. So I'm trying to build.

McKIBBEN

So they supported the union.

HALE

Supported the union. I remember him being on strike for six months or something like that, and the family just sinking under. So there were a few negative remarks made about the union at that time, that the union wasn't doing enough for the workers, that kind of thing, to support them during the strike.

McKIBBEN

How old were you then?

HALE

Eight, five to eight. I told you I'm bad at dates, ages.

McKIBBEN

More or less.

HALE

More or less, yes.

McKIBBEN

You weren't a teenager.

HALE

I wasn't a teenager, no. Also we lived in Iowa, farmland, and farming was an important area of discussion. I remember that farmer syndicates were also supported. I would say that my family was a populist family. They were not educated. I'll talk about my mother in a moment. They were not educated in a formal sense, and they were certainly not politically educated in the way in which we academics would generally think about politically educated, but they had a very clear notion about where they were in terms of the class structure, without using that terminology. I remember my mother's father, my grandfather, was a bartender, Irish bartender, a real stereotype, and he used to come home and talk about the bosses and the big guys and the little guys, and he always saw himself as being done in by the big guy. So I heard that language a lot, so I heard the union language, farmer syndicate language, the class language of the big guy

and little guy and the bosses and the little guy, and general populist language.

McKIBBEN

Did you see yourself within that as part of your family? Or how did you perceive that?

HALE

Well, my mother, early on, was raising me to see myself as somewhat above my family and my surroundings. Let me tell you a bit about my mother.

McKIBBEN

Okay.

HALE

One of my great regrets—she is dead now; she died at eighty-three and had dementia the last few years of her life, and I think because I was somewhat estranged from her for a time, angry with her for reasons of alcoholism and multiple marriages, I didn't take the time or whatever to ask her how she got the views that she had, which were very, very unusual for her time. For a white woman living in Des Moines, Iowa, she had very, very clear progressive race politics, although her parents were bigots. I remember my grandfather using all kinds of—any ethnic or racial epithet you can imagine, he knew. He had a rich vocabulary. My mother at one point banned all of those words from the household just as a general announcement. She would not have her daughter hearing those words. But Mother, who had a tenth-grade education, and was a kind of self-made woman, started out as a sales clerk in a military fort and then got a job—she was very musically inclined, and she got a job in a record shop.

McKIBBEN

This was in Des Moines?

HALE

Yes, we're still in Des Moines, unfortunately. She got a job as a sales clerk in a record shop, and they were fairly near a radio station, one of the leading radio stations, KSO at that time in Des Moines. This is pre-television. She so impressed the manager of the radio station with her knowledge of music and what there was in the way of records, that he

hired her at the radio station to be the music librarian. From there she worked her way up to musical director; from there, traffic manager. Traffic manager is someone who basically lays out all the scheduling of the commercials and so on, and deals with sponsor, a traffic director in many respects. It was a very good job for a woman in those years, although women weren't paid much. But she was clearly a white-collar worker at that point.

McKIBBEN

And she was working at the station while you were a child?

HALE

Yes. I could take part in station activities. She used to bring me into the studio and I could sit quietly while the disc jockeys put the records on. They literally manually put the records on in those days, and that was great fun. We used to get free tickets to jazz concerts and that sort of thing. So that was an area of privilege. But I don't know where she got her race politics. It's a puzzle to me and always will be. Des Moines was a highly segregated city, as you can imagine. By now we're talking about the 1940s. I could talk about the war years, too, but can't talk about everything, I guess. But I did live through World War II. My mother used to tell me that I had to play with what were called colored kids at that time. That was the polite word. I would cry and say that I'd be called—friends teased me and I was called "white trash" when I played with the colored kids. We lived in a very poor neighborhood, a slum, actually, at the time that I'm narrating, and African Americans lived across the alley, so to speak, from whites, so you had whites on one side of the street, basically, and very, very poor African American families in shacks on the other side of the street. My mother used to push me out the door and say, "Go play with the colored kids," and I would cry and resist. But she told me tales that amounted to blacks being superior. It had to do with music. She was a great jazz lover. It had to do with the arts in general. It had to do with, I think, everything she valued. All the sorts of things that we might consider stereotypes now were the things that she really revered, sense of rhythm and all that kind of thing. She liked the way

that African Americans danced, sang, looked, and I embraced that ultimately, so that it wasn't until maybe my high school years, maybe even my undergraduate years at UCLA [University of California at Los Angeles], that I was even willing to allow myself to dislike someone who was black. I thought it was racist to dislike someone who was black. It was a very great, liberating feeling when I finally admitted to myself that I didn't like X and that it was okay, X was just a jerk, and that I could actually acknowledge that. But I guess then I was raised with a kind of inverse racialism, let's say. Anyone who was black was okay.

McKIBBEN

So you were sort of overcompensating, in a sense.

HALE

I mean, that's still with me to some extent, although I'm fully aware of the process. I know where it came from, I know what it's about, and I know it has its limitations and so on.

McKIBBEN

Because you say that friends made fun of you, so I assume these were white friends also.

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

Did you sort of compartmentalize your social circles then, or how did you kind of navigate having these white friends and then these, quote, unquote, "colored" friends who couldn't, it sounds like, really mix?

HALE

No, they didn't mix and I compartmentalized. For the most part, my relationships with black kids were confined to school, once I went to school, and on the playground a bit, walking home. My mother made me walk home with the colored kids, and I used to protest and say the colored kids didn't want to walk home with me. My mother didn't seem to recognize that fact. But my very first activism was around this issue of racism in Des Moines, Iowa. A bunch of junior high school kids were brought together to talk about race and racism at a community center which was, I think, in a

black neighborhood and was primarily black. It was called Wilke House, I think. I'm pretty sure that's the name of it. So I was selected. I don't remember who selected me—teachers, I think—to go and take part in this discussion. So it was really my first—I mean, these were kids that were designated as possible leaders to change the situation in Des Moines.

McKIBBEN

These are both black and white students?

HALE

Right. And that was where I first learned that I wasn't doing a favor for African American kids by being their friend and that they may not necessarily want to be my friend. That was a startling revelation.

McKIBBEN

How did you come to that?

HALE

Well, a friend of—I thought it was a friend of mine in my class, named Camille Wilson—see, I still remember her name. I was saying, you know, something about, "I want to be friends with colored kids," or whatever it was, whatever naïve thing I was saying, and she said, "But what makes you think I want to be friends with you?" That put me in my place.

McKIBBEN

What did you say?

HALE

Well, I don't think I said anything. There's nothing to be said to that. I'm sure it was an awkward moment, but it was a big consciousness raiser that, in fact, I understood at some level of my consciousness that my position was patronizing and that African Americans wanted no part of white charity, my largesse, that I actually wanted to be friends with them as some kind of liberal gesture, and that's what we were. We were liberals and we were populists.

McKIBBEN

Did that change how you interacted with black students at your school or did it change the way you talked to your mother? Did that shift?

HALE

No. I did go home and tell my mother, "You know, Mom, colored kids don't necessarily want to be friends with me." And I remember her saying, "You just have to stay in there, just stay in there. Don't let that discourage you." I think she was always using pop psychology. That was probably defensive on her part. "Don't let it derail you." I'm sure she didn't use that word, but, "Don't let it discourage you. You're doing the right thing and you just think of yourself as doing the right thing."

McKIBBEN

Was it more of a "They may not realize it, but you're doing the right thing" kind of a statement, maybe?

HALE

You mean that African Americans, out of false consciousness, is that what you mean?

McKIBBEN

I guess, or it sounds like maybe I'm misunderstanding what you're saying, that you both decided that you should continue to spend time with African Americans, but that maybe your approach started to change from her approach or her justification of why that was important.

HALE

Right. I no longer had the arrogance that I must have had, that this was somehow or other my gift and that it would be something that would be embraced by and sought after by African Americans. Quite the contrary. My life was one in which I found myself pursuing those friendships rather than the reverse. And that contributed to a constantly changing consciousness about race in the States.

McKIBBEN

I'm surprised that students were brought together. This would have been in, what, 1950? Do you know how that came about?

HALE

This was the forties. Well, no. I was thirteen, so born in '37, yes, you're probably right, early fifties. Very early fifties. How it came about, well, I think there must have been some sort of civic attitude on the part of some small circle that we

weren't going to be able to end racism in Des Moines unless we started early, and that the kids were going to be—the youth were going to be the new leaders, and to start working on them early.

McKIBBEN

To back up just a little bit, how did your father feel about your playing with the colored kids and your mom's attitudes about that? Did he agree or did he disagree?

HALE

These were among the times that my mother, who was the central figure in my life, would put her foot down, and my dad would not interfere. I'm sure he didn't like it. He was a bigot like everyone else around me, everyone else. Well, there was an aunt who was an exception because she had—this is not a blood aunt, now; this is my father's sister, who had been married to a black man for a while. It was a big stain on the family, and I think at some point she had lived with us, but she was kicked out of the house, and she was let back in and everyone forgave her after the relationship broke up. But it was just, you know, so-called miscegenation was not accepted in 1940s Des Moines.

McKIBBEN

So did you not have contact with her during the time she was in that relationship?

HALE

I guess not, only I didn't quite understand why she was ostracized. I don't think my mother told me. I probably found out the way I found out most things, overheard conversations.

McKIBBEN

So what sense did you have of what your parents hoped for you when you were a child? Did they have ambitions for you or plans?

HALE

Again, my mother had the final word in what her daughter was going to be like and do and so on. She decided I was going to go to the university, only she didn't know that word, I don't think, so she used "college," and she put that in my head so deeply, planted that seed so deeply, that when

people would ask me what I was going to do when I grew up, I would say, "I'm going to go to college." It was like it was a profession for me, and it was. [laughter] Here I am. But that drive in me was so very, very strong because of her preachings early about how I was going to go to college because I would meet a nicer man, nicer-caliber man than she was ever able to meet, and, you know, it was sort of go there to get your M.R.S. ["Mrs."] degree, but she was a little more liberal than that. She would say, "Your chances in life will just be enhanced." She would say it over and over and over again, that I had always to learn to support myself, not depend on men. So there were these early feminist preachings as well, but always mixed messages from my mother because she was very, very—I didn't tell you she had been called by many people one of Des Moines's most beautiful women. That was difficult for me. She was a very, in quotes, considered to be a very "sexy" woman, and that was difficult for a child.

McKIBBEN

How did you find this out? Did people just make compliments about her?

HALE

Uh-huh. And, you know, people would comment on her walk, sometimes unfavorably. Women were often jealous of her, so I would hear their sort of catty remarks behind her back. As an only child who lurked in the shadows of conversations, that's how I picked up a lot of information. So she was this really beautiful woman, but I forgot your question.

McKIBBEN

The mixed messages, how you received mixed messages.

HALE

Right. So she would say things like—this was a part of her trying to train me to pass as middle class. Some of it was also how to act with men. She'd say, "Of course, dear, I hope you never smoke, but if you do, be sure that you let him light your cigarette for you. Be sure you let him open the car door for you. Men like to be needed. Don't ever beat them." I was very, very, very athletic all through my life, and she would note that I would really try very hard to beat the

boys at baseball or whatever, and so she would give me some lectures about, "Make them think they're winning," or, "Make them think they're on top," or, "Make them think they're important," whatever, "But you do your thing. You earn your money, you get your education, your good job," and so on. There were things she didn't want me to do, like she wasn't keen to have me learn to type. I had an aunt who was pushing me to learn to type, and my mother said, "Well, no, I don't want you to learn to type for two reasons. One, you might think you can't only go above a job as a secretary, and I don't want you to be a secretary. I want you to get a better job. The second reason is you'll go to school in some—." I think this was later. "The young men will all want you to type their term papers for them." She was so right. [laughs]

McKIBBEN

She said this specifically to you?

HALE

Yes. So the mixed messages were, "Be an independent woman, but don't let men know that you're an independent woman." That's one of many mixed messages.

McKIBBEN

Was that confusing?

HALE

I think it probably was. I think with regard to men I was always a bit confused.

McKIBBEN

You said you were athletic as a kid. What kind of sports did you do—

HALE

Everything.

McKIBBEN

—or activities?

HALE

Everything. My mother made me stop playing football when I was twelve.

McKIBBEN

Where did you play football?

HALE

Any garden, any yard.

McKIBBEN

Just around?

HALE

Yes. But baseball and then eventually tennis, which was my big sport. But at the [Municipal] University of Omaha, where we haven't arrived yet, you and I, I was on the honorary basketball, volleyball, baseball, and of course tennis, and golf teams, to give you an idea, but I played very serious tennis and played tournaments for years.

McKIBBEN

Wow.

HALE

Taught tennis and so on. Mother worried about my athletic stuff. She didn't like it much and she never watched me play in a tennis tournament, never. So no one in my family supported tennis. You know, I think she was worried that I was such a tomboy. I think she didn't know where that was going to go.

McKIBBEN

Were there other ways that she tried to kind of limit your tomboyishness or funnel you into a more feminine role?

HALE

Yes. My dress, my hair, you name it.

McKIBBEN

Like what?

HALE

Well, she wanted me to dress in a more feminine way. I wanted to wear slacks or pants all the time, and she was always trying to get me in dresses. In high school, I remember her trying to get me to stop wearing white because I was wearing a lot of tennis clothes. She would say, "I don't want to see you in another white blouse," or white shirt or whatever. She tried to teach me how to walk. She really did some feminine training, all of which failed, I might add. And she always talked about how I was too plain, and she'd say things like, "Sondra, you could be so cute. You just don't make any effort at all." And the more she said it, the more I rejected it.

McKIBBEN

The less effort.

HALE

Yes, the less effort, except I went on a real glamour kick later in my life and lost weight, grew my fingernails and polished them, and started to wear makeup and tinted my hair, and that was an interesting experience in and of itself.

McKIBBEN

Is that as an adult?

HALE

Yes, undergraduate at UCLA.

McKIBBEN

So when you were in high school, what high school did you go to? Was there more than one high school?

HALE

No, I went to Central High School in Omaha. We'd moved to Omaha by then. I don't even remember the name of my junior high right now. Yes, I but went to Washington Irving Junior High [School] in Des Moines and got exposed to journalism classes and started writing more.

McKIBBEN

In junior high?

HALE

Yes. What else in junior high? My dad died. That was a big deal. I didn't say anything about religion.

McKIBBEN

Oh, of course.

HALE

We were originally Catholic, and because my mother was married and divorced and so were many other members of the family, they assumed that had we been important enough, we would have been excommunicated, and that made my mother very bitter, so I was actually raised as a kind of anti-Catholic, and since we didn't then have our native church, so to speak, anymore, I was turned loose to be anything I wanted to be or be nothing. So we moved around a lot when I was a kid, because we would get evicted from apartments, not being able to pay the rent and so on. By the way, I didn't have a very good diet. We really were quite poor until I was past twelve, about twelve, and then we

started doing well, and that's when my father died. So that was another financial setback. So there were many, many things in my childhood that were the result of poverty. I'm having back problems now. My back should have been dealt with when I was a kid. I had some kind of spinal curvature. We didn't have the money for me to wear the brace I should have worn, or the corrective shoes, and my mother rationalized that she didn't want to have me marked as a kid by having odd shoes and so on.

McKIBBEN

Do you think that was more of a cover for the fact—

HALE

Oh, yes.

McKIBBEN

—that she didn't have a choice?

HALE

Right. And I didn't have proper dental care and that kind of thing. You can usually tell a working-class kid in the States, anyway, by how straight or not straight their teeth are. So I didn't have that kind of dental care. I wasn't very healthy, had anemia through most of my childhood. Again, diet. The diet was really poor.

McKIBBEN

Do you remember if you felt like you had to hide that about your circumstances as a kid, or were other kids around you in the same boat?

HALE

Yes, probably some were even worse off. I remember my mother talking about how my grandmother used to send her to neighbors' houses during the [Great] Depression so she could eat. They were really hit hard by the Depression. And that Depression mentality carried over in all kinds of ways. I heard so many Depression stories. My mother would never let me throw away a pair of shoes, even though I'd outgrown them as a child, because maybe things would get worse and I'd have to use those shoes. So even if they had a hole in them, maybe there'd be a worse hole. So I hoarded. I still don't throw away old clothes. That trait is with me. But the poverty was something that I hid for a long time from

myself, and certainly entering UCLA, one did not talk about one's poverty. By then I'd learn to pass, or I thought I did, anyway. I'm sure I didn't. I'm sure my working-class background showed all the time.

McKIBBEN

What kinds of things did you do, when you were a kid or in high school, to pass?

HALE

Well, my mother sent me to a Jewish Community Center in Des Moines to learn diction, so I think one of the primary ways that I left my class behind was that I talked differently from everybody, and that was remarked on by other kids. The fact that my name was Sondra with an "o" instead of Sandra with an "a" was mocked by the working-class kids around me, that I was hoity-toity.

McKIBBEN

Did your mother find herself correcting people a lot when they talked about you?

HALE

I don't remember that, but she might have, you know. She might have received criticism for the fact that I was a bit of a strange person, strange little girl, and of course she wanted me to fit in, but not at the expense of acting like a proper middle-class kid. I was going to be educated, I was going to speak properly, I was going to have good taste for the fine things in life, fine film. She took me to the—there was one theater that occasionally showed foreign-language films in Des Moines, and she made sure that she took me to any foreign-language film. She took me to the very best of the jazz concerts. For her that was the epitome. I mean, she raised me that classical music was the finest form of music, but she also raised me to think of jazz as a very creative form of music.

McKIBBEN

It sounds like that would have been kind of a sacrifice financially, too, to do those things.

HALE

Right. She sent me to the art gallery, the one and only art gallery, art museum in Des Moines. These were things she said I could talk about at cocktail parties.

McKIBBEN

Really.

HALE

"I want you to learn to talk about the latest novels and art. That's what you should do, dear." So she joined the Book of the Month Club, and that was fine literature for her, so I was reading those novels at a pretty young age. I remember some of them still. Then I went to the local art museum and memorized all the paintings and the painters in the museum.

McKIBBEN

Wow.

HALE

Well, it wasn't that big. It was Des Moines, you know, in the forties and early fifties. This is fifties by now. So that was my beginning of interest in art, so somehow or other my mother had raised me to think of art history and art criticism as the absolute pinnacle of intellectualism, and I took to it.

McKIBBEN

Were you doing art at this point, making your own painting?

HALE

Yes, I wrote poetry really young, but not any painting. I just enjoyed painting. I mean, I did some drawing and so on. It wasn't especially good. Sort of little artsy-craftsy stuff through my childhood.

McKIBBEN

Was the writing also encouraged by your mom? Was that part of that?

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

So when you went to high school, you said you were in Omaha at that point, right? What were you focused on in high school?

HALE

Being accepted. And that was a high school that had a very distinct upper middle class, Jewish kids from professional

families. It had the highest percentage of Jews, and that was fine with me because, like African Americans, my mother had raised me to think of Jews as special people, and I went to a few meetings in my childhood about anti-Semitism and worked in some discussions groups, I think at UCLA, on the issue of anti-Semitism. And I think it's one of the reasons why I get so hurt when I'm referred to as an anti-Semite, because of working on Palestinian issues. I mean, nobody knows anything about that background of mine. Working on issues of racism towards African Americans and anti-Semitism were my first two areas of activism.

McKIBBEN

Were those issues in which you were active in high school, in that period, or were you mainly just aware of—

HALE

It was just an awareness, not really an activism with regard to the Jewish students. Again, I was very keen to be accepted by Jewish students, and they were fairly self-protected, let's put it that way. I'll try not to use words like "clannish," "cliqueish." But fairly self-protected, so there was no way that I—I don't think I had a close Jewish friend in high school. It wasn't until UCLA. But in high school I was very active in—I don't think I talked about how I started out as a ventriloquist at twelve or ten.

McKIBBEN

No, we certainly didn't talk about that. [laughs]

HALE

My parents were always fooling around with hock shops. I think they probably were always sort of selling—they were always in debt, so they were always selling something and picking up something. But they brought home a Charlie McCarthy dummy when I was ten, I think, and I took to it, and a How-To book, How to be a Ventriloquist [not actual title]. I really took to it, and I won some talent show on the radio, no less, ventriloquists on the radio. Seems really odd. Well, the most famous ventriloquists in American popular culture in history were Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy. They were radio stars. It was only much later with the coming of TV that they were on TV. So I was on the radio as

a ventriloquist, and that also started my acting. I did some acting all the way through my early twenties, actually. So in high school I was in the talent show and I wrote skits and I did all those kinds of things. I wasn't a very good student. I had entered late, because in Des Moines we had what was referred to as mid-term students; that is, you could start school in January. But Omaha didn't have that system; you started school in the fall. So I was a semester behind when I arrived in Omaha, so they put me in remedial classes, and I did not belong in remedial classes, which was quickly discovered in about two weeks. So then they skipped me, and it was a little hard for me. Not only did I not come from a family that could really help me with my homework, despite all my mother's teachings, I didn't have an intellectual background, really, or vocabulary, even though she had bought Thirty Days to a More Perfect Vocabulary and trained me to use these big words. I couldn't necessarily apply it to my high school work. I was an okay student, but just not that great, and there were lots of problems at home that kept me from being able to study and so on.

McKIBBEN

Like what?

HALE

Domestic violence. This was my mother's third husband.

McKIBBEN

This is the man she married after your father died.

HALE

And then she had a baby, my brother [Michael Hill] when I was sixteen. I was the primary caregiver of my brother. So life was not very happy in high school. But I was on the tennis team and other teams. I had a high profile in that regard. But I wasn't very popular with boys, and that's always a downer, you know, in high school. I always had to kind of strive to be in the crowd that I wanted to be in, always a crowd that was special, upper middle class, the intellectuals of the school, and I was always on the fringes of that.

McKIBBEN

Do you feel like you were just sort of tolerated or did you make friends within those groups?

HALE

I had some close friends, but I was also just tolerated by the bulk of them. You know, I think anyone can tell tales like that in high school. Nobody, really nobody felt—

McKIBBEN

Fully fits in.

HALE

Yes, yes. Maybe a few cheerleaders and homecoming queens and so on. So I don't think that I especially stood out in high school in any particular—I mean, I stood out as somebody who was in talent shows and so on, but I don't think my story is unique, is what I'm trying to say, being unhappy in high school.

McKIBBEN

It sounds like you were involved in quite a few different things.

HALE

I was.

McKIBBEN

You were acting and you were on teams.

HALE

School plays, variety shows.

McKIBBEN

Doing a lot of stuff.

HALE

Yes. I don't know how we do it when we're younger, but we do.

McKIBBEN

Did you do any acting outside of school, like in community theater or on the radio after the initial—

HALE

No, I think most of it, even when I went to UCLA, was—or the University of Omaha and then UCLA, was confined to the university. It was only when I went to Khartoum, Sudan, when I was active in community theater. That's a later story, I guess, maybe.

McKIBBEN

It sounds like academically—I mean, were you encouraged? You said you were an okay student. Did teachers encourage you to—

HALE

No. Teachers were very interested in students from a different class from what I represented, and if I'm bitter about one thing in high school, it's that. I mean, you wouldn't believe it, but when I was probably even advanced candidacy for Ph.D., my spouse Gerry Hale and I took a trip across the country, and I specifically wanted to go to Omaha to see my drama teacher Mr. Rice, because he had had us write mock applications to universities. He was an English teacher and drama teacher. One of our exercises in English class was to write a letter of application to get into the university, so I wrote about all my extracurricular activities, and there were many of them, but not about my academic achievements. He sort of threw it back at me and said, "Nobody at the university's interested in this sort of thing. You'll never get into a university." He actually said something like that. And other teachers tried to push me towards—I forget what it was called, but the more vocational stream and not the heading-for-the-university stream, whatever it was called.

McKIBBEN

They wanted you to learn to type?

HALE

Yes, and homemaking, home economics, not the college-prep courses and so on. I totally defied them and went ahead, because I had this drive that my mother had planted in me. It would have been this great tragedy had I not gone to college. But my mother kind of lost interest in this idea of her daughter going to college by the time she was in this marriage that was consuming her in every possible way, and a new baby and the whole bit. They were in financial trouble, as usual, so even though she had bought an educational insurance policy for me when I was quite young—

McKIBBEN

What is that?

HALE

I don't think they exist anymore. Maybe they exist. But you pay X amount of money per month, and then when the kid is ready for college, you cash in. But they cashed in my educational policy. And then when it was time for me to go to University of Omaha, there was no money, I was told, and I think we're talking about $100, and they just couldn't afford it, and suggested I work for a year. Well, somehow or other I knew that if I got in the workforce, that was it. I mean, it might not have been because I had this drive, but in my head, I thought, "If I don't go to college directly out of high school, I'm never going to go." So I stood up and said, "You're going to afford it. I'm going." So they came up with the money somehow. Big deal, $100, which I suppose is more like $1,000 now. They came up with it, and I went to the University of Omaha, but I was just filled with anger and bitterness over the fact that they cashed in that policy. Then after years of building me up, my mother, to go to college, then to present me with that letdown, it was sort of the beginning of my estrangement from my mother. Even though we remained very close in a whole lot of ways, I began to be somewhat distrustful. One would be.

McKIBBEN

In that period, yes. Sure. And how long did she stay with her, I guess, third husband? That continued throughout?

HALE

No, they divorced. They separated and he moved to California. That's how I ended up in California, so that's the one really good thing he did for me, was I got to go to UCLA. He persuaded my mother to follow him after a while.

McKIBBEN

And you came with her?

HALE

Came with her and my brother, my baby brother.

McKIBBEN

So backing up just a little bit to sort of the end of high school, you said you were defiant not only of your parents' inability or unwillingness to pay for college, but also of your teachers and the school. So how did you do that? Did they

try to prevent you from enrolling in classes, or did you just take the classes you wanted?

HALE

I just took the classes anyway. I actually didn't have very good grades, as I said. They were okay, but I wouldn't have been able to get in UCLA. I've often described myself as getting where I got through the back door, until some friend told me recently to stop saying that, that it wasn't completely true, and that it was a self-disparaging remark. I didn't mean it as a self-disparaging remark, actually. I meant it as a statement of fact, that I had grades just good enough to get into the University of Omaha and I did just well enough at the University of Omaha to get into UCLA, and I got just good enough grades as an undergrad at UCLA to be able to squeak into graduate school in African Studies, and then from African Studies, I was able to transfer to anthro[pology] so I didn't have to actually apply from step one to get in. You can't do that now, I don't think, but in those years you could actually transfer. So I had a good M.A. [Master of Arts degree] in African Studies and could transfer. But to go back to high school, I squeaked through and did quite well at the University of Omaha, B, B-plus.

McKIBBEN

How did you know how to apply for college? I don't know how it was then, but it seems like now it's quite complicated.

HALE

It wasn't that complicated then. This was the Municipal University of Omaha, which is now a branch of the University of Nebraska. I think it must have been a quite straightforward application, and I'm sure nobody helped me. Nobody could advise me at all in my family about how to fill out an application. I had two quite intellectual tennis friends that I hung around with on the tennis courts, and they might have helped me, I don't know, advised me in one way or another. They were older.

McKIBBEN

You were the first person in your family to graduate high school, right?

HALE

Right.

McKIBBEN

Did you feel that as a triumph when you managed it?

HALE

I don't think I was aware of it at the time. It was only later that I realized that I was the only person to graduate from high school, and remain today the only person to have graduated from university. Well, I'm only comparing myself to my half-brother. We're almost an extinct family, we're so small. So then it became something to feel proud of.

McKIBBEN

Looking back?

HALE

Yes, and wondering how I ever did it. I mean, you're asking me these questions about how did you do it, and I, frankly, don't know, except that little seed that my mother planted, that just wouldn't let me give up. I mean, there were so many places along the way where I would have given up—I mean, I worked thirty-six hours a week to go to UCLA and commuted from La Puente. You know where that is?

McKIBBEN

Not near here.

HALE

No. I commuted every single day from La Puente and worked all those hours and carried a full load at UCLA, played on the tennis team, dated a bit. I don't know how I did it.

McKIBBEN

Did you also work in high school?

HALE

Yes, a little bit, but not a lot. I worked every summer and worked a little bit after school, Tennis Center and supermarket and places like that.

McKIBBEN

Do you remember, did those jobs give you a perspective on the schooling you were having? Did that increase your desire to continue on that path that your mother had set for you?

HALE

Yes, definitely. When I was at the University of Omaha, I worked for Sears and Roebuck [Sears, Roebuck and Co.] in

the wallpaper department, the paint and wallpaper department, about which I knew absolutely nothing, but I was certainly free with my advice about how people should wallpaper. But I thought, "Oh, this is not a job for me." I think I started at 50 cents an hour. Somehow or other I worked myself up to 75 cents an hour. Then when I came out here, I got a job at the May Company, and that's where I worked up to thirty-six hours a week.

McKIBBEN

So when you went to the University of Omaha, what were you majoring in?

HALE

English, and also UCLA.

McKIBBEN

Did you plan to transfer or did you want to go all four years at Omaha?

HALE

I wanted to stay in Omaha all four years, and when my mother took off for California—I think I misinformed you a little while ago. I didn't go directly with her. I joined them later. She wanted to move me in the middle of the university year, typical of her at that point in her life, and once again, she geared me up for this education and then did various sorts of things that undermined it. So a friend had me live with her and her family to finish the year.

McKIBBEN

You'd been living at home previously?

HALE

I lived at home till I got married.

McKIBBEN

So what did she do that was undermining of your higher education?

HALE

Well, trying to pluck me up in the middle of the school year, for example. Not having the money for me to go to college when the moment came. Even when I reached the point where I was studying for my Ph.D., she made some comment to me about, "You know, I think it was fine, dear, for you to get your degree and to get an M.A., that's fine,

but aren't you just overdoing this a bit?" And she never got it straight that I was studying anthropology. I mean, she would refer to it as sociology sometimes, and sometimes she'd call it archeology. She didn't really know what anthro[pology] was. I'm not blaming her for that. I'm blaming her for the fact that she didn't stick with encouraging me to the very end.

McKIBBEN

And you feel like that was in part because of the marriage that she was in? Was she alcoholic at this point?

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

When did that start?

HALE

Well, it must have started when she was quite young, but it was so concealed. My mother was a kind of "top off her drink" sort of alcoholic, and it didn't show up—I mean, the reputation she had was that she could really hold her drinks, you know. This is how alcoholics fool themselves for a couple of decades sometimes, until it finally catches up with them and they're no longer somebody who can hold their drinks. But she held down a very, very high-pressure job all of her life, and she was beyond sixty-five when they decided that her drinking and her general mental health probably required that she retire.

McKIBBEN

Was she still working at the radio station at that point?

HALE

No, she had gone up in her field and she was a time buyer at a time-buying agency. As media became increasingly specialized, she was no longer then a traffic manager at what then became a television station, but then she began to work for an advertising agency, and then even more specialized, the middle people between the advertising agency and the sponsors and the stations, channels.

McKIBBEN

It sounds like her husband maybe was not super supportive of that.

HALE

Of?

McKIBBEN

Her professional life.

HALE

No, I think he couldn't—you mean my father?

McKIBBEN

No, I mean, her first husband.

HALE

I think none of them could quite keep up with her. There was a lot of resentment, as her job was always better than the job of anyone she married, so she was our star.

McKIBBEN

You said you did quite well at the University of Omaha. Can you talk a little bit about things you were involved in there?

HALE

Well, much to my lifelong shame, I was in a sorority for a year. I was even voted the outstanding pledge. I don't know if you know anything about sororities, but, of course, I'm very anti-sorority now and have been for a very long time. One of the things that happened in the sorority was I was so naïve about what sororities were, I just knew it was a club and you couldn't do all the activities that I might have wanted to do if I didn't join one of these things, and that they had a monopoly on sports and teams and a monopoly on the variety shows, and that it was very hard to be in an independent. I was sold that. So I joined, even though it cost money to join, but I was working by then. I'm sorry. I lost the strand.

McKIBBEN

You said you joined a sorority and something happened there.

HALE

Thank you. I didn't know that sororities didn't allow people of color, had no idea that they were prejudicial, and I didn't find out until it was time to recruit people for the next year. We were supposed to bring names, nominate people. The two people I nominated were of color, and everybody looked at me like I was completely crazy, and more or less told me,

"Sorry, we can't have any Chinese girls in our sorority." And I turned in my sorority pin in protest. So I almost redeemed myself. That was one of my political acts, and I didn't just turn it in; I turned it in with a speech to the sorority.

McKIBBEN

What did you tell them?

HALE

Well, they said, "This is out of our hands. This is our main chapter." There are chapters all over the country. "This is our mother—," whatever it was called. "This is our mother chapter in the South, and you know how they are in the South. We can't do anything about it. These are national rules." And I claimed that we could do something about it, that we should have made every effort to change those rules, so that if it was true what they were telling me, that they didn't approve of these rules, then why weren't they doing something about it? So it was that kind of thing. So that's actually one of the acts that I'm most proud of in my life, because, you know, it was very important for me to be accepted, and there I was, making myself the odd person out. And the sorority was really important to me, you know. It was my whole social life.

McKIBBEN

Where did you go from there socially?

HALE

I had such a high profile, it didn't really matter. I wrote all their material for their skits, I brought all of their sports trophies to them, so I was okay without them.

McKIBBEN

So you were still involved in a lot of teams and other—

HALE

Yes, but it was near the end of the year then anyway, and I was about to take off for Los Angeles.

McKIBBEN

So you only stayed there for one year?

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

Then what was your ambition for college when you entered into it? Did you have a specific goal in mind other than improving your prospects?

HALE

I wanted to be a writer. That's all I ever wanted to do. When I said to someone a couple of years ago, "I want to be a writer and I never became a writer," and the person said, "What do you mean? You write all the time." I wanted to be a novelist, a poet, and so on, but I was aiming for my teaching credential because everyone said you can't make a living with a degree in English, so you'd better get your teaching credential. So I went for four years plus. I forget what the system was then, but you had to go a little bit over to get your teaching credential, and then off to Sudan. I never got the teaching credential, and I didn't write the Great American Novel, but I still have time.

McKIBBEN

And I've seen your CV [curriculum vitae]. You've produced quite a bit, if not the Great American Novel.

HALE

Right.

McKIBBEN

I believe your CV prints to forty-three pages at the moment.

HALE

I don't know. Maybe.

McKIBBEN

So you transferred to UCLA in what would have been your sophomore year and you were living at home. Was this in La Puente?

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

So you're still majoring in English and you said you were continuing your involvement in the arts also at UCLA and in sports.

HALE

Right, and on the tennis team. And I won the UCLA Talent Show, the Olio Show.

McKIBBEN

I didn't know they had a UCLA Talent Show.

HALE

They used to. Around homecoming they had this huge variety show, which was actually pretty good because, you know, this is L.A. and lots of kids in the arts, kids who were children of movie actors and musical stars and so on. So it was my standup comedy and ventriloquist act, and I was making money on the side as well, performing. I can't say, as I sometimes say in a kind of exaggerated form, that I worked my way through UCLA as a standup comic. I did supplement my income considerably as a standup comic during that period, undergraduate years at UCLA.

McKIBBEN

So, May Company by day, standup comedy—

HALE

And school squeezed in the middle.

McKIBBEN

On the weekends.

HALE

Right.

McKIBBEN

Where did you do your comedy?

HALE

It was strictly amateurish, but I got money. Various clubs. No comedy clubs, because they didn't really have them then, but I would play for the [The Benevolent and Protective Order of] Elks Clubs. Omaha had its Centennial while I was in high school, and I performed at this big Centennial. It was probably the largest audience I'd performed for. I can't even remember. I remember performing in lots of large auditoriums that weren't school.

McKIBBEN

I lost my train of thought. So this would have been the late fifties when you were in college at that time?

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

And were you starting to become aware of some of the political issues that were happening at that time?

HALE

As an undergraduate, I think, other than these small acts of defiance that I've told you about, like giving up my position in the sorority, at UCLA the first demonstration that I went to was a silent vigil to commemorate Hiroshima, and it was really the first time I became aware of the plight of the Japanese, because, like every other kid at least in the Midwest, I was raised to think of Japanese as these terrible kind of maniacal characters that victimized us, the United States, and so on. I knew nothing about the Japanese American internment. I think really only people on the West Coast or the West knew very much about that anyway. So I became aware of two things that were very important. One was the extent of the destruction of Hiroshima from a very different point of view, not, "Look what we did! We really wiped them out!" but I became aware of what that really meant, but more importantly, how unnecessary it was. That was, in terms of world events, very, very important.

McKIBBEN

How did you learn about this? Was it through classes or through your friends?

HALE

I think it was through my friends. I had one very close Japanese American friend, Etsu Nakamura (now Garfias) that I still have contact with, and in my conversations with her, I remember asking her where she was born and where she went to school and things like that, and she would say things like, "We used to live in Oakland, but my family was relocated." And I didn't know what that meant. I thought it just was that she meant her father was transferred. But she said it in such a serious and tragic way that I was curious about it, you know. "But then my father was relocated." And in those years, JAs [Japanese Americans], I know because I took a faculty development class much later as a faculty person here, JAs felt such shame over the relocation, more shame than anger, and so they didn't talk about it. But then finally she did tell me that—didn't I know that all the Japanese were put in camps during the war [World War II]? And I was horrified. So those were two areas. So, you know,

in a sense, my whole life is these sort of building blocks of acquired knowledge about treatments of particular groups, you know. I didn't yet have a full picture of anything, so I was kind of a single-issue kid, you know, first African Americans, then Jews, then Japanese, sort of in that order. Didn't yet have any kind of feeling for the fact that we were living off Latinos' land, and I had no understanding of agricultural workers or anything until later.

McKIBBEN

You didn't really have a framework within which to connect these things.

HALE

Right.

McKIBBEN

As you were moving through these, as you put it single issue kind of things, did you connect yourself with them or with the people that you were concerned about? It sounds like you had shifted your thinking a little bit as a child from "This is my act of largesse" to "My act of largesse is not necessarily what's required," but did that continue to evolve?

HALE

I'm not exactly sure of the question, but let me take a stab at it. Well, no, let me have you re—are you asking me if I'm—you started out saying did you identify with.

McKIBBEN

Yes. Did you identify with them or did you connect what they were going through with what you were experiencing or with yourself in some way?

HALE

I don't think that I linked my own class background with the issues of people of color until later. For one thing, I was not really into talking about my class background and therefore I wasn't into thinking about it. I had left it behind me. I was at the university now. I didn't have much contact with any of my family except my mother and a couple of other people, so I had really escaped this working-class background. But I could identify with these groups that I was just talking about in terms of always being trained to be for the underdog, so the political consciousness might not have been much more

evolved than that, just having great feeling and concern and wanting to do something for the downtrodden, for the dispossessed, for the oppressed, and so on. So that was creeping into my consciousness. And, of course, this was a time when the Civil Rights Movement was picking up, and I became then keenly aware of what was going on a mass scale with regard to African Americans, so they were no longer this little group that needed our largesse; they were a group that needed our political participation in trying to bring about social justice. So it didn't take long for my consciousness to be raised in, I think, a somewhat more coherent way, able to put things together and then within the Civil Rights Movement I began to care about each group, again almost separately, until the package was relatively complete. I think that's true of a lot of people. I mean, after caring about people that had been the objects of racial or ethnic discrimination or religious discrimination, then we became concerned with issues of sexuality, and then we became concerned with issues of disability. So my trend was pretty ordinary in that regard, following sort of raised public consciousness among progressives, the progressive public, let's say.

McKIBBEN

So were you connected with any student groups on campus, like any of the student activist groups, when you were an undergrad[uate]?

HALE

No, not as an undergrad[uate], I don't think.

McKIBBEN

So it was mainly through your friends and other kinds of contacts. Do you remember anything in particular from your classes that changed the way you thought about the world?

HALE

Well, some negative things about my classes. I took English classes and fell madly in love with a professor named Claude Jones, who taught here [UCLA] for years. He taught the American novel and so on. I became enamored with [Ernest] Hemingway, and through Hemingway, then [William] Faulkner and F. Scott Fitzgerald, the big three. I gained a

very masculinist view of the world. I didn't know it was at that time. But I wanted to be a bullfighter for a while. I was really taken up with the romance of Hemingway in particular. Wanted to go to the Left Bank in Paris and live a bohemian life and become that writer I'd always wanted to be, and be a groupie for painters, you know, the bohemian life. But the bullfighter thing, that was off, because I was also a big animal lover and so on. I'd never seen a bullfight, but I was just carried away with the romance of it all. So that was a negative, was the way we were taught. Our teachers, I had all male teachers, so that's a negative.

McKIBBEN

Did you notice that at the time? Did it stand out to you?

HALE

No, I don't think I noticed it at the time. I did not have a raised feminist consciousness. It was there sort of simmering in the—I wanted to be an independent woman and I didn't want to be bossed around by men, you know. So that was there. I was feisty and all that sort of thing, but, again, I hadn't put things together in any coherent way. I was pretty late in doing that, because my acquired Marxism in many ways militated against my taking on a feminist consciousness in those early years. But that's jumping ahead a little bit.

McKIBBEN

Had you encountered Marxism as an undergrad, or was that later?

HALE

No, I hadn't, except that some important figure in my life we've left out. I met Gerry Hale here at UCLA as an undergraduate. He was a T.A. [teaching assistant] for a geography class I took. He was a self-proclaimed socialist. I'd never met one of those. And also a very staunch supporter of Palestinians, so that was a very important early influence. I didn't admit that for a long time, by the way, because my feminist consciousness and my zeal to become a woman in and of itself, however you say that, an emancipated woman, would not allow me to credit Gerry with influence. I just didn't want to be one of those people who married this guy and took on his ideas and so on.

McKIBBEN

"I learned everything from my husband."

HALE

Right. So I really rejected it and didn't mention it, so he wouldn't have come into a conversation like this and I wouldn't have said he was this major influence on my life.

McKIBBEN

And how old were you when you met him?

HALE

Twenty and a half.

McKIBBEN

During that time or before then, did you—you said you didn't note the fact that there were no female professors or at least you didn't have any female professors. What about female students? Did your treatment as a female student or other women's treatment in classes strike you or was it ever a problem?

HALE

No, I didn't seem to notice it. I remember Claude Jones saying, the day before the final exam or the week before the final that he didn't want any of the students to be coming in looking like death warmed over, and especially he didn't want his pretty women students to come in looking like they had not slept all night. You know, just remarks like that. That's not one of the worst ones, by any means, but there were lots of prejudicial remarks made about women that I noted, but didn't note enough, let's put it that way. In terms of raised consciousness, it really does take a village to raise us up, I think, you know. You need to start hearing the—or sometimes it doesn't take a village. Sometimes it takes one person to make one remark, and I've experienced that any number of times in my life and I think, "Oh, my god, of course. Where was I?" It's like when you're asking me did I not notice that I didn't have any women professors, I don't know that I didn't have any, but I think I didn't have any. I'm thinking, yes, how could I, as a feminist, not have noticed that really early? But, you know, nobody had said anything. There weren't any people around to say, "Hey, we

should have more women professors." That's all it would have taken, by the way.

McKIBBEN

Then you would have started to notice.

HALE

I probably would have been off and running.

McKIBBEN

Were you encouraged by your professors or were they more dismissive of your efforts as a student?

HALE

There wasn't anybody in [my] undergrad years that went out of his way to encourage me. Maybe Claude Jones. I sat in the front row of every single one of his classes, and I think I took four of them or something like that. I had a friend who went to all of them with me, an African American, actually, Dorothea Clark. I say that because I don't know what she was getting out of those classes. Everything was white, absolutely, except, you know, an occasional stereotyped character or people in Mark Twain, a few novels.

McKIBBEN

Was that a part of those gaps in the curriculum or in the faculty? Were those things you noticed in terms of people of color or was your consciousness more around the social issues outside the academy?

HALE

I think the latter. Again, I wasn't noticing much in the curriculum. I don't think I was at all sophisticated about the curriculum in those years. I'm trying to remember, in fact. I think my undergraduate years at UCLA are pretty much a blur in terms of performance, in terms of being really turned on. I think it was mainly my friends. I had a small group of three Jewish friends, and I say that because it became important later that they were Jewish, who were very influential on me for lots of reasons, in lots of ways, rather.

McKIBBEN

Such as?

HALE

Well, about Jewishness, for one thing, and about my attitudes towards Jews.

McKIBBEN

That sense of kind of specialness?

HALE

And also the fact that I at some point wanted to convert to Judaism for just completely naïve reasons.

McKIBBEN

Like what?

HALE

They didn't believe in Christ and neither did I. I mean, really. How stupid. And it seemed a simpler religion. How naïve of me. And I think it was just that I noticed that all the intellectuals around me were Jewish, and so surely there must be something in the culture or the religion or whatever that bred really smart people. And my friends were really important in, first of all, telling me that Jews were not out for converts, thank you very much. "We're not interested in helping you become—."

McKIBBEN

A recurring theme.

HALE

Right. "We're not interested." I mean, I was always looking for further marginality and always kind of willing to take that on. That must still be with me, because I sure am marginal politically, maybe not so much socially anymore except as it's read by the political views and have people reject me for that reason. But I no longer think of myself as socially marginal. My daughters might have thought so, thought I was different from all other mothers. I forgot our line of questioning.

McKIBBEN

I was asking you about how your friends had affected your consciousness.

HALE

Right. So, you know, they debunked this idea of Jews being a special people and my stereotype of Jews as being more intellectual than others. I had a stereotype. It was a positive one, but it was a stereotype, and they pretty much undermined that. Then they were people of the world. They had traveled. I hadn't traveled. I'd never been outside the

country. I was twenty and hadn't been outside the country. They traveled. They had money. They traveled in the summer. I remember one of my friends, Julie Pressman Downey, said that her mother had given her a choice between having another year in Paris or a Citroën, and she had chosen the car. I was so envious. It was all so romantic. So they talked about their travels. They talked about literature in a very intellectual way that I wasn't used to, kind of new literature, the new ideas within literature. Not Claude Jones' ideas. They thought he was really an inferior teacher, and I was shocked. I don't know. It's very hard to pinpoint it now, but they had just a much more intellectual and cultural life. They knew about the theater. They knew people who were in the theater. They knew some actors and writers and so on. I didn't know any of these people.

McKIBBEN

Was that exciting to you to learn, or did that make you feel marginal or that you had to hide your class background?

HALE

Both. Always much of my life has been about envy and excitement. I had a therapist once, and only once, who used to describe me as this little kid with her nose on the glass window of a candy store. It's such a pathetic image, you know. I'm different now. This was like twenty years ago or more. But that was, I thought, in many, many ways what my mother did to me. She made me want, made me crave, not money or power, but respect and intellectualism and respect for my intellectualism, just a craving, the knowledge of the outside world and so on. I got that.

McKIBBEN

So in college, I want to talk about Gerry and meeting Gerry. Can you tell me a little bit about how you met? You said you were in one of his classes.

HALE

He was actually a T.A. for a beginning geography class. I was a senior who hadn't fulfilled enough whatever units in some category, so I had to take Geography 1B late. So I was probably a bit smart for that class. Gerry had come in to give a guest lecture and had given a lecture on Lebanon. He'd

just come back from Lebanon. He had this little goatee, which I thought was sophisticated. And I really liked his lecture on Lebanon. I got kind of turned on about Lebanon as a place I hadn't really ever heard of.

McKIBBEN

This would have been 1960 or so?

HALE

Right, '58, '59. So I was really kind of intrigued by him. I won't say attracted to him, not yet, but intrigued by him. He proctored the exams. And he used to tell this sexist little story that I made him stop telling, but for years when people would ask how we met, he would say, "Well, you know, when you're proctoring exams, it's really pretty boring, so what you try to do is put the pretty girls together with the high grades and see if you can—." Yeah, right? So Sandy, which was my name, my nickname and my name that's even on my B.A. diploma, so Sandy Dungan, got the highest grade on the first exam, I think by far, but he didn't know who I was, so in the next exam he tried to figure out who I might be. There were about, I don't know, seven girls left in the room. He guessed who Sandy Dungan was, and so he felt that that was probably a very good sign. In those years, unlike in these years, T.A.s and professors and so on would quite readily ask students out, but he didn't. We're very quick to add we did not date during the class, but he did talk to me during the second exam. I couldn't find a parking place. I'd run in, I was all flustered, I was like twenty minutes late for the exam, and all huffing and puffing and upset, and he said something calming. I forget. Then when he handed that exam back and it was like an A-minus or something like that, he said he was glad to see that it was just a smokescreen, you know, the fact that I wasn't ready for the exam. But anyway, he called me to go out. We saw each other at a basketball game, and he was with some girl who turned out to be his sister, and I was with some guy. I remember feeling slight jealousy. So then I knew something was stirring, anyway. So we went out and I found him kind of boring, actually. After about, I don't know three dates, four dates, I started avoiding him and not being home when he

called, and having my grandmother get the phone. My grandparents lived with us in La Puente. So he called me and kind of told me off and said he knew I was avoiding him, and why didn't I have the courage just to tell him that I didn't want to go out with him anymore. I was sort of turned on by the fact that he did that, but he called me again, I think three months later or something. His father died and I left him a little note. I don't know how I found out. So we started going out, and I was intrigued by the fact that he had all intention of going back to Lebanon to do this research, that he was in Middle East Studies, he had ideas I hadn't heard before, like socialism, or that I'd known were socialism. Well, the engagement story's kind of funny.

McKIBBEN

Well, I have to hear the funny engagement story.

HALE

Well, he came over to show me his slides of Lebanon. These were the exciting dates that he treated me to. But anyway, he brought a bottle of wine and we drank the bottle of wine between the two of us, so we were feeling pretty tipsy. So he was showing these slides. I don't even know whether he was narrating them in a very exciting way, but he was saying, "I'm going to do this. I'm going to go back and work on agricultural terraces in Lebanon." I this, I that. Then he slipped in a "we." I said, "Wait. What?" I said, "We?" He said, "Huh?" I said, "We? You said we." And he said, "Huh? I did? Oh, I did?" And he was obviously quite shocked that he said "we." Then he said, "I guess I'm asking you to marry me." Just like that, really cute.

McKIBBEN

Right there with a slide.

HALE

Yes. And then shortly after that, he drove home and he was so tipsy, he stopped the car and barfed, I guess, and so our big joke has been, "You proposed to me and then you go vomit?" There's more to the story, but you don't need to hear all that. So we got married almost a year later, and off to Khartoum [Sudan].

McKIBBEN

So you were still living at home when you guys were—

HALE

Living at home, working at the May Company. I was the employment supervisor by then, so at twenty-two I was over 650 people or something like that, and I could have had a career. "I could have been a contender." I could have had a career in retail personnel, which is where I was headed. But Gerry was also very important in kind of subverting that occupation, because the May Company was a strong anti-union store. In fact, when I interviewed people, I had been trained, before I was employment supervisor, I was trained to interview people, to screen out people who had even been members of a union, let alone union leaders or whatever, to keep the union out. So we were trained to be union busters, basically. I was uncomfortable about it, without Gerry hammering at me. He was a strong union person.

McKIBBEN

Because your father had been a union person.

HALE

Right. So he was sort of reminding me, you know, "Your father was in a union. This is terrible." So I started to lose a lot of respect for the job. It was a crummy job of low pay anyway, long hours, hard work, low pay, little prestige. So going off to Khartoum, he called me one day at the office and said, "How would you like to go to Khartoum?" And I said, "Great! Where is it?" That was the beginning of the thing that so completely changed my life. I wouldn't be able to describe it or explain it in a million years. Kind of incredible.

McKIBBEN

I'm even going to save that for our next session, because I know there's so much to talk about. Was this for his research?

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

His reason for going to Khartoum?

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

So to back you up a little bit, what did your family think of this guy who kept calling you?

HALE

Well, they thought he was a really nice, respectable fellow. After all, he was just finishing his M.A. at UCLA, was going to go on for his Ph.D. research, seemed like a really nice, gentle guy, and I guess they approved of him. My mother was completely shocked because she thought we were going to be bachelor girls or something. I guess she must have been single at the time. Of course, I knew she wouldn't be single for very long. We talked about how we were going to open up our own advertising agency and all that kind of thing. It was just kind of mother and daughter dreaming, I guess. Yes, I was still living at home. My mother and stepfather had separated, so that ended that phase of her life, and then she remarried shortly after that.

McKIBBEN

To talk about this dream of being bachelor girls together, had she kind of expected that you would marry? As you were getting older, was that something that was on the horizon for you?

HALE

No, I don't think we ever talked about it. I said I was never getting married. I was the feminist in my group of friends. People were getting engaged and all that, and I was going to have—no, they weren't getting engaged. I was going to have no part of getting married. They all talked about getting married and so on. I didn't. I thought marriage sucked. I mean, I'd seen some not very wonderful marriages in front of me.

McKIBBEN

Right.

HALE

So I was the first one in my group to get engaged. I got married at twenty-two, which is not young for that generation, but young enough, you know. Yes, I'd finished the university, but still nobody expected it. I was such a strong kind of feminist in my speech at that time, you know.

Who needs men? Marriages are terrible prisons. You know, lots of remarks like that.

McKIBBEN

And this was coming mainly from your own experience?

HALE

I think so, yes, and my mother's constantly bitter remarks, you know. She'd get married again, but not until she'd made several negative remarks about her last marriage and so on. So another set of mixed messages. On the one hand, she couldn't seem to not be married or have lovers, but then she would make all these anti-male comments, and I know that's where I picked it up. So, Mother was shocked, and I think the fact that her daughter, who was at that point really taking care of her emotionally, was leaving her was a bit difficult. I think that's why she got married again so quickly. She got married just after Gerry and I got married, I think. I'm not sure of that chronology.

McKIBBEN

You were married in L.A.?

HALE

Yes, in a funny marriage, yes. A funny wedding.

McKIBBEN

Well, if the wedding was funny, then come on.

HALE

Well, Gerry's an atheist, a confirmed and almost militant atheist, and I was an agnostic, and so clearly we did not want a religious ceremony, but our families seemed to want something a little traditional, so we looked for a marriage chapel. We found a nondenominational wedding chapel, and what I would have referred to in those years and would not use that language now, a "little old lady" ran the wedding chapel and we had a Unitarian [Universalist] minister who was going to marry us. I didn't want this, I didn't want that. We didn't want a big wedding by any means. Nobody could afford it, and I always thought it was such a waste of money. So we were all set to go, and two days or whatever it was, three days before the wedding, the Unitarian [Universalist] Church had passed some law that stopped their ministers performing weddings outside the church, and so this woman,

without asking us, slotted in this Baptist minister, and one of his requirements was that we be counseled before the—it must have been a week before, whatever—that we be counseled before the wedding. But, you know, we had our honeymoon plans. We just wanted to get it over with. That's how we were feeling about the actual wedding by that time, and we were doing this for our families. Otherwise we would have gotten the civil wedding, just done the civil thing. So we allowed him to counsel us. He asked if we had a religious conflict. We said no. [laughs] Very honest. Then he and Gerry talked about football or something ridiculous like that. Anyway, it must have been the day of the wedding, because then it was time and the woman called us and she said, "Everything's ready." I told the minister I did not want the "obey" clause in the wedding vows. "Oh," he said, "we don't use the 'obey' clause anymore. It's sort of a vague implication about 'obey under God' or something like that." I said, "Oh, I wasn't listening carefully enough." And I said, "And I don't want to kneel." "Okay," he said. "It's not a big deal." So we stand at the top of the wedding chapel, getting ready to go down to the altar or whatever, and she puts on this wedding record, which is the "Wedding March," and the record doesn't work. It screeches. So there were those funny moments. She had to come running up the—so we started to walk down the aisle. We started to walk down the aisle, and it was too soon. She hadn't put the record on. So she said, "No, no! Stop, stop!" So then we had to walk back up the aisle while she put on the record, and it didn't work, and then it worked, and all that. So it was all kind of funny. It was a very small group waiting for us down at the altar anyway, just our immediate families. So we walked down the aisle, he starts the wedding ceremony, and he says to me, "Do you promise to love, honor, and obey?" and I thought I would smack him. Gerry looked at me and I looked at him, and he thought, "Oh, God, she's going to blow the whistle on the whole thing." I'm sure he was thinking, "We've got reservations at the hotel up in Monterey." [laughs] I said, "I do." I let it go. And then he said something about, "Would you kneel?" And I glared at him. I mean, he just completely

betrayed us. So it's been our laugh, you know, in our marriage that Gerry tells people I promised to obey him. I cannot deny that I was unable to get that out of the wedding ceremony. I didn't want to wear a ring. Oh, okay, I would wear a ring if he wore a ring. Well, he didn't want to wear a ring. So we fussed about that.

McKIBBEN

Why?

HALE

He wasn't used to rings on his finger. It didn't have anything to do with commitment. But he finally agreed, so I agreed to wear a ring. We fussed over the name, whether or not I would change my name, but I hated the name Dungan, such an ugly name. I still wanted to be a writer, so I thought Hale was a very pretty name and that it went really well with Sondra. I was thinking I would change my name from Sandy to Sondra, back to Sondra. So I did change my name to his, and I've been somewhat sorry that I did that. But I had all these early feminist tendencies. This was 1960.

McKIBBEN

Was anyone talking about that?

HALE

No. The only people that were keeping their own names were professional people, you know, movie stars and people like that. Women definitely wore rings. Nobody talked about taking the "obey" clause out of the wedding ceremony. I don't know where I got it, even. I mean, I know where I got the "I don't want to bow."

McKIBBEN

Where did you get that?

HALE

From just not being religious. I wasn't going to bow to any religious figure, including God. So I was an early feminist in that regard, even though things sort of didn't work out as I had planned them. [laughs]

McKIBBEN

Early efforts.

HALE

Right.

McKIBBEN

And did Gerry have the same impulses, or was it you who kind of would say these things and he would say, "Oh, yeah, it's a good idea"?

HALE

Yes, the latter. He had to be taken along, but he's an enlightened person who wasn't very difficult to work with. I mean, probably during our engagement he would use expressions like, "I'm going to allow my wife to work," and I would say, "Allow?" And he would back away from the verb and never use it again, you know. So he was very good about—I mean, he had to be taught these things. Sorry to use that verb. But didn't we all in a way, you know?

McKIBBEN

Yes.

HALE

And I respect the fact that he developed a consciousness, a feminist consciousness. It was either that or our marriage was going to dissolve. I mean, there was not much choice about certain sorts of things. But we've always negotiated things pretty much, but some things were not negotiable and some things I was just not willing to compromise on.

McKIBBEN

What were some of those?

HALE

Well, working. There was no question about that. That was totally ridiculous. And as I pointed out to him, "You can't support me anyway." He didn't really have a job. He was a Ph.D. student. So he had a teaching job in Khartoum.

McKIBBEN

What were some of the things that you had to negotiate as you were setting up a household?

HALE

Well, I do want to tell you one thing we had to negotiate—not negotiate, but he found it very odd that I refused to be called Mrs. Gerry Hale, which is what people were called then, and that I made him insist with our credit card companies that I have my own separate card. They would not do it, under my name. And on the second card, that it

not say Mrs. Gerry Hale. I made him fight that battle, because I couldn't fight it. It wasn't my card. But he found these things—he would say things like, "Oh, Sondra, it's just words on a plastic card." And I'd say, "No, they're not words on a plastic card. I don't want us to have the credit card at all if they're not going to get it right." Anyway, there were those kinds of things. About negotiating early life, I don't know, but my feminism was growing and growing, and I'm not exactly sure why, because I'd married this enlightened fellow, you know. I didn't necessarily have to fight for every single thing, but I was fighting for a voice in the marriage, because he was the senior person, he was four and a half, almost five years older, and much more established. I was just this young thing who had a B.A. in English and had never traveled out of the country and was pretty naïve about a whole range of things, and he was the sophisticated one of us. He had lived a year in Lebanon and had traveled all around and so on. So it was very difficult to have a voice in social conversations, and that became even more pronounced after we went to Sudan and he was the expert on Sudan, even though I had lived there for three years also and had some knowledge of the place. So we struggled along those lines and later had some—I think Gerry might deny this, and if he hears this, he won't like it, but I think we had some professional competition between us, especially because we were working in the same area of Sudan, and cultural geography and anthropology weren't that far apart. So we were very close in some of our interests, and yet because he was a man, because he was senior, people would always look to him, and it was just like salt in my wounds. So I became kind of feisty and probably obnoxious in many kinds of situations. So that's not a direct answer to your question, but that was the most important one, was to work out a kind of intellectual egalitarianism, really.

McKIBBEN

[unclear] society.

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

Did you specifically try to do things differently than either what you had seen of marriage or what one hears of what marriage is like? Was that a conscious choice for you?

HALE

I suppose it was a conscious choice. I tried to build an egalitarian marriage from day one, even before we were married. I made certain rules about marriage. I didn't want to have kids. He didn't care. So the decision was, we won't have kids, at least for the first five years, and then we'll bring it up again and see how we feel about it. And we kept to that. So that was a little different, I think, and that was pretty much my rule. Neither one of us wanted to raise kids in a religion, so there was no problem there if we had kids, that is. We talked about how we wouldn't raise kids in religion. He had to do at least 50 percent of the housework and some of the cooking. In later years he'd done all the cooking and shopping and so on, and at least half of the childcare, if not more. But I began to establish that very early because I saw my mother work these really hard jobs, then come home and still be the one who put the meal on the table. So even though she was a part of making important decisions in family life, nonetheless, domestic labor was a big deal, and I hated domestic labor like I think most people do. So I tried really hard to—it took many years for me to reach a consciousness where I was still the one who would say, "The toilet needs to be cleaned," rather than having a situation where both of us might discover that the toilet needed to be cleaned and figure out who would do it, but trying not to be the domestic labor manager, so I was trying to subvert that to some extent. I started that really early. I started the division of labor really early, but the managerial role remained with me for a long time. I don't know if that answers your question. I think it probably does.

McKIBBEN

Was that new for Gerry, too, doing the domestic labor?

HALE

Yes, except he had lived alone in Lebanon for a year, so he learned to do his own washing and that sort of thing, so that was good for me that he'd been away a year, but his mother

was a very traditional woman in that regard, so she had done everything for the men in the family. They hadn't really had to do anything—she ironed his clothes and that sort of thing. I made it very clear from the start, "I'm not going to iron your clothes unless you also iron mine." So everything had to be a tradeoff. I don't even know where I learned this. Once again, this is pretty early, 1960. But I think I learned it from observing my mother and thinking it was unfair.

McKIBBEN

Did you ever get hassled socially for the way your marriage was arranged?

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

What happened?

HALE

People would just make remarks, tease Gerry and that sort of thing. I remember once in the geography coffee room—geography department used to have a coffee room, and he was on the faculty. I remember one of his colleagues said, right in front of me, "God, I'm glad I don't have an educated wife." That was probably about 1965.

McKIBBEN

Did anybody say anything when he said that?

HALE

No. I don't think it was an especially unusual remark. But people would say things to me like, "Don't you think you're giving Gerry a kind of hard time?" Or Gerry's sister might make a comment to me about, "You know, he does so much domestic labor, I don't know how he can get his work done." So there was a little bit of family pressure from his family. I think even my mother probably thought I picked on him a bit. People saw it as my picking on him, so there were jokes, jabs, things of that sort. But my friends, no, I think by that time I was surrounding myself with people who were enlightened about various political issues.

McKIBBEN

Was your socialist consciousness starting to form at this point? Were you starting to make connections in that way?

HALE

Yes, I was starting to make connections, but I don't think they were very fully formed. It was Sudan that made the big difference, just the whole experience of meeting my first socialist, really first communist, seeing what colonialism was like, seeing poverty like I never could have imagined. But we're going to go into that next time.

McKIBBEN

This sounds like a good place to leave it for today. [End of May 8, 2011 interview]

1.2. Session Two
March 28, 2011

McKIBBEN

Thank you for bearing with me during the technical difficulty. So in our last session we talked about your early life through your college years at the University of Omaha and UCLA [University of California at Los Angeles], and I think we got up until the time that you married Gerry [Hale], and talked a little bit about that. So we left it just at the point where you were about to go to Sudan, so maybe we could start off by you telling me how you came to have that opportunity of going to Sudan.

HALE

Well, Gerry was still a graduate student in the geography department at UCLA, and he was trying to get off to Lebanon to do his dissertation field work on agricultural terraces. I think I joked last time about how he soon lost interest in agricultural terraces and became a Marxist geographer, but that's a slight tangent. But it didn't look as if the Lebanese job was going to pan out that he thought might materialize, so he started to look for other places where there were agricultural terraces where we might be interested in going. He'd been trained in Middle East Studies primarily, but there was a possibility at the University of Addis Ababa, and there are wonderful terraces in Ethiopia, and then a possibility at the University of Khartoum in Sudan, where there are terraces in the Jabal Marrah mountain range of Darfur, a

word that has become familiar to most people who read newspapers, at least. UCLA and the University of Khartoum had an exchange program, and so he was sent on this exchange program where the Sudanese government would send students here for their Ph.D.s and UCLA would send university professors to teach at the University of Khartoum. But Gerry was considered a precocious student, and even though he had just finished his M.A. and was just starting on his Ph.D., he was sent to teach at the University of Khartoum. So that's how we happened to go to Sudan. It was originally for a nine-month academic year, and I think he was going to stay over the summer or something like that and do his field work. I just was completely smitten with the place in every conceivable way and started lobbying for a second year, and then we did stay a second year. Then I began to lobby for a third. We stayed a third. I think I said this on the last tape, but I'm not sure, that when I started lobbying for the fourth year, he put his foot down and said that he had to go back and finish his Ph.D., take his language and take his exams, and that he couldn't do that in Khartoum. So I knew at that moment that I had to choose between Gerry and Sudan, but I also thought, "Well, what I will do, because I have to come back, I just have to, I'll choose a field of study that will send me back to Sudan." So I won't go through the details of how I happened to know about African Studies at UCLA, but that seemed like a pretty good thing to do, since I didn't exactly know what discipline I wanted. My B.A. was in English literature, and so it was quite a shift for me to be interested in what appeared to be the social sciences of Sudan, or social science studies of Sudan. Sorry. We're skipping over my three years in Sudan, I guess.

McKIBBEN

Oh, believe me, we'll touch on that. I just wanted to hear how that opportunity—

HALE

That's how the opportunity—

McKIBBEN

—arose for you.

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

Were you familiar at all with Sudan before you went there? Did you know much about it?

HALE

Absolutely not.

McKIBBEN

No?

HALE

Nothing, no Arabic, no knowledge of Muslim culture. I knew nothing about Islam and didn't even know where Sudan was.

McKIBBEN

So when you came to that decision that you were going to go—because it was only a few months, right, is that right, between the time you got the opportunity and the time you landed there?

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

What did you think you were going to find? What expectations did you have?

HALE

Well, I guess I thought I was going to find some exotic place. I wasn't any more enlightened than that. I mean, I knew that they were African or Middle Eastern. I started reading right away, so I found out right away that they were—we could use lots of terminology, but Islamicized Africans, in the north, at least, and that there were Africans in the south. That's the way the reading presented it, Africans in the south, Arabs in the north. Gerry had already really interested me in Arab culture, so I was completely turned on by the idea. Then when I began reading about Islam—I'm purposely using this verb because this is where my mentality was at the time—I was intrigued with Islam. I was intrigued with the way it was described in the literature as this sort of romantic, solitary person out in the desert communing with Allah, and I became intrigued with what was presented to me in the literature as a very egalitarian religion that accepted anyone as a convert, and very simply. You just say, "I'm a Muslim,"

and you begin to engage in the five pillars of Islam and you're a Muslim as simple as that, and I thought that was incredible, especially since I had just been rejected by my Jewish friends. [laughs]

McKIBBEN

A much more complex process.

HALE

So that's a little bit of what I knew and what I didn't know. Then we met a Canadian professor here at UCLA who was visiting, who had been to Sudan, had been there, stayed there for a year or two, an economist, and he just really jerked us around in terms of the information that he was giving us. He was teasing me, basically, he saw this innocent. I said something about—he talked about theft a lot. I said, "Don't people lock their doors?" And he said, "What doors?" I mean, things like that. I mean, it was completely ridiculous, in fact, racist. I'll name him. Peter McLaughlin. So he told us many fallacious sorts of things, but Gerry offset a lot of that and kept giving me things to read. I don't even remember what some of those things were. He probably would cringe if either one of us remembered what those early readings were on Sudan. I probably read a guidebook. I probably read somebody's high school geography introduction to Sudan, things of that sort. But what did I expect? I don't know, but whatever I expected was met with ten times over in terms of my excitement, anticipation, and immediate love for the place, even though we got off the plane at something like eight or nine o'clock at night and this oven blast came into my face and I thought, "Oh, my god, so this is what heat is." We were met by the chair[person] of the Geography Department. This is very early in the Sudanization process, so Sudanese were moving in to take positions that had been held by the British. So I met my very first Sudanese at the airport. Then we were taken to the Grand Hotel, which was grand in the British sense of the word. We were going to stay there for two weeks until our house was ready. We were treated very, very well by special people. Remember that I'm this working-class kid who had never traveled, didn't know the world at all, had

never been treated like some special person except by my mother. Becoming the center of attraction in all kinds of ways was an interesting experience. I can tell you why that happened.

HALE

Please do.

McKIBBEN

Well, the Sudanese still had a colonial mentality. Anyone who was white was special. I was special because I was young and cute and I played tennis, and I was active in the local repertory company. So I was in plays, played tennis. I was a teacher at Unity High School for Girls and at the University [of Khartoum] as a tutor, and I was very friendly and sort of—oh, they were intrigued that someone from Hollywood had come to visit them. I just had all kinds of things that were apparently quite winning. I had all kinds of characteristics that were quite winning to them. I remembered names very easily, even though I didn't speak Arabic yet, and never did speak it very well, by the way, one of the things that's been most embarrassing to me about Sudan Studies, but that's another issue. But I was just very active and very friendly and very social, and I wanted to get to know everybody. I got taken under people's wings, I guess, in ways that I didn't understand. I didn't understand anything that was going on at that time. I didn't know that because of this kind of mentality that white people were somehow or other special, that families were kind of fighting over ownership of me, and I didn't know the political divisions in the society. I didn't know the family and histories of family animosities. I didn't understand completely the relationship between Christians and Muslims. There were just so many things I didn't understand that, in retrospect, maybe even two years later, I began to reveal to myself, that I was almost like this pawn, this prestigious pawn, and was used by people who wanted to get at other people and that kind of thing.

McKIBBEN

That's like a prize.

HALE

A prize, yes, yes. So when I looked at that in retrospect much later, I mean, you know because you've had some exposure to the fact that I'm very self-critical about, well, nearly everything, but I'm very self-critical about racism and always suspicious of myself. So I was very suspicious about why I loved Sudan and why people seemed to love me, and I decided that there was racism involved from me, that I was enjoying a colonial life and didn't even realize it in all kinds of ways. I mean, after all, playing lawn tennis and then tinkling our lemonade afterwards and going out for dinner that night in somebody's garden and tinkling our gin and tonics and being served by some waiter with a cummerbund and a turban, Sudanese waiter, obviously, just didn't strike me, at first, as anything other than exotic, probably, but I began to understand colonialism fairly quickly and the particular brand of British racism.

McKIBBEN

Were you spending a lot of your time with British ex-colonials or with Sudanese or kind of a mixture?

HALE

Well, for whatever reason, maybe Gerry was an influence in this area, I decided early on not to have anything much to do with the British or the Americans, certainly not the Americans, and I started building a Sudanese community, which was the most valuable thing I ever did there for me. But the British were just there. They were in your face. They were our next-door neighbor. They were still at the University of Khartoum in various important faculty positions and administrative positions. They owned the major companies. They were there and so they couldn't be avoided, at least for a while. And the Americans, well, the Americans discover you're there, you're the new American in town, so we had the initial attempt to embrace us, and we broke away from almost all of that within three months, I would say, so that my whole community consisted of Sudanese. It wasn't until late in our stay in Sudan, our fourth visit or whatever it was, in '75 that I allowed myself actually to have some close American friends and British friends and other expatriates and so on, non-European expatriates. But at the beginning,

all of my friends were Sudanese, and the friendships I started there, my three best friends and then a fourth one, could be added to that later, are still my friends, so we've known each other for fifty years.

McKIBBEN

How did you go about building that community?

HALE

Well, I was a schoolteacher, and Sudanese were the most hospitable people in the world then, I swear, and so I always had to be taken home by my students to meet their families and so on. By the way, I was only twenty-three, and some of my students were nineteen. They were hiding their ages, but a few of them might have been as old as twenty. So I was forming friendships with my students. So there were the students and then the students' parents, and then I met a lot of people through tennis and many other ways. But it was just a proliferating network. It wasn't difficult to get to know Sudanese at all. I was introduced to the Sudanese artistic community, which became really important to me, mainly painters, but also musicians and people in other forms of art, music. That was an important component, and it developed more in later years, actually. We met people at the university through Gerry and my own teaching at the university. I didn't do very well at Unity High School for Girls with the other teachers. They were jealous of me and how popular I was with the students, and there's no better way to get on the wrong side of your colleagues than to be a "popular" teacher.

McKIBBEN

Were they Sudanese faculty or expats [expatriates]?

HALE

Mainly expats, one Sudanese, one Indian Muslim, and all the rest mainly European.

McKIBBEN

How did you end up getting these positions?

HALE

Well, I had originally wanted to get my M.A. in English at the University of Khartoum, where the language of instruction is English, but when I went to find out from the head of the

English Department if I could enroll in the English M.A., he grabbed me instead for tutoring English. You know, it's tutoring in the British sense, so it's like a lecturer or instructor over here. So I tutored in English, and then I forget how I got the—someone told Gerry that there was an opening for an English Mistress at Unity High School for Girls, which was an elite high school that was very international. It was over half Sudanese, but one of the international schools, language of instruction in English, so they needed somebody to be the Fifth Form English Mistress, so that's what I became. Then I began to teach other forms. Fifth Form, these were the people, it was explained to me, that were matriculating, and I did not know what the word "matriculate" meant.

McKIBBEN

So this was like their college-prep class, kind of?

HALE

Their preparation for the Sudan School Certificate Exam, which had been the Oxford School Certificate Exam, Sudanized. So, basically, I had to teach these girls a pretty set syllabus, which drove me crazy, and I deviated from it as much as I possibly could.

McKIBBEN

How?

HALE

Well, I would offer them novels that hadn't been offered before, were on that actual list of those that could be accepted, but not really the ones that were generally taught, for example, The Great Gatsby. So it was fun to teach an American novel. Most of the British faculty would choose British novels, obviously, as you would expect. But I got in trouble at Unity High School for Girls because of my egalitarian stuff. Let's just put it that way. I didn't draw distinctions between me and them. I was very respectful of Sudanese. British were very disrespectful, I thought. The students liked me. I used to tutor them in my free hours. I would give them free tutorials at school. The British Headmistress, after two and a half years of this, called me into her office. Oh, and I used to take them on field trips,

unheard of there. I'd take them off to the Goethe Institute to see an art exhibit or to the American Library to see a film or whatever. So I would take seven or eight students at a time. Gerry would take one or two people on the Vespa motor scooter, and I would get in a taxi and take another four or five students. Some of them would have drivers who would drive them to wherever it was, but we would sometimes take as many as ten students to some event, and the school did not like it. So anyway, the Headmistress gave me a choice. "Either stop this stuff or resign, or I'll have to fire you," I think she said, or, "Sack you." So I resigned. Maybe she didn't even threaten to sack me, but I thought that it was implied, at least. So I resigned, and resigned in protest, actually. I didn't tell any of the students that I was leaving, and when I didn't show up for class on Monday, word got out that I wasn't going to come back, and the students demonstrated and shut down the school.

McKIBBEN

Really? What did they do?

HALE

They sat down in the hall, so when it was prayer time, which was every morning, instead of praying, standing up and praying, they sat down and refused to move, and when the teachers tried to move them, force them out, the students refused. Anyway, it was a big, big, big mess, and I think I walked in on the mess. I forget why. I think I had to come back and get some materials or whatever. So I did what I could to try to get them to settle down and to go to class, but by that time it was completely out of control, and it went on the next day. The Ministry of Education heard about it and called me in to find out what was up because, unfortunately for the school, one of the daughters, the daughter of the Minister of Education, was one of my students, one of my devoted students. So she told her father that they had sacked me for the fact that I was the only teacher who respected them and liked them and paid attention to them and gave them special treatment of one kind or another, etc., etc. So the Minister of Education was ready to shut down the school, strange as it may seem, but I didn't know—

see, this was another situation where I didn't know that the school, being basically a British missionary school originally, was always marginal in terms of whether or not the Minister of Education would allow them to stay in Sudan. So this was a way to get at them and a way, possibly, to kick them out of Sudan. I began to realize, to my great horror, that this was bigger than me and that this was bigger than just my students being really upset that I had left, so I tried to smooth it over. They wanted me to sign a complaint, and I refused to sign the complaint.

McKIBBEN

The Ministry of Education wanted you to?

HALE

Right. So things quieted down a bit, but you can imagine how much those teachers at Unity High School for Girls loved me after that.

McKIBBEN

Yes.

HALE

The Headmistress loved me [sarcasm]. But I really didn't like the British school system and I certainly didn't like the disrespect for students. This was a time when, in Britain, the school system was about as non-egalitarian as you could possibly be. I forget now what—students at the age of eleven had to sit for an exam that was going to determine the rest of their lives. They've since done away with those exams, not enough. There's still an enormous amount of class division in Britain and so on. So Unity High School really did reflect these class biases and so on. The administration of Unity High School was very impressed with the status of some of their students and catered to them. We had the elite kids in the school at that time. Anyway, I'm sure you want to move on to something else.

McKIBBEN

You mentioned that you didn't perceive the politics that were happening around you, and that's one example, I guess. What were some of the things that were going on that you maybe weren't aware of, and how did you start to become aware of them? I'm thinking about some of these classes and

race relations and the colonial experience coming out from under that.

HALE

Well, one of the things that—one of the older students in class, in my class, I think she failed her School Certificate exam three times. It wasn't hard to do. It was a very hard exam. So that by the time I met her, she was probably nearing twenty. She was a Christian, and she took me under her wing and introduced me to a whole bunch of the Christian community, elite Christian community, I would add. She decided she was going to tell me all about Khartoum and Sudan and so on. So for the first several months I was there, I was having a portrait of Khartoum and people in Khartoum and so on drawn for me by somebody else. I figured out later that this was a very skewed portrait, to say the least, an idiosyncratic and skewed portrait of the place, and so I broke out of this milieu that she'd put me in, to some extent. I don't mean by that I broke off relations with Christians, because I continued to have close relations with Christians, but I began to seek out more Muslim students, more Muslim friends, and so on, because to me, that really represented more what Sudan was about than this Christian community, many of whom had come from Egypt, were either Coptic or originally Coptic and were, by then, Protestants.

McKIBBEN

Was the Christian community in Khartoum at that time a part of the elite because of the British or were they favored over Muslims?

HALE

Yes, of course. So it took me a while to figure that out. It also took me a while to figure out that there were Arabs and then there were Nubians, and they looked alike to me. Since they were both Muslim and both spoke Arabic and so on, I could see no difference whatsoever. It wasn't until my second year there that a Nubian said in my presence, "I'm thankful for one thing in my life: thank god I'm not an Arab." I thought, "Whoa, what are you?" I eventually wrote my dissertation on Nubians, but I had no idea that there was such a different ethnic group that was in a very dominant

position as well. I mean, they absolutely dominated the University of Khartoum. They were only at 2 percent or 5 percent, at the most, in the population, and yet they were dominating intellectual posts. They were patronized by the British. Nubians are in northern Sudan and southern Egypt, and when the British were marching up the Nile to "re-conquer" Sudan, they took the Nubians with them as their servants, as whatever, various kinds of positions. So by the time the British had, again in quotes, "re-conquered" Sudan—this was at the turn of the century—by that time, Nubians were already in a much more advantageous position than the Arabs of northern Sudan who had, through the uprising of the Mahdi, had actually controlled Sudan and killed a number of British soldiers and so on, and set up their own government and were therefore constantly a threat to the British all the time they were there. So the British used divide-and-rule tactics, not only separating north from south—and we're certainly seeing the repercussions of that now—northern and southern Sudan and administering it differently and treating the two areas differently, they did the same with Nubians and Arabs. But it took me a while to figure out these things. These were not things that were written and mostly appeared in the literature that I had exposure to. But you asked me what were some of the other things that I was able to figure out kind of after the fact. I've told you two or three or four, but there were so many. One of the things was that I began to understand colonialism and the depth of the impact of colonialism, how British these elite Sudanese were and how they carried over that British racism and patriarchy, patriarchal ideas and so on, and imposed them on other Sudanese. I also began to understand a little bit about what colonialism did to gender relations—you've heard me talk about this in class, but gender relations, class relations, you name it. So I began to realize what an insidious process it was. It was more than just taking over someone else's land and administering it as your own. I mean, we know all that now, but I was just finding that out.

McKIBBEN

Do you remember some moments when that became clear to you in different ways?

HALE

I'd probably have to think about it more. An awful lot was symbolized by the professor of medicine at the University of Khartoum who was our next-door neighbor. We learned a lot from him. He was one of the biggest racists I met in my time in Sudan.

McKIBBEN

This was your British neighbor?

HALE

Yes. He did things for us and he invited us over for dinner and all that kind of thing, but through him, I really learned what the British really thought of the Sudanese, even these few Sudanese with Ph.D.'s who were members of the elite. They were never quite up to par. I mean, the native can't quite imitate properly, as Homi Bhabha has said, and I could see that. I could see the Sudanese aping, mimicking, sorry, I guess, is the Homi Bhabha word. I could see, quote, the natives mimicking the British, but not quite doing it right, and the British laughing at them. Well, there were lots of things, the rules at the Sudan Club, which was a British club, the rules about who could go in the swimming pool and who couldn't. I didn't tell you anything about that.

McKIBBEN

What were the rules about the Sudan Club?

HALE

Well, the Sudan Club had choice land along the Nile, beautiful, beautiful club with high palm trees and tropical architecture, etc., quite a few tennis courts and a beautiful swimming pool. The Sudanese could come as guests. They couldn't be members. I mean, this was independence. By then, Sudanese were independent, or Sudan, sorry, was independent. They could come as guests, but they couldn't go in the pool.

McKIBBEN

Wow.

HALE

In fact, in order to cover the racism, the British had a rule that you had to hold a British passport to go in the pool.

McKIBBEN

Did they check?

HALE

Well, no, but they pretty much knew. But I had these—I can't call them friends, but the head of the Zoology Department was also a neighbor, and he and his wife, British, invited me to the—I think Gerry must have been in Darfur doing some research. They invited me to lunch and a swim in the pool, and I said, "I can't go in the pool." And they said, "What?" And I said, "No, I'm not allowed in the pool." "Oh, what do you mean? This is totally ridiculous." We had this exchange that went on for some time, which they said, "We'll be very insulted if you don't come to join us in the swimming pool." So I said, "Oh, all right." So I was in the pool, and I knew not to talk because I knew my accent would reveal me, whatever, so I wasn't talking. But a Sudanese, poor Sudanese waiter, approached my host and said, "Is the madam British?" and just fell short of saying, "She has to get out of the pool." But we had laughs about how I integrated the Sudan Club pool and so on, but, still, this was just enormous racism that I couldn't overlook, as I said, the way that the British talked about the Sudanese, like they never could quite do it right. "When we British leave, the Department of Medicine's going to fall apart. Oh, yes, yes, these are people we trained in medicine. Yes, yes, they're British-trained, but, you know, they do their best." I mean, it was just so patronizing. When I think about it now, I get really angry, angry that I didn't know enough. I didn't have enough vocabulary, I didn't know enough, and so on, to answer back. I would say kind of liberal things like, "Oh, I'm sure that they must be just the same as any other doctor." I would say things like that, but it wasn't very effective, and I really needed to tell those British—I mean, not that it would have done any good, but it would have been better for my soul years later to know that I talked back to them.

McKIBBEN

Was that just where you were at that point, or did you kind of wrestle with feeling like you didn't have the words? Were you aware of that?

HALE

No, I was aware that I didn't know how to deal with those very well-educated British who'd been in Sudan for many years and therefore, quote, "knew" Sudan a lot better than I did. That's what they would say sometimes when I would object. They'd say, "Oh, you just got here. You don't know. You just wait. They'll steal you blind. They'll manipulate you. They're nice to your face, but they'll stab you in the back," all kinds of things like that, as if all Sudanese were thieves. And I never really told Sudanese about these exchanges in those early years. It just seemed like a humiliating thing, and that's what it was. That's what colonialism is, this constant humiliation, and it doesn't go away after independence. Franz Fanon was so right in terms of the kinds of things he said about the French colonial rule of Algeria or any colonialism. You might remember that in The Wretched of the Earth, I think it is, or maybe it's Black Skin, White Masks, but where Fanon suggests that there is no way that the Algerians can be free of French colonial rule except to rise up and kill every single Frenchman. For years afterwards, we tried to figure out, after Fanon was dead, was he being literal or was he being metaphorical, because it was so extreme, and yet I really do understand it. You had to kill the Frenchman inside of you, and that's what the Sudanese were struggling with at that moment we arrived in Sudan. So that was very exciting in a particularly sad way, but very elevating to my consciousness to find that those forms of racism and the damage of colonialism, and I also met my very first communists.

McKIBBEN

So tell me about meeting your first communists.

HALE

Well, I actually don't remember who the first one was because they didn't always introduce themselves as, "Hi, I'm Mohammad, the communist," but I just got to know in terms of the way that they argued particular things and so on.

Then I, at some point early on, met the Secretary General of the Sudanese Communist Party, who later on became one of my heroes and also later on was executed by the Sudanese government.

McKIBBEN

What was his name?

HALE

Abdel Khaliq Mahjoub. He was considered one of the really important communists in the Middle East and Africa at that time.

McKIBBEN

How did you meet him?

HALE

At a social gathering. Then I had conversations with him afterwards. So I've quoted him in my book and so on. Anyway, so I met from the top honcho down to working-class people, the Union Movement, especially the railway workers union which was very strong. The Communist Party was very strong at that time and grew in strength.

McKIBBEN

It was open? It was legal?

HALE

No. That's why people didn't come up to me and say, "Hi, I'm Mohammad. I'm a communist," but you got to know it. Sometimes they'd use the word "socialist." But I remember actually the first one. I recall now. He was married to an American, African American. He was arguing about development. He was arguing that USAID [United States Agency for International Development] should give aid without strings attached. And everyone in the room—and he was outnumbered—everyone in the room was incredulous, to give aid with no strings attached. He was arguing a Marxist line and I recognized it. That was the first recognition of the notion of controlling the means of production, and that was very, very exciting to me. But then I began to read criticisms of Marxist-Leninist forms of communism in some of these developing countries, and the fact that the peasants got completely overlooked, and they weren't encouraging peasant revolts, but the Communist Movement in the Third

World stayed at the level, really, of the urban intelligentsia, with some union involvement. So once I educated myself a bit on the Left, I started arguing a Maoist line with Marxist-Leninists, which was an education in and of itself. It was an incredible education to hear Marxist-Leninists justify why they were rejecting Maoism. Marx called the peasants a sack of potatoes, and that was pretty much what the Sudanese communists thought about the peasants. I mean, they weren't that mean in their description, but said that the peasants really couldn't be organized, but we communists can, in fact, organize a vanguard of the workers. Anyway, so I was introduced to communism. Even though Gerry had told me he was a socialist early on in our dating relationship, I didn't even fully understand what that was, and, besides, being a communist in a third-world country was very, very different from being one of those old U.S. Bolsheviks who was sitting around talking about the revolution. So I learned about communism. I learned about colonialism and colonial forms of racism. I met the strongest women that I've ever met in my life. What an incredible experience.

McKIBBEN

So tell me about them.

HALE

I wouldn't know where to start, honestly, because that has really dominated my life and much of my thinking. I learned my feminism in Sudan. A Sudanese said to me maybe ten years ago, "Oh, I find that patronizing," she said. And I said, "No, it's really true." We hardly had any women doctors here when I left the [United] States in '61, not very many. There were women doctors all over the place in Sudan. We know that's not necessarily an index, because there were lots of women doctors in Russia, in Soviet Union as well, and Soviet women were hardly emancipated. But Sudanese would do things that we would never have done here at that time. For example, they'd have a baby to fulfill their obligation to motherhood and to the society and all that sort of thing, plunk the baby down with Grandma, and go off for five or six years to get their degrees in Britain or somewhere else in Europe. It was quite common. Women were out in the

workforce not in large numbers, but they were, and often in pretty high positions. I don't want to exaggerate this, but the individual women that I met who were of this ilk, accomplished professionals, were really the strongest women I've met in their attitudes and all kinds of things.

McKIBBEN

So when you say you learned your feminism from Sudanese women, what do you mean by that? What did you learn from them?

HALE

Well, here in the [United] States, again at that time and even later, we felt we had to convince ourselves and convince the men in our lives and others, other men, that is, that we were just as good as they were. There was no doubt in the minds of these Sudanese women. That wasn't a question. The question was really how to go about getting the kinds of equity that they wanted. So it seemed to me that there wasn't the low self-esteem that women here had. So that was an eye-opener, to say the least. Some women that I met were reading Simone de Beauvoir, and I hadn't read Simone de Beauvoir. I don't think that her work was very widespread here in 1961—this would have been a little later, because that had to be translated and all that to reach some of these people. They were reading Nawal El Saadawi, On Women and Sex, and that was a very progressive piece of work, and they were talking about it. By then, it was probably the early seventies. So some of that thinking was percolating then in the sixties. There was a very strong Sudanese Women's Union. Granted, it was attached to the Sudanese Communist Party, so in a sense it was kind of what I used to call "The Wing of the Patriarch." That's the title of one of my articles. So even though it was an affiliate of the Communist Party and was initially formed, in fact, by the men of the party who pushed their women forward and so on, nonetheless, it was a very, very strong women's union that at one time boasted maybe 15,000 members. We had nothing like that at the same time here. Sudanese women got the vote in '65. There were many women in Europe who didn't have the vote. They pushed for and got maternity

leave, a very generous maternity leave, long before we did. They got time out to nurse babies in the middle of the day.

McKIBBEN

Oh, wow. We still don't have that.

HALE

We don't have that. Probably many other things that I've forgotten. But when I used to give these public talks on Sudan and so on and I would name these things and say that Sudanese women were ahead of us, Americans just do not believe that. I mean, part of that's our terrible arrogance about how we're the leaders of women of the world. But they would always counter with, "Yes, but aren't they circumcised?" And that was supposed to just cause me to collapse right there on the podium. I had a few words about that, too, however. All these things I've just said about women and how strong they were and how they had a women's union, etc., etc., I remember when I first found out about female circumcision. I was almost virtually traumatized. I'd been teaching at Unity High School for Girls by then probably almost a year before I think the same dastardly professor of medicine, our next-door neighbor, said something about female circumcision. I said, "What?" And he said, "Oh, didn't you know?" Loved playing with me. And I said, "No." And he said, "Oh, yes. All the girls in Sudan are circumcised," and described the operation a bit. And I said, "Well, not the Christians." "Oh, yes, the Christians." "Well, not the Jews." "Oh, yes, the Jews." "Not the southerners." "Oh, yes, the southerners. Every single woman in Sudan," blah, blah, which wasn't true, by the way, but it was pretty ubiquitous. I went to school to teach that next day and I could hardly look at my students, I was so traumatized. I remember that day very, very clearly, not being able to look at them.

McKIBBEN

What did you do with that at the same time you're having this experience and meeting all these other women?

HALE

Well, Sudan's been filled with contradictions for me, you know, oppressive governments, brave people who stood up

to tanks, and two civilian overthrows of the military. How do you weigh that against some of these other things like dictatorships, military takeovers, female circumcision, treating the South like slaves? I mean, there are just enormous contradictions, and that's one of the things that keeps me interested in the place. I've taken some of those contradictions and sort of, in a way, kind of tested them here. Please don't ask me for any example right now, but I have, and I've noticed some of the same kinds of contradictions we can say about Americans, if I can use that term, North Americans, that we can be, on the one hand, these wonderful egalitarian creatures, friendly, warm, welcoming, and on the other hand, we can just as soon kill people who step over the border. You and I could name a thousand, ten thousand such contradictions in American society, and we see the same in Sudan. They may be slightly different, context might be slightly different, but the contradictory processes and principles are still there. Long-winded sentence. Sorry.

McKIBBEN

Is there anything else that you really liked about Sudan?

HALE

Liked?

McKIBBEN

Loved about Sudan? You light up every time you say the word "Sudan," so I want to make sure and let you talk about it as much as you want.

HALE

Well, I just loved the personal interactions and the warmth and the welcoming and so on. But talk about contradictions. Okay, that warmth and welcoming and taking care of each other and communal attitudes and so on also leads to the fact that when somebody is sick and in terrible pain and so on in the hospital, you get thirty-five people cramming into the room to say, "Salaamtik, "or, "Salaamtak." I was always appalled, absolutely appalled at that, that people could not recognize the person needed rest, the person needed not to have germs floating all over the room, didn't need that noise

and all that. Sudanese wouldn't think of not going to the hospital when a friend is sick. It's unheard of.

McKIBBEN

Were you ever ill while you were there?

HALE

Fortunately, I was never hospitalized while I was there. [laughs] I know I would have hated it, but I would have loved the fact that sixty people might have shown up to give me their greetings and get-wells and so on. Well, I hated the fact that these were also obligatory visitation things, funerals, births, someone returning home from vacation or from getting their degree in Britain. I mean, there are just constant visitations. I didn't suffer from it too much because I was let off the hook as a foreigner, so unless I really knew the person well, I could get out of going. But I just see people run ragged going to all these social obligations. But on the other hand, it's something I also loved. Things I didn't like, I could name a thousand of them. One is that Sudanese would never say no to your face or really what they were really thinking, so I didn't like that. You know, I'm pretty blunt, outspoken, and I never got over that, even in those years in Sudan. I never was able to say a nuanced "no." But I still haven't told you what I liked.

McKIBBEN

Well, I mean, it's okay. You don't have to come up with a list. I was wondering, too, in the women's organizing that you talked about, did you learn anything tactically about organizing? You talked about the issues and the culture.

HALE

Well, again, it's just a different context. For example, this women's organization that I'm talking about, the Sudanese Women's Union, organized in ways that we here in a slightly later time period might have considered not radical enough because women were still being kept somehow or other in their domestic position. Or we might have viewed it as patronizing towards women or whatever, an example. Sudanese Women's Union tried to organize while teaching literacy, so they would offer these literacy courses, but they would use the moment to indoctrinate, basically. Or they

would do it in sewing classes. So they would offer sewing classes or hygiene classes for women, and then use that for indoctrination. I think most socialist feminists here would find that to be a very unacceptable way of organizing. The Sudanese Women's Union members really believed in getting women out, no matter what, get them there, and then do something with them, but get them there. So if offering sewing classes or cooking classes or whatever would do it, then that would be a mode of organizing. I don't think we ever organized in that way.

McKIBBEN

Did you have that opinion of the organizing at the time?

HALE

Yes, I thought it was really old-fashioned, even though this is pre-feminist for me. Nonetheless, I thought that that was very patronizing and it was keeping women in their domestic roles and all that sort of thing. Other organizing tactics, well, I didn't appreciate that almost every women's organization in Sudan at that time was a wing of some party, an auxiliary. You've heard me talk about that also in class, about so many revolutionary movements have women as just sort of help-mates behind the male cadre, and I saw the same process in Sudan, but I saw people trying to break out of it, whereas I might have taken it for granted here to some extent that of course there would be these women's auxiliaries. We saw that in the Union Movement here, that there were always women's auxiliaries. I think it was from Sudanese that I learned, not from the head of the Women's Union, but from other Sudanese members of the Women's Union, I learned that they were trying to break out of that. So there were these conflicts between economic emancipation and social emancipation, if you will. Then there were people who tried to combine them. So I was learning. I mean, these were all relatively new ideas that I then took into 1970s U.S. and had a little trouble with aligning my ideas with 1970s feminists who were much more into their sexuality and treating men as the enemy, really, I can't say it in any other more graceful way, but facing patriarchy, confronting patriarchy on a day-to-day basis. Sudanese women did not seem to be

confronting patriarchy on an everyday basis, and sexuality seemed really unimportant to them in the broad scheme of things. For one thing, there was a great amount of homoeroticism anyway. You didn't have to give it a name. Whether this was full-out sexual activity was not really relevant because it was so erotic. I don't know how much of this I want recorded, but it seemed to me that of the lesbians that I met—I'm giving it a name that was not given in Sudan. There was definitely rejection of the term with the accusation, "You Americans, you always have to have a name for something, and once there's a label, then you feel you have to act on that label. The label becomes a human category to you," etc., etc. But now I've lost—I went off on that tangent. I lost my train of thought.

McKIBBEN

You were talking about how women weren't—

HALE

How sexuality was not a significant thing. They didn't say it to me, but I observed the homoeroticism. People were just very physical with each, very intimate with each other, men with men, women with women, and not a big deal was made of it. It's almost like the difference between European cinema, when it comes to sex, and North American cinema. We make a big deal of it, but the French, just do it. That's how I felt about Sudanese. But the minute the concept of gayness or lesbianism or whatever was introduced in Sudan, then it became something hidden, closeted, condemned, dangerous.

McKIBBEN

Interesting. So the first trip you were there for three years, right, till about '63, '64-ish?

HALE

Sixty-four.

McKIBBEN

Then you came back and Gerry continued with his Ph.D., right?

HALE

He came back and finished his Ph.D., and then we went back to Sudan in 1966 because he had a consultant job, which he

was forever ashamed of afterwards. But he worked for Lockheed International in some sort of development project, so we were there for six months.

McKIBBEN

He went back and forth several times, right?

HALE

Yes. Then I went back by myself ’71 to ’72 to do my field work, and then he and I returned and I continued some field work between ’73 and ’75. Then he never went back again after ’75. I went back in ’81, ’88. Then I boycotted the place for many years.

McKIBBEN

Why boycott?

HALE

The Islamist government. Well, first I was told it was dangerous for me to go back because I was on lots of lists. I never knew whether that was just Sudanese who were in exile feeling so guilty that they were in exile from the government and not staying there and fighting it, which was silly because people were just rounded up and put in prison and tortured and all sorts of awful things. But I never knew whether it was that they were feeling guilty that they hadn’t stayed, and therefore they were telling me, “Oh, you’d better not go because you’re on a list and they’ll get you,” and that sort of thing. But it was only the first year or two that that was the reason why I wasn’t going. After that, it seemed a matter of principle that I wasn’t respecting my Sudanese lefty friends who’d been basically chased out of the country. So I got distracted. I’m sorry. You have to tell me where we were.

McKIBBEN

When you returned to L.A. [Los Angeles] from Sudan, were there differences that you noticed in yourself, or did you find that your perceptions of the U.S. had changed in ways you didn’t maybe realize?

HALE

Well, the so-called Second-Wave Feminism had taken off while I was gone, so when we came back with our two kids in ’75, there was a full-fledged Second-Wave Feminist

Movement, and I just felt really left behind in a very big way. So I started what really amounted to a crash course that I was teaching myself in feminism. I told you that as a Marxist, I had a—or maybe I didn't tell you, but as a Marxist in the sixties, I bought the notion that the Feminist Movement was just a distraction from the revolution, it detracted, and I found it very bourgeois, and with the stress on sexuality, which I'd learned in Sudan was not really all that important, all of these sorts of things combined made me reject feminism. Then I met—well, I didn't meet, I'd actually known her for a long, long time through her family, but I met someone who eventually became one of the outstanding feminist leaders in Sudan, Nahid [Toubia]. We really locked horns about—well, I like to tell the story that when I first met her as an adult, she was a feminist and I was a Marxist, and we argued and argued and argued. So I went back to the [United] States, got immersed in the Feminist Movement, came back, locked horns with her again because she had become a member of the Communist Party and I had become a roaring feminist. [laughter] Then a few years later we met again. When I say met, we had time, spent time together, either in Cairo or Khartoum or Alexandria. We both were into calling ourselves socialist feminist, rejecting communism, actually, both of us, but still considering ourselves socialists. [interruption] [End of March 28, 2011 interview]

1.3. Session Three
April 5, 2011

McKIBBEN

Okey-doke. So here we are again. Last time we talked, it was about 1964. You were coming back from Sudan to Los Angeles and starting your master's [degree], right?

HALE

Yes, starting my master's. I thought about all the things I didn't talk about with regard to Sudan, like I was a Sudanese tennis champion.

McKIBBEN

Oh, my. I didn't know that.

HALE

I don't think it's at all relevant to my activism and so on, but it was one of the ways I was able to network so effectively in Sudan and get this enormous network of friends that benefited me for many, many years afterwards. In fact, one of my tennis partners, who was the Egyptian cultural attaché at the time, I believe, is now the Foreign Minister of Egypt [Nabil el-Araby].

McKIBBEN

Oh, wow.

HALE

One of the good guys. Just moved in.

McKIBBEN

Is he still there?

HALE

No, he just moved in to his post, so with the housecleaning, he came out on top.

McKIBBEN

Oh, wow.

HALE

So that's great.

McKIBBEN

So did you travel around the country with tennis, or did you just meet a lot of people in the capital through that?

HALE

No, just in the capital, but I just thought I would mention that.

McKIBBEN

No, that's interesting. You never know where these connections are going to develop and where they're going to go. Was there anything else you wanted to touch on that we didn't get to last time?

HALE

No. You asked me why I liked Sudan, and I had to tell Gerry [Hale] that the question stumped me. I mumbled a few things, and he sort of took over the conversation and said, "Well, you liked this and you liked that and you liked this." I had a Sudanese friend with me, actually, for the last four or

five days, and I was trying to explain to her that there are many things I don't like about the place or I grew not to like, but each time I would go, there were new things for me to really like and to appreciate, that turned me on intellectually or really stimulated my political thinking or whatever. So I was always kind of kept alive by making these trips to Sudan. I don't know whether it's because I was especially open to changes and so on, that could be part of it, or exactly what it was, but by the time I left Sudan in '64 after three years, I was very, very politicized and definitely ready to enter graduate school.

McKIBBEN

So when you did come back for school, you had intended to continue on to graduate school previously, right?

HALE

Well, yes, I thought about continuing in English literature, which was my B.A., but the graduate projects that people were choosing—I thought I would end up doing the medical terminology in the poetry of John Donne or something of that sort because English wasn't nearly as interesting in those days, not diverse and not very interesting. I couldn't decide what to do. The head of African Studies here came to visit us when we were in Khartoum, and he was encouraging me to get an M.A. in African Studies, and that seemed to make sense because I didn't know what I wanted to do, and at least that gave me three disciplines, which was the case at the time. It's now two. But it gave me three disciplines to play with until I decided what it was I liked.

McKIBBEN

What were the disciplines in African Studies?

HALE

Anthropology, sociology, and political science or maybe history. I don't remember the third one, but it was mainly anthro[pology] and sociology, primarily because of the people I could work with. So I entered African Studies, and little did I know that that was really the heyday of African Studies because of what was happening in Africa. I mean, this was a period when there were nationalist movements that were very wonderful to watch, and African

revolutionaries, really truly revolutionaries, came through to give talks. We'll get to talking about Ufahamu, I suppose, at some point, and African Activist Association [AAA]. But as a part of being in those two organizations, I met all of these people and got so wonderfully excited, and it was also an important period for the Anti-Apartheid Movement, which was just beginning to pick up on an international level. So there was just a lot of activity, agitation, but also a lot of inspirational things, like revolution was in the air, independence was in the air, and we thought—I thought, anyway, that we were in the center of the world. It was a great, great feeling. Actually, to be a graduate student in the sixties was a great feeling, anyway, unless you were living under a rock. The Free Speech Movement was going on at [University of California at] Berkeley and was spreading to other campuses. Even though we were a more conservative campus, we had the feeling of that going on, although most of these movements I began to think of as pretty white, and I was very interested in things black, black and African and other ethnicities as well. So I was picking and choosing, but probably not picking and choosing enough, because I was involved in so many things. I think I told you I tried to make a list and tried to make a list with my spouse, and we couldn't even touch the surface of what was going on in those years on campus, let alone the sorts of things that were going on off campus, such as the very vibrant anti-Vietnam War movement, which I was very, very involved in, many demonstrations, much planning, much political education. The anthropology department, even though I wasn't in the department yet, I was taking courses, and it was a very active place. Although I was very active in a whole range of Left causes, so to speak, and Left organizations—and I can talk a little bit about those—I had some confusion about the cultural revolution versus the New Left revolution, the New Left Movement. Those were definitely separate. It's not that some of us who were hippies weren't active in the New Left or that some New Left people weren't touched by the idea of the cultural revolution, and so had a certain degree of hippie lifestyle, etc., but in general,

ideologically we were very different. The cultural revolution was much more of a dropout—I mean, I know that's almost reached cliché status now, and it wasn't just because of the drugs. Yes, it was a drug culture, and, yes, a culture connected with drugs as it ramified, but it was more than that. It really was young people who were totally disillusioned and didn't want any part of a corrupt political system, didn't want to work within the system at all, didn't even care enough about the system to talk about overthrowing it, whereas those of us on the New Left—and I include myself there—many of us were very opposed to the drug culture. I really bought the idea that we had to stay clean for the revolution, and I was chagrined at the extent of the drug use. I don't mean this in any moralistic way, but for me, it seemed wasteful and it seemed to sap people's energy, and I found it boring. I would go to anthropology parties and people would be sitting around giggling in groups and stoned by the time I got there. I couldn't have a decent conversation with anyone, let alone talk to them about the demonstration on Monday and wouldn't they come. I think I came across, certainly to my anthropology cohort later, I came across, as one of my friends called me, staid. I was a little bit hippie in my dress. I was a little bit of a kind of dropout type, too, in some ways, but I think the drug culture very much was a boundary for us, really separated us. But my best friend was in the sort of cultural wing. In fact, I think three of my best friends were more in the area of the cultural revolution, so there was some tension there. I thought that Africa was going to lead the way, and there I was in African Studies, and many people who were in African Studies at that time were former Peace Corps volunteers and so on, but also there were some white South Africans who were in exile, and while they were in exile, went on to get a graduate degree. Those people were very influential on me, people like Martin Legassick, for example, who is now back in South Africa as an academic. These were no-nonsense people with regard to the Anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa. I won't name Martin as one of these people, but the people I'm talking about were aiding guerilla groups that

were assembling and organizing over the border, getting ready for some kind of onslaught on South Africa. If apartheid couldn't be dismantled in any kind of peaceful way or through urban sabotage and so on, there would be direct military intervention. Our attitude was that with regard to colonialism, if Guinea-Bissau and West Africa fell, then the pressure would very much be on the Portuguese to contend with Angola and Mozambique, and once Angola and Mozambique fell, then South Africa would be next. That was how we had it all mapped out in our minds. In African Studies we used to talk about it all the time. How is it that we can help the Guinea-Bissauan revolution, anti-colonial movement, so that we can also put so much pressure on the Salazar regime in Portugal that it will fall? And once that regime falls, then Angola and Mozambique can move forward. We had all these political strategies all worked out, and some of us went to fight in some of these movements. Mozambiquan Movement, for example, was very open to outsiders coming in and helping with the revolution.

McKIBBEN

Did anyone you know go and do that?

HALE

Well, I can't remember. I just know there was general talk, but not anyone I kept in touch with. But I was so envious because I had a spouse that was so worried about my safety that even though his politics were pretty close to mine, he was always tugging on me to be safe. I mean, even going to register voters in the South during the civil rights push, he didn't even want me to do that. Well, it turned out that was actually pretty dangerous for some people, but I wanted to go for that summer when there was the drive to register black voters. But he kept saying things like, "What about your family? You're not thinking about your family if something happens to you." So I didn't do that, but I've been angry with him for over forty years for the fact that I didn't do that, that he held me back. I think when I didn't do that, when I didn't go south, it did something in terms of my saying to myself, "I'm not going to let him do this again."

But he was very worried. The Weather Underground was very active, was picking up, and was recruiting.

McKIBBEN

In Los Angeles?

HALE

Yes. I don't know that they were recruiting, but anyway, they were starting to be active, and I was very attracted to the Weather Underground, and Gerry was horrified at the idea. As it turned out, I began to be put off by a lot of their ideas, and certainly the first time someone was killed I was definitely put off. But urban sabotage began to be very appealing to me, and I was flirting with all these leftist groups anyway, Progressive Labor and the Communist Party, which was pretty boring at that time, by then, and also International Socialists, the Trotskyists. So I attended all of these various meetings, the Communist Party, the Progressive Labor, the International Socialists, really trying to find where I was on the spectrum. I was very attracted to Trotskyism because of the stress on the international. I had a very simplistic idea of what Trotskyism was, however, and I'm sure I had a fairly unsophisticated version of all of these leftist movements that I flirted with. I went to SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] meetings and I started to find all of these organizations very overbearingly masculinist.

McKIBBEN

Remind me, SDS was Students—

HALE

Students for a Democratic Society, and it was, at one time, probably the most left student organization in the country. It got discredited somewhat later, and I've never really followed that history enough to know if there was any truth in it being infiltrated by the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] and so on. I imagine all of our organizations will be infiltrated. Our worst paranoid thoughts during that time period turned out to be true. They did, in fact, have files on us. They were collecting files, even about the Women's Movement, for crying out loud, in the seventies. So people who took advantage of the Freedom of Information Act found

out, yes, indeed, they were there and they were collecting information. There's my name.

McKIBBEN

Did you do that?

HALE

I never did it. I think I was afraid to find out. [laughs]

McKIBBEN

The size of the documents.

HALE

Exactly. But I think there'd be something about seeing your name in a dossier like that that could put a chilling effect on one, maybe not for very long, but people told me I've got a Sudan file and a State Department file. It's the same thing; I don't really want to see it. In some ways it would be educational because you would know where there would likely be surveillance and the kinds of things they didn't pay much attention to. In the sixties I think they were paying attention to everything. Everything was potentially subversive.

McKIBBEN

So as you were looking around on that Left spectrum, what kinds of things appealed to you, or why did those things appeal to you?

HALE

Well, direct action appealed to me and going to the site of the production, although I never did it. There were a number of people who dropped out of academia and started working in factories, joined unions, and became strong union activists, not a lot of people, but some, and I was always envious of their courage in doing that. I think my whole working-class thing about the only way I could gain respectability in my own mind would be to get a Ph.D. or get a graduate degree or whatever continued to drive me, so that anything that suggested dropping out of academia was very unattractive to me. I don't even like saying that because sometimes I like to present myself to myself as someone who wanted to drop out of academia because I became so disillusioned with what a non-activist place it was and how complicit the university was in some of these

oppressions we were talking about. We had investments in South Africa, for example. By the way, the divestment campaign was something that was very active. We did win that one. We actually got the [University of California] Regents to divest from South Africa. Pretty amazing.

McKIBBEN

Yes.

HALE

We could do things in those years. We actually got them done. I mean, they got undone because one of the things about student movements is you're an ephemeral group. I don't think we realized until years later that we didn't build the kind of structure we needed to build to sustain the movement. The sustainability, I think, or lack of it was something that really hurt us. We didn't keep records. We didn't make sure we had new leaders in place before we graduated. We held onto power, our little petty power, our little positions within our organizations, until we got so busy with our Ph.D. work or whatever that we started to neglect it, and so organizations would start to fall apart. It took us a very long time to be able to recognize, and we never really did in time, recognize that process.

McKIBBEN

It seems like that's still an ongoing problem for student groups because we end up leaving.

HALE

Right. Exactly.

McKIBBEN

Just to focus in for a moment on that divestment project, how did you go about pulling that off? I imagine it took quite a while.

HALE

No, it took a lot of organizing and it did take a while, but not as long as you would think. It wasn't like ten years or something like that. We're actually talking about three years of fairly solid organizing on the part of—and I don't count myself among the most active in that movement, but the most active, the cadre. These were often South Africans themselves, black South Africans and white South Africans,

working on this, but not entirely. It was a safe kind of issue, in a way, to work on South Africa because it was far away. You didn't have to deal with what was going on here in the [United] States with that awful war and the violations of civil rights and police brutality and that kind of thing. This was something that was going on over there. But anyway, the divestment campaign was relatively easy, when I think about it now, certainly easier than attempts to get the Regents and others to divest from Israel, for example. That one is almost impossible right now in the States.

McKIBBEN

At the time, was South African divestment less controversial?

HALE

Yes, yes.

McKIBBEN

I mean there was more acceptance of that position at the time?

HALE

Yes. The only thing was that South Africa was a very, very healthy place for people to invest, had healthy industry and so on, but part of our argument was it's not going to be healthy for very long. There's this happening, that happening. I mean look at the forces building up. These whites are not going to be able to stay in power for long, so what are the diamond mines going to be like? What are the other resources going to be like? Are these going to be areas where you will want to invest as things start to fall apart? That was an argument. So that part was hard because South African investments were good ones. But we had so much documentation about how horrible apartheid was. We had statistics galore, and we'd really done our homework. I'm saying "we," but I can't take a lot of credit for that. But we were looking at the statistics of what was going on there, and it was so appalling, and people were so appalled, and then films and slideshows and lots of lectures. So it was a big educational campaign. Then you throw it in the face of the Regents, and they would be just these horrible villains to deny the rights of black South Africans. It was, again, safer to support black South Africans than it was to support blacks

here, which were just in your front yard and dangerous characters. That brings me to the African Activist Association and Ufahamu, which was in many ways the main area of my activism in the sixties at UCLA. As I said, I was active in other things off the campus, presidential campaigns, for one, the New American Movement that became the Democratic Socialists of America, trying to build alternative politics, not just alternative parties, but alternative politics. So I was active in those movements.

McKIBBEN

When you were selecting these types of movements, because like you said, you did things on campus and off and different types of things, how did you decide what to become involved in? Did you specifically decide, "I need to be involved in international and local issues," or, "I need to be involved in constructing new politics as well as these particular things," or were you drawn through personal connections to different activities? How did you select movements?

HALE

Well, this was a period when people who had been somewhat naïve about these things began to be educated about the links that could be made among all of these issues. I was introduced to that, in a sense, by an organization that's name I can't remember now, but it had "Africa" in the title, and it was a Left organization of African Studies people and those who were connected somehow or other, at least peripherally. This group did its homework on the kinds of multinational corporations that were running things in South Africa, but also had investments here, so there was a genealogy that was drawn that made connections among all these multinational corporations. It was new at the time and very, very important, and so it was no longer necessary for me to separate the international from the local because I could then see the various connections. You said how did I choose? I don't know that I make conscious choices about what to do and what not to do. I plunged into pretty much everything that came to my doorstep. Sometimes I don't

remember how I studied, but I was a very good grad student.

McKIBBEN

As a student, I wonder. [laughs]

HALE

But I think that was a very different era for students. I think we did have more free time. I don't know that we were better funded, but we certainly seemed to have more access to various monies. I don't know how that would be, because I guess the evidence shows that, actually, students have more money now than they did in the past. But we worked. Many of us worked while going to grad school, I mean worked off campus. So we weren't necessarily all TAs [teaching assistants] and what were called RAs at that time, research assistants. But somehow or other, I guess maybe the energy of somebody as young as I was, although I was a little older, because I had been in Sudan for three years, the energy level must have been very, very high, because I was doing virtually everything that we were called upon to do, fight against the war, build a structure here, build an organization there, support African Americans, support Africans in almost anything imaginable. I was very active in the grape boycott. I forget when the boycott started, but I was there for that, and that seemed really important. It was important in my formation because it brought another ethnicity into play, because I was very black oriented, not just African oriented, but I was very interested in the Black Student Union [BSU], as it was called then. I wasn't allowed to be a member, but I supported in any way that I could, and we were always trying to form an alliance between the African Activist Association and the BSU.

McKIBBEN

How did you guys support the BSU from without?

HALE

Well, we supported it through petitions, through pressure, through sit-ins. Can't tell you how many sit-ins I participated in at the university, just sitting outside a dean's door, whatever, for more funding, for the organization, to get support for the newspaper, NOMO, and to consider NOMO to

be our sister, our brother publication with Ufahamu, and just in any way we could, trying to get support for black students, publicize it as much as we could, that we had very few black students on campus, surprise, surprise, more then than now, however. It was very, very important to the African Activist Association to bring more black people into the study of Africa and African America. At that time we weren't really talking about diaspora that much, but that was starting. The African Activist Association, I was one of the founders, and it formed out of these sorts of things that I've been talking about, the Anti-Apartheid Movement, the various independence movements in Africa that were occurring. We were appalled at the silence among the faculty in African Studies and the director of the African Studies Center, and so we were constantly trying to act as a pressure group to accomplish various things. I mean, we insisted. In those years students could actually demand things and get them. We demanded that we have representatives on the committees, which may be partially taken for granted now.

McKIBBEN

On the hiring committees?

HALE

Hiring Committees was a bit more difficult, but we pushed for that, we pushed for admissions, and just every—Executive Committee. We managed pretty much, except when personnel issues were being discussed, we managed to have a representative, and that was new. In fact, the student power was relatively new, as you probably know. We tried to get an associate director appointed for the African Studies Center who would be designated as black or African. We accomplished that, actually got him a nice office up in Bunche Hall. We nominated someone and that someone was hired. It was a salaried position. Anyway, we increased the enrollments of blacks. We accomplished a great deal, actually.

McKIBBEN

Do you remember what specifically you did to make those things happen?

HALE

Well, by having very loud and brash representatives on the committees, again, by going in committees to lobby the director, to lobby other faculty members. Maybe it was easier in those days. I don't know. But we also had the force of numbers, and I think that was very, very important. I mean, now if someone in the Anthro[pology] Department decided we needed more blacks in the Anthropology Department and decided to have a sit-in outside the chair's office, it would be totally laughed at. We'd have about seven students there. But not in those years. I mean, we could get fifty or sixty students for a sit-in just in a blink. It was pretty impressive. We didn't even have email.

McKIBBEN

That is impressive.

HALE

No computers, no email. We burned the telephone wires. So that was it, just constant pressure, and then making sure we did our homework. That's something that students don't do. Going into meetings being uninformed was something that I preached about a lot. "Let's not go in and make fools of ourselves. Let's make sure we know what we're doing when we go in to complain that somebody was not going to be rehired in the faculty. Let's find out what it's about. Let's find out what we would have to do." Because we didn't really understand the tenure process and that kind of thing. So we tried to inform ourselves, and I think that it was very important to start doing that, to start learning how the university truly worked and to subvert it, to support it when it was something to be supported, whatever the "it" was. We were quite a little bunch. Then the African Activist Association, with me sort of spearheading this, we decided to establish a journal. It was a pretty ambitious little thing to do, but I think it's important to know that Ufahamu, which was founded in 1969, put out its first journal, first issue, in 1970, is still in existence. I mean, that's pretty amazing. So is the African Activist Association. But Ufahamu was quite an experience. We met for endless hours trying to establish it and argued over who would edit it, what the nature of it

would be, whether or not there would be any quotas on the editorial board.

McKIBBEN

For African students?

HALE

Would there be any whites. I mean, that was a question. Would there be any whites?

McKIBBEN

I guess a quota for white students would be [unclear].

HALE

I was one of the two white students on the first editorial board, and then the only white student on the editorial board. It was very hard. I didn't have the training in Critical Race Theory that I have now. I did too many things just from the gut feeling of social justice and equality and things of that sort, so I didn't necessarily know how to work with Black Panthers, for example, who were very well represented on campus, and a number of other black organizations were represented as well and were active enough, especially in the Black Student Union, that in the early 1970s, maybe '73, there were two assassinations on campus. I can go back to that moment at some point if you want.

McKIBBEN

Yes. I was wondering, actually, how you and the African Activist Association responded to that.

HALE

Well, it was difficult because it was a split between two black organizations, very radical. So embracing one of them would have been extremely difficult. I will tell one story, and I can't mention names. The person who was president of the Black Student Union at the time was also in African Studies, so there were students that bridged the two organizations. He, I think, was in the African Activist Association and generally [a] well-liked guy. We had a little library on the tenth floor of Bunche [Hall] where we hung out. That was another thing. We had space for hanging out. That is really important for organizing. So when I said we didn't have email, we didn't have computers, and so on, we had space and we

assembled. We were always assembled and always talking politics in the lounge. [interruption]

HALE

So we had a lounge that was ours. That was another thing we did. We insisted that we be given that room as our meeting place, as our lounge, quite large room up in Bunche Hall. I mean, you couldn't do that these days. Then we had our library in addition to that, and we met in both places. So anyway, I was sitting in the library studying one day, and I knew that it was the day of a Black Student Union election, which was a big deal. There were all kinds of political things going on around that. I knew that. But anyway, this guy who was a bit of a friend, certainly a good acquaintance, that I just mentioned, who was president of the BSU, came into the library right at the time I knew the meeting was going on. I said, "X, why aren't you there?" He said, "Oh, you know, there's just a lot of bickering going on, and I just let them settle it themselves," but he was sweating and he looked agitated. He opened a book, tried to look like he was studying, and then maybe ten minutes later someone ran into the library and said, "There's been a shooting in Campbell Hall." So we ran, rushed over to the window, and we could actually see the outside of Campbell [Hall] from the tenth floor, and we could see them carrying out the bodies and the police coming in and a large number of cars. This shooting has been debated years, years later. The fellow who used to be called [Maulana] Ron Karenga was a fellow graduate student with me and took African Studies classes. He's still teaching at Cal State Long Beach [California State University at Long Beach]. Because he was one of the leaders, or he was the leader, the head of US —I forget what US—I think that was just the name, US [The Organization Us]. That particular organization was implicated in the shootings, and he denied he had anything to do with it, but he has since talked more openly about it. Maybe the statute of limitations has run out. But he's now said, "Look, that was an era of armed warfare. We considered ourselves at war." Granted, community groups had a great deal to say about what went on on campuses. The [National] Chicano

Moratorium [Committee], for example, was very important on campus, and we wouldn't have Chicano Studies—well, we might have it by today, but we wouldn't have had Chicano Studies for years later had it not been for the pressure and participation of outside political Chicano groups. That's the way it was with the Black Student Union as well. Anyway, I was quite shaken by that, and it brought up for the hundredth time for me the uses of violence in various Left revolutionary oppositional and radical movements, and it's something that I toy with—"toy with"—something that I continue to ponder today. I mean, on the one hand, I sometimes call myself a pacifist. On the other hand, I know that some of the things that we cherish today, like the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, could not have been accomplished without some violence. But it gives me a lot of conflict, because then we see a situation like people in Tahrir Square in Cairo, which was about as close to a nonviolent revolution as I can imagine, and I have to remember that in Sudan two times, once in '64, once in '85, the civilians overthrew the military government just simply standing up to tanks. So that was a slight deviation, but back to Ufahamu.

McKIBBEN

Well, it sounds like, if I can just follow up on that quickly, the work that you did in the African Activist Association and with Ufahamu and this experience with the shooting in Campbell Hall would have played a part in your thinking about violence and political movements. Did they have opposite effects on your thinking, or how did they impact that at the time?

HALE

Well, I think I was pretty shocked at those shootings, as everyone was, and I couldn't process them in any positive way. I was having my own encounters with Black Panthers and the Black Consciousness Movement, members of US, members of organizations I can't remember the names of now, unpleasant encounters. For example, I was a research assistant. I worked for the director up in the tenth floor of African Studies, and therefore I had access to the supply room. I went to get some supplies once, and a very tall,

tough-looking [Black] Panther and his friend intercepted me and demanded that I give them some supplies. I did, because they were so menacing. They scared me, actually. So I gave them those supplies. I never informed on them or anything of that sort, but I deeply resented it. We had an expression in those days, which we don't use anymore because it's in bad taste, but they were "Mau-Mauing" me.

McKIBBEN

[unclear]?

HALE

There was a Mau-Mau movement in Kenya that was basically an anti-colonial movement, but it took the form of an anti-white movement, anti-white-farmers. Anyway, our editorial board meetings and Ufahamu—I guess I didn't answer your question about violence because, as I said, I'm still having trouble with it, and it's not fun to be the object of it or to be threatened with violence. So I experienced that, but I also experienced it from white police during the Vietnam demonstrations and other demonstrations. So I'm not just saying that blacks were menacing in those years. You know that I wouldn't say that or even think that, for that matter. I'm just saying it's not fun to be the object of implied or actual violence. Ufahamu, we had editorial board meetings that used to last five hours, and we'd meet three times a week, and we would hash it out about articles and the acceptance of articles. We fought over them. We fought over a very important issue any number of times that had to do with black English and what was, in essence, just incorrect writing, grammatical errors and so on, presented as black English, and sometimes it truly was black English. One of our board members, who was a [Black] Panther, insisted that—the editing was being done by two women, me and Renee Poussaint, who became a famous commentator on television in Washington, D.C. She became an anchor. At the time, she was working for African Arts, which was a journal right there on the tenth floor, and the editors of African Arts helped us put out Ufahamu, designed it and so on. So we had very good professional help for nothing. Anyway, Renee and I did all the work, very typical. The men didn't do any of the nitty-

gritty work; the women did it. All of these kinds of things sort of built towards my feminist consciousness, of course. I experienced in many groups how women were—I was the secretary of the African Activist Association. Even though I did more work than anyone else, I would not have been elected president, not only because I was white, but because I was a woman; still am. So in these meetings this Panther insisted—he had submitted an article—insisted that we had no right to touch a single word that he had written, and that I, in particular, but even somebody that he saw as pretty bourgeois black, didn't have the right to touch his English. So we fought a lot about that, and that's when the other white editor resigned. It was a very intimidating atmosphere.

McKIBBEN

Just for clarification, the other white editor was Allen Thorpe (sic) [Allen Thurm] at that point.

HALE

Oh, you really did your homework.

McKIBBEN

Well, I'm going to have to put it on the names list later, so I just want to make sure I have the right person.

HALE

I think he said that he was leaving UCLA or whatever, but I think he was really fed up with the editorial board. Allen Thurm.

McKIBBEN

Thurm, okay.

HALE

So Renee, actually, got disgusted with doing all the work and proclaimed that she was going to quit if we didn't make her Editor-in-Chief. Quite a move. We had decided we would be non-hierarchical. There would be no Editor-in-Chief. And she said, "I don't care what we decided. That's it." I thought, "Wow, this is a strong woman." She said, "You can be co-editor," or something like that. I'm pretty sure we had that exchange, and I said, "No, I don't think this is quite the moment to have a white editor." We did later. But anyway, it changed. But that was the moment when we were—I mean, this was also the period of time when the radical wing of the

African Studies Association, we had meetings in Montreal [Canada], and we stormed the podium, took over the meetings.

McKIBBEN

The African Activist Association?

HALE

No, just radical wing of the African Studies Association, some of whom were the African Activist Association people, and the African Studies Association was really never the same after that, really shook up people. The claim was that whites are running the organization, Africans have no chance, and African Americans, even less chance. Indeed, the white membership was very, very dominant. So there was a lot of demand for change in the air. Again, these movements were all masculinist. It's not that women weren't activist, but men were the leaders, and it wasn't questioned much. In fact, in the sixties it was hardly questioned at all. I think there were incipient feminist rumblings late in the sixties, but I would have no part of it because I really did buy a Marxist line that this was bourgeois feminism and that it detracted from the revolution. It was just one of those many distractions. I bought that for a while. I bought it into the seventies, for that matter, and I didn't see myself as a feminist. I'd hardly heard of the word. I mean, I was a Lefty. I was a Marxist, I wasn't a feminist, and it wasn't until I began to recognize what was being done to us in these organizations that I came into consciousness at about the same time that many other women did. This particular group of people I'm talking about, we weren't about to abandon our Marxism, so we started referring to ourselves as Marxist-feminist and socialist-feminist. I've lost my dates now, but in the seventies we formed the Socialist Feminist Network that emerged here on the UCLA campus, but brought in people from the community and from other campuses around and so on, but we just usually met here. That organization, which consisted of—people moved in and out because that's the way academic composition is, but we were professors and students, and we lasted a long time. I don't think the organization broke up until the late seventies, early eighties,

so we lasted more than ten years, which was very good for—I mean, we discussed political issues. We were just primarily a discussion group, but a very, very enlightened and progressive feminist discussion group. And that's where I learned some of my first feminist ideas. Go ahead.

McKIBBEN

I wanted to ask you a little bit about combining the activism and the academia or the studies that you were doing. It sounded like some of the people you worked with saw those things as being complementary or at least not in opposition, but were there other professors or students who tried to get you to drop these activist notions or to separate activism and academia?

HALE

Sure. I mean, my Ph.D. chair[person] was a white South African who was very active in the Black Sash Movement and had to go into exile because of her political activism. When she came here to teach, she pretty much wanted her students to finish their work and abandon activism, at least while they were studying. She once said to me that if she saw my name connected with one more petition or one more journalistic article or one more demonstration or meeting or organization, whatever, that she would resign as my chair[person]. Well, I was deep into the dissertation writing by then, and I was doing everything but writing it, so I think she felt that and felt that she was obliged to give me an ultimatum. Of course, I didn't pay any attention to it, and just from that moment on didn't tell her about my activism or tried to make sure that it was kept from her in various ways. There have been many people who have commented on my scholarship and have said, "She would do better if she paid more attention to her scholarship over her activism." I mean, I hear it said behind my back. I'm used to it.

McKIBBEN

At that time did you see academic work as potentially activist work in itself or as something you do alongside it?

HALE

No, I didn't see any separation between them. I couldn't imagine how people could think of them as separate. For me,

teaching was a political act and it always has been, actually. I was married to—I mean, Gerry always talked about—because he wasn't in the trenches with me. I mean, he's a very shy fellow and didn't go to demonstrations very much or anything like that, didn't go to meetings, felt silly chanting things, and so on, but he said that his activism was in the classroom, and since he taught the geography of the Middle East, he had many struggles in the classroom. But I couldn't see how theory and praxis were separate, and I couldn't see why people couldn't see that these areas of life fed into each other and enriched each other and so on. I mean, I know that I'm a better Women in Social Movements teacher because I've been a part of some of these things than if I hadn't been. Took me a while, however, to even talk about some of my experiences in the sixties in my classes. But anyway, yes, I was given a lot of difficulty. Meanwhile, my answer to that was to do really well in grad school.

McKIBBEN

The best revenge.

HALE

The best revenge, absolutely. Gerry was on the faculty by then, and the "then" we haven't even named. But anyway, Ufahamu went on. African Activist Association went on. But also I was active on campus in various other sorts of things. It wasn't just the Vietnam War, but during the bombing of Cambodia, which occurred within the same year that—maybe not the year, but within a short time span of the assassination of Martin Luther King [Jr.] and of [Robert F.] Bobby Kennedy, the killings at Kent State [University] and the killings at Jackson State [University]. All of these made for a very, very restive campus for those of us on the Left. So there were many demonstrations all the time. We had one really bad one after the bombing of Cambodia, for which Ronald Reagan, who was governor then, made sure the police were on campus, and they were pretty violent. We also had the Angela Davis case going on.

McKIBBEN

Of course.

HALE

Yes, which I was also active in my own little way, and Gerry was in his own little way. But she was fired not by the administration, which opposed firing her, and certainly not by the faculty that also opposed firing her, but she was fired by the Regents. That's something, I think, that's not generally known. I think people think that the administration sacked her. But anyway, she was this new assistant professor in the philosophy department hired by Herbert Marcuse. I'm sorry, she was a student of Herbert Marcuse's, and he got her hired in our philosophy department. We had a very progressive philosophy professor whose name has just totally left me. Anyway, shortly after she was hired, she was making a lot of speeches off campus, and the Regents decided to fire her for inappropriate professional behavior off the campus. Some people think she was fired because she was a member of the Communist Party. Of course she was, but that's not the way it was put. I mean, after all, isn't the Communist Party a legal party? How can you then fire someone who's a member? Blah, blah, blah.

McKIBBEN

But this was after the loyalty oaths, right? Did those apply to higher-education teachers?

HALE

Yes. There was a big fight over the loyal oaths during the [Joseph R.] McCarthy era. Then it died down a bit and it became something that we all began to convince ourselves that the people that really are doing subversive activities are quite willing to sign the loyalty oath because they just will. So people started signing it without questioning it. As a teaching assistant, do you have to sign a loyalty oath?

McKIBBEN

I haven't been a teaching assistant yet, so I don't know, actually, if I have to do that.

HALE

Because I think I was asked to sign it as a student assistant, a research assistant.

McKIBBEN

As a research assistant, [unclear], I don't think. I should probably check those documents and make sure. [laughs]

HALE

So where were we? Sorry.

McKIBBEN

Angela Davis.

HALE

Thank you. So we collected money, the faculty collected money to pay her salary and insisted that she stay on campus. She gave a lecture after she'd been fired, and they moved her lecture to Royce Hall, and it wouldn't even hold everybody. They had to put up speakers outside Royce Hall, and that's where I was. I was on the lawn outside. She gave an introduction, I think, to Marxist philosophy, using Marcuse and so on. I think this was just Philosophy 1A. It was a fantastic lecture, and I will never forget it. We were all so happy that we were going to continue to pay her salary and that the faculty was supporting her and the administration and we were defying the Regents and so on. Then there was the escape. I can't remember the names now or whatever, but the violent escape from prison of some people that she was accused of helping escape, and she became a fugitive. Then things kind of stood still. I remember Gerry and I had one of our few fights in our fifty years of marriage over Angela Davis. I was so emotionally overwrought, actually, about her being—we were convinced she was framed, and the evidence seems to point to that now, and that we needed to bring her back, we needed to save her. I was so afraid she was going to be killed by some FBI agent. So I was really distraught that she was out there as a fugitive, this wonderful, beautiful, fantastic human being. So I don't know why I presented Gerry with this hypothetical, "If Angela Davis were to knock on our door right now, would you shelter her?" He said, "No. We'd be arrested immediately. We'd spend time in prison." And I was so upset. I accused him of everything, not following his principles, and he said I was being careless. Anyway, we managed to survive that one, but that was a very difficult one. But it also underscored the difference in our politics, differences, to a large extent. My politics were rash, true. His politics were careful and methodical, true. Mine were a little more, quite a bit more

extreme. He wanted to work in different ways, and I was not mature enough to recognize that we all work in very, very different ways. Now I would not suggest to someone that they take in Angela Davis, but I would. But they do their thing in their own particular way, if it's someone who's also progressive in their thinking. So this is a way that I've matured, that I'm far more willing to embrace people's different strategies for getting to the same place. I don't want to make too strong a statement about that. This was a time when we also forced ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] off campus.

McKIBBEN

I did not know that.

HALE

They stayed off campus for a long time. This was a big campaign, and we were so proud of the fact that we managed to do that. That's what I said. I wish I could remember all the things we accomplished as radical students. The faculty participated in a lot of these things. I mean, the Angela Davis thing, that was really primarily faculty who were supporting her.

McKIBBEN

Did you make efforts as radical students to create alliances with faculty, or did that just sometimes happen and sometimes not?

HALE

No, we did, but we also distrusted them at the same time. They were over thirty and all that, the clichés about that, but that they had a stake in the system. They had more of a stake in the system than we had. I guess we saw ourselves as being able to go to another school, however it was we were seeing ourselves, but we saw faculty, many faculty, as having been bought out by the system, all the polemical clichés that you can imagine we were thinking and using. We need to get me back to Sudan at some point, but by the seventies, on campus, by the mid seventies, we began also to see a fledgling gay/lesbian, which is all that it was at that time, all that it was called, a lesbian/gay movement, and that began to create some opposition. So there was a

Congressman named [John] Briggs, who developed the Briggs Amendment, which basically tried to remove all, quote, "homosexual" teachers from the classroom. I remember speaking at an anti-Briggs demonstration and rally at Cal State Northridge [California State University at Northridge]. That must have been when I was just beginning my Women's Studies teaching, on CSUN actually. So I am jumping ahead a bit, but I did want to mention that that began to be a part of my consciousness leading up to the Cal State Long Beach case that occupied me for so long. But I remember that rally at Northridge. It was sponsored by the Women's Center, not Women's Studies, but Women's Studies might have been a co-sponsor. I remember standing up there. I was just a lecturer, vulnerable as hell, saying that if one single—I probably use the word "homosexual"—if one single homosexual teacher is fired from—and I think I meant from Northridge—I will resign my position. It wasn't much of a position to resign, but I remember that my knees buckled when I said it. I thought, "Oh, my god. What did I say?" But of course—not of course, but I had every intention. I meant it. I know I would have followed through with it, but the Briggs Amendment, alas, was defeated. However, I learned something from that too. Even though we were victorious, the women who'd worked on the anti-Briggs campaign met in a seedy bar right outside of downtown Los Angeles to celebrate, and the gay men who were active in the Briggs movement had their celebration at the Beverly Hills Hotel. I thought, "Hmm. Class difference between gay men and lesbians." Of course, one couldn't over-generalize.

McKIBBEN

Well, I don't think that was discussed to the extent that it is now.

HALE

No. No, it was a revelation to me, really, and we noticed that—we were in this bar, and I don't remember if it was a women's bar or just a bar, but I remember us commenting on it. "Do you know where the guys are? They're at the Beverly Hills Hotel, and look at us in this seedy bar with sawdust on the floor."

McKIBBEN

Was a lot of the activity around that effort done in a, I guess, gender-segregated fashion, or was there more collective—

HALE

No, it was pretty segregated in those years, and people did try to bridge it, sometimes successful and other times it wasn't. I don't think it's very different today, although—well, it is very different today, but there still is that segregation and, I think, a lot of resentment. When we began to develop Lesbian and Gay Studies here, the people who were dominating the committee were men, and when the women started to revolt, the men acted shocked and hurt. I went to those meetings. I was a part of that foundation. But again, I'm jumping ahead.

McKIBBEN

That's all right.

HALE

But outside the campus in those years—

McKIBBEN

Which years are we in?

HALE

Well, we're still sort of in the sixties, trying to creep into the seventies. I was active in the [Eugene] McCarthy presidential campaign, the [George] McGovern presidential campaign, and that was a part of my activism in the New American Movement. Then, you know, it was the beginning of the Women's Studies Movement and the Ethnic Studies Movements, and that was another whole phase of my life and a very, very exciting time.

McKIBBEN

Ethnic Studies started a few years before Women's Studies, so were you involved in the Ethnic Studies Department creation?

HALE

Well, only in the sense that I was a part of progressive organizations that were supporters. So I can't make any claim that I was a part of the foundation, only that I was a part of the pressure that was put on the administration to embrace these movements. I sat in during the Chicano

Studies hunger strike, for example. I don't think I stayed overnight, but I stayed for very long periods of the day in the tents and that sort of thing and tried to aid the hunger strikers in various ways. It was a very dramatic moment on the UCLA campus. It was really quite, quite impressive.

McKIBBEN

What were some things that you had to learn or unlearn to be a white ally in some of these struggles?

HALE

Well, I had to learn to be an ally and not necessarily a member, and that was very difficult for me not to be at the heart of something but to stand outside somewhat.

McKIBBEN

Do you remember how you learned to do that?

HALE

Yes, being mistreated at meetings, being told one way or another that I wasn't welcome, maybe not directly me. But something had happened a few years later, so I'm out of chronological order, but I was constantly getting sort of refresher courses in being an ally but not necessarily being accepted as an ally. I was at—I think it was the Berkshire Conference on Women's History, and there was a panel of Chicana lesbian feminists—I'm not sure they were all lesbians or identifying as lesbian—that was on Chicana history. It was a wonderful panel. If I weren't so dense these days, I'd be able to tell you some of the people who were on it because they're very prominent figures. They were talking about an archive of Chicana history that was owned, basically controlled by this white academic, I think, maybe at one of the branches of the University of Texas. I don't remember the details now. But they described this archive. They described that one had to get permission to use it, and it was very hard to get permission, and all that kind of thing. I remember I raised my hand during the question and answer and brought that issue up again and asked how we could help with—this word "help," it's a bad word. But I asked how we could help try to pressure this person to give these archives to some library that would give access to everyone. For some strange reason, they all buzzed with

each other up there on the panel, and finally one of them who knows me—they all know me; they all knew me—one of them said, "Why, thank you, Sondra, but very frankly, we don't trust any white women." The room was packed, and there was this buzz in the room. So I asked one of my close friends afterwards, "Why did they do that to me?" She said, "Because you're always an easy target because you're right out there." I knew that it wasn't personal, but it was still a very difficult thing to—I must have turned red. I just nodded. I didn't say anything, but several people said to me, "Why you? Why would they say this to you, maybe of all the people in the room?" And that was the point. That was the whole point. I had many experiences like that, and I wasn't a very pushy person. I mean, I actually am kind of shy in situations like that. But I'd be in groups where it was made pretty clear that white women weren't trusted after we'd been somehow or other chastised for the kinds of things that whites do and that we're complicit in, but not being invited to be allies in those years, in those years of the sixties and the seventies. Or maybe in the sixties there was more invitation for, "Come out and help us." By the seventies, this began to disappear, and the idea of forming coalitions really went back into the closet, so to speak. White women, or white people, but white women were pretty much told to go off and do our own anti-racism workshops, work on our racism ourselves, don't expect black women to do the work for you. So this idea of inviting African American women to come to the Socialist Feminist Network, for example, to help us work on our racism, this was rejected by a large number of African American women. I remember at the Woman's Building, as well, there were some anti-racism workshops, but women of color continued to say, "You white women, go off and form your own groups." It was sort of like, "Get in touch with us when you've dealt with your racism." And I began to understand that. I began to understand that it was too early for coalition-building, that we whites were not ready for it and maybe women of color weren't ready for it either. But it was a period of ideological separation, segregation, and I adhered to that. I went through a period of not inviting

myself into any groups of women of color or people of color. So now I think we're in a different phase where coalitions are being asked for again, in fact, transnational coalitions, international coalitions. Even though it's still the case that very often white women or white people will be asked to sort of form—what's the word I want—auxiliary organizations, nonetheless, there are calls for coalition now. I see the atmosphere as very different, partially because we're all so desperate that we recognize that we'll never be able to do some of the things we want to do alone. Look at the coalitions that formed around the election of [President Barack] Obama, just to pick a liberal, almost liberal, issue.

McKIBBEN

Coalitions seemed to kind of spring up.

HALE

During the bombing of Cambodia, the Anthropology Department came to a total standstill. I think it was during the bombing of Cambodia, but it could have been around My Lai or some of the worst of the Vietnam battles. I was a Ph.D. student by then in anthropology. I got my degree in African Studies a little bit late because Gerry and I went back to Sudan. It took me a while to get started again, so I got my M.A. in '66, and I was advanced to candidacy, I think, in 1970 and went into the field on a Fulbright [fellowship], went to Khartoum by myself because Gerry was fighting tenure and didn't want to leave. So I've lost my train of thought. It had to do with returning to Sudan.

McKIBBEN

You went to Sudan for research in '71.

HALE

Yes, that I did.

McKIBBEN

Before that we were talking about the Anthropology Department coming to a standstill.

HALE

Thank you, yes. Okay. But I was still active up to the end. So take us back to 1969, I think. We were agitating. We anthropology students were very powerful. We had a large cohort, and we did things like one of the faculty members

named Newman, actually, I think—not Newman [Michael Moerman]. Anyway, he worked in Thailand, and he worked for years in Thailand. He admitted that he had worked for the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], so we demanded that we were going to try him, that we were going to hold this tribunal and that we were going to try him for war crimes.

McKIBBEN

Wow.

HALE

And we did. I mean, he actually cooperated by coming to this tribunal. There were about thirty-five of us students sitting around in the lounge and firing questions at him, and he was trying to explain, and he explained away his time in the—I mean, we were angry with him for all kinds of reasons, the broader political issue, but also what he did to the reputation of anthropology students. We were being accused everywhere we went of being CIA agents, and here was some guy who actually admitted it. Michael Moerman is his name. I don't know if he's still alive or not. But at any rate, we found him guilty, and that was it. I mean, we didn't carry it any further. But he started to get death threats, probably from people within our cohort or within the graduate students, anyway, if not our cohort, and that was actually too much for me. I started to sort of back away from that kind of activity. He left for a while, or he left, because the atmosphere was so unpleasant. So we actually forced somebody out, is basically what it amounted to. He justified his actions by saying that he loved the Thai people and he knew the Thai people really well after all those many years, and if he didn't do it, somebody else who wasn't nearly as skillful as he was or knowledgeable as he was would do it, and the CIA would be misinformed about this particular group of Thai people. That did not go over well, and that was the excuse that was used by a lot of people who served in the CIA, that the CIA would benefit from correct information about people, and that's just a bunch of BS [bullshit]. In fact, the better we know them, the more effectively we can rule them, is what it amounts to. That was certainly the rule in colonialism with the colonial anthropologists, and we felt

he was a colonial anthropologist being visited upon us in the 1970s.

McKIBBEN

Because anthropology had changed a lot by then.

HALE

Yes. It was very radical, and with an attempt to clean up our history, which was a history of being, probably more than any other discipline, really kind of the part of the advanced wing of colonialism. We're the ones who collected the information that helped, quote, "the native" be ruled better, we and the missionaries. We're two of the important arms of colonialism, carrying culture, our culture, to the unwashed.

McKIBBEN

So after getting back from Sudan the first time and having your experience with colonialism, did you come to discover this history of anthropology? Did you know it before you studied anthropology?

HALE

Well, I'm going to back up a bit and say that when we shut down the Anthropology Department, we were also doing a lot of political education. So we were trying to force the classes out onto the lawn, and at those classes we were politically educating about all kinds of things, like what to wear to a demonstration, what kind of shoes to wear to a demonstration, and so on. So that was a very, very important activity at the time. I remember that. The university was such a different place. I mean, the fact that you could force people to take their courses out onto the lawn, or if they weren't striking, that is. Either they should strike and completely not meet their classes or if you didn't want to do that because you might be fired, then take your classes out on the lawn. They couldn't fire you if you took them out on the lawn. But then do political education. So we educated each other about the war in Vietnam, the history of Vietnam. Again, it was this attempt to do our homework so that we knew what we were talking about. We weren't just saying, "Hey, man, you know, you gotta rebel against The Man." It was just something much more intelligent and much more informed.

McKIBBEN

So you were really giving an in-depth kind of crash course in that.

HALE

Or we thought so, anyway.

McKIBBEN

Compared to "fight The Man," I suppose you were. [laughs]

HALE

So, yes, off to Sudan. Very different attitude about Sudan, different government, different atmosphere, different experience. I'm not sure I can articulate all those differences, but I got closer to the Left. I was very close to the leftist students at the University of Khartoum, which is where I had some kind of loose affiliation, and I became kind of a groupie, but also active in the student theater group [University of Khartoum Theatre Group], which was a leftist group, experimental theater group, and hung out with students who were a little bit younger than me, but not very much. Many of those people became my friends for life. But I had to be careful because any degree of activism on my part would have gotten me thrown out. I did get in difficulty because of a personal story. I sheltered my best friend, or one of my three best friends, who wanted to leave her husband, and she's a Christian. There's no divorce in Christianity in Sudan. Wanted to leave her husband and marry a Jewish guy, and that was just so fraught, so loaded. For lots of reasons and the fact that she's still alive, I don't want to go into that story, but I did get in difficulty. I thought I was going to have to leave the field. I got support from my Ph.D. chair[person], the same woman I told you about, said pretty much, "Don't let her family scare you," because her family was really upset with me and threatening me, I mean physically threatening me, and trying to get me thrown out. So they did things like the father had a letter written that was mailed from somewhere else, Addis Ababa or whatever, saying that I was a CIA agent. I mean, that's always a cheap shot at an American. But I weathered that somehow and managed to get my research mostly done. Then I came back. Well, my house was the safe house for

communists that were underground, and so late at night people would bring these people out from underground. One of them was a very well-known, very young communist leader who's now dead, Khatim Adlan, and he and I used to talk about Maoism versus Marxist-Leninism into, you know—

McKIBBEN

As you do.

HALE

As one does. Anyway, he was one of the people that I interacted with during this period, but there were other communists that were brought out from underground to this safe house until it got to be not so safe because I had a party and some security people showed up just as guests of some of the people in the party. So they didn't do anything, but they were there, and made us realize that it probably wasn't quite so safe anymore.

McKIBBEN

Did you live on your own, or were you with—

HALE

Yes, I had a flat on my own. Gerry visited me for a month of that year that I was in Cairo and Khartoum.

McKIBBEN

How did you get word to people that they could be there, that they could come there?

HALE

You mean to the party?

McKIBBEN

No, I mean—

HALE

No, that was taken care of by—I wasn't organizing. I wasn't spreading the word. My young communist friends were. They asked my permission, and, like the foolish lefty that I am, said, "Sure." I mean, all that it would have taken was to have the security forces follow them and come to the house, and I would be thrown out. I was threatened with expulsion, but it didn't quite reach that point. One of my best friends was wife of the person who was second in the government under [Gaafar] Nimeiry for a while, and she called me early in the morning one morning and was very distraught—this

must have been ’72—and said that I should start packing my things because I was going to be given a twenty-four-hour notice. She said that her husband reported to her that some of the soldiers—it was a military regime—some of the soldiers were sitting around in the barracks, and the chancellor, I think, of the University of Khartoum and a couple of other high officials in the University of Khartoum were sitting and they were all drinking, and my name came up. Somebody said to the chancellor, “You’ve got a CIA agent in your midst. You’d better clean house.” They said, “Oh, we can’t have that. You should throw her out,” and so on, and they decided that they were going to throw me out. So she was giving me warning. Now, nothing came of it. She said that she was going to try to get access to my file and see what was in my file and see if there was anything she could do to run interference. [interruption]

HALE

So anyway, I managed to avoid that particular crisis, because if you’re thrown out of a country, it marks you, period.

McKIBBEN

Yes. You can’t go back.

HALE

No. Not only can you not go back to that country, but it spreads. So that was always one of my fears if I got thrown out of Sudan. I didn’t think they would arrest me or hurt me or whatever. This current regime would do that if I did something, but not the previous regimes, not to me. I mean, they would just, as I said, just give me notice and ship me out. So I came back to the States, wrote two chapters. We got an opportunity to go back to Sudan in ’73 and to stay for two years, and it was Gerry’s opportunity this time. So we did, and that was the period that we decided to adopt our kids.

McKIBBEN

So how did that come about?

HALE

Well, it was ’74, and we heard about a lecturer, Marya Poole, at the University of Khartoum in the English Department that

we knew. We'd been over to her house for dinner once or something like that. We weren't close friends, but we knew her well enough, small community, an American, and we heard that she had gone to Eritrea against her husband's wishes and had adopted a five-month-old baby, that she'd gone under the auspices of the Catholic Church in Khartoum, and they'd made contact with this Catholic orphanage in Asmara [Eritrea]. So, in typical Khartoum social fashion, we, of course, had to go over and wish her congratulations for the baby and all that. I remember it so distinctly, but I won't bore you with details, the baby with her calamine lotion all over her because of mosquito bites or whatever. Anyway, darling baby, named Hannah Poole. Gerry and I lived about a five- to seven-minute drive by car away from her. So we drove back to our apartment and parked in our parking lot, and I paused and looked over the top of the car as he was getting out and said, "Why don't we do that?" Just so impulsive, my lord. And he, not being an impulsive person at all, much to my great surprise, said, "Why not."

McKIBBEN

Had you had previous conversations about parenthood since you had married?

HALE

Well, we had decided not to have kids.

McKIBBEN

Right. That's what I recall.

HALE

I was leaving that part out. But it must have been haunting me in some peculiar way. I was mostly thinking about how this was the end of an era, or I was viewing it as the end of an era. We'd be going back in the spring of '75, and there was an important friendship of mine that was crumbling. There were other kinds of things going on that made me think of it as the end of an era. But I also thought that we were leading a very selfish life. We were very free. We had enough money. It turns out we really didn't have enough money, but anyway, we had enough money, and I thought, "You know, this is really selfish of us not to try to share what little wealth we have." But to answer your question, yes, we

had talked about adopting a mixed-race kid here in the [United] States many years before that, or not that many years, but maybe four years before, and I'd picked up the phone—I think it was something on TV about how mixed kids couldn't get adopted. So I picked up the phone, I got Gerry's permission, and called the adoption agency, a Los Angeles adoption agency—I don't know what it was called, but anyway—and left a message that I was interested in adopting a child, and never got a response back. Meanwhile, I took a survey of my African American friends and my African friends and asked them what they thought about adopting, our adopting a kid. Renee Poussaint, someone I mentioned earlier, said, "No. Don't do it. If it has to be any white, you'd a pretty good one, but don't do it." And a couple of other people graciously said the same thing, "Well, as whites go, you'd probably be pretty good, but don't do it." So I thought, "I'd better back off from this. If we're not going to get support, then our kids won't have support." So I backed off, put it out of my mind, put the idea of having kids out of my mind, and felt okay about it, not sad, not like there was some great loss. But then this Eritrean thing. So we had a month to get some money. Sudan had a very tightly controlled currency system, couldn't take more than, I don't know, a hundred pounds out of the country, a hundred British pounds at that time, so we're talking about less than three hundred dollars. We wrote the orphanage, but we couldn't go through the church because we weren't church people. Anyway, we started just hooking up all these—making the various connections. Our money, as it turned out, went to Saudi Arabia instead of going to Asmara [Eritrea], so we had to kind of beg our friends to give us some of their sterling and we'd pay them back in other ways. We smuggled money out of the country, first time we'd ever done that, but we still didn't have very much. We probably only had about five hundred dollars on us to embark on an adoption. So the adoption story is actually a long story and complicated and all that, but instead of coming back with one child, we returned to Khartoum with two, and that started a whole long journey of looking at racism in very different

ways, being self-critical about yet another thing, which was our failure to actually raise the kids as African, which we thought we could do, and our failure to integrate our family into a diverse community, completely integrate. Lots of failures, but lots of success, one major, major success, and that was the closeness of our family, and we are still very close. If we're going to have another session, we can pick this up.

McKIBBEN

How old were the girls when you adopted them?

HALE

Well, we weren't sure. The ages are off because there are no real birth certificates, but we now know that Adrienne ("Bulbul") was two and a half, and we thought she was two, and that Alexa was six and a half, and we thought she was five. When we went back to Khartoum, we went through a whole series of medical checkups. One of the things we were trying to do is to try the various methods that are used to try to determine someone's age, and none of them would work, of course, because they were malnourished. So these—what do you call these—metacarpals in the hand, these small bones in the hand, they wouldn't have developed with malnutrition. So that was one of the ways. The other way was through dentition, the same thing. The teeth weren't developed. So we really, really didn't know their ages. I sort of secretly harbored this horrifying notion that maybe Alexa was really twenty-five and Bulbul was really seven or eight or whatever. But anyway, so we adopted these two extremely lovely but very malnourished kids and, as I said, embarked on yet another interesting, very, very interesting journey. People in Sudan could not believe that we did this. There is a lot of racism between Eritreans and Sudanese. The Eritreans, like the Ethiopians, think that they are a chosen people. [interruption]

HALE

So we had a whole series of these medical appointments and so on, and we were in Khartoum for a few months before Gerry's contract was up and we could go back to the States. I think it was four months altogether living with Sudanese,

knowing that Sudanese really didn't like Eritreans and Ethiopians. Sudanese considered all Ethiopian women to be prostitutes, and, in fact, one word for prostitute in Arabic was a word that's used to describe Ethiopians. They were technically Ethiopians at the time because Eritrea wasn't independent yet. We knew this. We knew the attitudes about Eritreans, and so adopting the kids was a pretty momentous decision for me—I'll just speak for me and not Gerry—because I knew it was probably going to be, or I thought, the end of my activism in the Black Movement, that I would never be accepted. I'd already done that survey I told you about, and so I knew there would be strong disapproval. That wasn't far off. I knew that the problems would be from African Americans, not from whites, because we roamed in a progressive white environment. So I knew it'd be the end of that very, very important aspect of my life, and I also knew that we would never return to Sudan as a family. I was not going to expose our daughters to any form of discrimination that I had seen exhibited towards Eritrean-Ethiopian women. We never told our daughters that, and that's why I think sometimes it hurt when our older daughter, in particular, would get angry with me and accuse me of caring more for my work than I did for them. It's fairly typical kind of mother-daughter resentments. We never told them, of course, for obvious reasons what we did give up, and it nearly ruined my academic career because I got so set back from the whole experience of having two kids at once while I was writing my dissertation. Anyway, I was going to tell you that while we were in Khartoum during those four months I learned a lot about Sudanese racism. People would ask us things like, "Are you taking them back to be servants for you? That's a very intelligent, very smart thing to do." We got asked that maybe three or four times. These were by decent people who were our friends, not our close friends necessarily. But my close friends, one of them—I've never quite forgiven her—said, "Why did you do this?" That was enough. "Why did you do this? Why didn't you have your own?" And to this day, she says, "I just never understood why you didn't have your own," and she's never paid much

attention to the kids. Another one said pretty much the same thing, "It would be better if you had your own." I mean, we'd already adopted them. Then we got comments like, "But who will inherit your money?" Not that we had any, but the fact that adopted kids can't inherit in Islam. The mother of one of my three best friends when I introduced her to the kids, I was so keen to have them meet her because she was so warm and embracing and all that, and she looked at them and she said, "They're so clean." They had ringworm because that's what happens in orphanages. So the first doctor we took them to, a woman, said, "They have a fungus." I said, "Yes, we know. We know they have a fungus." She said, "You mean you knew they had a fungus and you adopted them anyway?" I could go on and on and on and on with this kind of stuff. That was very hurtful. But one of my friends, when I was losing my courage during that month that we were waiting for the money and the permits and endless bureaucratic stuff, I really thought I would not be a very good mother, and I was lamenting to her. Even though she was angry with me at the time about something very complicated and we were hardly speaking, she decided to give me about an hour's lecture on all the qualities I had that she thought would make a good mother, and it was for that reason that I picked up and had the courage to go on. So Bulbul, our younger daughter, carries this person's middle name. That's a little bit of that story, and I'm probably going to bring it up now and then or talk about what it's like to raise black kids in America.

McKIBBEN

Well, let's end it here for today, and we'll talk more about that next time. [End of April 5, 2011 interview]

1.4. Session Four
July 26, 2011

McKIBBEN

All right. So here we are again. The last time we talked, you were just about to return from Sudan. I guess Gerry [Hale] had been doing some work over there, and you had just

adopted your daughters [Bulbul and Alexa], who, as I recall, were two and six. Is that right?

HALE

Pretty close. But I was there doing research also. I had another grant, American Association of University Women, to do reconnaissance fieldwork, in other words follow-up fieldwork, for my dissertation. I was advised not to do that by my advisor, but Gerry had a contract for two years, so it was a perfect opportunity to go back and pick up loose ends and maybe get a little writing done. So I was sort of tinkering, in a sense, with my research. I hope that no one on the board of the American Association of University Women is listening to my saying that I was tinkering with their money, but, anyway, so I was there also for my own professional reasons. And, yes, we adopted the kids.

McKIBBEN

Just for clarity, I don't remember if we discussed in the last session that your dissertation was specifically about urban Nubian populations, right?

HALE

Right. I was very interested in a school of thought that came from Manchester, England originally. The word "ethnicity" crept into our vocabulary, which was at that time, anyway, a political word, and it generally meant people coming into an ethnic consciousness. This was a very urban school of thought, and these mainly British but some American scholars were very interested in what happens to ethnic groups when they migrate to urban areas. So I had an extra twist to that. I was interested in what would happen, what had happened to Nubian, very northern Sudanese, identity when the High Dam in Aswan was built and Nubians were forced out of their homeland. Many of these urban Nubians had lived in the urban area in the capital and other cities in Sudan for maybe a couple of generations, and yet they were going through a process of a resuscitation, sometimes for opportunistic reasons, but resuscitation of their Nubian identity when, in fact, for years they had been pretty well integrated into so-called Arab society in northern Sudan. So I was exploring what these processes were and also the ways

that Nubians held onto their identity. The dissertation was in no way feminist. Although I was coming into my feminism while I was writing it, it was sort of too late, in a sense, to incorporate much about women. Although women now, if I were to rewrite that dissertation, I now realize how important women were to the maintenance of Nubian identity. I mean, I said that in the dissertation, but almost as an afterthought or just a section of the dissertation, when, in fact, with my feminist consciousness that came along a bit later or about now, I would have written it really, really differently. Women would have been centered. But back to the subject you set up.

McKIBBEN

Also, again for clarity, it's about 1975 when you're in this period?

HALE

Yes, it's mid '75.

McKIBBEN

Last time, we talked about your adopting the girls and some of the logistical processes that you went through in doing that. So let's talk about when you got back to L.A. What did you envision being a parent, parenting transracially, parenting girls? What did you picture for your family at that stage?

HALE

I think I already told you that it was a big decision to do this adoption, for me anyway, because I figured it would be the end of my activism with African Americans, that I would not be trusted in quite the way that I was before. Not Africans so much, but specifically African Americans. So that was really something to consider, but basically with the adoption I had only maybe a few days to consider it. But that was pretty much true. We came back to an all-white environment again. It's very easy, when you're white, to let one's environment become white. It's such a racist society, we have to work at our diversity constantly. I don't mean by that step out in the street and grab a person of color and invite them to lunch or—I'm being sarcastic. I hope you can hear it on the tape.

McKIBBEN

Yes.

HALE

But just how does one build and maintain a diverse community. I'd come back to a grad school in which basically my African American friends and a lot of my African friends that I'd been in African Studies with had graduated, and the faculty and the Geography Department, the Anthro[pology] Department, even African Studies was pretty white. My few African American friends that were still in the general L.A. area weren't that interested in our family, in our transracial adoption. Renee Poussaint, who was a good friend of mine and the editor of Ufahamu, was still in town, and we invited her over and so on, and what she had to say about the transracial adoption was, "Well, I see you didn't take my advice." She became a news anchor in Washington, D.C. shortly after that, a few years after that. Anyway, I could see the writing on the wall, and it was extremely worrying because we'd come back with these black kids, moving them into an all-white environment. My thought had always been that we could do this transracial adoption because we had the environment we had, which was at least 50 percent black at the time I was in African Studies. So that part was difficult. Trying to figure out how, not acting in an artificial way, how we could sort of add a person of color and stir in your family environment, how we could blacken, so to speak, the environment for the kids, and it's been a lifelong struggle and almost a separate story. But there were other parenting concerns as well. As I think I told you informally, I had this bizarre notion before we adopted the kids that I was not going to be like my other friends who'd had babies. I wasn't going to stop my life. It was going to go on. I was still going to be an activist and a scholar, or academic anyway, and a poet and an athlete and all these things that had been important in my life were going to continue. I was most worried, I think, that it would interrupt my activism, and I wasn't going to let it happen, that I would just pack the kids up and take them to the demonstrations with me and so on. Remind me if I don't tell you about the first demonstration that I took the kids to.

McKIBBEN

Okay.

HALE

That was pretty much the end of it. But the parenting concerns were overwhelming. I was writing my dissertation. We had one car. We were running out of money. We didn't realize how expensive it would be to suddenly be the parents of two kids and trying to private school the older one, our six-year-old, because she was so far behind in school that we didn't figure we could just plunk her down in public school. We probably could have, but at the time we were concerned that we couldn't. We had one car. I was teaching part-time at Northridge [California State University at Northridge] over in the San Fernando Valley, so there was a commute. We had the kids in two different—one was in nursery school, and the other was in regular elementary school. Or not regular; private. So we were a high-stress family, highly stressed family, I mean, of trying to just chauffeur people places. My reaction to all of this was to get sick with something that was diagnosed as Graves' disease, which is a hyperactive toxic thyroid condition. So I was really pretty much—excuse an old expression—a nervous wreck. My friends were saying later on that they pretty much can't stand me when I come back from Sudan because I'm so angry. I don't want to be in the [United] States, and then add to that the stress of having two new kids and all that. It was an extremely difficult time. And in the midst of all of it, I was torturing myself about how I needed to get my activism started. I needed to be in the center of things again right away. And the dissertation was giving me trouble. I'd lost interest in the topic and my advisor really wasn't all that helpful, nor any of my advisors, for that matter. After you remove yourself from your committee, from your department and so on, I know from my grad students now, it's very, very difficult to get help anymore. We didn't have email in those days, so it was difficult. So I'd gone for the two years in the Sudan without any advisory help, and now I was back at UCLA, but not really at UCLA, no office or anything like that. So I worked at home. I was isolated. I joined a women's group. I found

them, which was strange for me, you know, because I'd always rejected these women's groups, and Second Wave Feminism had emerged in a big way while I was away.

McKIBBEN

This was a feminist group that you joined?

HALE

Yes and no. It was a women's group. I mean, there were a bunch of them sprouting up all over. This was the period of time when women were getting together and pretty much talking about what jerks men were and in what ways, and many of the women in this group had been activists and were still activists, but some of them had been very serious activists on the Left and were fed up with the leftist groups they belonged to. This was a time when I was also rethinking the Marxist and leftist groups that I'd been a part of and what my role was as a woman, although I didn't in those years really identify as a woman. I had no consciousness as a woman. It may have been unconscious and subconscious and all that, but it wasn't there on the surface. So I was oblivious to the fact that I was one of the main leaders of Ufahamu and the African Activist Association [AAA], but I was never suggested as a president of the AAA. I was the secretary, and that was the role that women played. We not only were the secretaries in that I took the notes for all the minutes and sent them out and that kind of thing in, again, a pre-email period so it was a big job, but we were also the ones who brought the wine to the meetings and the potato chips and any food and all that sort of thing. We were also the ones that helped each other with childcare. The men weren't participating in childcare. We were doing all of it, so maybe we would share it, but maybe we were also isolated. In my case, I had a fairly stay-at-home husband who stayed at home and did the babysitting, so I was freed up to do more than many women in the same situation would have been. But this women's group, I remember being very dissatisfied because it turned into people talking about their sexual relationships, and it wasn't comfortable for me. There wasn't anything wrong with them talking about their sexual relationships, but I remember coming home and telling Gerry

that it was a very self-indulgent group and that we weren't discussing politics and we weren't getting anywhere. Of course, it was politics, but my consciousness wasn't far enough along, nor was theirs, actually, for that matter. But my consciousness wasn't far enough along for me to understand that these were very, very political issues that were being discussed, even though they weren't being framed that way.

McKIBBEN

You were still adopting a more classically Marxist outlook?

HALE

Well, I don't know if it was so much that as that I was defining politics in a very narrow way, in terms of parties and movements and the state and so on, not our private lives. That was not political to me at the time, and "The personal is political" was not a slogan that had reached me yet. Maybe it hadn't even—my dates are slightly off, so maybe it hadn't even been uttered yet. It was about to be, but it hadn't been, because if I had heard that slogan, superficial though it may sound, I think I would have started thinking about that, and I might have evaluated that group quite differently, and I might have been able to play a role in politicizing it more than it was already—I mean, politicizing it, not to say I was the person who could have politicized it. But I, along with other people, might have been able to frame it. I started to say "elevate" it, and I'm trying to avoid saying that.

McKIBBEN

To make those connections exclusively.

HALE

But there they were, talking about gender dynamics, and I only heard them talking about and they only heard themselves talking about who they were going to have sex with that weekend and whether or not they should have sex with their ex-husbands and how there were a couple of women who had been married to anthro[pology] faculty, in the group and a couple of ex-anthro[pology] grad students. They were talking a lot about faculty members that they'd had sexual relationships with and so on. I'd always been

appalled at that and had been called a prude, but I continued to be somewhat appalled that there was all that partner switching and so on going on in the Anthro[pology] Department and in other departments as well, not just anthro[pology]. So, yes, maybe I was being a Marxist prude, but something wasn't setting right with me.

McKIBBEN

How did you find them? I mean, why had it occurred to you to join the women's group?

HALE

Two of them were two of my best friends in grad school in the Anthro[pology] Department. They thought I was really obnoxious in my contributions and generally in the way I was acting, and I think they were probably sorry they invited me.

McKIBBEN

Did you criticize the group when you were there?

HALE

No, I don't think I said anything like, "Oh, all you people talk about is who you're screwing," but I must have been kind of hostile in suggesting our topics or suggesting shifting topics, that kind of thing, and it was picked up on. I was not a friendly presence. Part of that was my anger that I didn't want to be there, I didn't want to be in the U.S., I didn't want to be at UCLA. I wanted to be back in Sudan or just anywhere outside of the United States. [laughs] Although it was a really interesting time in the States. It was a time when the Weather People were active. There was still the possibility in the air of revolution. Student activism was still there, although it was waning. The Vietnam War had ended, but there were the residuals, a sort of rethinking about the U.S. as a military might and intervening in other countries and so on. So there was a lot of very, very interesting discussion, not unlike today, for that matter, in our involvement in two wars and butting our noses into the business of just about every country in the Middle East that we can think of, plus some others. Anyway, though, leftover from my Sudanese connections, I was feeling a kind of, let's say, prefigurative feminist consciousness, but I didn't know what to do with it. So I was kind of a feminist creature in

search of a framework. So I started looking at notices on bulletin boards and so on, and I saw that there was a workshop being offered at the Church in Ocean Park, which at that time housed and hosted and so on a number of activist groups. It was definitely a center of activist events in West L.A.

McKIBBEN

It's in Santa Monica, right?

HALE

Yes. It's not quite so activist-friendly now and many things have changed, and that has changed. But there was this workshop, I forget the name of it, but I think it was referred to as a socialist feminist workshop. I thought, "Whoa," and the announcement had some of the people we were going to be reading and analyzing, among them [Karl] Marx and [Sigmund] Freud, so it wasn't just that we were reading early feminists, although we were, but we were reading some of the so-called classics and then reading some of the early feminist classics.

McKIBBEN

Which ones were those?

HALE

I was afraid you'd ask me that. Phyllis Chesler, Nancy Chodorow, Susan Brownmiller. Oh, I'm going to embarrass myself by not being able to come up with these names. But, anyway, some of those very an early texts that—oh, and even Rayna Rapp's The Anthropology of Women, which had just come out. So we were going to be reading books that had come out in 1975 that were really at the vanguard of the academic feminist movement or scholarly feminist movement. [interruption]

HALE

And a work that became really important in my later teaching and everything was Shulamith Firestone's The Dialectic of Sex, and that was one of the books that we read. So in that workshop that was coordinated by, facilitated by Maria Ramos, who's still on staff here at UCLA, and a psychology colleague of hers, Dawn Baker, those two offered this workshop that was just a fantastic opening for me, an

opening up and opening everything else with these pieces we were reading, reading a feminist interpretation of Freud, of Marx, and other major male thinkers and then countering them, in a sense, or complementing them, with early Marxist feminist, socialist feminist, and radical feminist. It was at that workshop where I learned the differences among these three schools of thought or maybe four schools of thoughts, if you differentiate between Marxist feminism and socialist feminism. But I was introduced for the first time to radical feminism, which puts sex as the earliest human division and hierarchy, so that sex, as it was presented then, in other words, gender, was really central to various forms of oppression, central over class, not that class wasn't considered, but central over class and race and so on. Whereas socialist feminism attempted to keep class as an important variable, Marxist feminism had class as the central variable but gendering it. That's not a very good explanation. And then liberal feminism. How could I leave out liberal feminism?

McKIBBEN

Wasn't that what you were trying to get away from or stay away from?

HALE

Yes, yes, exactly. So the workshop was an explosive workshop. I think something like twenty-one people were there the first session.

McKIBBEN

I'd love to get twenty-one people to a feminist book reading meeting. [laughs]

HALE

And it got smaller, but it never got much smaller than, say, twelve or whatever, and it was extremely exciting, almost all new to me, and the process was all new. That's where I learned feminist process, too, the criticism, self-criticism, the attempt to break down the divisions between the academic women and so-called community women, and to break down our class differences within or related to what I just said, the academic and community, although those are not straight down class lines, and, probably more than I wanted, an

introduction to the importance of lesbian feminism and lesbian separatism. I mean, for a workshop that probably didn't last more than a few weeks formally, I learned a lifetime, and I've always been indebted to Dawn and Maria for presenting those ideas.

McKIBBEN

Can you talk a little bit more about the feminist process that you guys engaged in, how that worked for you?

HALE

Well, it worked in a rather jumpy way. I mean, it worked in a delicate way for me because I felt a little stifled. I'd always been used to talking a lot in seminars, probably dominating some of my UCLA seminars. I was filled with enthusiasm for this new subject matter, some negative enthusiasm, and so I wanted to talk a lot. But feminist process really did require—and, by the way, I got more of this in the Socialist Feminist Network, which I was one of the early members and founders of a bit later, and then when I started teaching Women's Studies in various Women's Studies situations, I learned more and more about feminist process or what we were calling feminist process, which was actually very akin to Maoist principles of criticism, self-criticism, sort of breaking down these various divisions that I just talked about, the class, and I suppose it would be in the U.S. context, race divisions in order to make it a completely egalitarian or supposedly completely egalitarian environment, a safe environment, an environment where decisions were made not by the vote but by consensus. So I learned for the first time how to try to bring about consensus, many of the kinds of processes that are often now debunked as having had their own—that there were, in fact, hidden agendas. We weren't supposed to have hidden agendas. We were not supposed to caucus outside and come up with ploys and strategies and agendas that we wanted to bring into the meeting. The agenda was always determined at the meeting. The amount of time that we wanted to spend on each agenda item was determined. By the way, I'm doing an amalgam now of this early workshop, the Socialist Feminist Network, and the later feminist Women's Studies, feminist

environments. We followed [Paulo] Freire without giving much credence to Freire. We followed Mao [Tse-Tung] without giving much credence to Mao. We sort of appropriated all of this and made it, in a sense, seemingly our own. We went around in a circle for our contributions. We always did a check-in of some kind at the beginning of the meeting. We would do criticism, self-criticism at the end of the meeting, which consisted of being able to talk freely without being challenged about what we might not have liked, or it could be a self-criticism. It could be something as simple as, "Well, I find it disruptive that—," and we were always supposed to be very specific. "I find it disruptive that "Susan" always comes in about twenty minutes late for every session," or, as a self-criticism, "Well, I'm still trying not to interrupt. I'm getting a bit better, but I'm still interrupting people," this sort of thing. So we would end the meetings with this kind of criticism, self-criticism, or of the group process. "I think we did really well this time because we did such-and-such," or, "Well, I felt the atmosphere this time was hostile. I wasn't as comfortable as I usually am." No one in the room is supposed to be able to challenge you. They can ask for clarification, which is another form of challenging. They can ask for clarification but not challenge. So "Susan" would not be able to say, "I only came late once. I don't know what you're talking about." But when it came Susan's time, she could acknowledge that or she could try to refute it, but she would be trying to follow the practices of how you receive criticism as much as possible. So she might say, "Well, even though I initially thought that what "Grace" said, what "Sondra" said, wasn't fair, but I'm willing to think about it more," or something of that sort. So it was really an attempt to listen, to acknowledge what other people were feeling about you or thinking about you without just an immediate defense of oneself. In many, many cases this worked very well, especially when we were talking about extremely personal sorts of things, personal topics such as sexuality and gender dynamics, although we weren't using that term yet.

McKIBBEN

Did it ever work poorly?

HALE

Yes, it worked poorly because there were always people who knew the rules and people who were new and didn't know the rules. So I remember the first time that a socialist feminist, even though I should have known more, but at a socialist feminist meeting I said something and someone yelled, "Process!" I didn't know what the person was talking about. I forget what it was I did. Maybe I challenged someone in a criticism, self-criticism, and was called on it. But I personally felt intimidated by the process very often. But to go back to my point, some people knew the rules and they knew them well. They had made up the rules. And others didn't have anything to say about the rules; they were made up already. So instead of a situation where we might go in and say, "Let's develop our particular guidelines for this group," which we do now, so that's a kind of a modification, I think, "Let's talk about what our guidelines will be, the ways that we might criticize, the ways that we can sort of build up respect for each other," or these would be named as the guidelines. So that's a problem whenever you say, "Here. Here is our process." When someone has made up the rules, not everyone has been asked to agree with them or disagree with them, and so it becomes unequal.

McKIBBEN

Let me just pause here and maybe close the window. [interruption]

McKIBBEN

Just for the sake of clarity, is it safe to assume that you were using the name Susan earlier because my name is Susan, and you weren't referring to a specific Susan in your meeting?

HALE

No, I was using your name and mine.

McKIBBEN

Okay. I didn't want a future historian to be confused. [laughs]

HALE

Right.

McKIBBEN

So tell me about how the Socialist Feminist Network came to be formed.

HALE

Well, it was formed like a lot of groups at that time, with a notice on a bulletin board and word of mouth, not the sort of way that we would do it today. Besides, no matter how we did it today, we would not get the kind of enthusiastic response that we were getting in those years, which was very exciting. So I think I was either invited by somebody to the first meeting, or I saw a notice on a bulletin board that there would be at UCLA, and that made it convenient, that there would be the first meeting of the Socialist Feminist Network. By the way, I wanted to go back to this workshop in Ocean Park, because those of us who lasted out the weeks, however many weeks it was, I think it was one night a week or whatever for six weeks, we wanted to go on, and so we did. We went on, I think, in various people's houses for quite a long time after that until we kind of went up in flames, and we went up in flames basically over Palestine.

McKIBBEN

So what happened there?

HALE

What happened then?

McKIBBEN

Yes.

HALE

We disbanded.

McKIBBEN

I mean, what was the issue, the controversy, or how did that develop?

HALE

Well, I think I was in the heart of it, which shouldn't be a surprise, and I think I was assuming a certain progressive thought in the group, and I'd forgotten that no matter how progressive people might be, on every issue on the face of the Earth, if they're Jewish this issue of supposedly anti-Semitism and connected with Palestine will emerge or might emerge. I wasn't even conscious of whether people were

Jewish or not Jewish in the group when I was saying certain sorts of things that were, I think, anti-Israeli government. I don't know how it came up, I don't know in what context or whatever, and was called on it by one of the members of the group who burst into tears in defense of Israel and talking about having suffered anti-Semitism or her relatives or how she was a Holocaust survivor, or not she, but her relatives. I don't remember what she said, but I was brought up short, and her close friend in the group came to her rescue as well, and suddenly a couple people came to my side, and there we were. We were really badly split with most of us, by the way, thinking that it was ridiculous to think that it was anti-Semitism to come out on behalf of Palestine. But there was a small enough vocal minority, and these were the people that had started the other workshop and were very much at the heart of that first workshop.

McKIBBEN

The original work—

HALE

The original one, and also helping to facilitate the continuation of that original one. I was heartbroken, because these were among my favorite people. One of them I just grew to idolize, Maria Ramos, and I learned so much from her. She's so brilliant. She was the one who came to the aid of her friend. But that was the beginning. That was the beginning of some splits within feminism anyway, this whole issue of critique of Israel meant anti-Semitism. Also there were many people in early Women's Studies in early feminism that thought that we were not addressing anti-Semitism as a major problem within American society and were insisting on putting it forward in the agenda, and others who didn't see Jews within the U.S. as a disprivileged group or even so much a discriminated-against group at this point in American history. I disagree with that. I think anti-Semitism is still there and that people don't get in clubs because they're Jewish or they don't get into certain private schools because they're Jewish and they're not hired or promoted in certain jobs because they're Jewish. I definitely think it's there. But to have it be primary on the agenda was

something else. So I went to that first meeting of the Socialist Feminist Network, and there were a lot of people there, and it was so exciting, but almost right away when we went around the room and said who we were and what we wanted to see from the group, we immediately had splits. We had splits between straights and lesbians, splits between women who saw themselves as community activists and others who were more academic, and others who saw themselves as both and didn't want these divisions to be made. That was someone like me. Also a split between those that wanted to discuss theory and those that wanted to discuss more policy-oriented issues and/or engage in some activism, whether that be to try to change policy or straight activism, basically. And there must have been other splits that either I was unaware of, people's histories with each other in early leftist groups. Oh, yes, and I suppose there were those splits among—even though we were calling ourselves Socialist Feminist Network, there were those who were still very much Marxist feminists and those who were on the more liberal wing of socialist feminism. We had some difficulty defining socialist feminism, and therefore some difficulty defining our mission. There was one woman who dropped out because we weren't dealing with childcare. She thought that childcare was the single most important agenda item that women could deal with, whether we had children or not.

McKIBBEN

In society, not just in the meeting itself?

HALE

In society, but why weren't we in a group like this having this be a major issue. What we tried to do was to work on a theme each week, or maybe it would be more than a week. Well, we weren't meeting every week. We were meeting every two weeks, which was quite frequent. Then I think eventually we started meeting once a month, so we would have a different theme each time or each block of time. So we would work on childcare or we would work on labor-force participation or work on domestic labor, you know, the various kinds of issues that you might expect. As usual, my

problem with these feminist groups, all of them, was that I found them to be very, very provincial, very U.S. oriented, not very international. That would be different now, I think, or maybe not so different. I don't know. So I, with my Sudan interest and Middle East interest and African Studies interest, always felt like my particular areas of expertise were not honored, were not seen, were not visible, and certainly weren't being utilized. It's been my frustration within feminism and continues to be my frustration in Women's Studies and in various women's groups and feminist groups.

McKIBBEN

What kind of work was the group doing? Were you writing, were you going to demonstrations or what?

HALE

We were definitely going to demonstrations as a contingent, and the demonstrations in those years were about reproductive rights, I mean in terms of a, quote, "women's issue," which it was considered at that time. Now I think we no longer consider it a women's issue; we consider it much broader than that. So demonstrations for reproductive rights, abortion rights in particular, were really hot in that time period. Still is, but really hot. What was the date of Roe vs. Wade? I don't remember.

McKIBBEN

Seventy-three.

HALE

So it was still being discussed and heatedly and people were still attacking it and trying to get it repealed and it was still a big battle, and continued to be.

McKIBBEN

At that point, did you see reproduction and sexuality as more political than you had initially?

HALE

I was starting to, but I still wasn't all that interested in—I thought it was a major error at that time. Now I'm talking about at that time. I thought it was a major error to focus so on abortion rights. Reproductive rights, that's something different, because that could take in maternal mortality, which is a big problem in Sudan, infant mortality, big

problem in Sudan and in many areas of the world and here in the U.S., where we know that among industrialized nations, we rank very low in terms of maternity deaths. Not to get off on that, but I thought that abortion was a too-controversial issue for us to have be almost the icon of Second Wave Feminism. I felt that there were definitely more important issues that we should have been working on, and I just named a couple of them. I remember telling a sister feminist that I was uncomfortable about abortion, and she just jumped all over me. All that I was saying was that I was uncomfortable about it being so high on the agenda of feminist organizations. She wanted to know if I was Catholic. I said, "You know that I was originally Catholic, but that I'm a really fallen-away, hostile-to-Catholicism person. So that has nothing to do with it." It really had to do with the fact that I knew, or I thought that I knew, that at some point in our history we're going to be considering abortions as barbaric, and we will come up with other methods of birth control and other methods of generally having population control, but that abortion itself as an operation would be considered pretty barbaric. I got in lots of fights with lots of feminists who were shocked at this point of view of mine. I don't think I ever made public statements. I never spoke at a rally against supporting abortion rights, because my position was we have no choice but to support abortion rights, but does it have to be on the forefront of our agenda. Just in terms of organizing strategies, in terms of forming coalitions with other groups, religious groups, more conservative groups, pro-natal groups of one kind or another, it was making it impossible for us to move into any sorts of coalitions to support other areas of reproductive freedom.

McKIBBEN

It seems like that's turned out to be an accurate perception.

HALE

Yes, I think it's an accurate perception, but I feel more strongly in support of abortion rights than I did in those years now, even though I think that as a strategy it was a weak, very weak strategy.

McKIBBEN

Speaking of rallies, is this the point to ask you about the first rally that you took the kids to?

HALE

Yes. It was a reproductive-rights rally, abortion-rights rally, and it was in Anaheim [California]. The Right-to-Lifers were having a big convention, and ours was a counterdemonstration. It was of the few counterdemonstrations I've actually, I think, been a part of. It was big. Both of them were big, the Pro-Lifers and so on. Anyway, we planned it to be there when they came out of their convention hall, so it was confrontative and so on. But the difficulty was—I mean, there were several things. First of all, the kids were grossly uncomfortable. It was a summer day in probably July or August, and in Anaheim and we were under the sun. We had no shade. Of course, like in many demonstrations and rallies and so on, it involved a lot of waiting around and standing around, and the kids got whiny. I wasn't paying any attention to them because I was one of the leaders of our contingent and trying to organize and figure out what we were going to do and so on, so the kids were in the way and I was being an irritable mom. People were chanting, and the chants were scaring them. People would chant in their faces, so to speak. But one of the Right-to-Lifers came up to Bulbul and yelled at her and said, "How would it feel if your mom had had you aborted?" And said something sort of equally nasty to Alexa.

McKIBBEN

To your five-year-old?

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

Good lord.

HALE

Six, I guess, or seven at that time. I don't know. So they were very upset. But, you know, I think that that wasn't the first. I think that I took them not to a demonstration, but to a feminist music concert that was just down the street at Vets Park in Culver City, and I think that it was the usual

suspects. I think Holly Near, Meg Christian, Chris Williamson. Williamson? What's wrong with me?

McKIBBEN

Chris Williamson.

HALE

And the major, major names in feminist music were performing. I took the kids alone, I didn't go with anyone else, and it was maybe in many ways the most "outlandish-looking" lesbian group that I had ever been a part of, with women growing beards, and they were being very publicly demonstrative. This must have been '77. We had to wait out in line, wait outside, instead of going into the auditorium because there was some delay in opening the doors. So there was this long line of, to our kids, very "odd-looking" women behaving "very oddly" towards each other, kissing each other and hugging and just being publically demonstrative. People were driving by in cars and yelling insults, "Dykes!" whatever terminology, and throwing some things and so on. Both kids got extremely—well, Alexa was old enough to get upset. Bulbul, I think, didn't know what was going on. Maybe I only took Alexa. But at any rate, she was asking me, you know, "Why do so many of these women look like men?" Or she would say, "I can't tell the women from the men." Then I would say, "There aren't any men in the line." "Those are women?" She was embarrassing me with her comments, because people could hear her. She has a loud voice and so on. Then she was just absolutely appalled. Everything that she knew as her world had suddenly been turned upside down and given to her in a very large dose. Now, I'd had lesbians in the house, some of my best friends are lesbians, as the line goes, and so I was surprised, but that was also a big public display. So then there was the reproductive-rights march, and by that time I was thinking—and I think I took them to a Palestinian demo, too. I tried again. I forget. I think it was—what would it have been? What was going on in '73?

McKIBBEN

The Yom Kippur War?

HALE

Probably. Palestinian men and angry Palestinian men were shouting, and there was a counterdemonstration across the street, and it got very nasty. In fact, I got worried that it was going to get physical and that I shouldn't have taken the kids. I remembered the kids saying, "Why are they shouting? Why are they so angry?" Why are they this and why are they that, and really cowering. So I think all of those experiences, maybe I didn't prepare them for them each time, but I didn't know about the women, the feminist music concert. I didn't know that we'd be standing outside or that the audience would be especially demonstratively lesbian and sexual acting and so on. I'm not making judgments now; I'm just describing events. I didn't know that people would yell at them at a reproductive-rights thing and that that it would really sort of hit, that the things that would be said to them would really hit at the quick of who they are and their life experience. So I thought, well, I'd better back up from this a bit and rethink it and work them into it gradually and try to do some more home education instead of just taking them out into the streets. That was just a bad parenting error. So that was in response to the first demonstration I took the kids to.

McKIBBEN

Sounds like it was eye-opening. So what was going on on campus in terms of conversations as far as feminism in the academy, do you recall?

HALE

Well, I probably should tell you about my first Women's Studies class.

McKIBBEN

Okay.

HALE

And how I got into Women's Studies, which was a totally new field in '75. Again, I read a notice. I was teaching anthropology part-time at Cal State Northridge, and I read a notice on the bulletin board.

McKIBBEN

Bless those bulletin boards.

HALE

Good old bulletin boards. Well, they were that era's answer equivalent of email, I guess. So I saw a notice that Cal State Northridge was going to be starting a Women's Studies Program and that they were open for applications for the very first teaching of Introduction to Women's Studies. What I had in my belt, under my belt, was that one workshop in Ocean Park. [laughter] And a lot of reading. I mean, I had really been reading everything I could get my hands on. So it's not actually like me, although if Gerry were sitting here, he would say, "Yes, you've done many things like this," but I'm going to say it's not like me to be so bold as to think I could apply for this field, this course. So I went for an interview, and I got the job. [laughter] The people who were interviewing me, it was all new to them, too, you know, so it's not like these were these highly sophisticated—it's not like Sandra Harding was interviewing me or something like that, or Karen Brodkin. So I was asked to name two of the leading feminist journals. [laughs] I had, in fact, read some Feminist Studies articles, so I immediately said, "Well, Feminist Studies." And they said, "But what about Signs?" I said, "Oh, yes, and Signs, too, but I think Feminist Studies has got it over Signs right now and I like the way—," blah, blah, blah. I just faked my way through. I didn't know anything about Signs. I had not heard of Signs, I have to say. [laughter] But they liked my other attitudes, I guess. I think they asked me to work up a syllabus before I went in, so they must have liked my syllabus. I wish I had a copy of that syllabus. I'm sure it would be quite laughable. [laughter] But I know that I probably used all of these ideas I'd learned in that workshop. I do remember ending the course with the three or four schools of thought, and I was calling them schools of thought rather than political perspectives of liberal feminism, socialist feminism and radical feminism. I was just teaching the three and really going wild with that differentiation, and the students really took to that. But I'm sure I had a section on violence against women and a section on representation of women in the media. I know that I started teaching the arts because I started being very aware of—I was very into the arts anyway, because I was working

on the Sudanese arts and literature. So I think I was noting suddenly, like my consciousness was suddenly raised to [Pablo] Picasso, who was really an obnoxious sexist, as were many of the other Cubists and Surrealists and Modernist artists of the time. So I know I had an arts section. I always had an arts section, which often here at UCLA set me off from the other people who teach Introduction to Women's Studies. I probably had a section on women in the workplace. I mean, it was a very simple syllabus, women in this, women in that, women in that. It was a semester long and so on. That was really—I can't tell you how exciting it was to teach Introduction to Women's Studies, and maybe by that time it was '76, probably early '76, and to be the first one to teach it at the institution. The class had something like forty students, because that was the ceiling on Northridge classes, but no problem getting forty students, forty very enthusiastic students who were just sitting there with their eyes wide open. I remember, however, I learned a lot from people in the class. People came out as rape survivors, as incest survivors. It was very moving and enlightening. I was challenged a few times, and that was exciting. But I do remember I was taken aback by one thing. I remember saying to my first class in this really dramatic fashion, "More women are killed or maimed by the men in their lives than in any other way, than in household accidents, automobile accidents, war, catastrophe of one kind or another. The numbers of domestic killings and maimings far outnumber." They were struck by what I said, but somehow or other I expected them to rise up from their chairs and go out into the streets and say, "I've had it! This is it! This is not going to happen again! Never again!" kind of thing. But there were some people who became activists after that class, kept in touch with me years later, so I did raise the consciousness of people. There was no doubt about that. My biggest, longest, and most difficult debate was with a Christian Fundamentalist in the class, who was really trying to understand what in heaven's name I was saying. I don't know why she was there, but I probably taught a section on religion, and she was taking offense with what I had to say

about the various religions. Women's Studies had not even started at UCLA. People were trying to get it started at about that same time, which was what was happening all over the nation. I mean, '75, '76, those were the years that Women's Studies was emerging. It was a time, however, when more community-oriented universities, like even our Cal State system and places like UCLA, in other words, research-oriented places that were elitist and considered elite, where there began to be major differences in the Women's Studies movement, or I should call it movements at this point. Northridge was somewhere in between the more activist Long Beach [California State University, Long Beach], where I ended up coordinating the program, and the much more academically oriented UCLA that became increasingly detached from activism. Didn't begin that way. Most of the programs, in fact, began—I shouldn't say most. A goodly share of programs began with a handful of activists on campus who were also academics who wanted to keep that connection with community and with activism and so on, but at a place like UCLA, it's extremely hard to maintain this. The university frowns on it, frowns on giving credit to students for activism; won't allow it, in fact. It has to be called all kinds of other names: internships, community service, euphemisms, basically. That's true here. But at Long Beach, it was a whole different kettle of fish. I don't know at what point you want me to go into Long Beach.

McKIBBEN

We'll definitely get there. It seems like especially in some of the secondary-source research that I've done, a lot of the development of Women's Studies that's documented came from faculty activism. Was that your experience? Were students or community members more directly involved, or was it mainly faculty getting together and advocating for these changes?

HALE

No, I think it really differed. I think that your information is not incorrect. I think in many cases the Women's Studies movement emerged from grievances that faculty and students and staff had, and there were many of those, of

course. Women faculty were way down, way low on the totem pole—still true—less paid, more difficulty getting tenure, fewer women in high positions. So that you could take a field like anthro—and this has been charted and written about—take a field like anthro where, if you look at it initially and you just count the number of women faculty members, it's almost equal in the country or at the time this article was written, which was about twenty years ago. So if you count lecturers and instructors and assistant professors and so on, we're equal. We might even outnumber the men if you count the lecturers and instructors. But then the higher you go up in the hierarchy, the more the numbers drop off, so that the numbers of women with tenure as full professors was very paltry. Then if you start to compare the schools, you take Harvard [University] and the number of women at the full professor rank at Harvard was pretty, pretty low, I mean just disgraceful. But at state colleges and state universities, you could find more women at the full professor rank. Not a lot, but more. So there was a split between elite institutions and community and state institutions, but it was very, very clear. In terms of the students that got funded, men far outranked women in the amount that they were funded. Staff—well, we know the story of staff, and it's still the case today. Staff and administration, we know who's mostly in high administrative positions. Now that is changing, but it's taken all of these years since with the combination of Second Wave Feminism and the Women's Studies movement. I mean, on this campus today, I'm a part of a group, I've not been very active in it, but I'm a part of a group that's senior women in the social sciences that did statistical studies of the UCLA campus, finding that women were really, really lagging behind men in salaries, no doubt about it, even at the same rank, because men will go in to the dean and demand more money. Anyway, I don't want to get into that right now. So you're right in that some of the pressure for the establishment of a Women's Studies program on any one campus might have come from that internal ferment, but I would maintain that most of the idea for Women's Studies

really came from the activism of Second Wave Feminism outside the academy, but many of these were academics who took those activist ideas into the academy with them, people like me.

McKIBBEN

When you're teaching these classes in that kind of early days, were you talking about women of color as well?

HALE

No, it was very white. I was talking about women of color because that's kind of how I was raised, but not enough and not appropriately and, as in the early years, probably as an add-on rather than something that was integral to the first lecture on. Now I teach very differently, but in those years I'm sure that I must have had a section on women of color, but many who taught Women's Studies didn't even have that. I was teaching early with bell hooks' books. That was considered to be pretty enlightened, I think, because I don't think my colleagues who were teaching Women's Studies here, Introduction to Women's Studies, had any books by women of color. I mean, finally Gloria Anzaldua came onto the scene in terms of the books that we were—so Borderlands and bell hooks became kind of standard texts for teaching about women of color. Fortunately, we're better, but Women's Studies at UCLA, we're changing that right now. The undergraduate curriculum has a course on women of color. If we had that material better integrated into all of our other courses, that would not be a necessary course to offer, might still be, but now it's just essential. Finally we're diversifying the faculty, and Women's Studies has a diverse faculty, but it took a long time and a lot of struggle.

McKIBBEN

Was it very separate between Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies at Northridge as well?

HALE

These are really good questions, Susan, because, yes. I mean, I don't want to keep pointing to myself, but when I was at Northridge, I couldn't understand why we weren't collaborating with the Ethnic Studies programs. It made all the sense in the world to me. So before I left Northridge as

coordinator of Women's Studies, which I became later after Long Beach, I managed to get from the dean, who was a Chicano dean, so I was very lucky, I managed to get from the dean a position that was going to be half Chicano Studies, half Women's Studies. That was a big breakthrough.

McKIBBEN

That was in the nineties, right?

HALE

Right.

McKIBBEN

That you were coordinator.

HALE

Yes, early nineties. Yes, since I'm retiring, I'm looking up these dates now.

McKIBBEN

But it took a while.

HALE

It took a while.

McKIBBEN

I mean, that wasn't the case until then.

HALE

Yes. So Northridge was very white. Long Beach was very white. Every now and then we would have these faculty meetings, and we would say, "Oh, we need some women of color. That's the way it was working, just really add a woman and stir.

McKIBBEN

Was there resistance on the part of the white feminist faculty to making those collaborations, or were they trying to do that and faculty of color were resistant, or how did the dynamics go?

HALE

Well, the resistance was in both directions, but for sure I can remember a couple of very senior Northridge women who did not want to form any kind of coalitions with Chicano Studies. They thought they were a bunch of sexist men. They were, but not entirely. There were some very powerful women in Chicana Studies, and those were overlooked, so what I tried to do was to form coalitions with them, partnerships with

them, and work through them, to work on the men through them and that kind of thing. But there was a very closed attitude. There was always this fear that Women's Studies would be taken over. I mean, Chico, Cal State Chico [California State University at Chico] had a Women and Ethnic Studies program, and it looked like maybe that was going to start being the trend, putting all these little programs together under one dean. So I think there was some fear at Northridge and less fear at Long Beach because we were just such a powerful group of women that they probably wouldn't mess with us. But at Northridge there was fear that if we formed these collaborations, that we'd be taken over, and especially since there was a Chicano dean that they didn't trust. They thought he didn't care anything about gender studies. I knew that he did because I had lots of private conversations with him. He's the first dean, and no doubt the last dean—well, no, I'm very fond of the one we have now in social sciences. But it was the first dean that I'd ever formed any kind of honest and straightforward relationship with. So we talked about race a lot. We talked about Women's Studies and race and the necessity of forming these coalitions and so on. He was really behind me in trying to do this. But I think that a number of my white colleagues, who had been among the people interviewing me for that very first introductory course, I think they saw me as somehow or other working behind their backs. I guess after I left Northridge, somebody actually said, "Oh, after she puts us in the hands of Chicano Studies, now she's leaving for UCLA?" Just to give you an idea of what some of the attitudes were, that I'd sold us out to Chicano Studies because we had this joint appointment, which was our first tenure-track appointment. That was the problem. I wasn't tenure track, and it was the first tenure-track appointment in Women's Studies and it was going to be split with Chicano Studies. That was a big threat to these women. It was absolutely all white when I first started teaching, the faculty.

McKIBBEN

And domestic?

HALE

Domestic, yes.

McKIBBEN

U.S.-focused.

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

I imagine you tried to push that a little as well?

HALE

No, I didn't actually push it as much as one might have thought, nor did I here at UCLA in my first years of teaching Intro[duction to Women's Studies], because it seemed pretty clear to me that the description of the course was domestic. But what I tried to do was to get other courses in. So at Long Beach I developed the very first Women Cross-Culturally—I'm sorry, that's an awkward name, something like that. So that was the first international class, but it also included a great amount of material on women of color. I also think I developed the Women of Color class at Long Beach. At Northridge, because I designed the major, we didn't have a major when I started teaching; it was only a minor. So when I became coordinator, I designed the major, and I had a course on International Women or something like that, and Women of Color and so on. So I really completely redesigned the curriculum. I think some of those courses still exist at Northridge, and I know the one at Long Beach still exists, Women Cross-Culturally, because I've sent some of my Ph.D. students, recommended that they be hired, and they were teaching until the lecturers were laid off, but they were teaching that course part-time. But, no, at the beginning I thought, "This is supposed to be domestic. I will teach it as domestic." It was sort of leading two lives in a way. All my research was international. My teaching was pretty white, domestic.

McKIBBEN

Okay. [End of July 26, 2011 interview]

1.5. Session Five
August 4, 2011

McKIBBEN

Okay. So here we are, and this is Sondra Hale once again, and Susan McKibben, and we're continuing our interview. I wanted to circle back a little bit to your activist days in grad school in the sixties and ask you more about your activities protesting the Vietnam War. You've made mention of that a few times, and let's talk about that in a little more depth.

HALE

It was pretty much the core of my activism in the late sixties. We had come back from Sudan in 1964 from our first three-year visit, and the Vietnam War, I believe, began to pick up in about 1965 with [President John F.] Kennedy had been assassinated and so on, and he had begun making various contacts, sending advisors and so on, but it wasn't a very visible process. [President Lyndon B.] Johnson continued the tradition, in a sense, of continuing to send, quote, "advisors" to South Vietnam, and eventually we began to send troops in a more visible way and a more blatant way, and the Antiwar Movement began to pick up. This was a time when there was quite an almost healthy, for the U.S. almost healthy Left organized for all sorts of things from the Civil Rights Movement on through other kinds of issues, Labor Movement and so on. So, unlike other times when we might have been pretty much caught off guard, such as this particular time when we are involved in Iraq and Afghanistan, almost without much effective opposition to it, maybe at first, but not now, Vietnam was very different. Vietnam, I think, was the first time, even though it wasn't really the first time, but it was the first time that the U.S. Left noticed in a big way that the U.S. was intervening in the affairs of other countries in this attempt to, quote, "stem communism." But I don't need to go into all the reasons for the war in Vietnam and the process of Vietnam and so on. In terms of my own participation, I would say that in addition to African issues such as the Anti-Apartheid Movement and various revolutionary and nationalist activities that were going on in Africa and the Palestinian issues, the thing that occupied most of my energy was the Vietnam War. During that time, I went to a number of demonstrations,

participated in endless meetings about the war. It was also a period when I—I shouldn't use the verb "dabbled," but when I experimented with a number of different Left groups in order to try to find a home, to settle into a home, from which I could engage in all of these various protests and activities, progressive labor, international socialist, etc., etc. So I would go to various meetings, although I was not a member of any of these organizations. I never joined the Communist Party. I never joined the Revolutionary Communist Party or any of the other groups that were working at the time, that were active at the time, because none of them really seemed to be groups that did what it was I wanted to do, which was to fight basically on all fronts. So at that point I was not a feminist yet. I mean, feminism wasn't one of those ideas that I was interested in, but I was certainly interested in civil rights in the broadest sense, with special reference to race relations.

McKIBBEN

Were you looking more for an outlook or theoretical basis for your actions, or were you looking specifically for colleagues or friends?

HALE

That's an interesting question, because I suppose it's both. I'm always, to this very day, in search of like-minded or nearly like-minded souls, even though I realize that those don't exist anymore, that we're all different and that we will run afoul of each other on some issue or that we have greater and lesser emphases. So I'm not going to find a like soul. No one's interested in Sudan, for example, just to pick one. [laughs] And so few people interested in Palestine that one almost gives up. But back to this search. It was almost like my early, early search for religious identity and thinking that I had to have a religion. It took me a little while to realize that I don't have to have a party, I don't have to have an organization, that I could, in fact, be an independent Marxist or an independent anything for the rest of my life, and I could visit these various organizations. I could be an ally. I could be a part of forming bridges, forming links, trying to build coalitions, whatever, but that I didn't have to

be a member of a party. So I started to give that up. I don't know if I mentioned after we turned off the recorder last time and said it to you privately or if I actually said it in the recording, but one of the grave disappointments that I had around the Vietnam War era was that it was considered by African Americans to be a white issue. Do you remember my saying that to you?

McKIBBEN

I do remember you saying that. I don't remember if it was on the tape or not.

HALE

Yes, I don't think it was because I think we were just talking about whether or not I would be discussing Vietnam today. I had thought that when we began using chemical weapons and began bombing the hell out of North Vietnam, I thought that my own organization, the African Activist Association [AAA], and Ufahamu and the people in the Anti-Apartheid Movement and other organizations, NOMO and the Black Student Union and so on, that they would be very interested in this, because I saw the Vietnam War as an assault against people of color, in addition to the ideological issues. By the way, I guess I never did answer your question about was I seeking an ideological umbrella. Yes, I was, so both wings of your questions I can say yes to. I was seeking kindred souls, just as I was seeking a religion in the early years, I was seeking an ideology that made sense, something that answered all of my political needs. Yeah, good luck. So where was I?

McKIBBEN

That you were disappointed to find out that African American students didn't see it that way.

HALE

Right, that they said this was a white issue. These were friends. They might as well have said, "So you go on out, whitey, and go to these demonstrations and fight this particular issue. We'll stay here, right here, and fight the discrimination and oppression of African Americans and in Africa."

McKIBBEN

Did they say why they didn't feel that this was of resonance to them?

HALE

Well, I don't think they associated Vietnam as people of color. I mean, I got that. We weren't using the term "people of color" at that time, but I suppose we were using "third world," and I don't think they really saw them as third world.

McKIBBEN

They were more Africa-focused specifically?

HALE

Yes, right, and black people throughout the world, Africans and Africans in Diaspora and so on. So I couldn't move them even to sign petitions against the war, and that was very, very crushing to me. It wasn't crushing enough to cause me to pull out of my activism on behalf of Africans and African Americans, but it was disillusioning and I think it was also a wake-up call that I wasn't going to be able to find a fully formed holistic movement. I just wasn't going to find such a thing. And the fact that at the age of seventy-three I'm still looking for such a thing, not seriously looking, because I know I won't find it, but yearning. Let me just say I'm yearning for a movement that will embrace all of the issues that are of concern to me, that are driving me. But it wasn't just the Vietnam War; it was also the related bombing of Cambodia, and then this was the same period of time when, of course, we had a series of assassinations and the killings of students, student protestors at Jackson State [University] and Kent State [University]. This was really the beginning, in a sense, it seemed like the beginning of an era of police shooting student protestors, killing student protestors. So it was an alarm. We set off an alarm and attempted to try to make connections between the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, Civil Rights Movement, the general right of dissent, and worked on that for a while as well. When I say worked on that for a while, I'm making it sound as if these various issues were being fought chronologically or sequentially, and they were, of course, being fought simultaneously. One was busy in those years, the mid to the late sixties, very busy.

McKIBBEN

Was there a large presence of students at UCLA involved with those issues, or was it a small group of you?

HALE

It varied. Sometimes we could get a demonstration going that involved thousands. Other times we would launch this campaign and this call and so on, we'd get three hundred.

McKIBBEN

It still sounds so big. Maybe it's the change in time period. It sounds big.

HALE

If we could get three hundred now, it would be great. But this was a time when Ronald Reagan was the Governor of California, and for one of our demonstrations, he called the National Guard onto campus.

McKIBBEN

At UCLA?

HALE

Yes. And they got really rough, and one of our professors was beaten up, and actually he was just trying to keep the police from hitting the students and got hit himself, and never really fully recovered from that beating, a linguistics professor.

McKIBBEN

Do you remember who that was?

HALE

[Peter] Ladefoged. I may have the name slightly wrong. Students were clubbed. I remember just missing the most violent part of that particular demonstration. We never forgave Reagan for that. It seemed so unnecessary. It was billed as a peaceful demonstration. We had every reason to think it might stay peaceful. There might be some vandalism but we certainly didn't expect anything that would have warranted calling in such a paramilitary force, and that just inflamed us. I remember striking. When we invaded Cambodia, I'd really had it—or when we bombed Cambodia. Sorry. It was after Martin Luther King [Jr.] had been assassinated and [Robert F.] Bobby Kennedy, and as I said,

the killings at the universities, and I started striking in my various classes. I was a graduate student.

McKIBBEN

Striking as a T.A. [teaching assistant] or walking out as a student?

HALE

As a student, walking out of classes, but not just walking out of classes, trying to get other students to walk out with me. I wasn't very successful at that, I have to say, and it didn't help me with the professors at all. In anthro[pology] we were pretty mobilized and we were offering political education classes. I remember that we would go out on the lawn instead of going to class. If professors weren't allowed to strike, which they weren't, and the administration was threatening to fire professors, and so a number of them would take us out onto the lawn instead and hold class outside and change the subject matter and teach political education, even something like how to dress at a demonstration, what kind of shoes to wear, what sorts of identification to have on you, how much money to have on you and that kind of thing, always have the name of a lawyer, just various little tidbits. Women don't wear jewelry. Don't wear anything. Earrings could be yanked off of you. Or don't wear things that police can get a hold of. This was not exactly the curriculum that the university wanted taught, I'm sure, but this was a very important time for political education.

McKIBBEN

Did you ever do that as an instructor, as a teaching assistant, during this period? Hale: I wasn't a teaching assistant. I was what we call now a G.S.R., graduate student researcher. But I would have struck, absolutely would have. I have no doubt in my mind about that. That's not some sort of romantic hindsight. I just know what I like and how much I supported the organization of the T.A. and apprentice teachers' unionization. I was on the picket line for that, but we're jumping ahead now. Back to Vietnam, Cambodia. I was, at some point, I think, the bombing of Cambodia, I was taking my Ph.D. exams, written exams, and in

anthro[pology] in those years they could be quite long. That is, we could take considerable periods of time. So I was taking the whole year to write three long questions. When I say long questions, I'm talking about sixty-five pages or whatever. So these were almost like small books that we were writing for each one of our Ph.D. questions. But just before I was starting to write, we had a meeting in the Anthro[pology] Department of the students, and we decided to strike. There was some discussion about whether or not that included graduate students as well. Were grad students going to strike? And, yes, we decided they would strike. I think that the question of what would happen with those of taking our exams, well, we would strike. I took that very seriously, and I went on strike for a whole year and didn't write my written exams for a whole year. Near the end of that year, I began to ask some of my colleagues what they were doing, and they were writing their exams, and I realized that I must have been just about the only Ph.D. student in the department who was truly striking her Ph.D. exams. Probably that's as much as I shot myself in the foot as a Ph.D. student. So I lost a year, basically, in trying to support the strike. During that period we engaged in a lot of political education and we also held a tribunal. We discovered that one of our professors, whose name slipped my mind right now, but it will come back before I finish the topic, probably, but he did his research in Thailand, he was primarily, I think, a linguistic anthropologist, and it was discovered that he was working for the CIA. At that time, that was just absolutely—and to this very day—but, anyway, at that time it was anathema.

McKIBBEN

I think you mentioned that. How did you guys learn of that, do you recall?

HALE

I don't remember how we learned of it, but he acknowledged it, so it wasn't like it was some rumor, because rumors certainly were flying around about lots of people. It was from within our Department of Anthro, by the way, that Angela Davis was informed on.

McKIBBEN

Someone in this department?

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

Did not know that.

HALE

Acknowledged it. Anyway, I don't want to go into that right now, but that, by the way, was one of the issues that I also worked on. I may have said that already.

McKIBBEN

How was the political education that you did organize? Was it mostly within the Anthro[pology] Department that you as graduate students worked on these things?

HALE

Well, we tried to broaden it. It was mainly within the Anthropology Department. We tried to include soc[iology] and the other departments around to join our classes, and so we would advertise this political education. We had to be a little careful because the faculty could get fired or not tenured or any number of things, and that was true of the T.A.s as well. But, anyway, back to the tribunal for a moment. We called this person to a meeting, to a tribunal, basically, and told him it was a tribunal. We were cheeky, cheeky little creatures, and we interrogated him, basically.

McKIBBEN

Who was "we"? I want to see this picture.

HALE

These were graduate students primarily. I would say there were thirty people in the room. I remember it was in our only lounge. I just really for a moment can't remember his name. He was quite forthright with his information, the kind of information he gave. He supported his actions, defended his actions by saying that he knew the Thai people well, that he had high regard for the Thais, that he knew that if he didn't do this work, someone else would, who would misread the Thais, sell them short, give wrong information about them, and he felt that that would be devastating. We felt that that was just—excuse me—bullshit, and we found him

guilty of betraying his profession, of abusing his role as an anthropologist. So, anyway, we decided that [Michael] Moerman, the professor's name, was guilty of these abuses and that he would reflect very negatively on the field, on academia, on anthropology, and make it extremely difficult for the rest of us doing fieldwork. So it was more than just our feeling that it was a political outrage to have an academic hired as a CIA agent, but also that he'd reflected on us and affected our lives. He was given death threats after we left that room. People tried or were very clearly trying to chase him out of the job, and a number of us really backed away from that sort of behavior. We were appalled at the idea that he was given death threats. He did eventually resign, so we were successful. I mean, one of the interesting things about the student movement was how successful we were with regard to so many things. Like we'd hold a sit-down in front of someone's office and get our way about some pretty major things; for example, hiring a student as the Associate Director of African Studies. I mean, you couldn't do that today. You could have as many sit-downs as you wanted.

McKIBBEN

It would never happen. [laughs]

HALE

It would never happen. There was a certain kind of feeling really of student power, to use a cliché, in that era, a feeling among liberal faculty, administrators and so on, that students should have some power. So when we exerted our power, it was listened to and taken seriously. Not always, obviously, but a whole lot of the time.

McKIBBEN

Did you connect that to the university as an institution?

HALE

What do you mean?

McKIBBEN

Well, because I'm thinking now we can't even have a protest against fees in our own university without the police coming out and disbanding everybody, let alone some issue that's at least mostly external to the university as an institution. But

then, I think, the budget situation was different, the UC [University of California] system was different.

HALE

Yes. When you think of the changes in the state university from that time, we're talking about the sixties and into the seventies, and now in the year 2011, this is a corporation we're working for. It's a much privatized, corporatized university. It's like any other corporation. It's not very different now. I think in that era it was really different. I know that it's all too easy to look back in the past in a positive way, in an almost romantic way, but I know it was different. As I said, the attitude toward students, some of that came about from the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley and those student-power movements that were going on throughout the country, but not all of it. It really had to do with who owned the university at that time and now. I think that both faculty and students in the sixties felt that it was their university. Now I certainly don't think that we feel that it's our university. I don't know how you feel, but I don't.

McKIBBEN

As faculty.

HALE

As faculty. And I can imagine as a student I certainly wouldn't. So student power as a concept has really withered. I keep saying to students—I'm not supposed to exhort students, but, never mind, I do, and I keep saying, if you could organize in greater numbers, if you could organize more effectively, if you could make sure that the whatever you've accomplished doesn't die with your generation of students, if you could keep your history, if you could make sure that you're building bridges to the next generation of students, you could still have some power. After all, you know, it's not going to be a university without us. What would the administrators administer, for goodness sake? But I think the fact that we now allow donors to sit on search committees is—

McKIBBEN

We do?

HALE

Yes, although they're sometimes called alums [alumni], but they're big donors, alums who are big donors. That, to me, is anathema. But there are people on campus who believe that if people give money to the university, that they should have a say in what goes on. There was no question of that in the sixties. There was also no question about taking dirty money. [U.S. Department of] Defense money was considered dirty money. Now mostly people don't think about it much.

McKIBBEN

UC didn't take defense money?

HALE

No. We took what was NDEA funding [National Defense Education Act], which is basically FLAS [Foreign Language and Area Studies Program] now, I guess.

McKIBBEN

For the foreign language training.

HALE

Right. So that was kind of the line that some people drew, but a lot of people wouldn't accept language fellowships because it came from the Defense Department.

McKIBBEN

Students, you mean?

HALE

Students.

McKIBBEN

But the departments would take it.

HALE

But some departments didn't. I mean, African Studies, I don't want to name the person, but there was an African Studies director who took the money that many of us thought was dubious, and he was ultimately driven out for years of taking money that people objected to, students and progressive faculty. But a number of the directors of African Studies would not accept certain forms of funding, would not accept having the CIA come on campus and recruit students and so on. Now we don't do really anything about it. A CIA agent can knock on my door and ask if I would like to participate in various kinds of activities, and I could report

him or her and nothing would be done about it. But in the past, a movement would begin to try to—I mean, you know, we got ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] off campus. That was one of our accomplishments.

McKIBBEN

That was during this period?

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

So how did you pull that off?

HALE

Just persistence and numbers and also doing our homework and lobbying on the outside as well.

McKIBBEN

Like where?

HALE

And that's something that I don't think we do very much of anymore, faculty or students.

McKIBBEN

You mean the community lobbying the university, or you as students lobbying other entities?

HALE

Lobbying the community to try to get community to support getting the military off the campus. So ROTC left, we blocked the CIA and government recruitment on campus, a number of kinds of issues were fought and won in that time period, giving us, we little arrogant students, this feeling that we could own the world if we just got our act together a little bit better, and it gives you an enormous amount of—we have very few victories now, but it gives you an enormous confidence to have had as many victories as we had in that time period, and it emboldened us. But it didn't really last all that many years, when you think about it, and that's part of the sadness of my life, really. But I had the joy of knowing that certain things could be accomplished.

McKIBBEN

How did you set up systems that would continue for subsequent students?

HALE

Well, we didn't. That was one of our major failings. One of the things I tried to do for Ufahamu was to write constant notes, keep constant minutes and notes and so on, and keep those on file, make more than one copy, keep them in the file. I mean, obviously it was Sondra Hale's version of the African Activist Association, Ufahamu, but still it was a version. Those notes have disappeared now, but it was used by— [interruption]

McKIBBEN

Before I had to pause it for a moment, we were talking about how you tried to keep records at Ufahamu and African Activist Association for subsequent generations of students. Do you know if those records were used by subsequent groups?

HALE

Yes, most of the immediate successors ignored them, but one or two either presidents of the African Activist Association or editors of Ufahamu did dig them out and read them and interviewed me. I'd been interviewed two or three times about Ufahamu and the AAA based on those notes, but I don't know that they were applied the way that they probably should have been applied, and that is at the first meeting of the year of a new crop of students to get out those notes in some form. Maybe someone could have summarized them because they were quite voluminous, to get out those notes and read them over and see what some of the problems were of the preceding generation, and to note what it was we were able to get from the administration, both in terms of funding, but also in terms of the kinds of things we were able to accomplish. Because the minute one radical student generation leaves the administration, whether we're talking about administration at the sort of department or center level or higher up, the minute we leave, the administration will undo whatever it is we've accomplished. So they should have used it to try to see what it was they could accomplish, even in a changed atmosphere, so that they could move on to the next level, but it wasn't used in that way, and I think it's because students don't really have a tradition of historicizing the

movement, and that's too bad. It's a major, major flaw in student activism. But I don't know that nonstudents, adults, we older people do much better. We are constantly—excuse the cliché—reinventing the wheel. Sometimes we talk about the mistakes of the past and how we're not going to make those same mistakes and so on, but we don't map it out very well. We don't map out exactly how these mistakes occurred and how it is that we might do things differently now. What are the different conditions that would alter our strategies, and what are some of the same conditions that would allow us to embrace some of those strategies that had been successful in the past? We don't seem to do a lot of that. People write about movements long after they've ceased to exist or be powerful or whatever. I mean, when I think of the rash of writing that came out on the sixties, it didn't start coming out until the eighties. Okay, yes, we need some perspective and all that, but it loses its impact. Some of those people who wrote in the sixties would like to have been able to influence what went on after the sixties, but in a sense they waited too long. Perspective is fine, but if you want to be an activist, the immediacy is really important.

McKIBBEN

It seems like strategizing holistically as you go, it seems like that's kind of what you're talking about is you have this tactical strategizing but not necessarily the more holistic or broad view of the trajectory, I guess, or the goal.

HALE

Yes, that's put well.

McKIBBEN

In the student activists against the Vietnam War, did you have contact with other students at other campuses, given what was going on at and at Jackson State, like you talked about?

HALE

No, we tried to. There were student organizations, not all of which were very progressive, but you know that SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] attempted to—it was a national—

McKIBBEN

Students for a Democratic Society.

HALE

Right. SDS was nationally active. I mean, it was an attempt to build a national student movement, and fairly successful for a while in doing that. But SDS had all kinds of difficulty, internal difficulties and so on, and I don't remember it clearly enough to be able to go into it, and also it was infiltrated by, we'll say, conservative forces and became delegitimized in the eyes of a number of leftists in a period of time. But, anyway, in answer to your question, yes, there were attempts, and we all made attempts to get in touch with other campuses as we went along. Not enough, not nearly enough. We offered to lend our support to the Kent State people and Jackson State people. By the way, Kent State, white students killed, was much more visible and influential and so on than Jackson State, where black students were killed. I mean, the difference in the attention and the visibility should have been pretty embarrassing.

McKIBBEN

Symbolized by the fact that I was well aware of what happened at Kent State and not at what happened at Jackson State. [laughs]

HALE

That was pretty true in general, and it was black students. In fact, I think when I made this appeal more than once to the African Activist Association here at UCLA and Ufahamu group and so on, I was told at one of those encounters that I had, "You have all paid attention to those student demonstrators against the war at Kent State. I haven't heard anything about Jackson State." And I hadn't heard much about Jackson State, and I was sort of taken aback by it and decided I'd better go and find out what had gone on. I was appalled that, in fact, it was so invisible and it was just as bad or worse than Kent State. I think more students were killed. So for black students that just symbolized that whites did not have their best interest at heart and that it was really a white movement, all this antiwar movement.

McKIBBEN

Do you remember an occasion where you did work with students from another campus or another part of the country?

HALE

No, only in the sense that with regard to the Anti-Apartheid Movement, we did meet with activists on other campuses more than once, so that I remember clearly. And the Vietnam War Moratorium, we met with students from campuses all over. There were coordinated marches, mainly made up of students, and that obviously took some getting in touch with different campuses and so on. But that's always also been a weakness. We've carried on our budget fight here at UCLA, and I don't know that we've had much contact with the Cal State system, for example, so UC and Cal State, had we been together on this, we would have been a very, very powerful force. But now UC always considers itself to be superior to the Cal State system, the Cal State system has always been resentful of the UC system, and so on. It's very, very hard to get these coalitions going, and you know our unions are not very strong.

McKIBBEN

Was that similarly difficult in the sixties when you were trying to build coalitions on issues, of going to the Cal State campuses and vice versa?

HALE

I think that that hierarchy was still definitely there, but forming coalitions was so much easier in those years. We just assumed that we should reach out and that we should form national movements and that kind of thing. We talk about it here, but we don't do anything towards it. I'm sorry, we talk about it now, here, but don't do very much toward that goal.

McKIBBEN

Earlier on, you alluded to the Palestinian activism that you'd also done in this same period, and we haven't talked very much about that either. Unless you have more you want to discuss about Vietnam, do you want to tell me a little bit about how you got involved with that?

HALE

No, I don't necessarily want to talk anymore about Vietnam, but in that same time period we worked on presidential campaigns. I remember being a member of the Peace and Freedom Party. When I said I'd never been a member of a party, I forgot about that, and I stayed registered in the Peace and Freedom Party for almost as long as it stayed on the ballot. Then if I wanted to vote in a primary or whatever, I would change my registration and then go back to being registered in the Peace and Freedom Party. That was probably, except maybe for the Libertarian Party, about as close as we've come to having a third party, an independent party. I had, I think, talked earlier about the Briggs Amendment and Proposition 6.

McKIBBEN

Yes, you did.

HALE

I didn't talk much about the grape boycott, which was also something that occupied a lot of my time and energy and so on.

McKIBBEN

I don't know how you did any of this Ph.D. work of which you speak. [laughs]

HALE

I don't either. When I think about it and when I was sort of listing things in my head, I thought, oh, my gosh. But, you know, a lot of these were the same people working on some of the same issues, and we worked on them as we came along, all the while trying to tell ourselves that we should not be engaging in single-issue politics. That was sort of the slogan around. "Let's not just do single-issue politics. Let's continue to try to link these various issues." How is Proposition 6 related to the grape boycott and supporting agricultural workers, and how is this related to the war in Vietnam? We weren't necessarily very good at making these links often or maybe they were only made in the abstract but without any conversation about how we could put these links, so to speak, into action. But, anyway, I just wanted to talk about that. But you wanted to move on to what?

McKIBBEN

I wanted to ask you about your Palestinian activism, because that's something I know you've done in more recent years, but I hadn't realized, before you mentioned it, that it was also starting for you at about this time.

HALE

Yes, well, you know, the 1967 War was one that woke up some of us. I mean, some of us were already concerned about and would sign petitions about, and so on, Palestine, but it was only after about '67 that any kind of movement in the U.S. picked up. I wasn't very active. If we think it's anathema now to be active in Palestinian issues, it was really anathema then, because in that time period, I forget when the first major plane hijacking by a Palestinian occurred. I forget the date.

McKIBBEN

I don't remember the year.

HALE

But after that time, people were very hostile. Most people here in the States were very hostile to Palestinian issues, so that the idea that there was, quote, "another point of view," was sort of unheard of. Whereas now, even though people may vehemently and violently disagree, now at least the public is aware there's another point of view, and so that makes it a very different atmosphere. Of course, it makes the backlash greater, but that's something else. I can't right now recall the specific sorts of areas of activism. I know that I went to demonstrations, but I wasn't a part of an organization. I don't remember the dates that we formed U.S. Feminists in Support of Palestinian Women, which was a group that came out of a Middle East women's discussion group that I think was in the eighties.

McKIBBEN

This is a little later.

HALE

Yes, a little later.

McKIBBEN

In the sixties, I mean, presumably things would have been in the news because of the war, but because a different

perspective was so anathema, as you said, how did you even really catch wind of it?

HALE

Oh, I married into it, not because Gerry's a Palestinian, but because when I first met Gerry Hale, he was already talking about Palestine.

McKIBBEN

It was on your radar in that time.

HALE

It was on my radar. I met Gerry in 1959, and he talked about Palestine. I met him in '58, I guess. We were married in '60. Palestine was something he taught and thought about a great deal. So, yes, it was on my radar. I think we can just summarize it in that way. It became one of the causes that was, of course, later was to be one of the driving activist forces in my life. [interruption]

McKIBBEN

So now I want to take you up a little bit in time to where we stopped our conversation in our last session, which was we were discussing how you got involved with the Women's Movement in L.A. and with some of the feminist reading groups you were a part of, and you said you were teaching at Northridge in the mid to late seventies, teaching anthro[pology].

HALE

Right.

McKIBBEN

You told the story of getting to teach a Women's Studies course there. As I recall, you had said that that course got quite a good response in terms of student enrollment and involvement.

HALE

Yes, it was just crammed. I had to turn students away. Their classes were smaller. I mean, their classes were capped at forty or whatever. But, nonetheless, occasionally I was allowed to let more people in, and I think my first class was like forty-five people. The second class, people were really clamoring. I mean, it sparked a lot of interest on campus, and I just can't tell you how exciting it was to be a part of

something so new. We always say there's nothing new under the sun. Boy, there was. Women's Studies was something new under the sun.

McKIBBEN

What was so new?

HALE

Just the subject matter, the mere subject matter, which just caused so many conservative people on campus to sit up and take notice and object. How could we have a subject matter that was about women? When I think of some of the oppositional statements that were made to try to block Women's Studies or not allow us to expand or whatever, they're funny now, you know. Although I think some of those sentiments still exist.

McKIBBEN

Do you remember some of those conversations?

HALE

Well, that people shouldn't be studying themselves, which is really stupid.

McKIBBEN

That other people should study them?

HALE

Yes. And, of course, always the cliché question, "Well, what about men? We should have Men's Studies then." And then the cliché response to that, "That's all the rest of the university." So there were these debates going on. But also there was this notion that we couldn't possibly have a methodology that was all our own. That debate is still going on, by the way. Or we couldn't possibly have theories that were all our own. How can you theorize about women? Also, even though the terminology was not used in those early years, accusations of essentialism, and that were coming from progressives. That was coming from the male Left, basically. In fact, the most severe and cruelest criticism I got was from my two closest Marxist colleagues at Cal State Northridge in the Anthro[pology] Department, who said to me—this is almost an exact quote—"Sondra, we're really disappointed to hear that you are teaching the very first Women's Studies class at Northridge or that you've gone into

Women's Studies. We always thought of you as a good theoretician."

McKIBBEN

Oh, dear.

HALE

"We can't see you teaching anything as frivolous as Women's Studies." Direct quote. Pretty bad. It's the sort of comment that now if somebody made that kind of comment to me, I would probably file a grievance against them for basically sex discrimination or a form of harassment. But in those years, we expected it, and there wasn't much we could do about it, because some of the same rules were not set up that would allow us to defend ourselves or to file grievances or whatever for comments like that.

McKIBBEN

Did you talk with your colleagues or with students about how to respond to these kinds of attitudes?

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

What did you come up with?

HALE

Well, you know that we had the good luck of coming in, in a sense, on the tails of Ethnic Studies programs, but, of course, some of these same people would also disagree with the existence of Ethnic Studies programs. I would counsel them to give some historical context for it, that we had, like many disciplines at the university, not just ethnic studies, but many disciplines at the university, if you go way back in their history, come out of social movements, social thought, new social thought, and that we were a part of that tradition. That was the nicer way of responding to the critics. But there was this, "Well, tell them and the whole rest of the university is Men's Studies, and we're trying to offer something different." Where else will we find women in the curriculum? We were training students, actually, to challenge each one of their professors, who maybe, if they were progressive, might tack on one work by a woman in their reading list. So we were training them to talk about and to do their homework

so that they actually had suggestions for these professors for works that they could put on their reading lists that were relevant to the subject matter of the course. So these were the kinds of polite academic-like things that we were teaching them, but we also taught them to report these comments. Because Title IX had come in, there were beginning to be sorts of legal protections against the kind of harassment that we were getting in those early years.

McKIBBEN

Do you remember in those first one or two classes what kinds of things did you teach? Did you teach differently than you had taught or seen others teach?

HALE

Well, you know, I had learned feminist process in these women's groups that I'd been a part of before I started teaching, and so I tried to apply some of those principles. I had also learned about [Paulo] Freire and the notion that the knowledge is there with the students, and my role was really a role as a facilitator to try to get those ideas from the students. That led to some of the explosiveness, emotional explosiveness, of Women's Studies, because that's when people would come out as rape survivors, incest survivors, survivors of domestic violence, and so on, and also their sexual harassment on the job. It didn't take very much to try to facilitate all of us hearing each other's stories, and it didn't take much to be able to take their ideas and build a curriculum from their ideas. Although I had a syllabus, I had a curriculum in mind, I had readings and so on, I also taught the class in a much more flexible way than I'd ever taught before. Of course, we're always hindered by the framework that the university expects of you, and you can't have too much flexibility. You can't suspend the notion of a syllabus. You can't totally suspend the kinds of traditional things that you're hired to use and teach and so on. But within reason of using the university structure, I tried to teach through asking questions. I mean, you've seen my teaching style to some extent. It's greatly modified for the more intellectually stimulating environment of UCLA, more—

McKIBBEN

[unclear].

HALE

—theoretically rigorous. Yes. But even within that kind of theoretical rigor, I like to teach by asking a lot of questions and trying to elicit subject matter from the class itself. So I would tell the students that they were the experts on their lives, and we were talking about their lives, so I was not the expert on their lives, and that the class would only fly, would only be successful and so on if they participated and shared their ideas and so on. Those first classes were really, really stimulating. I think I said in the earlier session, I know it's a cliché, but I learned a great deal from my women students that first year, those two semesters of teaching Introduction to Women's Studies. It'll never be the same. I will never, ever, ever have a class like those. Even though you know the UCLA "standard" and so on might be higher, this was just really life, just really a living classroom.

McKIBBEN

How did you respond or cope when students would talk about these really painful experiences that they'd had?

HALE

Yes, that was difficult, and I think I wasn't trained well enough in the first year or two to be able to use that subject matter without using the person. I think that takes a particular skill. I don't know still that I've developed that kind of skill. But to listen to the student, to take into account what the student is saying and to use that subject matter, as I said, to try to further some of the ideas and to try to generalize about that student's experience without losing the student, using that technique. I think that teaching Women's Studies takes more skill than most of us are trained for. But it's also psychologically dangerous, and I had the feeling all the time that I could say something that could be damaging forever. Maybe that was being too self-aggrandizing, I don't know, but I did have the feeling that I was in dangerous water because I wasn't a trained therapist and in no way should one engage in any kind of therapy or advice or whatever. But the thing was to also try to get the student herself to generalize about her experience. If she's not

completely sobbing in class, to try to—and if she is, that's another matter, brings the class to a grinding halt, and maybe it should be halted for a moment. It's a problem not to intellectualize from personal experience.

McKIBBEN

Meaning to take it out of the experiential realm too quickly?

HALE

Right. Too quickly theorize, too quickly theorize, and maybe to try to help her do it, if it's possible.

McKIBBEN

Did you ever take these things home with you mentally? It sounds like it would have been rather draining.

HALE

Yes. Poor Gerry. I think I probably took things out on him rather than take things home with me. I think that was an extremely difficult time for us anyway. I was really feeling my oats and feeling angry, angry for those women, angry for my own experiences of living in a family with domestic violence—my mother, that is—my experience of the sexual harassment on the job, sexual harassment while doing fieldwork, just various things like male colleagues telling salacious sexual jokes in my presence and not thinking twice about it, the comments, the very, very negative trivializing comments about women in general. All the way through grad school, I remember that I was supposedly exempted from whatever it was these men were saying, either my male colleagues, student colleagues or faculty people or whatever. Somehow or other, I was exempted.

McKIBBEN

What do you mean?

HALE

Well, they would make jokes about stupid women drivers and stuff like that, but, of course, they didn't mean me.

McKIBBEN

Right. "You're different."

HALE

"You're different," yes. Boy, does that—every time something like that happened, I would think about African Americans and think about how many times—and not just

African Americans, I'm just picking on one particular group of color—or not picking on but picking out—how many times they must have heard someone say, "Oh, I don't mean you, but, you know, most blacks are just really not able to—," blah, blah, blah, blah, do problem solving or can't think abstractly or whatever it is. The stereotypes were just amazing, and so I would come home angry, yes, because very often my own consciousness had been raised by my students, and my anger level would increase. And Gerry was always trying to kind of calm me down.

McKIBBEN

Probably not the most helpful strategy. [laughs]

HALE

No, no. And I would say, "Don't try to mitigate my anger. This is not to be mitigated."

McKIBBEN

How did you channel that? What did you do with that?

HALE

I channeled into my activism, so direct from the classroom to activism, direct from activism into the classroom, back and forth all my life, all my teaching life. So sometimes I would say in the class something like, "Is anyone interested in forming a support group around this issue?" And I would say, "I can't engage in it myself right now," or else sometimes I would. But I would try to get them to form various kinds of discussion groups or activist groups or whatever. I am always trying to get students to act.

McKIBBEN

Did they?

HALE

Sometimes. We can't always be successful at that, but if you can be successful just once even.

McKIBBEN

So at the same time, or around this time, you were also teaching over at CalArts [California Institute of the Arts]?

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

And were you incorporating some of the feminist scholarship you were developing—

HALE

No.

McKIBBEN

—in Women's Studies, or was that kind of a separate sphere?

HALE

Well, I was hired at CalArts initially to be a part of a summer curriculum-development project in which the Critical Studies faculty, as it was called then, was developing. We had a grant to develop the Twentieth Century Arts course, which was going to be a course that everybody at the Institute was expected to take. So, yes, I did incorporate feminist thinking in our summer-long discussions, everyday discussions about building this curriculum, but there were other feminists as well that were contributing. So then I saw my more important role being to incorporate the arts of outside of the U.S., and there was a lot of resistance to that, because I'm sure that even the most well-meaning and progressive person on the Critical Arts faculty felt that twentieth-century U.S. and European art had to be superior to just about anything you could name, and that those "primitive" masks—purposely putting "primitive" in italics, their words—those "primitive" African masks and other forms of sculpture and so on were interesting, and certainly a few of them influenced [Pablo] Picasso and [Georges] Braque and a few others of the Impressionist and Abstract artists of one school or another. Nonetheless, they were insignificant in the broad scheme of things. So it was really up to me. It wasn't just the visual art, but also the literature. It was up to me to try to introduce some of the outstanding African literature and art forms into that curriculum. So in answer to your question, yes, there was some discussion of feminism in twentieth-century art, but that wasn't so difficult because there were such outstanding feminist poets that we ended up discussing, and feminist artists and so on. Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro had been a part of CalArts. They had left by the time I got there, but they had left a huge slide library

and had taught workshops and so on. So the place had been, in fact, infected by some feminist teachings.

McKIBBEN

And you were also, you said, earlier going to some exhibits at the Woman's Building.

HALE

Yes, at CalArts but also at the Woman's Building. I took in practically every art show that they offered and became somebody who sort of hung out at the Woman's Building whenever I had time. But, of course, I was teaching in two places, raising kids, writing a dissertation, and the other activism we've been talking about. But whenever I had a chance, the Woman's Building was one of the places where I would go for solace and for more education in terms of feminism. I had been following Sudanese art since 1961 and collecting Sudanese art, or I was being given Sudanese art, and I was leading up to where I am now, which is very close to starting a book on Sudanese Modernist artists in exile, my work that I've had trouble finishing. But let me go back to the Woman's Building. Many of the activities that were going on in Woman's Building employed the various processes that I had been learning and perfecting, so to speak, or I should say developing from my women's discussion groups and from my teaching of Women's Studies classes and so on.

McKIBBEN

Are you talking like pedagogical process?

HALE

Yes. I mean, performance art at the Woman's Building was highly collaborative. It wasn't sort of the artists standing aside, standing above, being apart from the audience, the participants, the society or whatever. It was really the artist as a part of society, the artist as a part of the audience, so in many ways just applying some of the ideas of people like John Berger. To me, it was revolutionary art. It filled lots of the categories of what I would consider revolutionary art.

McKIBBEN

So what do you consider revolutionary art?

HALE

Well, I just named a couple of those qualities, the artist is a part of the audience, and the work is a part of a context. It's not a sociopolitical material context. It doesn't stand apart. The work doesn't necessarily belong in museums. The work belongs among the people in some sort of working capacity among the people. The work is collaborative, whether that's collaboration with the audience or collaboration among artists to produce whatever it is. The artists, the art, should have built in it an action component. It should be about change, automatically about change. Either it should provoke people to a point of wanting to change something or it could be change in and of itself, a changed method, changed motif, changed theme. I know I'm forgetting certain kinds of characteristics. I've written about this, actually, in the contextual introduction to the e-book on the Woman's Building that Terry Wolverton and I co-edited, that's now going to be issued in a hardback version funded by a grant from the Getty and published by Otis Art Institute [From Site to Vision: The Los Angeles Woman's Building in Contemporary Culture]. So we're very, very happy that will be coming out, I think in October or November. So I have a major essay, a long essay in the book in which I talk about the performance art, but other art forms as well at the Woman's Building as revolutionary art. I also discuss the concept of women's culture, which I was very much into—excuse that expression, but very much into at that time and attempted to develop this notion of women's culture starting from my ideas, not just from the Woman's Building but also from teaching multidisciplinary Women's Studies, so that there was always a humanities component and—well, so I've said it, both a humanities component and a social science component and philosophical component. The Woman's Building became a really central piece of my life, and I was invited to participate in a more official way by the poet Eloise Klein Healy, who sent me an invitation to the Vesta Awards, which was an annual award that the Woman's Building gave to people in various categories of art and then also the category of art educator. I don't think it was called that. I think it was called the Scholarship Award. I eventually won a

Vesta Award. I forget what date it was, but got a Vesta Award for my contribution to the scholarship of the Woman's Building. More on that later, maybe. But, anyway, I went to my first Vesta Awards, and at the Vesta Awards, which was held, I think, at the Bonaventure Hotel, I sat at a table with a whole bunch of really interesting women, but one of the things that was at the table were some forms that we were to fill out if we were interested in any more participation in the Woman's Building. Did we want to exhibit there? Did we want to join a committee? Did we want to be on the board of directors? I forget what all the categories were, and I think I checked them all off. So, sure enough, about four days later, I got a call from, I think, Terry Wolverton, asking me if I wanted to come for an interview to be a part of the Woman's Building Board of Directors. Well, I was just elated. This just sounded like exactly something I wanted to do. It didn't, in fact, end up exactly what I wanted to do, but it did give me a lot of inside information about the building. It brought me into contact with a whole bunch of artists, and I became such a glorious groupie. I'd always been an art groupie anyway. It was perfect for me, absolutely perfect.

McKIBBEN

Do you remember meeting some of the artists?

HALE

Yes, I think I met them all. I met Judy Chicago. Since I critiqued her work, she's not madly in love with me. Suzanne Lacy, Miriam Schapiro, I met them all, Faith Wilding, all of the ones that were really well known at that time. I could go through a big long list. I still have contact with a few of them.

McKIBBEN

Any stories?

HALE

Stories about the artists?

McKIBBEN

Or about your interactions with them.

HALE

No. No, not in the way you mean stories. Maybe I'll think of some later. But my contribution to the Woman's Building was

in my lamenting at how unintellectual so much of the art was and so many of the programs, and, of course, anti-academic but also anti-intellectual and anti-theoretical and you name it. Of course, I had come out of that very tradition in a sense or come to them from that tradition. I decided to, or was invited to, I don't remember, do something about it. So I did two things. One was to coordinate a national conference called "Women's Culture in the Eighties." I did that one at Cal State Long Beach in collaboration with or aligned with the Long Beach Museum of Art's show. Why can't I remember the name of the show?

McKIBBEN

Is it "At Home"?

HALE

Thank you. "At Home," yes. And I was a part of the program that opened that show, and then the conference followed the next day, which was about the concept of women's culture, and those proceedings were published by Cal State Long Beach Women's Studies program. The second thing was to co-organize a conference here at UCLA called "The Way We Look, The Way We See," which was sponsored probably by the Center for the Study of Women, Women's Studies, and the Woman's Building, the first such collaboration. That was a pretty successful conference. Then after that, or maybe even before that, I don't remember, I held a series of Saturday-morning symposia on various academic theoretical topics. We discussed semiotics. I didn't do it all myself. I brought in guest lecturers. But I coordinated it. Got a lot of resistance, an enormous amount of resistance. I mean, artists at the Woman's Building would say things like, "You know, I don't want to study this. I don't want to study this theoretical shit. What good is it to my work?"

McKIBBEN

Was it a rejection of the sort of ivory tower reputation of theory or was it an ideological stance or was it just something that people did not make a connection to their work?

HALE

Well, I think it was many things. I think a lot of the women at the Woman's Building, who were among the leadership were not university-educated or did not go on for graduate work. They may have felt that they were somehow or other being judged in an abstract way, at least, by some of us who had more formal education. They saw themselves as coming out of the people, being out of the community, I mean being of the people, and that somehow or other theory wasn't connected with people at all. But also there was this idea—and I think that's related to your asking me if it was related to the ivory tower. Yes, I think so. I think they thought of us academics as a bunch of snobs, and thought of the Woman's Building art as experiential, not theoretical, and that it was really important that it remain at that level because otherwise it could easily be taken out of the hands of women, taken out of the hands of women's experience. There must have been other objections that were more articulate than that, but those are the ones I can remember. My response to this "I don't want to read this theoretical shit," was usually that we should have respect for everybody's work, that I do academic work and I expect it to be respected because I respect your art. That may have sounded a little defensive. Terry Wolverton told me that I was occasionally defensive. But, I mean, how can you not be defensive when people are talking that way about your work? It's not that I'm uncritical about my work and about the work that we do in academia, but, anyway. So the Woman's Building experience for me was kind of an uphill climb because of this anti-intellectualism, anti-theoretical stance, but I think I gained some respect for what I was doing, and I think people eventually did see it as somewhat valuable. The fact that it was decided by the Woman's Building board that we should write a book about the Woman's Building within the context of the U.S. was an important kind of validation in a sense, that this could be useful work.

McKIBBEN

It sounds like it was difficult because you were getting this pushback, but also kind of nourishing in the same way.

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

You moved into these feminist circles about the same time that you quite suddenly became the mother of daughters [Bulbul and Alexa]. So did that affect the way you thought about parenting your kids?

HALE

Well, I was trying to raise feminists, but I got a lot of backlash from the kids for my feminism and so on, so that was an uphill battle.

McKIBBEN

What do you mean by that?

HALE

Well, they rejected everything feminist around me, my listening to feminist music, "Oh, Mom, do we have to hear Holly Near again?" They rejected the feminist films I took them to, the feminist art that I took them to, and one of them within my earshot, but they didn't know that they were within my earshot, I heard one of them say to the other one, "When do you think Mom is going to get over this feminist phase?" [laughter] I wanted to shout, "Never! Never!" [laughter]

McKIBBEN

Do you know where or do you have a sense of where that was coming from? Was it just sort of an "Oh, that's a Mom thing," or was it something else?

HALE

No, I think it was from what they experienced as having things crammed down their throats that were so antithetical to their environment. Their classmates weren't talking and thinking along these lines, nor their classmates' parents, probably, and so it was kind of Mom pushing, just pushing them too much, I guess. I thought I was just exposing them, but they were experiencing it as pushing them. So my idea of raising little feminists had to be put on hold for a while and let them develop into their own feminism, which they have, but it's very different from Mom's, and that's fine.

McKIBBEN

Interesting. What about the way that you and Gerry talked about your parenting?

HALE

Well, we talked a lot about the gender division of labor, and we had some incidents happen early on, after we brought the kids back to the States, that were pretty revealing of things that Gerry and I had to address along these lines. Alexa fell, skinned her leg, was screaming. It wasn't a bad accident. She was screaming and ran to Gerry because he was the closest parent, and Gerry said, "Well, that's going to have to have a Band-Aid on it. Go to your mom." And I said later, "Why? Why did you send her to me? You've actually had first-aid training. I haven't." He said, "Well, I mean, you know, kids want their moms when they get hurt and want their moms to put on the Band-Aid." I said, "Nonsense. You put the Band-Aid on next time." "Okay." So we had many, many incidents like that where somehow or other Gerry had this notion of a very traditional form of socialization of children and gender division of labor. But I told you earlier, he's a very smart guy, very sensitive guy, and he was a quick learner. So we worked out, with some bumps, we worked out how a father and a mother—by the way, we don't celebrate Father's Day or Mother's Day; we celebrate Parents' Day. But, anyway, the way that a father and a mother might work out the kinds of ways that we interact with our kids and to try to do it as much as possible according to what our skills were. Easier said than done. But I will remind you that we're upon the hour.

McKIBBEN

But I still want to hear about Parents' Day at your house. How does that go? Or how did you come into that?

HALE

Well, Mother's Day and Father's Day was a bit of a sexist set of holidays, of course, brought on by capitalists needing more money and all that. Anyway, so the poor kids, you know, they had to hear this from us. I mean, Gerry and I did go through the paces of a lot of traditional stuff for many, many, many years, and then finally when we thought the

kids were old enough that they wouldn't be, quote, "damaged" by our outrageous ideas—

McKIBBEN

Being the only kids at school that didn't celebrate Mother's Day. [laughs]

HALE

Right. It was my idea, actually, that we should combine these two holidays that neither one of us liked very much at all into Parents' Day and that we would alternate the years that we would hold Parents' Day on Mother's Day or Parents' Day on Father's Day and we would do the same thing we would do otherwise. We would go out and have breakfast together and be given presents. The presents were not mandatory; they were quite voluntary. And our older daughter has taken that seriously and hasn't given me anything as a gift for a couple of years now. [laughs] But, anyway, we're still working things out. Now we've got adult kids and there are new things to be worked out with regard to our particular roles in their lives. But I think the kids don't any longer go to—I'm probably a little easier to talk to about personal things than Gerry is, because, you know, women are socialized to do that better than men, and then my Women's Studies background, I think, has also trained me to deal with talk to girls and women about personal issues better than Gerry's training has equipped him. So I don't know where that's taking us right now. I'm probably getting—

McKIBBEN

It's just interesting.

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

Okay. [End of August 4, 2011 interview]

1.6. Session Six
August 17, 2011

McKIBBEN

Okay. So once again, this is Susan McKibben with Sondra Hale and it is August 17, 2011. So we're continuing in our discussion. Last time we talked about your involvement in the Woman's Building in particular, and you were also teaching the very first Women's Studies class at Northridge. Is that right?

HALE

Right.

McKIBBEN

At Cal State Northridge. Then how long were you at Northridge? Was it just two years?

HALE

Oh, that's complicated. I think it was two years as director of Women's Studies, but I was teaching at UCLA at the same time. So I was part-time in both places for a period.

McKIBBEN

You were at CalArts [California Institute of the Arts] as well.

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

Late seventies.

HALE

Yes, I was.

McKIBBEN

We talked a little bit about it, but not a lot.

HALE

CalArts was wild, yes. [laughs]

McKIBBEN

So you were rushing about on the freeways to all these areas.

HALE

Yes. I think there are some terms for these nomadic academics who had two or three jobs at one time.

McKIBBEN

Yes, the things to which we look forward.

HALE

That's why actually I get a bit prickly when someone suggests that I'm in this very safe elite position of full professor at UCLA and starts making snide comments of one

kind or another. I always want to say, "Look, you know, I've been in the trenches. I earned it. I spent years as a lecturer and as an adjunct and being a 'freeway flier' between and among institutions." I don't think I ever actually taught at three institutions at the same time. I think it was usually two. But somehow or other I wandered into both UCLA and Northridge and then—oh, wait. I don't think I was teaching at UCLA yet. No.

McKIBBEN

No, probably not until later in the eighties, from what I recall.

HALE

Yes, yes. I skipped over. So it was CalArts and Northridge. You were perfectly right. You know my timeline better than I do. That's what research and study will do.

McKIBBEN

Yes, indeed. So you finished your Ph.D. in '79, right?

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

You finished up with that. How was that? Were you just glad to be rid of it or were you excited? [laughs]

HALE

I took a long time, and I took a long time because I didn't know you weren't supposed to take a long time, and I was pretty busy enjoying taking a zillion classes, graduate classes in all kinds of departments, and taking time out to strike and taking time out to be a political activist in just about everything, on campus and off, and internationally, etc. I lost my train of thought.

McKIBBEN

Then finally you finished.

HALE

Oh, yes, that's right. No wonder I lost my train of thought. It took so long to get there. [laughs] Took so long to make the point. Anyway, yes, it took me a long time, and I went back into the field for another two years on another grant, and I filed in '79. I wasn't in a hurry also because I claimed to my committee and especially to Hilda Cooper, my Ph.D.

chair[person], that there weren't any jobs out there. So why should I—my life was going to look exactly the same, even though I had filed my dissertation. And she said, "Oh, no. No, no, no. Your life will change. Mark my words, your life will change." At the time, I didn't really believe her, but my life changed but not in the ways that, you know, one immediately got hired for a tenure-track job at Harvard [University] or whatever, but my life changed in terms of how I felt about myself. I mean, there were some negatives. That is, I had used the excuse that I had my dissertation to write for so many years, that once that excuse was removed, then I had no excuse for lots of things, like publishing, various family responsibilities, you name it. So there was that negative. But the positive was the way it made me feel. So that even though I was in a rinky-dink job—sorry, Long Beach and Northridge—but even though I was in a rinky-dink part-time job, it's in reference to part-time, I felt like I was a person with a Ph.D. If we go back to some of the early things that I talked about in my childhood and so on, being a university professor, having a Ph.D., once I learned what that meant, was just heaven. That was the pinnacle. So there I was, I had reached the pinnacle. What happened after that is another matter.

McKIBBEN

Was your mother alive then?

HALE

She was alive but she wasn't lucid enough, let me put it that way, to fully understand that I'd actually filed. She was lucid, but she didn't die until the same year as 9/11 [September 11, 2001]. But she was not lucid for a good decade before that. So I guess, yes, she was alive.

McKIBBEN

Were you concerned about being out in the job market specifically as a woman at that time?

HALE

No. I didn't really think of myself as being discriminated against as a woman, which was naïve of me. I looked at anthro[pology] and 50 percent of the people in the Anthro Department, almost, were women, this Anthro Department

at UCLA and other Anthro Departments and so on. That was before I'd read some statistics about the glass ceiling in academia and so on. No, I wasn't. I was worried about being in the job market as a Leftist who'd been a rabble-rouser at UCLA as a graduate student, and I didn't know how much that would follow me, and I never will know if that followed me. So that when I was a finalist for a couple of jobs, did people call around? So these are not necessarily formal letters, but people call their cronies, and their cronies say, "Ah, no, she's really a troublemaker." So I was most worried about that, but then I was also worried about the fact that we'd adopted kids [Bulbul and Alexa] that already were carrying around the stigma of having white parents and being adopted and all that sort of thing. I think I said earlier, I didn't want to inflict on them our being a commuting family. So there were all those issues, and at the time I was in therapy. It's the only time in my life I was in therapy. So it was a four-year period to try to finish the dissertation, and trying to figure out with the therapist what was keeping me from finishing. I mean, I was that same grad student who used to write sixty-five-page seminar papers in a week, you know, or less. I mean, what was holding me up? Why couldn't I think of a dissertation as six of those seminar papers strung together or something? Why couldn't I use some of those mental tricks? Well, I won't get into what some of her ideas were, but whatever they were, she managed to get me through that, and also a major piece of advice was I was fretting so much about the job market and what would it be like to have to move away from L.A. because Gerry was not very mobile. He hadn't published enough to be very much in demand anywhere I wanted to go or anyplace where I might be offered a job, that it seemed that the solution would be that we would have to live apart. So I started fretting, and I fretted a lot in therapy until finally my therapist, Roe Rotenberg, said, "Look. Why don't you wait until you get the job offer before you start all this negative thinking about all the reasons why you can't do it." She said, "You may not even get the job offer. Why put yourself through this and put all your friends through this

and put me through this?" [laughs] So I realized that was really good advice, and I shut up. Yes, of course I was worried about being in the job market.

McKIBBEN

[laughs] So eventually in this process you applied to be the director of Long Beach Women's Studies program. Was it just right over there or did you sort of wander around for a while before? [laughs]

HALE

You might remember that I'd only really taught one course. Well, I taught the same course more than once at Cal State Northridge, and I'd had those workshops and I was active in the Socialist Feminist Network, and it was kind of not in character for me to be so bold as to think that I could, first of all, teach Women's Studies with that kind of shabby background, but we all had shabby backgrounds. It was new. I think, not counting this generation of Women's Studies faculty here, the newest generation, at some point maybe, let's say, five years ago, we looked around at the faculty and realized that none of us, virtually, had ever had a Women's Studies class. You know, that's pretty striking when you think about that, about how new the field was and how we had created the field. Anyway, back to the boldness. So there was an ad for lecturers at Cal State Long Beach. I think I had tried to apply the preceding year, and I'd missed the deadline or whatever, and I'd been greatly encouraged to apply. I think the person that told me that they were going to be having a full-time job advertised soon. "Please apply," she said, but she didn't say it was for director. In fact, I'm not really sure that it was ever advertised as director. The details are a little bit foggy right now. But, at any rate, I either saw an ad or someone told me about it or whatever, and I wrote a cover letter and turned in my résumé and then got called for an interview, and that part wasn't surprising, except what was surprising is that I found out that there was a possibility of being the Coordinator of Women's Studies. That stunned me a little bit. I especially got stunned when I was taken aside—I went to some social gathering and I met Emily Abel, who was teaching part-time at Long Beach at

that time, or maybe it was Sherna [Berger] Gluck I met. I guess it was Sherna. And I just blurted out, "Oh, you're Sherna Gluck. You teach at Long Beach. I just applied for the job there." She looked at me in such an odd way. After she'd been very friendly before that, very glad to meet me, I was glad to meet her and so on, so I found that a bit weird. Then Emily Abel I met at a social gathering a little later, we already knew each other, and she was the same. She acted the same. I thought, "Hmm, well. But they invited me to apply, so what is this?" So the whole thing was a bit odd. So I was interviewed. I was taken aside by someone after the interview and after I had been offered the job and told that there was an inside candidate and that I shouldn't have applied for the job.

McKIBBEN

This is what they told you as the aside?

HALE

Yes. They said, "X was supposed to get this job. All of us wanted X to get the job." And I said, "Nobody told me. I mean, you knew my background. You knew my politics. You should have known that you could have trusted me to tell me, 'Withdraw your application,' and I would have done it." "Well, it's too late now," I was told. I think Betty Brooks was one of those people. You can imagine. You can just hear her saying, "Well, it's too late now," and Sherna was saying, "It's too late now." The Dean interviewed me and put me in, made it official that I would be the Coordinator of Women's Studies, and I got a really hostile reception. [Deborah] Debbie Rosenfelt, who was a tenured person or tenure-track, anyway, in English, a contributing faculty person to the program and one of the builders of the program, was very sympathetic. She could see the situation. I said, "You know, I don't think they believe me that I didn't know this was a wired position." She said, "Well, we couldn't tell anyone, because if it got out, the dean would probably have cancelled the position. He would have been so angry with us." And she told me that the inside candidate was never going to get it, never. The administration would never have hired her.

McKIBBEN

Just politically?

HALE

Yes, politically. Well, she didn't have a Ph.D. and no publications and so on. So she was just the local favorite in a whole lot of ways, and she's a wonderful person, and I understood that she was super popular, and she had all the qualities that the Long Beach program wanted. So I want to go back now, if you can remind where I am in the process. I was so overjoyed at the possibility of being hired there because Long Beach had become legendary already, even though it wasn't that old, but legendary in terms of radical Women's Studies programs, infamous in some circles, but definitely famous in especially radical feminist circles. A large number of lesbians were teaching in the program. Those who weren't lesbians, I remember Sherna Gluck used to refer to herself as a political lesbian, and so people, for the most part, were— [interruption]

McKIBBEN

Okay. So after that technical hiccup, please continue to tell me about the program at Long Beach when you arrived.

HALE

Well, I think I said that—I know I said that community people were involved and students were involved, but I don't think I was specific about the fact that they were not only involved in trying to shape the program and so on, but also called in to teach particular courses, not the students per se, because they were all undergraduates, but the community people. So Gail Goldstein, for example, who was an activist in the Feminist Women's Health Center, was teaching one of the sections of "Women and Their Bodies." Denise Wheeler, who got her M.A. actually at Cal State Long Beach in philosophy, was head of the Women's Center, and she taught "The Lesbian" course. In other words, she was not technically on the faculty. This was done before I arrived. She was hired to teach at least one of the sections in the course called "The Lesbian." I didn't realize at the time how essentialist that terminology was, but never mind. It was a product of its time. In fact, we were definitely a product of the time, a time that didn't actually last all that long in terms of the Women's

Movements. Let me not digress too much. So I admired all of these things. We were considered to be a grassroots Women's Studies program, and there were very few of those in the country, but that was one of the ideals that people talked about in the National Women's Studies Association [NWSA]. This connection of community and academy was one of the high ideals of the NWSA and of some of these early Women's Studies programs, not so much UCLA and some of the more elite schools because, frankly, they couldn't get by with it in a place like UCLA. But in Cal State, the various Cal State campuses, just to pick California, there was much more of an opportunity to actually build a grassroots program. There were many—let's see. What were some of the other sorts of issues? Well, we participated directly in community events, so that we would go as a program to a demonstration, form our own contingent in the demonstration. We might even call a demonstration. We demonstrated on campus about various sorts of things as a program.

McKIBBEN

What were some of the issues that you demonstrated on?

HALE

Well, issues about employment, tenure track, tenure decisions for various radical faculty. We were defending women in various kinds of situations. I can't remember some of the specifics, but we were always there, I mean for issues of race, and we supported the Ethnic Studies program, not enough, as far as I was concerned. That was one of the changes that I made as director, coordinator. But we were pretty much on top of things in the U.S. and in California and in Greater L.A. and Long Beach, pretty much on top of politics. We were extremely parochial, though.

McKIBBEN

In what sense?

HALE

International studies were hardly paid attention to, and that was also one of the contributions that I made. The theoretical orientations were very limited. There may have been people who had an affinity towards Marxism, for

example, on the faculty, but Marxism itself was not considered important. It was very much a woman-identified program, and that meant that there was a lot of pressure on the instructors. By the way, we worked out syllabi together, looked at each other's syllabi, evaluated the courses together, which was both positive and negative, because, frankly, like all good things, there was a sort of—well, let's just take the example of the fact that in feminist process we are supposed to arrive at decisions by consensus. Leotard and a number of theoreticians have talked about this concept of consensus and how it really is another form of terrorism. You sort of terrorize people into agreeing with everybody. That's how I often felt at Long Beach, that people were really intimidated into arriving at decisions by consensus. Although I think more than most programs, we went quite a distance in trying to convince each other, there very clearly was a party line, and that party line was radical feminist, but even within that there was a more narrow point of view. It was a point of view that you had to be lesbian or straight; there was nothing in between. "Bisexual" was a derogatory term. It was scoffed at, and we hadn't even reached a point of talking about transgender, etc., and actually multiplying the various ways that one could have gender identification. So it was pretty rigidly lesbian and lesbian separatist. So it was a school of thought, and I'm not saying that everyone in the program adhered to that school of thought, but the most influential people in the program, not the senior people, but the most influential, were people who adhered to a separatist line. One of the members of our faculty, a part-timer—we were almost all part-timers or lecturers or whatever, we didn't really have anyone, no one was tenure-track in the program, including me. So I was coordinator but not tenure-track, even.

McKIBBEN

So there weren't any tenure-track positions at that time in the program, were there?

HALE

Right. We were a program that brought in people from different—like all programs, it was interdisciplinary,

interdepartmental and so on. So there were tenured women, senior women, teaching in the program, but that wasn't where their home was. It wasn't their home program. I'm afraid I'm going to get bogged down in too much detail about the nature of the program, but the nature of the program was really important in terms of what happened and in terms of the kinds of defenses that we were or were not able to make. So I was saying that it was pretty rigidly—one of the members of our part-time faculty divorced her husband and took her daughter with her, but gave up the male child to her husband because she didn't want to raise a boy. People mainly had female animals, pets, I mean. So it was pretty radical.

McKIBBEN

Very woman-focused.

HALE

Very woman-focused.

McKIBBEN

How was it to be a straight woman, a straight married woman in that environment? How did you position yourself?

HALE

Well, it wasn't very comfortable. [interruption]

HALE

Well, I took the position then, and I'd take it now, that everybody is potentially bisexual, but that was not a popular position in our program at all. So I think people had some difficulty relating to me.

McKIBBEN

Because you had to be in—

HALE

You had to be one or the other. You really had to be categorized. But, you know, I'm sounding critical, but this is often a stage of every social movement, and it really becomes important that people can identify themselves very specifically as something. The problem comes about not from that, I don't think, but from the unwillingness to change from the "that" as we learn more, as we feel more comfortable with ourselves, as we begin to learn that Women's Studies is not going to be eliminated. It might change, but it's not

going to be eliminated. So some of the defensiveness and some of the—I mean, we were carrying on trench warfare, basically, and saw the world in—I think we were accused of having a siege mentality by our critics. I don't know that that's an expression necessarily that I would embrace. Certainly I didn't at the time, but I do think that we saw ourselves in the trenches. You notice that I've shifted from "they" to "we" now because it didn't take me very long to really identify with the program, and I think people began to realize that, and as they began to understand my commitment to the program and the fact that even though I was brought in by the administration, I was an outsider brought in to direct the program, which was the last thing they wanted, I think they began to, first of all, believe me that I didn't know that there was an inside person that the program and community wanted for the job and that, in a sense, I was an innocent. But I think they also began to believe that I was the best they could get for a situation that they didn't want, someone whose politics were such that she didn't want to come in and, quote, "clean up the program" or clean out the program or alter the program in any particular way. Of course there were things I wanted to see change. One was the international focus, and the other was that I wanted more theory and more theoretical perspectives, much like the Woman's Building. Our program at Long Beach, there were many people in it who were anti-theory, not everybody, but a number of people, and I was sort of working on that.

McKIBBEN

Do you think that the administration, when they brought you in, did they expect you or want you to, quote, unquote, "clean it up"?

HALE

Yes. It was pretty clear. Some of the public statements that I made, even before all the trouble started, was they hired the wrong person for that, and that was one of my slogans, if you will, while we were going through the struggle. They hired the wrong person to clean up the program or clean out the program or whatever. I was amazed at their naiveté. I

mean, I had a résumé that had a lot of activism on it, for one thing, and I think that they could have called any number of people to find out what I was like. I remember having a conversation with the associate dean, who was the person I worked with more than the dean himself, but he would say, "I'm so glad we hired you. We have to do something about that revolutionary faculty." I said, "But I am a revolutionary." He said, "Well, you know what I mean. Not that kind of revolutionary." That was one of the many times that euphemisms were used for "lesbian."

McKIBBEN

I didn't know "revolutionary" was a euphemism for "lesbian." I've heard a lot of others. [laughs]

HALE

Yes, yes, it was sort of funny. "I'm glad you're not one of those radical faculty," he said to me another time. I said, "But I am a radical faculty." I mean, it's one of the things that I'm proud of that I did not back down on, on these conferences that I had with these guys. I think one of the reasons why I could show a little courage was that at that point the program was making me so miserable that I didn't really care whether I lost the job or not. I didn't feel that way a bit later because, I told you, I got invested in it and committed to it, and it suddenly was mine as much as it was anyone else's, and that was why I was willing to go to the barricades to defend it and defend a number of principles along with it.

McKIBBEN

Besides the fact that a lot of faculty were lesbian, did the administration at the time that you came in have specific grievances against the program, or were they just sort of suspicious of the whole enterprise?

HALE

Well, they found the program completely uncooperative. They, the administrators, were trying to build the program a little bit, but, no, these women wouldn't cooperate in that, and they were shooting themselves in the foot, and they were making a bad impression in general on the public and the rest of the campus and that sort of thing with their

intransigence. "So we need someone we can work with." That was the pitch with me. "We need someone we can work with." So they gave me a couple of carrots. They gave me a summer grant to build the curriculum a bit, to diversify the curriculum. I was appalled that it was an all-white faculty. That was another thing. So, not international, not very theoretical, and very white, which, if we can make reference to the Lesbian Movement, we know it was pretty white in that time period, not that there weren't lesbians of color, but lesbians of color had their own goals and their own grievances and so on, which white women were not really paying much attention to.

McKIBBEN

So we have the situation here that you come into this radical program and you're allegedly the person they can work with. [laughs] Which I still find amusing. And then stuff started to happen.

HALE

Stuff had been happening. There was a major complaint against—well, let me describe our curriculum a little bit. We had a course called "Women and Their Bodies," and we ran two sections of it, and different people taught it, but Betty Brooks was one of the main teachers of "Women and Their Bodies." Betty, at the time she started teaching "Women and Their Bodies," her credentials were that she was a P.E. [physical education] teacher and she eventually went to some kind of institute in L.A. I don't remember the name of it—maybe you do—and got her Ph.D. It was not a credited institution and so on, but she claimed to have a Ph.D., and we used that to try to convince people that she had the qualifications to teach a course.

McKIBBEN

I think it was an Ed.D. [Doctor of Education] from the Institute for the Advanced Study of Sexuality.

HALE

That sounds about right. Betty and Gail Goldstein taught what could only now be considered a very offbeat course. There was a lot about bodies, of course, and a lot about sexuality and a great deal of curriculum was very radical

about sexuality. The textbooks that were required were not one's ordinary textbooks. Saphistry was one of the main texts that was required. Saphistry has a chapter in it that's on bestiality, for example. This was one of the books that eventually caused a lot of trouble. I thought I said earlier, or am I just hearing myself talk in my sleep or whatever, but one of the charges against us, and I'll go back to it later, but one of the charges was that some of the books that we were requiring might be classified as pornography, and that if there were any students in our classes that were seventeen, that we could be charged with selling pornography to minors.

McKIBBEN

My goodness.

HALE

Saphistry is pretty far out. Anyway, and many of the books were the kinds of books that would cause mainstream Americans to wonder what was being taught in our universities at that time. The other thing that caused a lot of difficulty was the vaginal self-help exam that went on in the classroom. Although our instructors, both of them—I doubt if Goldstein gave anybody many options. She was just very rigid. Brooks was a much more embracing and accepting person who understood, partially because she was from the South, you know, very straight-laced family in the South and from a religious family, she understood that many people would have an awful lot of difficulty with these ideas. Goldstein came from the East Coast, very sort of—I don't know if Leftie family or not, but certainly socially progressive family, was not very understanding of people needing to move at different paces and in different directions. The vaginal self-help exam, which involved women looking at each other's vagina with a spectrum (sic) [speculum], was, I was told—I never observed the class, which was my failing, I think, as a director—I was told that it was voluntary, but a number of students who complained, who weren't some radical right-wingers or religious fanatics or whatever, but complained that, in fact, it wasn't voluntary, that there was an enormous amount of social pressure in the class, and that they had the distinct impression that the professor might be

prejudiced against them if they didn't participate in this exercise. There occasionally would be a male in the class, and supposedly separate exercises of a comparable nature would be set up for the male, but he definitely would not be in the room while these measures were going on. Our two "Women and Their Bodies" instructors were not the most articulate people that we had in the program in defending these particular strategies, pedagogical strategies in the classroom. We had some people very articulate about it, about trying to break down these—the class was called "Women and Their Bodies," and so there was a felt need to try to use our pedagogical skills to break down women's detachment, basically, from their own bodies, and to be able to talk about their bodies in a much more natural way, a much more comfortable way, talk about menstruation and childbearing and sexuality, etc., all forms of sexuality, and to also talk about intergenerational issues of sexuality. Brooks showed a film also that became very controversial, of older women having sex, much older women, probably my age and older, and that was apparently pretty difficult for some of the students to fathom. She had a number of visuals. One of the mistakes that Brooks made was that at the time she began teaching "Women and Their Bodies"—and she considered herself a pioneer and I think she was—I mean, there were some problems. She didn't have any biology background, for example, and no background in anatomy classes and no scientific background at all, even though she had that certificate or whatever from the Sexuality Institute. Now I've lost my train of thought.

McKIBBEN

You were talking about a mistake that she had made.

HALE

There weren't any visuals available, any slides. That was before PowerPoint. Anyway, there weren't any slides of women's genitalia that one could use for instructional purposes. There were only drawings and so on, but Brooks wanted to teach with actual pictures. So what she did was to get a group of her friends together and they took pictures of each other's vaginas and so on. The mistake was that in one

of them she had on her ring, and it was a recognizable ring. So she set herself up for being referred to as an exhibitionist, so exhibiting her body in the classroom.

McKIBBEN

That's how people knew that it was her?

HALE

Right. She admitted later that that was really silly of her not to take that ring off so that her hand, separating labia, someone else's labia or maybe her own, with that ring on was a big mistake. So what I'm doing is building the case for how some of this happened, how some of the complaints against the program happened. So I was called in early by an associate vice president, June Cooper, who was receiving so many complaints about this class that she wanted me to do something about it. I was literally called in to do something about that class.

McKIBBEN

Were the complaints from current students or from community, do you know?

HALE

I think there was a combination, but generally these complaints came from students who hadn't actually taken these classes. So students would come out of the classes and they would talk about them, you know, in their sororities or whatever, and then someone would go running to the administration or their parents would or maybe one of their church members would, whatever. So word was out. In fact, one of our defenses was that these complaints are not coming from people who actually took the class, except for those who took the class under assumed names, like Jessica Shaver, who weren't bona fide students. Anyway, June Cooper basically said, "We can't have a class like this." I said—I don't remember my exact words, but it really had to do with, "Are you trying to tell us the curriculum that we should have in Women's Studies? We know the curriculum. We're the experts on our curriculum. No one else is an expert on our curriculum." She actually backed down because I said, I talked about what "Women and Their Bodies"—I was such an unlikely person to have to defend

"Women and Their Bodies." I, who am myself extremely inhibited about my own body and about talking about bodies, and was completely, at that time, uneducated in this area of feminism. But, boy, did I get a quick—I had to engage in a very quick education about it so that I could defend that course, with some reservations myself, but so that I could defend the course to the administrators and eventually to the whole community and to our court case. But it wasn't just the "Women and Their Bodies" class. It was a number of other classes, but it was really more who was teaching the classes that was being objected to. Not just the politics, but the way they were able to get at our politics was by saying that we were not bona fide academics, that we did not have the credentials, and this was one of the ways they couldn't get me in that regard. I had a Ph.D., I had quite a few publications at that point, I had some academic reputation, and so I was a bona fide academic. But the way in which the Right tried to get at me, of course, was through my Marxism. So that's why, when the complaints began, maybe from the Right, they began saying that the program was too lesbian and Marxist. [interruption]

McKIBBEN

Sorry. Continue.

HALE

Well, I might as well cut to the chase, but I did want to point out that the attack that eventually came to our program was not completely out of the blue, that there had been complaints about the program all along, and the administrators were very uncomfortable about it, and they were urging me to do something about it in one way or another. In fact, I said that I was. I said, "I'm internationalizing the program. I'm trying to build theory into the program. I'm trying to bring women of color into the program." I must have used the word "diversify." "But, you know, you can't do these things overnight." "Well, get rid of some of those other faculty and then you can," and that I was unwilling to do, and unable to do, actually. I mean, even if I had been this cleaner that the administration wanted me to be, even if I had been this character, I mean, we're

talking about a bonded, established, and very, very radical faculty that would have been demonstrating at my door. There was no doubt about that. That's not what motivated me. However, the reality of the situation was that I couldn't have done it even if I had wanted to do it. Fortunately, they wouldn't have let me.

McKIBBEN

It sounds like you were trying to kind of mollify the pressure from the administration with these academic arguments to counter their academic arguments, but did you feel that from the administration there were other underlying motivations, [unclear]?

HALE

No, they were homophobic, and not courageous enough to stand up to a public that objected to a program that was more than 60 percent lesbian. So they were homophobic. They were not happy with, as I said earlier, the lack of cooperation. They wanted their various departments to be able to be controlled by the dean, at least. The whole situation was absolutely tense, as you can see. I mean, we had internal splits, so we were not the strongest. When I talked about how it was a bonded faculty and all that, we had gay-straight splits; we had newcomers-old-timers splits; we had community versus academic splits. That's three major splits that we had. Plus, some people just hated each other, you know, the usual. But that reached a climax when our faculty decided to remove Denise Wheeler from teaching "The Lesbian." My details may be off, but I think that's the spark that caused an enormous difficulty in the faculty, and we decided to bring in an outside mediator.

McKIBBEN

Why was it decided to remove her?

HALE

You know, I'm not remembering, except that she was very rigid. She wouldn't listen to other people's ideas—this is what was said—and that she did not have the academic credentials to teach "The Lesbian" class. Her historical perspective was weak. I think there were a number of objections from—these are internal criticisms. So it's not as if

we didn’t do internal critiques, but I said earlier some of those internal critiques were really vicious and terrorizing. Emily Abel, for example, taught the course on “Mothers and Daughters.” Diane Wicker also taught the course on “Mothers and Daughters.” Straight woman, lesbian. Wicker didn’t like how Emily Abel taught the course and sort of brought her up. We were having a tribunal or something, brought her up in front of this faculty meeting, this tribunal. This happened before I joined the faculty and it happened one time afterwards. So Diane Wicker was always trying to dominate how Emily Abel taught her “Mothers and Daughters” class. So we had that kind of difficulty. So we went into mediation. My complaint in mediation was that I was sick and tired of always being compared with Linda Shaw, who was that favorite inside person, and that I felt that, and I think I even said that I felt that Linda played into that and could have made my life easier. Linda was very hurt by my saying that. She thought she’d been very whatever. I don’t want to dwell long on the internal splits, but the mediation did help. We were able to air a whole lot of—we had a really good mediator. I don’t remember her name now. The whole program was there, I mean in full attendance, I think something on two Sundays or whatever. So that is the situation when, once upon a time, I was called into the dean’s office and told that there had been major complaints made against the program by the assistants or whatever, advisors to two state senators, Zeta Chi fraternity, some members of the community. Zeta Chi fraternity was a Christian fraternity on campus. Of course, Phyllis Schlafly’s Eagle Forum was behind some of it, but I don’t think the dean knew that. I had been in Sudan, by the way. It was in 1981. I had been in Sudan all summer, and so while I was in Sudan, this high-level meeting was held. These people, quote, “from the community,” Jessica Shaver and her cohorts were prepared. They had been taking our courses under assumed names. They’d been buying our textbooks and sitting around in reading groups, reading certain areas of the textbooks. They designed this complaint about the pornography, selling pornography to minors that I told you

about later. They referred to our program as being unbalanced, and that we didn't have any courses on marriage and the family and we didn't have a conservative point of view represented at all or even a mainstream point of view represented in the program. They brought along some of the textbooks at this meeting that consisted of the president of the university, and all of the high administrators, virtually. I don't know that every single one was there, but two or three associate vice presidents, our dean, our associate dean and so on met with these community people without any representatives from the Women's Studies program present, not even some of the senior women, who were just contributors to the program, and certainly without the director being there; that's me. Most of us thought that they should never have had that meeting without any representation from Women's Studies and without the director being there. Anyway, so it was the Dean's job to call me in and say that I had to fire those—or not rehire, basically, since they were part-timers, not rehire those "radical faculty." And I said, "I don't know who you mean." And he said, "Yes, you do." And he said, "If you don't fire them, I will have to fire you so that I can fire them." And he said, "I appointed you. I have high regard for you. I think it would be a shame if I had to fire you." So I think—details are a little foggy—I think that he told me I had to think about it and we'd meet again the next day or something like that. So I alerted everybody immediately. He said, "Keep this between us." I had no intention of doing that. I think Brooks, but I'm not sure, I think Betty Brooks called in Susan McGrievy of the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union], and we informed her about what was going on. But maybe we hadn't quite—I mean, I think maybe she was only informed but hadn't come in yet. So I met the Dean again and told him that in no way was I going to remove those faculty, and that I would continue to rehire them in the fall. He said, "I'm really sorry to hear that. I'm going to remove you then as director," and basically he removed me, period, fired me. So I went back to the department. Everybody was waiting there because we knew what was going to happen, and Susan

McGrievy from the ACLU was there, and we started to plan our strategy, and, with great difficulty, we had decided we would have to take some legal action. I had to go into the hospital for a hysterectomy, because I had to. Things had to continue moving, so there were some meetings while I was still in the hospital, but Sherna Gluck was delegated to come and visit me in the hospital and ask me a very, very important question, which was, "Are you willing to be the named plaintiff in the case?" And I said, "Of course." And she said, "Now, think twice about this, Sondra. I know that you're taking painkillers, and I'm worried that I'm asking you at a time when you're really very physically vulnerable. Do you think that you can make a decision like this?" I said, "Yes." Of course I shouldn't have made the decision under those circumstances, but never mind. I said yes, and so Susan McGrievy began to construct a case, which I later found out would be called Sondra Hale et al. vs. the State of California, the State Universities and so on and so on [Sondra Hale et al. v. Board of Trustees of the California State University and Colleges, et al.], bigger than anything that I dreamed was going to happen. We claimed that the university violated our academic freedom, that they violated the right to assembly, that they were guilty of sex discrimination because of the way in which they were attempting to control our curriculum and the derogatory remarks that they had made about Women's Studies as a field. I know I must be leaving out another course of action that we were claiming. They were claiming, on their end, that these were people not qualified to teach at a university level. So what they tried to do was to bypass the objections that the Christian Right had formed and the pornography stuff and so on. They did say that there were elements of our curriculum that didn't seem—they backed away from that, from criticizing our curriculum, which weakened our case with regard to academic freedom. I wanted to say that it was quite inspiring that we had so many people interested in joining the case. Really very, very few, I think only two people of the contributing faculty, the senior women and so on, only two of them did not join the case, and they made it

very clear that it really wasn't because they disagreed with the program or that they didn't think we had a case or whatever, but that it just wasn't the time in their lives when they wanted to get involved in a legal case. Maybe they were smarter than we were, because the case lasted nine years and tied up our lives immensely.

McKIBBEN

Why was it decided to go the legal route? Were there other discussions about what—

HALE

There was a big argument about that. Ah, yes. Gail Goldstein. Gail Goldstein said that she thought this was a battle that should be fought in the streets, not in the courts.

McKIBBEN

Demonstrations and that sort of thing?

HALE

Yes. And she had some support on this. I'm sure probably Denise Wheeler, who was her lover at the time, supported her on the demonstrations and other forms of agitation and so on, writing articles, which we did anyway, but not the courts. At the time, I remembered thinking that was an insane strategy because these things never last very long. You can only keep a series of demonstrations and agitations and so on going for a fairly short period of time, and you've got to rely on having thousands that are going to stay there with you or at least hundreds, and I didn't think we had that kind of support. Gail did. But the problem with taking the legal route is that our courts have a tendency to depoliticize everything, and we only went to court because we wanted the story of Women's Studies told. We wanted to fight homophobia. We wanted to fight for academic freedom. This was going to be a form of activism for us, not a personnel issue. But the courts tend to translate everything into a personnel issue and what you've lost. So everything has to do with whether or not you've lost salary or you lost reputation, which then would cost you your salary and so on. So we were constantly having to shape our case accordingly. Had I lost anything? Well, the university did fire me, but then they hired me back in the fall as a full-time lecturer.

McKIBBEN

Not as director?

HALE

No, not as a director, but there was no salary difference. So I could claim a certain lack of prestige and a certain smudge on my reputation having been fired as coordinator, but I couldn't show any financial loss. Although we started to develop an argument whereby, for one thing, the university—I left out an important piece. The university was quite far along in trying to create a tenure-track position, which they thought that I would be the person who would be hired for, or I would be competitive for that position. So our argument was that I was basically bounced out of that opportunity to be tenure-track, and to show what that would have meant in salary through the years. Also we tried to make an argument for whether or not any of us would be hirable anywhere else under these circumstances, and it looked pretty much like we wouldn't be. But let me go back to the fact that there were sixteen plaintiffs originally in the case, including two or four students. I don't remember the number now. The state of California, which is what we were up against, had all the resources to kind of wear us down, but one of the things that they did immediately was to try to bounce people out of the case for not having any—I've forgotten my legal terminology now, but not having really any grievance. So even though the students were claiming that their quality of education was being changed and that this would no longer be the Women's Studies program that they had enrolled in and that, therefore, their whole career was going to be affected, their whole academic career, it was ruled that they had no grounds. "Grounds" is the word I'm looking for. Other people were bounced out pretty early on, as well, and eventually the number of plaintiffs was whittled down to—I think we were six at the end.

McKIBBEN

It went down to six?

HALE

Yes. You know, we really felt like we were out there kind of alone.

McKIBBEN

How did that affect the way you were in school, at work with each other? Because people were coming out of this lawsuit, and yet there were the six of you still left.

HALE

Well, there were several problems. One decision that had to be made was whether or not, when I was rehired in the fall, I should accept it or if I should walk out. Some people thought that I should walk out, and those people continued with that point of view. Those were a minority. The more senior people plus our lawyer felt that—not the more senior people, but, I don't know, in my book, the wiser people—felt that I should accept the position so that we would have an inside person, because all these other people had been fired. So Sharon Sievers, who was the senior person in the History Department and active in Women's Studies for all those years, felt that I should stay on, but she would have been one of the few inside people. So I stayed on, although it was extremely uncomfortable. For seven years I stayed on; others were fired and not rehired. What happened was that the administration moved Sharon Sievers into being the coordinator; Sharon immediately felt embarrassed about it, announced that as far as she was concerned, she was simply a caretaker for a time when Sondra Hale could be hired back as director. That was a bit phony, but that's another matter. Sharon's dead now and I do not want to speak badly of her. But she wanted to be director of the program, that was pretty clear. She wouldn't have done me in to get that position, but I started to get in her way, you know, because I took her seriously at first and was in there making a lot of decisions and so on and being the person behind the scenes, and I think that could get to be kind of aggravating after a while, because she was the one who had to be held accountable to the administration. Anyway, so there was dissension from within. But your question was something slightly different from what I just answered.

McKIBBEN

Well, you still had, I think, part-time and full-time faculty, and then you had faculty who were participating in the case

and who were not, those who were not. So I just wondered if those tensions were played out.

HALE

Yes, yes. The university began to hire people in order to weaken our case, for one thing, to show that they were really supportive of Women's Studies after all. One of the more cynical acts of the administration was they created that tenure-track position and they hired Norma Chinchilla over me. I did apply for it because we decided I had to apply, because otherwise it would weaken the case. So I applied for it. I was probably the second candidate or whatever, even though I was told they would hire me over their dead bodies. So Norma Chinchilla, who had been denied tenure at UC Irvine [University of California, Irvine], took the position, causing trouble for many, many years between Norma and me, because I was in that situation where I felt like Norma, as a good Marxist, should have refused to apply. In fact, a number of people called me and asked me if they should apply, and I pretty much said it was up to them, and then laid out the situation for them. People like Eileen Boris, for example, who's head of Women's Studies now, I think still, at UC Santa Barbara backed away from applying. But Norma, whose situation was a little more desperate, I guess, chose to apply, and then the university, once she was hired, could say, "Look, we're not prejudiced against Marxists. Here's a Marxist. We just hired a Marxist." So they were pretty crafty in the way in which they conducted the case.

McKIBBEN

Did the curriculum change?

HALE

Yes. Yes, the curriculum changed. "Women and Their Bodies" was taught by a woman with a degree in biology, and I'm sure taught decently and all that. I think it was very awkward for everyone. It was not a happy situation. We also went to the streets. I mean, we tried to and were successful for a while in getting a support group together. I've often wondered what happened to this big community that Women's Studies in Long Beach supposedly had behind us, because, you know, that community dissipated pretty

quickly. I would say that some thirty people at the very, very most stayed with us through the first few years, but mostly people just got tired of the case and kind of wanted it to go away, and that's what happens to cases that take a long time anyway. People forget about you. We tried really hard. I did so much public speaking and other people did as well at various universities and just all over the city, any opportunity that we had. At the NWSA [National Women's Studies Association], I remember standing up on top of a table in the cafeteria and telling people what was going on. We got a lot of support from other Women's Studies programs, letters and so on, and from the National Women's Studies Association, from, I think, but I'm not sure, I think the AAUP, American Association of University Professors, also wrote an inquiry. I mean, that's pretty powerful. I mean, there was a lot of pressure on the university. But the state, you know, and the high administrators were determined that they had to see this through. There was no way that they could back down at a certain point, and they had all the resources on their side. We were running out of money. I think we raised $10,000 for the ACLU. You know, if you do it quickly, people are willing to contribute money, and then after a while they don't want to contribute anymore. We even got to be kind of expensive for the ACLU, you know, if it goes on that many years. So we did some rabble-rousing. I was constantly rabble-rousing on campus itself. I had a number of—two or three senior people that I think were sympathetic, or certainly sympathetic to me, tell me that I really, really needed to pay more attention to my career and try to save my own career, that it was going to go down the drain and that I was going to be blacklisted from the various state schools in California. We had two kids, two relatively young kids. I was making a piddly amount anyway, and Gerry wasn't making that much money as an associate professor here. It got to be financially scary, and, you know, we never wanted to settle for money. We wanted our case to be heard, as I told you earlier. We wanted an apology from the university, which we never got. We wanted an acknowledgement that they had violated our academic

freedom and they had stepped all over our process, that they had bounced me around and they bounced Betty Brooks around. Maybe Brooks did—do you know about the Long Beach story from her?

McKIBBEN

We haven't talked that much about it yet. I know that it started from the early seventies, even, she was getting—

HALE

Yes. Part of how Betty Brooks was able to earn her money was from extension classes and from summer classes, and the dean removed her from those classes, and she filed a grievance with the union. By the way, the union was very, very supportive. We had a hearing, and she managed to get back at least one of those classes, I think. She actually won the hearing, and that strengthened our case a little bit as well. So there were things that would come along that would strengthen our case, but then we kept getting the carpet pulled out from under us. One of our plaintiffs knocked off again, as we've said, until we were whittled down to six. By the way, Sheila Kuehl, bless her heart, stayed with the case. She hadn't even been teaching at the time this happened, and we used her as a symbol in a sense, because here was a Harvard-trained legal professor who was teaching part-time at Long Beach and got fired, with the idea that this was a bunch of people without academic credentials.

McKIBBEN

She was teaching "Women in Law," wasn't she?

HALE

Right. But she was one of the people who was not rehired. So having me on the case because of my academic credentials and the fact that I didn't teach any of those courses like "Women and Their Bodies" and so on, and Sheila Kuehl on the case, those were two, and Sharon Sievers, whose book called Flowers and Salt, which was on a period of the Japanese Women's Movement, it was published by Stanford, I think, right at the time this was going on. So the more academic credentials we could parade, the stronger the case, even though with the part-timers who were fired, who didn't have those same academic credentials, were

extremely embittered by this fact. The case was a cause célèbre. I mean, it was very well known for quite a few years, at least in Women's Studies' circles, and I think in radical feminist circles, because it was considered that in the way the case was won, 1991, but we settled for money, a piddly amount of money. It was $120,000 for all of us. Sheila Kuehl donated her money to the rest of us, and, still, I think I got $20,000. You figure over nine years and all the labor put into it, all the time and labor, and, for me, a deadly thing, and that was that I for many years could not go back to Sudan to do my field work. So that was really, really hurting my career. Susan McGrievy, every summer when I would try to go to Sudan, she would say, "You can't because we're going to court this summer." Finally, one summer I said, "Sorry. You'll have to subpoena me." And she said, "I will. I'll subpoena you." I thought, "Yeah. Good luck getting a subpoena to Sudan." So I went away for two and a half months or whatever it was, finally, to get some fresh research done. But my publication list just really started looking puny and clearly it was taking a major toll on my career. But I was lucky because Nancy Henley, who was the first director of Women's Studies here, very well-known scholar in psychology—what was the name of her famous book? Sorry. Never mind. Sorry Nancy. But it was about body language, gender dynamics and body language, a pioneering book, very, very important. Anyway, Nancy Henley had been one of the people who'd really been supportive of our case and supportive of me, and she and Kitty Sklar, Kathryn [Kish] Sklar, historian, decided that they should try to rescue me. [laughs] So they hired me as a visiting associate professor here at UCLA in Women's Studies, but I had to be housed somewhere, so it had to be anthropology and Women's Studies. And that was the beginning of my UCLA career and really saved me financially because Gerry, my spouse, was so worried about finances, that every time that I would tell him that I can't stand to stay there [CSULB] any longer, not a day longer, he'd say, "But, Sondra," and he would mention, "what are we going to do without your salary?"

McKIBBEN

When you said you couldn't stay there at Long Beach.

HALE

Right, right. I mean, it was miserable. I mean, Sievers, Sharon Sievers was sort of crowding me out. New people were coming in. Everybody wanted to forget about the case. The new students didn't know anything about it. I felt really isolated and increasingly lonely. At the same time, there was still that resentment on the part of people like Linda Shaw and Diane Wicker and Denise Wheeler and so on, that I was still employed. I could see that in [Betty] Brooks. I could see that. But it was a decision we all made and, by the way, by the end of the case, the six of us were pretty close.

McKIBBEN

I bet.

HALE

Yes, stayed together all that time and had our little tensions and so on, but basically were fairly unified. But what was I saying just before that? Oh, about money. So, finally, one day I said, "Look Gerry, if I were a miner and I was developing Black Lung [disease], don't you think you would want me to get out of the mines?" "Oh, sure," he said. I said, "Well, I'm developing Black Lung." And he said, finally, "Well, I think you'd better quit." I mean, it's not that I couldn't have made the decision on my own, but we'd always had a kind of code between us that we didn't make really, really, really important decisions unilaterally, that we would try to get the cooperation of the other person. So every year I would say, "Gerry, I have to get out." "Why? Maybe you better not leave until you have another job." So that's why the UCLA job was really, really, really helpful, and Northridge as well. The Dean at Northridge, when he interviewed me to coordinate Women's Studies, direct Women's Studies—these titles change with each institution—Jorge Garcia is his name. He used to be head of Chicano Studies, which you know at Cal State Northridge was very radical. Anyway, he had become Dean and so he was going to interview me, and I was really nervous because I figured that I was going to be blackballed. He said, "By the way, congratulations on the

Long Beach case. I really wish you well." So, boy, what a relief, you know. I could even talk to him about it, even though I knew that I probably shouldn't talk to him much. He was an administrator at a Cal State campus, so I didn't torture him by talking to him a lot, but I know I had his support and that was really, really important. I had his support because I had moved into another all-white Women's Studies program, or almost all white, and he knew—

McKIBBEN

At Northridge?

HALE

Yes, and he knew that, he just knew from my résumé and from the way I talked that one of the most important things to me ever, ever, ever in my life was to live and work in a diverse community and to make it diverse.

McKIBBEN

Being so concerned and focused on international issues, what was it like for you to be in the situation where you might be sacrificing everything professionally for something that was not even really your area of focus?

HALE

Well, that's a question I got asked a lot, and I have a stock answer for it. Yes, that's not where I wanted to be, and, yes, it's not the cause I would have chosen, but you fight the battles at your front doorstep and that's what I did. I fought the battle that was in front of me. As far as I'm concerned, I had no choice. I mean, just in terms of my politics, no choice. It was absolutely clear-cut. I didn't have to ask anybody. I didn't consult with anyone should I do this or should I not do this, including my family. It was just one of the most clear-cut things in my life. Did I want to stay in the courts nine years? If I'd known it was going to be nine years, would I still have said yes? Well, these are questions that I don't think we can answer, really. If I'd known I wouldn't be able to go off to Sudan for nine years or looked like it was going to be nine years, maybe I would have waffled a bit. But at the time, knowing what I knew at that moment, it was the thing to do. In fact, it turned me into a kind of folk hero, certainly with people at UCLA. I mean, they were marveling

at it, that I didn't have to do this. I had inherited this program. Everyone knew I'd inherited it, and a lot of people knew the story of how they didn't even want me, those women, yet I went to court for them. There were just lots of ironies there. But, you know, I guess I'm glad I did it. I don't know what impact we made. I fear none, but it's hard to say. I mean, did it caution administrators forever about their homophobia or were they just cautioned that maybe they'd better manifest their homophobia slightly differently, change strategies or whatever? I mean, did we caution administrators not to fool around with Women's Studies' curriculum? Well, you know, at the beginning of the case, I think people did reference the Long Beach case, but they were more likely to reference it negatively. One of the strategies that we were forced into and that I, in particular, was forced into while we were going through the mechanisms of the case, McGrievy told me I had to apply for other jobs, and then when I wasn't hired, that would be more evidence. So I applied for director of Cal State Fresno and I was a finalist. I wasn't offered the job.

McKIBBEN

As director of Women's Studies?

HALE

Yes. And one of the things that was repeated to me was that they said, "We don't want another Long Beach here." So that was good evidence for the case, but it also told me that I was marked in some ways. So that was a sort of negative referencing, and that was by a feminist, somebody who was sort of mainstream feminist, who probably saw me as one of those radicals that would ruin the program, would stir up the community, would ruin everything in a department that was trying to build, convince the community and the university and so on that, "We're not dangerous women." But anyway, the question was, was it worth it? Did we have any impact? One of the things that I wanted to do, Betty Brooks talked about writing a book and I wrote a couple of things, but I was collecting—I still have the materials—no, wait. Some of them I probably gave to an archive. But I have a lot of materials and I thought about writing a book, sort of the

inside story. Several things stopped me. One was that I didn't think that many years later that it would be of interest to very many people, and now I'm often surprised at the number of people in our Women's Studies program here who've never heard of the Long Beach case. When they hear about it, they say, "Oh, my goodness. I didn't know that went on." I want to be able to say, "But you benefited from it," but I don't really know if they benefited from it or not. So I wanted to write this book and I wanted to interview all of us who were on the case, not just the six that remained, but everybody who started out, to ask them if we accomplished anything. Of course, we claimed we did. We had a victory celebration at Long Beach, not something, by the way, that I think a lot of people wanted to have, but some people insisted on it. Sherna Gluck was still teaching, and she insisted that we have that celebration, that we couldn't have a case settled and over with and so on and not acknowledge it. But others who'd been brought in later were just so sick and tired of hearing about the Long Beach case. They just wanted it to go away and they were afraid that this would stir up things again. Their new crop of students didn't know anything about it, and why should they be bothered about it. So it became very controversial, but we did have this celebratory evening, in which we were given certificates and things like that for our "courage," etc. A couple of us spoke. I don't remember who. I don't remember speaking, but I probably did, as the named plaintiff. And we tried to get political capital from it, so we talked about this was a victory. Even though we'd never really wanted to settle, nonetheless, it was a victory because the mere fact that the university would give up that much money meant that they understood they weren't going to win this case, etc., etc. We considered that even though we didn't have an official apology, that this was a kind of apology. So we tried to put a spin on it that gave us political capital. I don't know. But your question about why would I do this when I didn't have to, I think that that's probably a question that we could ask any number of activists, especially ones that do things that are not directly related to their particular interest or whatever. Would I

rather have been working on behalf of Palestine? Yes. Would I rather have been working on behalf of Sudan? Yes. Was I more comfortable in the Anti-Apartheid Movement? Yes. More comfortable being a founding editor of Ufahamu and the African Activist Association? Yes. Did I have criticisms of our program? Yes. Did I have criticisms of people who taught in it? Yes. Did I agree with everything that was taught? No. But, nonetheless, this was a grassroots Women's Studies program that had value in and of itself for what it was, and a group of extremely brave and courageous women, even when I disagreed with them. They were really warriors, and I think that that, in and of itself, has enormous value. I will never forget the experience. I learned a great deal from—I'm going to use an old-fashioned expression. I learned a great deal from my sisters in the program, and they really taught me radical feminism at the base, at ground level, people trying to live their politics, whether they were in the workplace and whether or not the workplace was this sacred thing called academia, nonetheless, they wanted to live their politics there, and they had every right to live their politics there. I think it was important to fight for our right to live our politics in the workplace, in academia, in the classroom, in any environment that we choose. And in that sense, I think historically it was important. Some of those issues are still alive. Some of those issues are still being fought. I mean, we have trouble in Women's Studies here, getting people to respect us as a field. Our majors get flak from their parents, from the community, from other professors. They're still the same snide remarks, dismissive remarks, reference to us as being a soft social science. We still hear "warm and fuzzy" directed at us, any number of things. So we're still fighting these battles. They may be slightly different, our classrooms may be different, especially in an elitist institution like UCLA. Nonetheless, we've got the most radical or one of the most radical faculties here on campus. In fact, I think it might be the most radical, even in comparison with the Ethnic Studies programs. I mean, we are at the forefront whenever major issues come up, not as much as I would like, but we are in the forefront, and I'm really proud of that

fact, and I can't help but think that somehow those early grassroots programs, even though they may be somewhat disavowed by the more elite programs, that we here built ourselves on their shoulders. Sorry for the cliché, but I think we did.

McKIBBEN

Even just this idea that you have the right to live your politics in your workplace and in your classroom seemed to come up very much in that case, and it's still a question, especially now, for a public university.

HALE

Yes. We're increasingly becoming not a public university.

McKIBBEN

Right. Well, this whole other question of what do the taxpayers have to pay for, is that the question to ask and does being publically funded or allegedly publically funded mean that you can't have politics.

HALE

No, I think, in fact, not only are we still, but it's a resuscitation of some of the very issues that the community—I mean, the Long Beach community people felt that they should have a say in what a Women's Studies program should look like, and some people argue that. Some people argue here that now the donors have a right to be on our search committees.

McKIBBEN

I remember we talked about that last time.

HALE

That's not that different from what was being argued at Long Beach, one of the many things being argued, and we're still arguing about what's appropriate to talk about in the classroom. I'm the Coordinator of the Southern California Scholars for Academic Freedom, and these issues come up all the time. They look different in 2011 than they did in 1982, but they're basically the same kinds of issues, and I just wish more people would recognize that. I wish we had a better handle on our political history than we have, the "we" as the general "we." I mean, I'm really glad that you all are doing this oral history because women have hardly been

asked about the Long Beach case. Not that that's why you're doing the oral history, but I mean it's an opportunity for a number of the issues that should still be important to us to be brought out. I appreciate that. I appreciate getting our individual histories and trying to disseminate those histories so that we can know where we've been. Sorry for the clichés, but know where we're going and who we are and where are we going from here, what are the kinds of things that we want to shed from our past, and what are the sorts of things do we want to take forward with us. We've discussed that in Women's Studies here. I lost this battle. I claimed that we didn't have a vision and that we should have a vision statement, and I wrote a vision statement that I wanted us to be able to discuss, debate. I knew that it wouldn't be accepted as it was because it was right out of 1970s feminism, you know, feminist process, self-criticism, revolutionary pedagogy, the ideas around diversity. Well, that wasn't so popular in the seventies and early eighties, but nonetheless, these were issues that I thought were really important to be debated, and nobody was especially interested. Programs are not very politicized.

McKIBBEN

I've noticed. [laughs]

HALE

I'm sure you have.

McKIBBEN

This gets back to the whole question of at that time what did you or you all think that Women's Studies was for? What was it about? What was this thing, Women's Studies?

HALE

Well, I think we vainly thought that we were a revolutionary force, that we were going to not only change—so it wasn't just about Women's Studies; it was really about changing society. I mean, I'm positive that every single person in our program thought that we could be a microcosm of what the society could look like, egalitarian to the hilt, and in every way possible. Okay, we weren't perfect, by any means, and we violated that and so on, but I think that we not only thought we could change the university in the way that the

university governs itself, and that we could break down hierarchies, and that we could change the way that education is structured, change the pedagogy, not only of Women's Studies, but of other programs. That's one of the reasons why some of the early grants that were given to Women's Studies and to other programs from FIPSE, the Fund for Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, that there were a number of grants given for diversifying the university curriculum with more ideas and so on, on women and gender, and then within Women's Studies there were grants that were given for the diversification of faculty and curriculum within Women's Studies. So this was mainly a sort of creature of the early 1990s, but very much, I think, comes out of some of the early work that we did in these early Women's Studies programs. There are others, not just Long Beach. I mean, San Diego State's been very important as a Women's Studies program. Okay, we haven't changed the world, but it's often hard to measure just what kind of impact you did have. It's like the Woman's Building book that I co-edited with Terry Wolverton, the subtitle is The Woman's Building in Contemporary Culture. We weren't always successful or we weren't totally successful. We were trying to grapple with just what kind of influence the Woman's Building had on not just art but on contemporary culture. Many of the same ideas that we see in Women's Studies were the same goals and aspirations of the Woman's Building, Women's Studies. I think it's a question that's very difficult. It's almost impossible to quantify. If you've got a whole generation of students which hasn't even heard of Gloria Steinem—I'm not putting her up as some sort of paragon of feminism.

McKIBBEN

We were just talking about the documentary that was made about her.

HALE

And my daughter saying, "Gloria Steinem? Does anyone still know who she is?" Anyway, I think it's just important to keep these ideas alive. I mean, that's a contribution in and of itself. So we managed to keep those ideas alive for nine

years, and to have it spill over enough into UCLA to have them hire me. You know, they could have said here at UCLA, "We don't want another Long Beach here," but they weren't afraid. They're strong enough that they weren't afraid, and Fresno wasn't quite strong enough. Well, that's about what I want to say about Long Beach, which was that I learned a lot. It changed me. It was inspiring. I like to think I made a contribution to the program but also to Women's Studies in general by my participation there and by the case itself. We made some contributions to legal history. The ACLU was pleased ultimately with the case. It was taken over by Jon Davidson in the end and another lawyer. [Susan] McGrievy left the ACLU and went elsewhere, and at that point it was actually easier to wrap up the case. Everybody wanted to pack up their briefcases and go home, but we didn't want to go home empty-handed and we didn't. We absolutely didn't.

McKIBBEN

Thank you. [End of August 17, 2011 interview]

1.7. Session Seven
August 25, 2011

McKIBBEN

Okay. This is Susan McKibben. I'm interviewing Sondra Hale once again in her office, and it is—I never seem to recall the date. I think it's the twenty—

HALE

It's the twenty-fifth.

McKIBBEN

—fifth of August, thank you, 2011. [laughs]

HALE

We've got the year down at least.

McKIBBEN

Yes. This year we know. So when we last talked, we were discussing your work and your activism in the Women's Studies program in Cal State Long Beach, which had just drawn to a close with the ending of that court case in 1991 and your leaving Long Beach a couple years before that, I think, to come to UCLA.

HALE

Yes. I think I left in ‘86, came to UCLA must have been the academic year of ‘86-‘87. It could have been fall of ‘87. I might be off a year. As a visiting Associate Professor in Women’s Studies, but I had to be housed in Anthropology, so I also taught in Anthropology, which is what it’s been all along since then, actually, 50 percent in anthro, 50 percent in Women’s Studies. But I was teaching. I had to get permission from the Department of Education or the UC [University of California] system and Cal State system, whatever. I remember some big deal about how I had to get permission to work over 100 percent. So I was 100 percent at UCLA, and I had to get permission to be one course over that 100 percent, so that I could teach and eventually coordinate the Women’s Studies program at Cal State Northridge. It was strange. I don’t know whether I told you earlier or not, but I was very nervous about being hired at Northridge because I had been told that I was going to be blacklisted in the Cal State system because of my suing the Cal State system. Made sense, right?

McKIBBEN

Right.

HALE

So I had a meeting with the Dean of Social Sciences and the Arts, I think, at Cal State Northridge. He died recently, but his name was Jorge Garcia. I’ll always remember him fondly, partially because of that first interview. Now, I knew he was a very radical faculty member because he’d been head of Chicano Studies at Cal State Northridge, which was sort of the heart of Chicano Studies in the country, really, one of the really radical programs and one of the pioneer programs. So I wasn’t worried about his radical policies vis-à-vis mine with regard to issues of race and social movements and so on, but I was worried that he would have pressure on him not to hire someone like me who was suing the system. So I went in for the interview very nervous, convinced I wouldn’t be hired, and he said, “Well, before we start, let me congratulate you on the Cal State Long Beach case. Good job, very good,

defending academic freedom." I thought, "This is great. This is really great."

McKIBBEN

Deep breath. [laughs]

HALE

Yes, deep breath. Then I thought, so there are people, there are pockets of people in the Cal State system that are not going to try to eliminate me.

McKIBBEN

Was this the beginning of your activism around academic freedom? Because you've persisted in that.

HALE

No, no. I was active as a graduate student at UCLA on issues of academic freedom. People who didn't get tenure because of their politics, we would launch a student protest. So I was very aware of it early. I was also made aware of it because my spouse, Gerry Hale, was in the Geography Department, was an untenured person in the Geography Department, teaching quite radical things on the Middle East and then eventually as a Marxist cultural geographer. He was threatened frequently in various ways. So my consciousness about how he could perhaps not get tenure because of his politics, or, even worse than that, because of my politics as a radical grad student on campus, I just became highly conscious of it. Also I saw certain radical faculty not get tenure. Of course, other excuses were used, but it was burned in my brain early. I don't know as an undergraduate that I understood academic freedom, except for the fact that when I was an undergraduate the talk of how the faculty had to sign a loyalty oath because this was just still—we had the residuals of the [Joseph R.] McCarthy era. We still felt those residuals, and so there were still all these legends about people that refused to sign the loyalty oath and were fired. In some cases, they were hired back years later. One even became the president of University of California, David Saxon. So this not signing the loyalty oath, which, of course, is connected with academic freedom, closely connected, also raised my consciousness. So even as an undergraduate, I don't think I went around using that term because it's kind of

a fancy term, "academic freedom," but I was aware of it. And also the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley when I was a grad student and I considered myself to be indirectly a supporter of the Free Speech Movement. We had our own demonstrations here on the UCLA campus on behalf of free speech. So, no, that wasn't my first encounter with academic freedom. I would say that it's an idea, an ideology, that I've lived with for three-quarters of my life.

McKIBBEN

We'll come back to it, too, because I know it's continued to crop up since this period that we're discussing.

HALE

Yes. [interruption]

McKIBBEN

Okay. Before we continue on with the topic of academic freedom, I wanted to ask you more about coming into these other Women's Studies programs from Long Beach and what some of the differences were that you observed between the Northridge and UCLA programs, but also with the Long Beach program as it had been when you were there.

HALE

Well, I think I have set the foundation for talking about different kinds of Women's Studies programs by talking about how Long Beach had the reputation for being a grassroots program. That was a term that was thrown around a great deal and that generally was to characterize those programs that had a close relationship that had definitely come out of the activism of the Women's Movement, or movements—we like to pluralize them now—and out of other kinds of community programs. So these were programs that had a close relationship to the community, a history of activism, a close relationship to current activist movements, Women's Movements and so on. Then there were the sort of intermediate programs that had a degree of activism but weren't considered to be grassroots programs, but still had more touch with the community and more touch with the history of the Women's Movement and so on. Then we had the more elite institutions that were, in some cases, even though they may not have begun that

way—this is in reference to UCLA—they might not have begun that way. They might have begun with some activists on the campus who wanted to generate interest in a Women's Studies program, but they quickly became something else, and we can talk about that in a while. They became programs that kind of wanted to lose that reputation of being a ragtag army of protestors and dissidents and so on and wanted to be thought of more along academic and high-theory lines, etc., as we can imagine. Northridge was a kind of intermediate program. I mean, first of all, it was quite new, still new. All of them were new. But remember I had taught the first Introduction to Women's Studies class at Northridge, and so this was a return for me after teaching at Long Beach for a number of years. I found in those early years and in the later years, upon returning where my status was different and therefore I was actually able to do something about it, but in my early years I found that the Women's Studies program was run by, I could say, a clique—that might be unkind—but a solid group of contributing faculty from several departments, which was fairly typical of programs. That's what programs are versus departments. They have contributing faculty members and they have an advisory board. Women's Studies at CSUN, Cal State Northridge, had an advisory board that at the time that I taught my beginning class was completely white and very middle class, with some lip service to activism, but not much, and not active as a faculty. I mean, that was the difference, big difference, between Long Beach and Northridge. Long Beach was active as a faculty. That is, as I think I said, we actually went out as contingents in larger demonstrations or had demonstrations ourselves. That wasn't the case with Northridge. That doesn't mean that there weren't individuals who were activists, but the program itself—and let me just talk about when I returned to be the director. I think that was the title that was used. Coordinator at Long Beach, director at Northridge, and chair[person] at UCLA, which I eventually was for two years. So as Coordinator of Women's Studies, first of all, I wanted to try to generate a major and then eventually have us become a

department. Now, that's a big undertaking always, but I started it, and by the time I left Northridge we were sending our proposal through the general channel. So I'd actually designed a major, and later we became a department. But the main thing that I tried to do at Northridge all the time I was there was to diversify the faculty and to diversify the curriculum, and those two are linked, obviously. That was a big undertaking. Before I left, I had managed to get an approval from Dean Jorge Garcia to get the first tenure-track position approved at Cal State Northridge. Again, that's a big deal because there are always constant budget cuts, and we were this little department, etc. But we needed to stabilize, it was very clear, and a tenure-track appointment would do that. I managed to convince him have it be half in Chicano Studies and half in Women's Studies, which, I will add, was not a popular position for the advisory committee. After I left Northridge, someone told me, who was on the advisory committee, one of the white faculty, that she personally and she knew that others were just livid with me because they saw me as selling Women's Studies down the river to Chicano Studies and that Chicano Studies was so powerful that they would just take us over and so on. I was just appalled.

McKIBBEN

What do you think that was about for them?

HALE

Well, I think it was about the fact that they were the pioneers and the founders of Women's Studies, and I think they never felt that I appreciated them and appreciated that fact. I think there is too much of a tendency of—well, let's just pretend for a moment that I'm a woman of color. There's too much of a tendency, I think, on the part of some women of color to discount the contributions that white women have made to movements and so on, because, of course, there's a high degree of anger and resentment, as there should be, but that anger and resentment then becomes kind of—people begin to exclude and begin to discount. So I think that it was threatening to these women who had been in total control of the Women's Studies

program for, I don't know, ten years, then to suddenly be challenged that they weren't doing it right, being told basically they weren't doing it right in one way or another, and to seem to turn the power over slightly to perhaps another group of people. That's hard to take. I don't know how it would work in any Women's Studies program to have a new coordinator come in and to try to do that; director, rather.

McKIBBEN

Make changes.

HALE

So I think although I had a lot of friends and supporters and so on at Northridge, I know I was nominated in recent years for—they have a banquet once a year now for—what do they call it—extraordinary women. That's not the word, but something like that. They give awards for contributions. I was nominated, but I didn't get it. I think that level of anger was probably still there. But just to be perhaps immodest, definitely immodest, for a moment, I credit myself with the fact that the program at Northridge is now as diverse as it is. I mean, Nayereh Tohidi. For one thing, I was responsible for that first appointment. The other thing is that each time they offered a position, I made sure that I wrote to every woman of color that I knew who might possibly be interested, to get them to apply. I wrote a number of letters of recommendation for the people that are there now. I don't credit myself with the hiring of Nayereh Tohidi, but I was one of the people who wrote a letter for her. I think that what they are now, which is just a pretty diverse place, is part of my legacy. I think that's even true to some extent at Long Beach, because I designed the very first cross-cultural course and got it approved at some general education level. It wasn't a cluster program, but some program whereby we ran more than one section of this course. So I don't actually think I'm the one that designed it. I think Sharon Sievers did, but I'm the one who developed it so that it could be accepted as a general education requirement, and that really bolstered the numbers and so on. Then they needed faculty of color to teach those courses, and I have sent them now, I

think, four of the Ph.D. students from UCLA to teach in their program so as part-timers and so on. So I also had a big role in diversifying their program.

McKIBBEN

Do you remember the name of that course?

HALE

I think it was Women in Cross-Cultural Perspective, but the title may have changed a little bit since I first developed it. So Northridge was structured in a pretty conventional way, and, in fact, up until and including 2011, I think, many Women's Studies programs have been structured in very conventional ways. Introduction to Women's Studies and then "Women" in every title, Women in Law, Women in Literature, Women in Sports, Women in whatever, Women of Color. The Lesbian, which always sort of stood out as the ultimate of essentialism, but, anyway, The Lesbian. I think they've changed the title of that class now at Long Beach. Then a sort of specialty, other kinds of specialty classes that people would teach, and then there was always a theory class and either a methodology class or some kind of cornerstone or capstone class was that supposed to put it all together. That was your conventional way of organizing a Women's Studies minor or major. UCLA now is trying to break away from that, and I'm not going to be able to talk to you in an articulate way about how we're trying to break away from it, but we're trying to be innovative about the particular theme. We're trying to do it thematically, rather than topically and so on.

McKIBBEN

I guess maybe if I could get you to talk in broad terms about what you would see as a different way to organize the major, or what does that mean if you're going thematically as opposed to topically.

HALE

It means that we might talk about the relationship of citizens to the state. We might talk about gender in the state, gendered violence. That's one of the ways that we're trying to be more sophisticated at UCLA, and that is not to essentialize women but to really talk about gender. We had

another discussion recently about whether or not we would call ourselves Gender Studies, and it's still on the books that we might call ourselves Critical Race, Sexuality and Gender Studies or arranging those words in various ways. Now, this reflects a very, very different Women's Studies program, and I think even putting the term "Critical," everybody at the university likes to think that they do critical studies, but we know that Critical Race Studies means something very different. It's a very politicized way of looking at race. So we know that Critical Gender Studies would be a very highly politicized way of looking at masculinities and so-called femininities and genders, multiple genders within society. I think once we change our undergraduate—I mean, already our graduate program at UCLA is starting to look different, or it does look different, but we're going to alter that, too, even more, to try to reflect the changes within the most progressive units within universities throughout the country and to reflect basically what's happening on the ground as well as in terms of the way in which we're starting to frame various kinds of social movements. But back to Northridge, it was pretty conventional, and even when I developed the major and redid all of the curriculum, I designed some courses thematically, but it was still pretty topically oriented. We weren't quite ready for anything very different. We had a huge debate about whether or not we would have something called Queer Studies. People weren't quite ready for that word, and we're definitely ready for it at UCLA. We just don't have any courses that are called Queer Studies, because we have to figure out how much we're overlapping with LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered]—I know there are other letters after that—and how much we want to share that and so on, so we're still working that out. But the curriculum was starting to change and the social movements were starting to change, and the composition of those social movements as they related to gender were definitely starting to change. So it was extremely important that these programs move out of, in fact, explode out of their conventional categories. I may not have answered your question. Do you think I did?

McKIBBEN

I think so. I have more questions about that, though.

HALE

Okay.

McKIBBEN

Did that involve collaborating with other departments, like the Chicano Studies department or programs?

HALE

You mean at Northridge?

McKIBBEN

At Northridge, yes.

HALE

Yes. I tried to—well, not just me. I don't want to just keep saying "I," but I was director. I tried to work with all of the Ethnic Studies programs, and the way that we did that was that I began to organize co-conferences where we collaborated in the conference. So the conference would be about race in America or something of that sort, race and gender in America. I managed to get the cooperation also of the very, very radical Pan-African Studies program. Then after the Northridge earthquake, we were put in trailers. Yes, I lived through the Northridge earthquake. That was really something.

McKIBBEN

I bet.

HALE

So we were all rearranged, all of us who were in some of the worst-hit buildings, and put in trailers, and then we had to share that space. These were large trailers, the largest you can get, really, and we ended up sharing our space, Women's Studies, with Asian American Studies. The head of Asian American Studies at that time, the chair[person] of Asian American Studies, was a very progressive guy and he was very interested in collaborations, so then we started collaborating as well with Asian American Studies. I left shortly after that, so I didn't get much of a chance to try to develop that, but we were doing far more cross-listing of courses with the Ethnic Studies programs, trying to get the Ethnic Studies programs also to develop more courses on

women, and that was a big deal for one of them that had not really been very good, shall we say, with regard to gender issues, and that was Pan-African Studies. But they also had a more progressive chair[person] or director that I was able to work with. We had quite a bit in common, as it turned out, from my background in African Studies. So that really helped, I think, and then my general reputation as an activist in the areas of African Studies and Chicano Studies. So, for me, it was really, really important to have this interaction and collaboration with the Ethnic Studies programs, although we always had to be really careful, as we are now, even, that some administrators don't come along and say, "Oh, yes, all these little programs, it would be good to consolidate them and put them in one department." So we didn't want that to happen.

McKIBBEN

The Difference Department.

HALE

Yes, exactly. [laughter] So we had to kind of draw the line. We had to make it clear that we had our distinct subject matter, all of us, discrete subject matter, but that we were also overlapping in some of our pedagogical methods and in some of our theories and obviously in some of our history. So that's what we did, and here at UCLA also when we were a program. [Christine] Chris Littleton and I, when I was chair, always tried to increase the cross-listing of classes and bring people of color in to teach in Women's Studies program and so on as much as possible. But, still, the permanent faculty and the joint appointments and so on were still very white. I can say that at UCLA I have been on the search committee, often the head of the search committee, and the promotion committee of every woman of color on our faculty in Women's Studies at UCLA. So I think of my legacy in Women's Studies as that. Internationalizing the curriculum, and that was another thing that I worked on at Long Beach, Northridge, and UCLA, internationalizing the curriculum and diversifying the faculty and the curriculum. Women's Studies is a very, very different-looking field now from what it was like in the mid seventies and even into the mid nineties.

Since the mid nineties, I would say, or since 2000, there's been an enormous interest on the part of women of color and women from the global south in feminism and in Women's Studies. Most of the applicants that we get for our graduate program at UCLA are women of color. If they don't want to use that term, women from the global south. So either international women of color or local women of color, this is the larger portion of our applicants. Also Muslims and Middle Easterners are often a large portion of our applicants each year. So that's pretty amazing. That is a big change from a time when nobody of color would have applied for a graduate program at UCLA. It's just an amazing change.

McKIBBEN

Is that making its own change from the students?

HALE

Sure. Sure. The students are more diverse. But I have to say at UCLA the students were diverse before the faculty was, and that's just the opposite of, say, UC Santa Cruz [University of California, Santa Cruz]. When my daughter Alexa Hale was attending Santa Cruz, they had a very diverse faculty in comparison to UCLA, I mean, thanks to people like Angela Davis, but the students were so white. Partially that's because of the Santa Cruz area versus living in the great metropolis of Los Angeles, Greater L.A.

McKIBBEN

I wanted to go back for a second and talk a little bit about your work on committees, because that's an area of activism that I think gets overlooked a lot. It's easy to think about social movements as activism, teaching as activism, but it sounds like you've done a lot of your activist work in the academy on committees, on hiring committees, on curriculum development committees. What do you think are some of the opportunities or limitations of activism in these kinds of venues as coordinators, administrators, committee members, versus other kinds of activism?

HALE

Well, one of the things that I had to learn the hard way was that collegiality was very important on these committees, and one of the things I wanted to say, in reflection, at some

point in this oral history is how much I changed my political tactics from being a very confrontative person, an all-or-nothing and very confrontative, to being somebody who became much more soft-spoken and a much nicer person, if I can use such a kind of strange mundane word, much nicer person. That comes from changes in me about people that do or do not fit my politics exactly. I've become far less—I'll talk about this later. On committees I realized that I had to compromise more than I generally like to compromise politically, and I had to change my personality, in a sense. So I did, and I think I've been fairly effective. I've misbehaved on a few committees, one recently. I think the Modern Iran search was one where I definitely lost my patience. Well, let me just give you an example. I've been on any number of search committees where people did things illegal, like they would ask about someone's spouse, their personal life in one way or another, and I would call them on it, but very nicely. But in the past, I would have filed a grievance, and then I would never have been put on another search committee. That's the punishment, and that's the problem with not compromising ever, and I had to learn that. So, yes, I think you can get a lot done on committees if you handle yourself all right, if you try to build coalitions rather than divide people. I was very good at dividing people in the past. I wanted people on my side, kind of thing, and not always thinking about "the other side." But I got to be much better about consensus, no matter what our criticisms might be of this concept of consensus that I discussed earlier.

McKIBBEN

Yes, I remember.

HALE

But I got to be better about trying to arrive at consensus if we could. I got to be better as a chair[person], when I was chair of these committees, not to dominate and to do more listening and to work more on having other people listen to each other. So I just learned some techniques of criticizing and so on. I know that wasn't your question. I think your question really had to do with did I see my activism in this area. Yes, although, at first I was embarrassed about it. I

remember Karen Sacks, Karen Brodkin, which is her name now. Karen Brodkin once said to me, "I don't deal with the administration at all. I won't be on any of those committees." Maybe I shouldn't have named Karen, but I think she would still say, "You, Sondra, seem to do better at those." I considered it an insult, by the way. We're close friends. But I considered it an insult to have somebody tell me that I actually did better in committees and could interact with administrators better than they could, gave me a moment of pause. I thought, have I become something that I never wanted to become? Then I thought, no, it's just a different form of activism and an important one, because this is one of the largest state universities. We have a very diverse population. We're very visible in the world, not just in the United States. When change comes here, it's important change, even though it's just a little piece of change. I think one of the first important pieces of activism I engaged in—Katherine King is just a wonderful activist in Comp Lit [Comparative Literature] and Classics, appointed me when I was just a lecturer. I say that because it was unusual to have lecturers on most of these committees I served on, in fact. That's why people thought I was on tenure-track long before I was, because I was just on these committees, these important committees, and I had a vote and all that sort of thing. But she appointed me to the—I forget what it was called at the time, but I think it was called the "Diversity Committee."

McKIBBEN

I have this, I think. The Task Force on Ethnic and Gender Studies Requirement?

HALE

Yes, thank you. No wonder I didn't remember the name.

McKIBBEN

I know. I just barely remember it myself.

HALE

I'm just going to call it the "Diversity Committee" for now.

McKIBBEN

Okay.

HALE

But my job in the end of it all was to actually design the course that we were going to ask everybody—at first it was on the whole campus, but moving the South Campus, the medical school and so on becomes another matter. We were going to ask the Academic Senate to approve it as a required course for everyone. Now when I look back on it, I don't think that I designed the course that I should have, because it didn't pass. There were just too many people who saw it as too radical. I thought it was very watered down. But the Academic Senate thought that it didn't serve everybody, that it was a particular point of view, and I thought that that point of view had to do with human rights and social justice, but apparently that's a point of view. So it didn't pass, but we met for over a year, but the good that it did was that every now and then a group of students and maybe with some faculty would sort of come up with this idea about having an Ethnic Gender Studies requirement. So then they would be told that, "Oh, we tried that once and it didn't work. Why don't you go talk with Katherine King or Sondra Hale." 0 So people would come and I would give them the history. I would give them my materials, and they would start again. Of course, it would be voted down again, but nonetheless, it served as a consciousness-raiser for certain segments of the population, and I think it will probably come up again, even in this budget crisis, that we really, really, really need one. Every time we have an incident like the couple of really awful racist incidents we've had recently on campus, then somebody starts talking about how we're not educating our students properly in these areas. Then people start talking again about, "Maybe we need an Ethnic Gender Studies course."

McKIBBEN

We've mentioned this, actually.

HALE

I've also been on a number of other committees that have been addressing gender and race issues and sexuality issues. I can't even remember the names of them, there've been so many, enough that I was given the award for [Fair and Open Academic Environment Award]—here we go again.

McKIBBEN

See if I have it. Don't know if I do.

HALE

It's loosely called the "Diversity Award," and it's given by the Academic Senate, but it's worded something like for contributions to the enhancement of diversity on campus or something like that, so a big-deal award. There's some money involved and so on, and it's one of the awards I'm most proud of. I felt that I was being given an award for activism, and it's always great to be given an award for activism. So the committee work, yes, is very important, and the search committees, that's very political work. You can actually raise people's consciousness about certain things on these committees and bring up issues when you have an opportunity. For example, I was on the search committee for the Dean of the Social Sciences. Well, it was a big committee. I forget how many of us, twelve, fifteen, from various segments of the social sciences, and there were people on the committee that I certainly didn't have much agreement with about most things in life, but it was a great opportunity to try to reach people about certain issues. Some people you'll never reach, but others might leave the committee with some different thought. So that's how I thought of each one of these, as an opportunity to not only get what I thought was right, the candidate that I thought would be right for the job or the issue that I thought was right and was worth fighting for, whatever, but it was an opportunity to collaborate with one's colleagues and to try to share ideas and maybe persuade them.

McKIBBEN

In some of the research that I was doing on Women's Studies, especially at UCLA and to a lesser extent elsewhere, a lot of that activism in Women's Studies was very faculty-driven and involved a lot of faculty. But were students involved in a lot of these kinds of issues at this time in the nineties and the early 2000s, as compared to, say, earlier when you were working at Long Beach?

HALE

Well, it depends on what student body you're talking about. Are you asking me if Women's Studies emerged as a field through the activism of faculty and/or students, or if it emerged in the way in which I described it or adding that other important component which is that it emerged out of the Women's Movement?

McKIBBEN

Well, I guess I'm asking was there a high level of activism/political consciousness on the part of students as Women's Studies was evolving during your career at these two and three campuses that you'd worked at.

HALE

At Long Beach, yes, a very high degree. I remember that at Long Beach we had student representatives on our committees. Students were included in everything, and especially they were a student body with an especially raised consciousness certainly about gender and sexuality. They needed some education about race and ethnicity, but they really had their Women's Studies education down, and they were very, very important in building what it was that we were trying to build. They were a troublesome bunch, but, in the end, it's positive. It may be aggravating to have to deal with it when you're the coordinator, but it's a positive thing. At Northridge, the student population was very difficult to work with because they were so—well, it's a working-class school, at least it was at that time, for the most part, and so many students had jobs off campus. They didn't have a lot of time for activism or even for meetings or whatever. So, I mean, it should have been the same at Long Beach as well, but somehow or other we had that radical core at Long Beach that would carry other students along as well and raise the consciousness of other students. At Northridge that wasn't working quite so effectively. There may have been other factors involved, such as the distance that people travel to these schools and the fact that there is or is not housing on campus, a range of things, not to mention the demographics of the campuses.

McKIBBEN

By the time you were coordinator at Northridge, too, the Women's Movement was in a very different place.

HALE

Yes, it was.

McKIBBEN

I would guess, anyway, there wasn't so much push from the community.

HALE

Yes, the Women's Movement had been really exciting, of course, in those early years, those very early years, and was waning, and also there were splits and those splits affected the students and so on. So, yes, that's a good point that the Women's Movement had changed as well, and the population had changed. We're starting to move into more conservative presidents and governors and so on, so the age of radical politics was seeming to ebb. At UCLA, back to the student constituency, at UCLA, of course, we've got both. We've got a radical core and then we have a bunch of apathetic, entitled upper middle-class to upper-class students who can be apathetic. But I don't like feeding into these statements that we faculty so glibly like to make, things like, "Well, the student body is really apathetic. They're very different from when we went to school or very different from even ten or fifteen years ago," or whatever, and putting all that blame on the students and how we radical faculty or liberal faculty, even, can't seem to move them. I think that that's a real mistake. I think that the students are interested in different issues and/or the issues need to be presented to them differently. Now, they may not be the issues that a Lefty like me might think should be high on the hierarchy of worthy causes, I am purposely being sort of self-disparaging here, but they can be important. For example, it would be very easy for me to belittle the fact that the only thing that stirs up students is money. On the other hand, the budget crisis, so called, I don't really think it's a budget crisis, but never mind. The budget crisis that we are in right now in the state of California and in the UC system and Cal State system is really a fight over public education, and that is just as important as anything else I can think of nationally because

it really has to do with class and therefore it has to do with race. It has to do with gender as well, because women don't make as much money, still, etc. These are all kind of connected. Our job as campus activists is to connect these things for them, or to help them make those connections, is what I should say, is really to facilitate that. I think that those of us who've been very active lately in the budget fight and struggle, have at our rallies and so on—and I've spoken at any number of them, maybe three—we have tried to facilitate those links, and the students get it. They're not just protesting that they're having to pay so much tuition. I mean, that is awful and we should certainly do something about it, but they're talking about something else as well, a lot of other things. So I think that to go back to your question, because I seem to have meandered, but I haven't, about the student body and how much the students were involved in, say, Women's Studies activism, it has varied through the years, and it varies with each campus and it varies according to how we as faculty choose to participate with students, whether or not we choose to include them. I've had a struggle in Women's Studies here at UCLA with the heads of our program with having student representation on every committee, and I both won and lost that battle. We have more student representation, but I still think we don't have enough. At Long Beach we took students very seriously, and although sometimes I think students can be led astray, can go astray in terms of how I might view things, on the other hand, we learned a great deal from our students. Even though we claimed to be activists and out there on the ground and all that, we were pretty busy, and so our students were the ones that were often closer to the ground and could bring issues to us that we didn't even know were in existence or give us a different slant. So to answer your question, I think students were very, very important in some eras and on some campuses, and I think they're important on the UCLA campus. Now that UCLA has a Ph.D. program, our Ph.D. students are a wonderful group of activists. Not every single one, but most of them, it's quite amazing that most—I don't know how many grad [graduate]

students we have, twenty-five, thirty, almost all of them are activists in some way, at least academic activists; that is, they're writing important political things. Most of them are interested in pedagogy and radical methods and more radical theories, and all of them are interested in not just gender, but race and sexuality. I mean, all of them. That is really amazing, so I'm really impressed with our graduate students.

McKIBBEN

Do you think that in that way they're pushing the discipline of the department here?

HALE

Sure. I can't begin to tell you the kind of influence that my Ph.D. students have had on me. I've now had three Women's Studies Ph.Ds graduate. We're a relatively new Ph.D. program. There was a time when I had three-quarters of the graduate students in the program, which was resented.

McKIBBEN

That's a lot. [laughs]

HALE

Now it's spread out a little bit more, but that was a lot and I've graduated three: Sharmila Lodhia, Khanum Shaikh, and Azza Basarudin. The three of them are very, very enlightened and political and are activists in different ways. Now I have a new crop, newish crop, of people who haven't finished yet: Tina Beyene, who's a Leftist Ethiopian, who is so, so sophisticated about issues of colonialism and race; Rana Sharif, who is a Palestinian-American who is very active in the Palestinian community and so on. I'm not going to go through all of them, but you get an idea. Esha Momeni, who was someone who was jailed in Tehran for trying to do a documentary on the "Million Signatures March" [One Million Signatures Campaign for Change for Equality] and got out of prison even more radical than when she went in, and now wants to do work on prisons, women prisons in the state. It will be really, really important work, I think, and there are a number of our graduates very interested in the prison system. She's the only one actually working with me. I don't want to leave anyone out, but I also don't want to name everybody. Gina Singh, Dalal Alfares. It's quite a group of

activists and then there are others in the program working with other people. It's really, really, really wonderful. So I started out saying they've given me a lot of ideas and have through the years now changed my politics somewhat. I hope you don't ask me to be more specific. Of course, they're ideas, so they're intangible, but they're often hard to exactly get in touch with. You know that you've changed and you know why. You know who's done it and you know what some of the ideas have been. I have all these Muslim students and I've changed a great deal about how to look at Muslim women's activism. I never was somebody closed to the idea that Muslim women could be activists or feminists or whatever, or there could be Islamic movements where women could be really important. I wrote about that in my book that was published in '96 [Gender Politics in Sudan]. But nonetheless, the nuances and the shades of meaning and so on that I've been taught by people like Khanum Shaikh and Azza Basarudin about Muslim women's activism, I mean, that is just priceless and just extremely valuable to my own research. So they've given me so many ideas, and I can't imagine that that's not true of the other faculty members in Women's Studies. But skipping to a Ph.D. program and talking about the influence of students is very different from talking about the undergraduates, who are also a very feisty and dynamic force within our Women's Studies program and very, very diverse.

McKIBBEN

How has it changed now that Women's Studies has become institutionalized? For example, UCLA just became a department in, what, 2008? I know there was controversy about that or whether or not to stay a program, whether or not to try to influence the rest of the campus, whether or not to assert oneself as a department.

HALE

Yes. The institutionalization is a problem, and I actually opposed our becoming a department. I mean, I went along with people eventually because that's what everyone wanted. But for one thing, I knew that at the time that we became or were talking about becoming a department, we were still not

as diverse as we needed to be to have that happen. Our diversity at that time was brought in by the fact that we were a program, and therefore we could draw in faculty from other departments and so that would enhance our diversity if we so chose. But once you become a department, that's your faculty. You have a fixed faculty then. So I was really worried about how white we would be as a department. But, fortunately, because we were able to hire UC postdocs [University of California Postdoctoral Fellows], three UC postdocs or maybe it's four, but anyway, for sure it's three women of color that immediately, over a very short period of time, within two years, we were able to greatly diversify. Then we've been lucky enough to get a spousal hire and then a joint appointment with African American Studies, and so we've been able to build. We've been very opportunistic. But your question was about institutionalization. So it could have been a major problem. We did the things that we needed to do to offset that. But I think that we had to become a department, because IDPs, interdisciplinary programs, are increasingly threatened, and so you can quite easily be combined in some sort of conglomerate that we talked about a little earlier and lose a lot of your autonomy. We could see the writing on the wall that if we didn't become a department, we could easily be forced to become a part of some cooked-up stew that someone was suggesting.

McKIBBEN

The Difference program. [laughs]

HALE

Yes, the Difference program. So I don't know if I've answered your question about the students or not.

McKIBBEN

You covered it admirably, yes. [laughs]

HALE

All right.

McKIBBEN

Perhaps a dramatic change of topic, but I wanted to go back to some of your international activism in and outside Women's Studies, I guess, and ask you about your work with

Palestinians and your ongoing work with Sudanese and Eritreans as well.

HALE

Well, maybe before we do that, we should talk about the "Dirty Thirty."

McKIBBEN

Yes, let's.

HALE

Yes, because some of these sorts of things that I've talked about are the reason that I ended up on the so-called "Dirty Thirty" list of UCLA's most dangerous professors. Actually it was only twenty-eight, I think, or twenty-seven, but it must have sounded cute to the guy Andrew White who devised this website and claimed to have done all this research on all of us and put all of us on the list. I was number six on the list and the top woman on the list. Now, that could have been a badge of courage. It could have been a very positive sort of thing to think about, but it had its drawbacks as well. But let me not talk about that for a moment. I was very proud to be on that list, and I don't think we should back away from the word "dangerous." I may have said that earlier, I'm not sure. Well, let me just digress for another moment, another digression, and say that I was getting some award from the Women's Studies undergraduates. I don't remember what it was, an award of excellence or something of that sort, but I was given an opportunity to go to Sudan during graduation. Couldn't pass it up, so I asked my spouse to give the speech for me, and I asked him to challenge this idea that we have that we should back away and try to convince people that we're not dangerous. The way that happened was that I started writing this speech for him, and I began with saying something like, "People out there think we're dangerous just because we believe that, believe this, believe that." Then I guess I started to try to dissipate that notion, and then I said, "No, no, I suppose we are dangerous because we are dangerous to ideas that don't change. We're dangerous to a structure and a system that isn't working, that doesn't change." And I went through this whole long speech about the ways which we can proudly say

that we're dangerous. So poor Gerry had to deliver this speech. That's why being put on that "Dirty Thirty" list and being called dangerous was just fine with me. I didn't like the fact that the Palestinian activism was what was stressed with regard to me. I knew that was the reason I was on the list. The guy, whatever his name was, developed this argument that I did damage at Long Beach and then I took the freeway up to Northridge and did damage there, and now, lo and behold, I'm at UCLA doing damage. That didn't bother me particularly, but stressing the Palestinian aspect of it did, because Palestinian activism is always linked with anti-Semitism or usually always, and that bothered me. Let me go back to what I did with my "Dirty Thirty" entrée. I thought, "Well, why don't we try to make the best of this situation, the thirty of us. So I convened a group called In Good Company and got everybody plus some people that really felt disappointed that they were left off the list. [laughs] We met in the anthro reading room. It was a very good attendance the first meeting, and we talked about the kinds of things that we could do and whether or not we could make something out of this. I think we had three meetings altogether, and we set up a listserv, and it stayed in existence, I think, for a year or whatever, which is not bad, I suppose. But there were people that clearly didn't belong on that list as any kind of radicals, and so quickly they got very uncomfortable with trying to deal with any sort of radical issues, and dropped off the list, and it sort of started to fall apart. I got disinterested because I realized that people really didn't want to engage, academics. It's very hard to get academics to be activists, and for the umpteenth time I was reminded of that. But, anyway, that was the "Dirty Thirty" episode that's probably still lingering there. I see it mentioned every now and then.

McKIBBEN

It comes up immediately when one does a search for you.

HALE

Yes, I know.

McKIBBEN

For example, when one is preparing to conduct an oral history. [laughs]

HALE

Yes, I'm sure.

McKIBBEN

But that was fairly recent; that was just a few years ago. So maybe I could back you up a little with some of your slightly earlier activism around Palestinian issues. I mean, we talked already about how 1967 was a good year, or was a difficult year, rather. We don't need to go back that far. [laughs] [interruption]

McKIBBEN

Okay.

HALE

Well, I've been active in Palestinian issues for a long time, on campus but not so much on campus as off campus. I don't think I could name the first time I became active. I mean, Palestine has been on my mind and in my heart for decades now. I think we talked earlier about how I even got the idea of Palestine and knew anything about it, which was through my spouse, who was a Middle East geographer and talked quite a bit on Palestine. When we met, he was talking about Palestine all the time. I really hardly knew what he was talking about, but I certainly learned. For one thing, I was part of a Middle East Women's reading group that was made up of quite radical women, Middle Eastern and Middle Easternists. When I think about that group now and some of the people in it, I realize how privileged I was to be a part of it. That group became a more activist group, and we became Feminists in Support of Palestinian Women, and we would launch a demonstration on the corner of Santa Monica [Boulevard] and Ocean [Avenue], or anyway, in Santa Monica on Ocean [Avenue]. We weren't very many, so we had to be in a prominent corner. On Mother's Day, every Mother's Day—

McKIBBEN

When about was this? Decade?

HALE

Decade, the eighties and definitely in the nineties. So then we also became a contingent within other larger demonstrations and so on. Then I became active in the L.A. Eight [Los Angeles Eight] case, which was a case in the late 1980s where eight Palestinian or seven Palestinian activists and the Kenyan spouse of one of them, was arrested for subversive activities for passing out literature from the Palestinian Liberation Front, and that was considered a terrorist organization, which was ridiculous. Therefore, these people passing out literature were arrested for subversive activities. Two of them were Cal State Long Beach students, and that got us more immediately involved, as in the next day after they were arrested, more immediately involved that we might have been otherwise. The "we" is people like Sherna [Berger] Gluck and me. I remember our very first demonstration was actually on the Long Beach campus, a small demonstration, but still we tried to build it, and that case is still in the courts. There's been talk that it would be dismissed and so on, and the state is still not letting go of them. I stopped being active after a while, but some people have been active all along. So we're talking about a couple of decades now or more, and go to court every time there's a hearing. I think the last time I went to a demonstration must have been almost a decade ago, I'm embarrassed to say, but I still consider myself one of the supporters of the L.A. Eight and one of the pioneering supporters of the L.A. Eight. So these were the earlier, in a sense, forms of activism, and then I've just been active every time there was some major clash between Israelis and Palestinians, such as the invasion of Gaza, the invasion of South Lebanon that involved also a lot of Palestinians, every time some major event like that occurred or the awful massacres at Sabra and Shatila [refugee camps] in Beirut. So I could just tick off the various kinds of historical events that caused us to be activated here in L.A., sometimes under particular names like Justice in Palestine, sometimes not under any names at all, just the usual suspects would come out and demonstrate in front of the Israeli Embassy or elsewhere. I became active early in a divestment campaign, divesting from Israel, that collapsed. I

became active in—well, let's just put it this way—anything that had to do with Palestine after a while, and then that began to involve academic freedom issues when people were fired or not hired or whatever. It also led to our supporting particular student demonstrations like the current Irvine Eleven that we might get to.

McKIBBEN

And also the Berzeit University as well? You were in support of academic freedom there, I think, as well?

HALE

No. There've been a number of cases, and I will get to the California Scholars in Support of Academic Freedom eventually, but I—

McKIBBEN

Did you—I'm sorry, go ahead.

HALE

I became active in what is referred to as the BDS Movement, Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions, and that's where most of my activism is right now.

McKIBBEN

When did that start?

HALE

Oh, it's pretty—

McKIBBEN

It's fairly recent, right?

HALE

Well, no. Well, I guess it is recent in the way in which we're talking about recent, within the last decade, but it's really picked up in the last four years—I think Israel's assault on Gaza was so horrifying to so many people, that a lot of people began to look twice at this issue. Jewish activists have become very, very visible and prominent in the Pro-Palestinian Movement, if we can call it that, which is not quite the right terminology. That's like Pro-Abortion Movement in a sense. It really has to do with social justice, period. Anyway, we can talk about the BDS Movement a little bit and link it with academia, because I was invited about four years ago to a conference in Bellagio [Italy]. The American Association of University Professors [AAUP] had

passed a resolution against academic boycotts, and Joan Scott was in the vanguard of that and actually wrote the resolution that was passed. But she got so much flak from a number of people that she really respected for this decision of the AAUP that she and other members of the AAUP—and I think she was president then—decided to hold a conference in which this would be discussed. Academic boycotts would be discussed. I was invited to give a paper at this conference that was supposed to be pro and con and was pretty much pro and con, but what happened was that the public relations person who was head of one of the Israeli universities [Tel Aviv], head of public relations—I can't remember his name right at the moment—he sounded the alarm on this conference, so to speak, and said that it was basically an anti-Zionist conference, it was going to be anti-Semitic, and he pointed to a number of people that were being asked to participate and said, "They are known anti-Zionists, anti-Semites." They shook up the people who funding that conference at Bellagio, Italy, at the Rockefeller Conference Center in Bellagio. The people who were funding it were obviously Rockefeller [Foundation], Ford [Foundation], and I can't remember the third funder, but another big funder. Well, Ford got really nervous because—I don't know whether you know or not, but Henry Ford through the years was accused of being an anti-Semite and probably was. So the Ford Foundation then has always been on edge about that reputation that Ford has had, and they've tried to offset it in various ways. But the fact that in more recent years they had chosen to fund certain Arab, Muslim, and Palestinian activities was raising the red flag again for Ford, and so they got very nervous about this one. I mean, even though it was supposed to be an academic conference, not a political conference, they felt that it was going to be politicized, and that's probably true, and would have ended up with an acrimonious debate and we might not have gotten anywhere, even though there were people from all over, South Africans, British Americans, Palestinians, Israelis, and American Jews representing Zionism. It was very diverse. Well, Ford and Rockefeller pulled out their funding one week before this

international conference was to be held, which is pretty unusual, to say the least. So then we tried to take advantage of the situation and take a look at the—oh, and the AAUP pretty much backed down. We felt that that was a moment in which they should have used all of their influence to try to move people to hold that conference. Of course, once the funding is gone, that's something else. But we tried to persuade them to have a local conference, and by local I mean U.S., and have us go on our own money. We made all kinds of suggestions to not have this collapse, but it did collapse. The compromise that the AAUP made was that they would publish our papers in edited forms in their publication Academe, and so I have a little publication in Academe, which talks about if not now, when? When is it time to academically boycott Israeli universities that are so deeply implicated in state policy towards Palestinians, helping develop arms, helping develop the intelligence units? Lisa Taraki, a Palestinian activist, gives a magnificent presentation on the degree, the depth of the complicity of Israeli universities. We've had a hard time trying to show that we're not boycotting individuals. We're not going to say, "Oh, X from Tel Aviv University can't come and give a talk at UCLA because of the boycott." It's not an individual boycott; it's an institutional boycott. So the kinds of things we're boycotting then would be government-funded exchange programs between Tel Aviv University and UCLA, for example. So that's often misunderstood. The academic boycott — I think, there are a number of people that have agreed to support the economic boycott to try to force Israel to change their policy towards Palestine, but some of those very same people have this notion that ideas are sacrosanct and academics are sacrosanct, and the university cannot boycott a university as if it's a really sacred cow. So some of the same people who would support an economic boycott will not support an academic boycott. By having my name attached to this, it's been one of the ways that has drawn the hate mail that I've received and other kinds of things.

McKIBBEN

Have you brought this into your classroom and into your teaching as well, or has it mainly just been off campus?

HALE

Well, I have to say that I've been really careful in the classroom, and I'm not proud to say that. It's not that I don't discuss it. When I taught the Anthro of the Middle East, what I did was to teach with Susan Slyomovics' book, The Object of Memory, which is a book about how Palestinians and Jews, Arabs and Jews in Palestine-Israel tell the story of their villages differently. So it's really a kind of politics of memory, just a fantastic book, by the way, politics-of-memory book. So what I did was to save the Palestinian-Israel unit to the very end of the course, and then taught it as two different stories, but not in the neutral way that it's sounding. I made my position very clear, and I said that it's not really fair to lay out two equal stories, because the people are not equal in terms of social justice, and then presented in that way. That actually provoked a pretty good discussion. I'm sure there were some Zionists in the room upset, but basically that worked pretty well. In terms of my Women and Social Movements class, I think I've been pretty clear that, for example, I teach about Palestine. I don't teach about Israel. So that's an omission that tells people a great deal, I mean, because I could talk about the Kibbutzim—listen to me, it's like a movie star's name or something. I could teach about the Kibbutzim Movement, I could talk about the role of women in the Israeli military, which I do mention. You took that class, didn't you?

McKIBBEN

Yes.

HALE

Don't worry, I'm not going to ask you what you remember. Well, I might. Do you remember my talking about Palestine?

McKIBBEN

Not very much.

HALE

Yes, not very much.

McKIBBEN

But it's been a couple of years since I took it from you, so you may have altered it.

HALE

I do mention it. I do lecture about it. I give a whole lecture, I think, and I make my point of view clear, but I'm careful. I still get complaints and sometimes I ask myself why am I being careful when I'm still getting complaints, because there's no being careful about that subject. It's always out there. I do try to address the issue once in a while, depends on what term it is and what mood I'm in. This notion that if you are in support of Palestinians and if you're anti-Zionist, you're necessarily an anti-Semite, I will concede, by the way, that the Jewish people have managed to have "anti-Semite," the term, only apply to them, even though Arabs are also Semites. I've given up on that issue. I used to always bring that up, and I used to always get rejected in an angry way. I thought, this is not worth it, because now it's etched in our brains, or most people's brains, that anti-Semite means anti-Jewish, so I'll just use it that way. There are such strong arguments that have been published to show that this is simply not true, but how does one—I suppose out of all of the things that I've been called or accused of in my various forms of activism through all of the decades, nothing has hurt me more than being called an anti-Semite. It really touches me to the core. I'm not exactly able to figure out why that is, but, well, I mean, it's pretty clear. It would be a pretty racist thing to be, and since I've been fighting against racism all of my life, that would be a disaster for me. And you can't wear a badge that says "I'm not an anti-Semite," or "Most of my friends are Jewish."

McKIBBEN

That would be a fairly counterproductive strategy. [laughs]

HALE

So there's nothing. One feels helpless in the face of that particular kind of accusation, and I feel unfairly treated in that area. I suppose when I joined the U.S. Committee for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, which is quite an active committee, and I was originally on the organizing committee and I pulled out—well, I'll tell you. I pulled out for

a very interesting reason, and that is that one of the Palestinians on that committee said in an email—this is an email activist group—"There are just too many bossy Jews on this committee." I wrote and said I couldn't be a part of a group where that kind of anti-Semitism was being expressed. It was just absolutely too blatant. I was surprised, because actually I don't hear very many Palestinians making those kinds of remarks.

McKIBBEN

It's surprising.

HALE

It was pretty surprising. He did resign shortly after that, because I think he got—my complaint was public, I mean public as in on the list, but I think he got some Palestinians saying, "Look, this is—," you know.

McKIBBEN

Right.

HALE

But I'm still a member of the organization. I'm still one of the—what are we called—sponsors. Endorsers, I guess that's what we're called. I lurk on the list itself and have done things for the organization and that kind of thing. Just didn't want to be on that committee anymore. That committee came out of an organization that I formed, that I founded, which is California Scholars for Academic Freedom, and that actually happened after a colleague of mine in the anthropology department took on Susan Slyomovics and me, without naming us, but everyone would know who it was, on a website from an organization called Peace in the Middle East, which is just a misnomer. He took us on for our particular views, and he accused us of third-worldism.

McKIBBEN

I don't even know what that is. That sounds made up.

HALE

Well, no, it's a term that's directed at anyone who supports the particular justice issues in the third world. So it means favoring the third world.

McKIBBEN

Heaven forbid.

HALE

Yes, heaven forbid. I'm proud to say I'm a third-worldist. [laughter] Anyway, and then he threw a whole lot of other things into the pot, post-colonialism, etc., etc., and I filed a complaint against him with our chair, which is something I've never done, and because it's confidential, I can't tell you what the chair did. But, anyway, I started thinking, look, when our colleagues in our own department start attacking us, then we really need some protection. So I formed this organization that consists of some twenty-two or twenty-three—it's just for higher education—California institutions of higher education. It's very multidisciplinary. Some campuses are more heavily represented than others. Some surprises, like [University of California] Santa Barbara is very heavily represented, and that's because they had a major, major academic freedom issue over someone who made a remark about the Middle East in a class and then got censored for it. Censured, I guess, is the word. At any rate, most of the cases that we've dealt with have been cases connected with the Middle East, even though it's not a Middle East listserv/organization. I mean, we defend academic freedom, period. But I don't think it's any coincidence that most of the cases have been violations of the academic freedom of either Middle Easternists or Middle Easterners. This is, after all, a post-9/11 listserv or post-9/11 organization. So I am the coordinator of that, and we are pretty active. We're mainly active with writing letters and that sort of thing and trying to keep people on their toes, trying to let them know we're watching them. We don't call ourselves a watchdog organization, but I suppose we do partially function that way.

McKIBBEN

It seems like especially the Palestine Movement and its backlash have become quite prevalent, or evident, maybe is the right word, on university campuses, or maybe that's just my own personal experience of really noticing it here at UCLA in the last few years. But do you think that's the case in general?

HALE

Well, I think that even though there's been this enormous discrimination towards Arabs and Muslims and so on since 9/11, the countermovement has been—I don't mean countermovement to that, but what has gone on, a second strand, is that people have begun to recognize that there's a Palestinian issue, and I think that's why you're seeing that there's more activism on campuses. More people are aware, and then, as I said, Israel has carried out some pretty high-profile acts.

McKIBBEN

Particularly in the last three, four years.

HALE

Yes. So Gaza, the attack on the Freedom Flotillas, you know, we could—

McKIBBEN

Lebanon.

HALE

Exactly. So, yes, I think that even though the Zionist organizations are fighting back very hard within Israel and outside of Israel, like the Israelis have been talking about legislating against their own academics for supporting the boycott, and this is new. It's a new weapon. We claim, we in the BDS Movement, claim that this is a nonviolent way of addressing the issue. We've never been violent. I'm not a pacifist, but violence does disturb me, and so I would not be in a violent movement. But it doesn't get recognized as legitimate—boycotts are legitimate nonviolent methods for dealing with causes or incidents or events that one disagrees with. So I maintain that it's highly legitimate and it should not be considered to be—yes, anti-Zionist, I am, but that's because it's the ideology that drives the policies of the Israeli state. It shouldn't, because that's not what Zionism was all about initially. Zionism was an ideology about egalitarianism, a whole range of things that I believe in, but it became something else. Like a lot of causes and movements and so on, it became corrupted, and it became corrupted in some of the policies of the Israeli state. And I'm not anti-Israel; I'm anti-Israeli state. And that's a clear distinction for me, absolutely.

McKIBBEN

Can you say more about that?

HALE

I don't believe Israel should be pushed into the sea. I'm not sure that I think that—"I'm not sure." I shouldn't say I'm not sure. I've thought about this a lot. At this point in history, I don't believe there should be the elimination of Israel. Let's just be clear about that. However, in terms of the foundation of Israel, I'm not at all sure because of taking Palestinian lands. It seems to me that we should have been able to work out some other solution for what happened in World War II and not have Palestinians pay the penalty for that. Whether it should have been two states right to start with, although the British were so clumsy and the colonial and the European powers were so clumsy in their handling of it, because there was a lot of guilt about standing by and letting happen what happened in the Holocaust and a lot of trying to make up for it without really thinking of the consequences for other people. Why didn't we resettle Jews in the United States? I would have been quite happy to have had millions of Jews resettled here. I mean, this country was partially built on Jewish intellectual thought, on Jewish activism. I don't know where the Civil Rights Movement would be without American Jews. I don't know where our universities would be. I don't know where our whole intellectual structure would be without Jews. I would have been very happy to have had that influx. Even though it might have been difficult to do it all at once, I think we could have taken hundreds of thousands of people in each year for two or three or four years. I know that Zionism meant something else. Zionism did mean having one's own homeland, And bringing people into the United States and having them become a part of the so-called melting pot of the U.S. was not an answer in that regard. Oh, how did I get off on all this? You asked me.

McKIBBEN

I was just curious about that particular distinction that you made.

HALE

Yes.

McKIBBEN

I keep making all these really clunky segues, but to me this brings up the perennial question of solidarity, and you've done work in solidarity with groups and peoples in various parts of the world. But I wondered about your thinking about what appropriate roles are for someone like you in a position of solidarity, and when one takes that step, and when solidarity is actual solidarity as opposed to neocolonialism or self-righteousness or what have you.

HALE

There are various thin lines involved in the questions that you just asked. I like to be asked to form solidarity if it's not a cause that comes out of my own experience, let's say. So if this is not about white women of the former working class, whatever, I'm being ludicrous now because I'm not quite sure what my own particular experience is, because I think that my experience as an American, as a North American, my experience is the experience of slavery. I think that my experience is the experience of the Civil Rights Movement. I think that my experience is the class struggle in the United States. I think that my experience is the genocide of American Indians, Native Americans, indigenous people. I think these are all a part of my experience. So when I say if it's not out of my own experience, I like to be invited. These are very difficult things to decide on. When do I have a right, in a sense, to step forward and join an organization if not invited? Or should it just be understood that if social justice is what we stand for, if ending racism is what we stand for, if ending sexism and homophobia and prejudice against disabled people—I don't want to go on—if it's understood that one stands for that, then is it always appropriate to join these causes? I know that what I've done is answer a question with a question, but I still have these questions and they haunt me. I don't know if I should be in Sudanese Studies. I used to make this joke in my classes about how two things happen in the Hale household in the morning: the alarm goes off and Sondra asks herself if she has any right to be working on Sudanese women. That's somewhat different from what you were talking about, but not.

McKIBBEN

I think it's the same. [laughs]

HALE

It's related, yes. So what's a nice white girl like me doing in a place like Sudan? To do a play on words in case people who are not Americans are listening to this. And when do I pop up in a meeting that says it's for the liberation of American Indian Studies on the UCLA campus?

McKIBBEN

And if you're allowed to go to the meeting, does that still mean that you should say something, or if so, what?

HALE

Yes, exactly, right. Right. What role do you play? Well, I know not a leadership role unless asked. That I've learned. Not in American Indian Studies or Indigenous or Native American Studies. You notice I'm fooling around with the terminology because we don't know what to use anymore. So, no, I shouldn't play a leadership position unless asked. And by leadership position I like to think that I might have some skills or knowledge or background or experience to bring into a group like that. I just picked one out of the air, one where, in fact, I wouldn't be very qualified, except that it is my experience. The American Indian story was also my story, not in a colonial sense of appropriating their story, but because I was a perpetrator. That's my legacy. But my legacy is also that the other perpetrators ruined my legacy. So I feel that I have a right to be active in areas where my history is being soiled, my future is about to be soiled, tainted, ruined, not in any selfish way, but in a way that really does reflect hopefully living in a world where—well, one doesn't want to use the Rodney King expression of "Can't we all get along?" This is kind of hairy territory for me. But let me get back to your original question again. Back up, start again, because that's all that I do with that question is back up and start again. How does one form solidarity? Does one create these? Does one have leadership? Does one say, oh, the African American students on our campus are not—I'll just stick with the local scene. The African American students on our campus are not being treated fairly. Let's all

meet. Now, that's not something I would do. If I knew about certain things that were happening to African Americans, I would talk with other African Americans about it and ask if I could, in my role as someone with some information, if I could supply them with some information and if they would like any solidarity in this, let me know. If they want me to spread the word, let me know. If they want me to use my computer skills—that doesn't happen to be one of my skills, but just as an example—let me know.

McKIBBEN

If you need a letter written to somebody.

HALE

Right.

McKIBBEN

I see what you mean. It seems like especially in these issues or when you're dealing with—as you've studied women Islamists in Sudan, which is a hot-button topic and so on, one also runs the risk, and I think about this with my own research, when you tell someone outside of that milieu what you're researching, especially someone in a dominant position, somebody white, for example, then you're becoming part of their information and whatever stereotypes they might have. That's such a tricky area to navigate. Maybe they say, "Oh, those women are so oppressed." Then what do you say? Or maybe they say, "Gosh, tell me about Sudanese women. I don't know anything about Sudanese women." Then what do you say?

HALE

No, this issue of does my work speak for Sudanese women, am I trying to speak for Sudanese women, is haunting me. I usually say that I'm writing for a Western audience, but that doesn't get you out of it, because you're speaking for Sudanese women to a Western audience.

McKIBBEN

What if you end up justifying all sorts of horrible things?

HALE

Yes. Yes, I know. Well, the whole issue of female circumcision comes up all the time with regard to Sudanese, and then I've had to grapple with that because, on the one

hand, I give a helping hand to Sudanese who are trying to eradicate the custom, at the same time I jump down the throats of people here who talk about it who know nothing about it and have never met a circumcised woman or talked with a circumcised woman in all of their lives. So, in a sense, it depends on where you are. I don't think you can be any one thing all the time. Of course, you want to be true to yourself to some extent, but that true to oneself has to be a flexible self. I'm not a cultural relativist. I try not to be. But on the other hand, a healthy dose of cultural relativism is sometimes what's called for. I'm sure I'm going to die with these questions still in my brain, but they're very, very important to me, so I don't want to shove them away and I don't want to stop responding to them. I don't want to stop the soul-searching and all that kind of thing. I want to be able to work with other people on issues that we see as important issues to be worked on. I want to work on these together if possible. I think that this award that I was given when I went to Sudan just a few weeks ago, next to that "Diversity Award" I talked about earlier, in fact, even more than that "Diversity Award," I was given this plaque, this huge certificate. It's about, I don't know, maybe almost three feet, when it's framed, by two feet. It's from Salmmah, the leading women's NGO [nongovernmental organization] in Khartoum, and the certificate is to honor me for my fifty years of contribution to the Sudanese Women's Movement. So for me, that was a recognition that I haven't taken away from them; that I've given to them. I feel like I've also taken away, I mean taken from them, taken information, taken information, basically. But I'm so honored that at least some of them think that I gave back something, that I've been in solidarity with the Sudanese Women's Movement. I know not all Sudanese feel that way, because I clashed badly with the fifty-year-long head of the Sudanese Women's Union, who, if she finds out about this award, which she will, will just have a fit. But about Sudanese, I try to do what I'm invited to do. I was invited to help this time with the IDPs [internally displaced persons], with the Nuba, ethnic groups in the Nuba Mountains, in Central-West Sudan, who were assaulted by

the government—and that's an almost mild word—with bombing, and the government's been accused of genocide against the Nuba, and I've been, with a whole bunch of other people, northern Sudanese, western Sudanese, trying to see what we can do about the new IDPs, the people who have fled the war.

McKIBBEN

The displaced people.

HALE

The displaced people in Khartoum state. So I was going to a series of political meetings to try to build an anti-war movement, which has never existed in Sudan, which is amazing, considering all their wars. It's the first time, really, that I've actually invited myself to—and I say that I was invited to these meetings, but I sort of allowed myself—I should use that term—allowed myself to go to political meetings. I hadn't before for various reasons. I didn't feel I belonged. Number two, I would get thrown out of the country. [laughs] But I went to a number of meetings to see what we could do about the Nuba, and I'm still working on this issue while I'm here. So that's my primary activism right now, is to try to get immediate emergency relief to the IDPs in Khartoum. Now, I generally don't deal with humanitarian relief or aid or whatever. It's not my thing, but this was right under my nose. Remember I said earlier we fight those things that are right there in front of us. We do that struggle. It may not be our primary struggle in life, but there it is. What can you do? I don't know if I answered your question about solidarity.

McKIBBEN

I think it's an ongoing—I don't know if it's possible to answer my question about solidarity. [laughs]

HALE

No, no. I just said it wasn't. I pretty much said it wasn't possible.

McKIBBEN

It's something one takes a stab at.

HALE

Yes. I mean, coalition-building, solidarity-building, all of these are really important to all of us who care about a whole range of issues that we see as linked. Sometimes we have to unlink them to fight certain kinds of discrete battles, or maybe we don't unlink but what we do is we engage in the broader coalition. But we're also working on the side in our smaller campaign, whatever it is, and that's how I like to think, in general, that I work in maybe larger organizations, but then working on the side in the thing that I know best. We need to work on the things where we can give the greatest amount of information and help and experience and so on. Sometimes I think I don't know anything and that I can't contribute anything to any cause whatsoever. I go through those moods. What skills do I have? I ask myself that a lot.

McKIBBEN

Your postmodern moment.

HALE

Yes, indeed. But I do know that I have skills to offer, and most of the time I will admit that, and I want to use those skills and that experience and that knowledge and so on until I die. I want to be able to make little contributions. I no longer think of big contributions, I'm not so arrogant, just little ones.

McKIBBEN

So, what's next?

HALE

Oh, we don't know, do we? I'm going to continue working on the Nuba. I'm going to continue working on Sudanese issues. I'm going to work on academic freedom issues forever, even though I'm retiring on November 1, 2011. That doesn't matter. I'm going to join committees, if asked, when it's legal here after you retire, but I'm told that I can still be on committees and the like. I don't think being retired is going to look very different for me. I won't be teaching in the direct classroom sense, but there's not anything that I'm dropping. I don't know how I'm going to fit it all in, but there's nothing I'm dropping. I dropped tennis, let's face it. That used to take a lot of my time.

McKIBBEN

Something had to go. [laughs]

HALE

Something absolutely did. But I'm hoping that my kids, who worry and put pressure on me, one of them in particular, not the other one so much—our younger daughter Adrienne Hale worries constantly about me getting in trouble, and is always sort of pleading with me to pull back, to be careful, to "Oh, don't go to that demonstration, Mom. You know you might get arrested," this or that. She's a worrier. I don't know. I don't think I told you this story, but when I was in Asmara, Eritrea, which is where our kids are from, the city from which we adopted our two kids, I was there with our older daughter in '94 after the war ended between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and then I went back with our younger daughter in 1996. I think I said that earlier. While I was in Asmara in 1996, Asmara was the headquarters of the Sudanese opposition movement, and so a number of Sudanese communists and leftists and dissidents were there in Asmara. One of them was an old friend of mine who had been a member of the Communist Party but had withdrawn from the party and formed his own party. They were having their first-year anniversary. He lived in London [England] but his party was having its first-year anniversary in Asmara. I discovered he was in town. He discovered I was in town. He got very excited and so did I. He wanted me to go to the headquarters of his new party and meet the people, and they could tell me a bit about the party and so on. I was interested in what he had been doing since he had spent eight years in prison and was now out and continuing to be politically active. Anyway, I was just excited. He died quite young. Khatem Adnan is his name. I should name him. Anyway, I got very excited about seeing him. So my daughter was at the hotel. She had her own social life going and so on, so I left her to spend the day with him and then have dinner with him and another guy in the evening. So the next morning, she and I were sitting and having breakfast in the hotel, and I said to her, "Oh, Jesus, I wasn't thinking. My head was not on my shoulders. I've been meeting a Sudanese dissident in the capital of Asmara.

That's going to cause the Eritrean Intelligence people to watch me," because they were watching the Sudanese dissidents really carefully. I said, "I wasn't even thinking." I was sort of musing. "I wasn't even thinking," I said. "Now I've met Khatem and now they're going to follow me." She went back to the States before I did, by a month or something like that. When she came back, she said to Gerry, "You know, I think Mom is getting really politically paranoid." He just blew up and said, "You know, you know nothing about your mother's background. You haven't bothered to find out. She had every reason to be worried. This was an international capital. You don't know anything about these things." I mean, we don't usually talk to our kids like this, but he said, "Ask her about them. She wasn't making up things. It was an unwise move on her part to meet with Khatem. Not that if she'd realized it, maybe she would have met with him anyway, but at least she would have been able to remind herself of what dangers this could bring about." So she told me and he told me that he talked at her for an entire hour about, "I don't want to ever hear you calling your mom paranoid again." So that's a little deviation from our theme.

McKIBBEN

Well, you know what they say, "The personal is political," and so on. [laughs]

HALE

Yes. You just got a personal story.

McKIBBEN

Right.

HALE

But she worries all the time about my activism. Gerry is much better about it. He grew better.

McKIBBEN

Because he used to worry a lot too?

HALE

He worries, yes. But except for my little interview with the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] which—

McKIBBEN

We never did talk about the interview with the FBI.

HALE

No, we didn't.

McKIBBEN

Yes.

HALE

We didn't. You want to talk about that?

McKIBBEN

Yes. I remember talking to you about it a couple years ago briefly.

HALE

Well, it's not a very long story, and I will make it short. I wondered. I was making several trips to Sudan. This is early 2000s, or whatever we call the early 2000s.

McKIBBEN

Nobody knows. [laughs]

HALE

I was wondering why they never asked me any questions when I came through Immigration. "Where have you been?" "Sudan." "Oh." And Sudan's on the terrorist list, you know. It seemed to me that they would at least say, "Why were you there?" or whatever. Maybe a couple of them did, but they never stopped me, and I never got a follow-up phone call until two years later after what was then my latest trip. The call was left on my machine here at school, and the fellow said, "This is the FBI, and we'd like to have you come in and talk to us about a few things." I thought, "Yeah, okay, this is it. This is the moment. They were just waiting." For what, I don't know, but they were just waiting. This was post-9/11. So it was a message left. I didn't answer the message. I got on the phone and immediately called the National Lawyers Guild, which is a Left lawyers guild, and I'd done some asylum cases for them gratis and so on, so they owed me some favors. So I got hold of this lawyer that I'd worked with and told her the situation. She said, "Well, I'll call him and find out what he wants." So she did, and he just wanted to ask me a few questions about Sudan, he said, surprise, surprise. I said, "Well, can I refuse to go in?" And she said, "No, not really, you can't." I said, "Well, can I refuse to answer questions?" She said, "Well, yes, but it's not a good

idea. I'll just teach you how to answer the questions." So she taught me techniques for asking questions that so frustrate your questioner that he or she changes gears. She said, "What I did do was arrange to meet at my office." Because I know I had already told her, "I don't want to go there, and I don't want them coming here, and I don't want them at my house." So we agreed to meet at her office. It turned out this young man was head of the anti-terrorism unit in Los Angeles and basically he wanted connections with Sudanese. He wanted me to connect him with Sudanese. He explained to me that the agency is split, that some want to do the old surveillance techniques and so on, but others, the newer generation, wants to work through networks, and that's his point of view. So he wants to know if I know any Sudanese in Los Angeles, and I said no, which actually was true. Most of the Sudanese are in Anaheim [California] or other places quite far outside of L.A., and I don't really know them anymore. I used to know a lot of Sudanese here. So I explained, "Most of my Sudanese friends are in Sudan or scattered all over the world, but I don't know any in L.A." Well, he didn't really believe me. He continued with his—he said that, you know, since Osama bin Laden lived in Sudan for six years that he figured that he must have been building up some Sudanese cells during the time he was there, and he said, "We have good reason to believe that the next major attack will be Los Angeles, and so we're just trying to prepare ourselves." So then he said, "Do you know any place where Sudanese hang out?" By the way, he'd read a lot of my material. He'd read my book. He'd read articles and so on. He came prepared, and that came up in various ways throughout this interview, which lasted a little over an hour. "Do you know any place where Sudanese hang out?" I said, "Look, if I did know some coffee shop or whatever where Sudanese hang out, I wouldn't want to tell you because you would just go and harass innocent people." He said, "No, no, no, no. We don't do that anymore. We used to park outside of mosques and write down all the license plate numbers." That was an interesting piece of information. I mean, Muslims are paranoid about that, and I thought they were

paranoid, but it appears that it was quite a usual tactic. He said, "No, we don't do that. Do you know any Sudanese who would be willing to talk to us?" I said, "No. You're asking me to link you up with Sudanese in a way that would make them informers somehow. I can't do that." He looked a little surprised. So then he asked me a series of other questions, one of which was, "Do you know any Sudanese who had been members of the Communist Party but became Islamists?" I still can't quite figure out the reason behind that question. I said, "Well, you know about one of them, because I wrote about it in my book, and I know you've read my book," and I named him because everyone knows him, Ahmed Suleiman. I said, "I don't know any others." And he didn't quite believe me. I don't think he quite believed anything I was saying. Then in the end, he gave me his card and he said, "Well, if you think twice about any of this stuff or you come across anything that Sudanese are talking about, any links that you might see with al-Qaeda, let me know." When he left, I realized that I'd found out more about them, in a sense, and the way they worked, than he was able to find out from me. I was still appalled, but my lawyer was quite—she said she was disappointed in me. Surprised. No, she didn't say disappointed. "I'm surprised, Sondra." I said, "Why?" She said, "Well, if there were a terrorist attack, wouldn't you want them to be able to stop it before it happened?" She said, "I'm actually quite worried." I said, "Well, first of all, I don't think it's going to happen, and, second, I'm simply not going to cooperate with them because I never know what they're going to do to these people. Look at Guantanamo. I'm sure there are an awful lot of innocent people there. I don't want to be responsible for linking up the FBI or the CIA with Sudanese." So then I got a call two weeks later from another FBI person who wanted to talk with me about female circumcision and honor killing. Now, what? Why? I thought it was, once again, just to make connections so they can ask me other questions. But I don't know anything they don't know, I don't think. They just want to hear it. They want names. They want names, and I'm not going to give them names.

McKIBBEN

It just sounds like such a strange question.

HALE

Yes, it does. But that's the FBI story.

McKIBBEN

Okay. I've kept you here storytelling for a long time, so I'll let you kind of wrap up our series of interviews.

HALE

Well, one of the things that I thought about in our series of interviews, which I think you really conducted very well and did your homework very, very well—I've enjoyed the talk—I thought about how I haven't really been interjecting much in the way of feeling as I've been talking, and that's, I think, unusual for me. I might have said, "That made me angry," or I think at one point today I said what really hurts me is being called an anti-Semite, for me it's the same as being called a racist, so I did express hurt. That was about the only time. But I don't think I expressed such emotions as indignation. I was reading an obituary today—I don't even remember who it was now, or maybe it was yesterday—in which the person, an activist, and the person said what has driven her through her life was indignation. I think it was June Wayne, the artist who has been an advocate for women's causes and women artists being left out of the art world and that sort of thing. So I thought, has indignation been one of the things that has driven me? I mean, what is the emotion that has driven me through this life of activism? I thought, well, anger has certainly been one of them. Indignation, I suppose, from time to time has been one of them. I suppose fear of what's going to happen in the future if such-and-such happens, like if Roe v. Wade is eliminated. Fear for my daughters, fear for their daughters, fear for all the poor in the country that can't go off to some other country and have an abortion. So, fear of the future. Sadness and sorrow for people that are low on the pecking order, the downtrodden." But to be corny, I suppose love is—as [Ernesto "Ché" Guevara] Ché would say if Ché were here, I guess love is really what's driving me, just a really basic love of humanity and a love of people. I know it sounds really corny, I'm sorry about that, but I'm not

a religious person. I don’t believe in God. I believe in basic humanity and the goodness in people. So when that goodness is not showing, then I sort of spring into action. I suppose you could say it that way. You asked me earlier if I had any advice. I think it’s sort of built into some of the things that I’ve said, but I say over and over and over again to my poor frustrated young friends and students and daughter, don’t think you can do it all in one fell swoop. So this particular cause failed. So that demonstration fizzled. So that organization fell apart. So you got infiltrated. So everything went wrong. But, you know, you can’t give up. It’s not in your genes, is what I would say to our adopted daughters. You just have to get up the next morning and you give yourself a day’s rest or something like that, and then you get up the next morning and you just bite off a small piece and start again. If that’s what’s called for, start again. I think that’s what it’s all about, just constant new beginnings, never endings, and I’m just going to keep—like the words of all those old union songs, just gotta keep going on.

McKIBBEN

[laughs] Well, thank you very much. It’s been a pleasure.

HALE

Thank you. My pleasure. [End of August 25, 2011 interview]

Date: 2013-05-09