

Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

University History Series  
Department of History at Berkeley

Paula S. Fass

AMERICAN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORIAN AND HISTORIAN OF CHILDHOOD

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY,

1974-2012

Interviews conducted by  
Ann Lage  
in 2009

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Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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Paula S. Fass



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[End of Interview]

## Preface to the Department of History at Berkeley Oral History Series

The Department of History at Berkeley oral history series grew out of Gene Brucker's 1995 Faculty Research Lecture on "History at Berkeley." In developing his lecture on the transformations in the UC Berkeley Department of History in the latter half of the twentieth century, Brucker, whose tenure as professor of history from 1954 to 1991 spanned most of this period, realized how much of the story was undocumented.

Discussion with Carroll Brentano, coordinator of the University History Project at the Center for Studies in Higher Education, history department faculty wife, and a former graduate student in history, reinforced his perception that a great deal of the history of the University and its academic culture was not preserved for future generations. The Department of History, where one might expect to find an abiding interest in preserving a historical record, had discarded years of departmental files, and only a fraction of history faculty members had placed their personal papers in the Bancroft Library.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, many of the most interesting aspects of the history—the life experiences, cultural context, and personal perceptions—were only infrequently committed to paper.<sup>2</sup> They existed for the most part in the memories of the participants.

Carroll Brentano knew of the longtime work of the Regional Oral History Office (ROHO) in recording and preserving the memories of participants in the history of California and the West and the special interest of ROHO in University history. She and Gene Brucker then undertook to involve Ann Lage, a ROHO interviewer/editor who had conducted a number of oral histories in the University History Series and was herself a product of Berkeley's history department. In the course of a series of mutually enjoyable luncheon meetings, the project to document the history of the Department of History at Berkeley evolved.

In initial discussions about the parameters of the project, a crucial decision was made. Rather than conduct short oral histories focused on topics limited to departmental history, we determined to work with selected members of the department to conduct more lengthy biographical memoirs. We would record relevant personal background—family, education, career choices, marriage and children; discuss other institutional affiliations; explore the process of creating their historical works and changes in the discipline. A central topic for each would be, of course, the Department of History at Berkeley—its governance, the informal and formal relationships among colleagues, the connections with the broader campus, and curriculum and teaching.

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<sup>1</sup> The Bancroft Library holds papers from history professors Walton Bean, Woodbridge Bingham, Herbert Bolton, Woodrow Borah, William J. Bouwsma, George Guttridge, George Hammond, John Hicks, David Keightley, Joseph Levenson, Martin Malia, Henry May, Thomas Metcalf, William Alfred Morris, Frederic Paxson, Herbert Priestley, Franz Schurmann, Engel Sluiter, Raymond Sontag, and Kenneth Stampf. Miscellaneous files of the Department, 1915-1929, are also held in Bancroft's University Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Two published memoirs recall the Berkeley history department: John D. Hicks, *My Life with History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968) recalls his years as professor and dean, 1942-1957; Henry F. May reflects on his years as an undergraduate at Berkeley in the thirties in *Coming to Terms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

Using the Brucker lecture as a point of departure, it was decided that the project would first document the group of professors who came to the department in the immediate postwar years, the 1950s, and the early 1960s. This group, most of them retired, was the one whose distinguished teaching and publications initially earned the department its high national rating. They made the crucial hiring and promotion decisions that cemented the department's strength and expanded the curriculum to meet new academic interests. At the same time, they participated in campus governing bodies dealing with central social, political, and cultural issues of their times: challenges to civil liberties and academic freedom, the response to tumultuous student protests over free speech, civil rights and the Vietnam War, and the demands for equality of opportunity for women and minorities. And they benefited from the postwar years of demographic and economic growth in California, accompanied for the most part through the 1980s with expanding budgets for higher education.

Carroll Brentano and Gene Brucker committed themselves to facilitate project funding and to enlist the interest of potential participants. Members of the department responded with interest, joined the periodic lunch confabs, offered advice in planning, and helped find funding. In the spring of 1996, Brentano and Professor Sheldon Rothblatt organized a symposium, titled "Play It Again, Sam." There, Gene Brucker restaged his Faculty Research Lecture. Professor Henry F. May responded with his perceptions of events, followed by comments from other history faculty, all videotaped for posterity and the Bancroft Library.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, the oral history project got underway with interviews with Delmer Brown, professor of Japanese history, and Kenneth Stampp, American history, both of whom came to Berkeley in 1946. To date, we have completed a total of seventeen in-depth oral histories with this group, nine of which are now in print and on line. The interviewees represent a variety of subject fields and historical approaches. The series also includes one interview with a faculty wife. (View online at

[http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/collections/subjectarea/univ\\_hist/history\\_department.html](http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/collections/subjectarea/univ_hist/history_department.html))

Diverse in their personal backgrounds and scholarly interests, the faculty who came to the department in the postwar years had one thing in common: all but one were men.<sup>4</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, as more women completed PhDs, women within the academy and the women's movement nationally worked to increase women in tenured faculty positions. The Department of History at Berkeley slowly began to add women to its faculty, beginning in 1971 with the appointment of Natalie Zemon Davis. By 1990, the department had two female full professors, five associate professors, and four assistant professors, of a total tenure-line faculty of sixty-two. During these years, women historians nationally were part of a broader critique of universalist assumptions about history and society that included significant contributions from Berkeley faculty. Feminist scholars, in particular, were integral to the radical changes in subject matter

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<sup>3</sup> The Brucker lecture and May response, with an afterword by David Hollinger, are published in *History at Berkeley: A Dialog in Three Parts* (Chapters in the History of the University of California, Number Seven), Carroll Brentano and Sheldon Rothblatt, editors [Center for Studies in Higher Education and Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1998].

<sup>4</sup> Adrienne Koch was a faculty member, 1958-1965.

studied, methodology, and modes of discourse in the profession.<sup>5</sup> The new intellectual and programmatic directions associated with an increase in female faculty were accompanied by sometimes contentious battles at Berkeley as elsewhere over the evaluation of academic work, teaching priorities, and curriculum development.

The second phase of the project on the Department of History at Berkeley focuses on the women faculty who came to Berkeley in the 1970s and 1980s. In 2003, Natalie Davis was interviewed during a visit to the campus, and in 2008 we launched a three-year project to document several more of Berkeley's women historians. As in earlier interviews, we explore the faculty member's contribution to her scholarly field, examining the development of her intellectual project and working methods, and probe experiences relevant to understanding the development of the discipline and the department. In addition, we discuss challenges facing women in the academy over the course of their professional careers.

The organizers of this project are grateful to the Department of History and to the many individual donors that have made these interviews possible. The considerable interest in the fruits of our project to date confirms our initial premise that departmental histories and personal memoirs are essential to the unraveling of some knotty puzzles: What kind of a place is this University of California, Berkeley, to which we have committed much of our lives? What is this academic culture in which we are enmeshed? And what is this enterprise History, in which we all engage? As one of the project instigators reflected, "Knowing what was is essential; and as historians we know the value of sources, even if they are ourselves."

Carroll Brentano, Coordinator  
University History Project  
Center for Studies in Higher Education

Gene Brucker  
Shepard Professor of History Emeritus

Ann Lage, Project Director  
Regional Oral History Office  
Berkeley, California  
May 2009

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<sup>5</sup> Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York, London: W.W. Norton, 1994), 153. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: the "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 471.

**Series List—Department of History at Berkeley November 2012**

- Bouwsma, Beverly Hancock. *Observer of Campus and Community Culture, Berkeley Department of History Faculty Wife, 1956-2001*. 2008, 136 pp.
- Bouwsma, William J. *Historian of European Culture in the Early Modern Era, University of California, Berkeley, 1956-1991*. 2008, 137 pp.
- Brown, Delmer M. *Professor of Japanese History, University of California, Berkeley, 1946-1977*. 2000, 410 pp.
- Brentano, Robert. *Scholar and Teacher of Medieval History, University of California, Berkeley, 1952-2002*. 2005, 370 pp.
- Brucker, Gene. *Historian of Renaissance Florence, University of California, Berkeley, 1954-1991*. 2005, 211 pp.
- Davis, Natalie Zemon. *Historian of Early Modern Europe, Professor at Berkeley, 1971-1978*. 2010, 79 pp.
- Fass, Paula S. *American Social and Cultural Historian and Historian of Childhood, University of California Berkeley, 1974-2012*. 2012, 113 pp.
- Herr, Richard. *Historian of Spain and France, University of California, Berkeley, 1960-1991*. 2009, 256 pp.
- Jordan, Winthrop D. *Historian of Slavery and Race Relations in America, Professor at the University of California, Berkeley, 1963-1982*. 2009, 194 pp.
- Keightley, David N. *Historian of Early China, University of California, Berkeley, 1969-1998*. 2003. 163 pp.
- May, Henry F. *Professor of American Intellectual History, University of California, Berkeley, 1952-1980*. 1999, 218 pp.
- Malia, Martin Edward. *Historian of Russian and European Intellectual History*. 2005, 229 pp.
- Riasanovsky, Nicholas V. *Professor of Russian and European Intellectual History, University of California, Berkeley, 1957-1997*. 1998, 310 pp.
- Schorske, Carl E. *Intellectual Life, Civil Libertarian Issues, and the Student Movement at the University of California, Berkeley, 1960-1969*. 2000, 203 pp.
- Stampp, Kenneth M. *Historian of Slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction, University of California, Berkeley, 1946-1983*. 1998, 310 pp.

Donated Collection:

- Borah, Woodrow W. *Woodrow W. Borah interview: oral history transcript*, by James W. Wilkie and Rebecca Horn, 1983. Transcript in Bancroft Library.

In Process:

- Halperin, Tulio, Latin American history
- Hunt, Lynn A., Cultural history, the French Revolution
- Levine, Lawrence, United States cultural history
- Litwack, Leon, United States history, African American history
- Wakeman, Frederic, Historian of China

## **Interview History—Paula Fass**

An internationally recognized scholar of American social and cultural history, Paula Fass is a pioneering figure in the study of youth, family, and childhood. She has been a celebrated teacher for thirty-eight years in the Department of History at Berkeley. She came to Berkeley in 1974, one of two young women assistant professors to join the department that year. Their arrival doubled the number of women in this large and prestigious department of more than fifty faculty members. Her oral history explores the trajectory of her historical work and examines gender issues and debates over historical subjects and methods within the department over the course of her career.

The oral history fittingly begins with recollections of her own childhood in New York City, as an immigrant child of Holocaust survivors; she recounts how important her personal and family experiences were in shaping her historical sensibility. Fass discusses her education at Barnard College and Columbia University, where she studied with Richard Hofstadter, in an era when few young women students were directed toward academic careers. Accepting the position at Berkeley involved a wrenching personal decision, eased by the welcome from history department colleagues and their families. She describes a strong family feeling among colleagues in the department in her early years, with frequent social events and inclusion in family occasions. Following her marriage to colleague Jack Lesch and the birth of their first child, their fellow historians warmly welcomed the first baby born to a woman in the department. She discusses issues of balancing family and professional work and the accommodating concern of department leaders for family needs.

The department in these years was important for her as an intellectual family as well. Fass recounts the benefits of an infectious atmosphere of intellectual innovation and mutual sharing of work among faculty members. She perceives less cohesion and community in the department in later years, however. The central conflicts often played out in hiring committees; they occurred not over gender issues but rather in discussions of legitimate historical methodologies and topics, the centrality of theory, and the importance of cohesive narratives, although she indicates that gender issues were perhaps embedded in these conflicts. Fass expresses concern about the growing dominance of cultural history in the department. While she acknowledges the cultural turn as crucial to her own studies of childhood, Fass nonetheless believes that there is now a dangerous lack of respect for different approaches, which threatens to make the department at Berkeley less likely to provide the kind of innovative atmosphere that fostered her growth as a scholar.

The oral history was video-recorded during three interview sessions in Paula Fass's Dwinelle Hall office, in April and May of 2009. Following transcription and audit-editing, Professor Fass reviewed the transcript, making no substantive changes. Interview tapes are available for viewing in the Bancroft Library. This oral history is one of nearly twenty in-depth interviews on the Department of History at Berkeley; the list of completed oral histories documenting the Department of History at Berkeley is included in this volume. Many of the interviews in the

series can be found online at

[http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/collections/subjectarea/univ\\_hist/history\\_department.html](http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/collections/subjectarea/univ_hist/history_department.html).

Copies of all interviews are available for research use in The Bancroft Library and in the UCLA Department of Special Collections. The Regional Oral History Office is a division of The Bancroft Library and is under the direction of Neil Henry.

Ann Lage

Interviewer, Project Director

Berkeley, California

October 2012

**Interview with Paula Fass**  
**Interviewed by Ann Lage**  
**Interview 1: April 2, 2009**

[Begin Audio File 1]

Lage: Okay, we are starting. Today is April 2, 2009, and this is the first interview with Paula Fass in the Department of History series. I'm Ann Lage. So Paula, we're plunging ahead.

01-00:00:18

Fass: As I said before, it's the only way I can do it.

Lage: Right. And we're focusing on Berkeley and your time here at Berkeley and your work, but we can't leave out the past. So I know you've just done your memoir and have really engaged with your personal history and your family history, but I wonder if there's just a very brief way to kind of sum up that aspect in relation to your being a historian. And then we'll move into your education.

01-00:00:51

Fass: There are so many things I want to say, but let me divide it into three parts. First, I want to almost make a statement. It's hard for me to believe that I'm doing all this backward glancing. It's hard for me partially because it suggests just how old I am. But also because I've always taken pride— My statement has always been, I don't turn backwards. I don't look back because I'll turn into a pillar of salt—a take from the Biblical injunction. And so now these days, I'm turning back so often that I'm beginning to think that I'll have to change my emblem, and it won't be that anymore. So I'll say that. I'll say that I'm here, also in an odd way, because of my mother.

Lage: Here as a historian?

01-00:01:43

Fass: No, I'm a historian because of my mother. That's not odd at all. But I'm at Berkeley because of my mother.

Lage: Oh, okay.

01-00:01:49

Fass: I think maybe it's best if I say a little bit about that. Because of my parents' lives and because of how close I was with my parents, and because of how dependent they were on me in certain kinds of ways, when I got the offer from Berkeley, although I was very excited, I also realized that it was probably something I wouldn't be able to take; that I would have a very difficult time leaving my parents on the East Coast and going 3,000 miles away. They didn't often travel. I didn't expect them to travel very often. And while I was comforted by the fact that it was just one plane trip away, it was still one long

plane trip away. And I wasn't even taking into account the differences in time zones. And so I thought I should have this conversation— I left Berkeley waiting until literally the week when I had to give them an answer, which was April 15.

Lage: 1974.

01-00:02:53

Fass: 1974. And I discovered afterwards that a lot of people thought that I was playing a game, that I was being coy, or that Berkeley wasn't good enough for me. But none of those things were the case. And it was hard to explain to people that the case was that I was *very* reluctant to leave my parents behind. And so I sat down with my parents—as I often did when important decisions were made—around the kitchen table. We had a big, round kitchen table with a glass top. And I laid out the situation. And my father, as would have been expected, said, “I don't think you should go. You've got a job.” Which I did. I had a perfectly good job. In fact, a *very* good job. Rutgers University history department at the time was an excellent place. It still is, but at the time, it was especially good because it was doing a lot of social history, had a lot of interesting—in fact, fascinating and subsequently, very important—historians there.

Lage: And were you on the tenure track there?

01-00:03:53

Fass: Oh, yes. I was on the tenure track there. It wasn't a temporary job. So I had a very good job, which was within the vicinity of New York. So it was not at all clear what was going to happen. And my mother, in her usually wise way, and because she always cared about my career, said to me, “Do you think going to Berkeley would make a difference to your career?” And I said, “It probably would.” That it was one of the most distinguished departments in the country, it was well known for its history department, and that it could be beneficial to me. And she said, “You know, there comes a time when the mother bird has to push the baby bird out of its nest.” And she said that and said, “Go. I want you to go.”

And it was only because of that that I then went home and wrote a letter accepting the appointment. I went to see my chair at Rutgers and told him I was leaving. But it was not at all clear that I was going to come here at all. And it sounds strange, as if I needed her permission; but it wasn't quite like that. And it was, to say the least, a tremendous sacrifice on her part to let me go. She died two and one-half years later. And I realized later that it was also a sacrifice on my part to leave.

Lage: Sure.

01-00:05:28

Fass: So my coming here was—

Lage: It was fraught.

01-00:05:32

Fass: *Very* fraught. *Very* fraught.

Lage: Were you able to make trips back to visit?

01-00:05:37

Fass: I did. One of the things that I did as soon as I arrived here, as soon as I settled down in my apartment, which was arranged for me by Marcia and Richard Abrams, one of my colleagues— As soon as I settled in my apartment, I made a reservation and I surprised my parents by coming home before the semester began. And they were *genuinely* surprised. And I said to them, “See how easy it is? I just got on the airplane and I’m here.” It was kind of a wonderful, wonderful event. As a reward, when I got back to the airport at midnight, I couldn’t find my car. I was *so* excited about the idea of doing this surprise that I hadn’t written down where I’d left my car. I had never driven myself to an airport before. So here I was, the first time I had driven myself to the San Francisco airport, left my car, and arrived at midnight, and I don’t know where my car is. And luckily, one of these people, one of these attendants with one of these little cars came by. I said, “I can’t find my car.” He said, “Hop on.” And we literally took the tour of the airport parking lot.

Lage: And you didn’t do *that* again.

01-00:06:55

Fass: No. I did not do that again, that’s right. I did not do that again. So that was my coming to Berkeley. I thought I should at least share that with you. So my coming to Berkeley has many different dimensions. That one, I think, is the dearest and in some ways, the most important.

Lage: That’s very nice. It’s meaningful for me right at this moment; I’ll tell you later.

01-00:07:17

Fass: Okay. So having said that, you also understand *just* how important my family was to me. And I’m not going to go into detail, but my parents were both survivors of the concentration camps. They had lost families. Not just their parents and siblings, but in fact, husbands, wives and children. They were married to other people, and my mother had a son who was taken from her when he was three. My father had four children who were all taken away and died in Auschwitz.

Lage: Incomprehensible.

01-00:07:53

Fass: And this, of course, is what my memoir really is about. It’s trying to reconstruct their lives, the tragedy of their lives, insofar as it’s possible to do by a second person, and probe into my grandparents’ background and lives.

And to talk about its importance to me and how it helped to form who I am. And one of the things that's *very, very* clear is that I became a historian because of it. I became a historian because history was always around.

Lage: It just surrounded you in the family.

01-00:08:26

Fass: Completely. The history was alive. The history was there. It wasn't just, oh, your grandparents or your sisters or brothers, who you will see next week. These were parts of a past that had passed and was not cut off from the present. And so finding a past, knowing about it, was just obvious to me. And one had to explore it. I knew it existed, so it became my objective to explore it. Now, as I say in the memoir, I of course did not explore their past in its particulars.

Lage: You went into United States history.

01-00:09:06

Fass: Exactly what I did. And I thought very hard about that. I can rationalize it. I can say by being on the margins, I understood it better or differently. And I think that's true. Things that other people took for granted, I thought needed to be problematized, like culture or society that is just all around you and for me, was something that needed to be explored and understood intellectually, not just emotionally. Because it *wasn't* emotionally mine.

Lage: Was it because you saw yourself as, or you thought of yourself as an outsider?

01-00:09:41

Fass: Oh, I did. Oh, I was an outsider.

Lage: You came here—

01-00:09:45

Fass: As a three-and-a-half-year-old.

Lage: Three and a half. Not speaking English, I'm assuming.

01-00:09:47

Fass: At all. My mother taught me, when I went off to school, two words. Oh, she actually taught it to me onboard the boat. One was good morning, and the other was thank you. So I didn't know any English at all. So yes, I was very much an outsider, and I always felt like an outsider. And I had a mixed experience as an outsider. Part of it was painful, as being an outsider always is. Part of it was also very strengthening. And especially because I was an outsider whose life had been determined by my parents' past. And since they had been strong in order to survive everything, I was going to be very strong. And I also leaned on that. I felt there was something special about me. So I was an outsider, but not a lesser person, as a result. Just a different person. And I think I always used that as part of who I became as a historian.

And one of the reasons I explored America is because I wanted it to become mine, clearly. But I also wanted to understand the differences, to kind of in my mind understand what the difference was between being an American and being partially an American, like I was, and not being Americans, like my parents were and most of the people they knew. It wasn't just my parents, it was our whole society, the people we met on the weekends, the people we lived among. And in the summertime, we always went to a colony in the Catskills, where we lived among other survivors. I knew their children and my parents knew them from Hannover, where we came from, in Germany. So I think I was always a very intellectual child, and I think on some level, I intellectualized that very early. I may have intellectualized it in part because it was painful. I won't deny that. But the intellectualizing made it also a source of satisfaction.

Lage: Now, did you experience this even in elementary school and secondary school?

01-00:12:02

Fass: Absolutely. Absolutely in elementary school. In elementary school, I was— after I got past learning English, which I could—

Lage: Took how long?

01-00:12:14

Fass: I went to kindergarten when I was four, a little over four. They made room for me, which was amazing because there were no places in the kindergartens. But my mother, being my mother, got our next door neighbor—who was John O. Killens, the African American novelist's, wife and who—they both spoke German—she got her to translate for her and she went to the principal and explained why *I* needed to be in the kindergarten, because *I* needed to learn how to speak English and I needed to become an American and become adapted as an American. So my mother always had—

Lage: She was a savvy woman.

01-00:12:50

Fass: She was savvy. She wanted to know that after all the losses, I would not be one of them. I knew that. I knew that very well. So that was one of the things that she did. And I got the place. There was a long waiting list, and they gave it to me. So I went to school not knowing any English. The first day in school, I remember vividly being put in the corner by my teacher because I wasn't following instructions, because I couldn't understand anything. At a certain point—and I can't trace it at all—I learned English and I was able to speak. So that by first grade, I told my teacher the story about my parents. She was amazed and shocked. Most Americans didn't know very much about the experiences of the camps at that time. This was in 1952-'53. And she asked me to tell my story to other teachers. So she took me to her friend's classroom

and I told my story. I talked about the Hitler devil and all the Jews going up in flames.

Lage: Did you tell it to other classrooms or just the teachers?

01-00:14:00

Fass: No, just the teachers. Just the teachers. Then she took me to the teachers lunchroom, which was a very privileged place to go to, and I told the story to a group of teachers.

Lage: My goodness!

01-00:14:11

Fass: So here I was, I was five years old. In a sense, already a kind of intermediary on that level, between my parents' story and these teachers. So given that experience, I never entirely felt like this system was necessarily superior to my system. As I said, it was different. Now, there were times when it could be quite difficult. My mother had taught me how to write my name. And the teacher sent back a note saying, "Please do not interfere in your daughter's education. She has to learn how to print before she writes script." And so we stopped. They also changed the spelling of my name.

Lage: Oh, my!

01-00:15:00

Fass: [laughs] I was named after my grandmother, whose name was Paula, but it was P-O-L-A, as it's spelled in Poland. And I wrote it down as Pola and I was told, "No, your name is P-A-U-L-A." And of course, from then on, I was P-A-U-L-A. So there were various kinds of subtle adaptations. I never felt that was anything more than a form of instruction. I was always taught to be very respectful of teachers, which I always was. And so—

Lage: Were there many other new immigrant children in your school?

01-00:15:34

Fass: My school was in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. At the time, it was a flourishing middle-class African American community that still had some Jewish people in it and some refugee children. We were known as refugees. But in my class, it was rare that there was another one. In the school or, say, in the second grade or third grade, there might be two or three others. But in my classroom, it would be very rare if there were anyone beside myself. And I have no memory of there ever being anyone else but me in each of those classes. It was not a common experience. It wasn't like being an immigrant in the early twentieth century, when there were many immigrants.

Lage: Whole neighborhoods.

01-00:16:20

Fass: I've written about it. I became very interested in the contrasting experiences of other immigrants. This was *not* whole neighborhoods. Although there were, of course, some people in my neighborhood who had had a similar experience. But no, most of my friends in class were African American.

Lage: And did that relationship work, in those days?

01-00:16:45

Fass: It was perfectly natural. It's the only way I can describe it. The only way it wasn't natural is I could never skip Double Dutch. [Lage laughs] And they made terrific fun of me about that. I just never was coordinated enough to skip Double Dutch. So when we went out to the playground, I had to hang out with the other uncoordinated kids because I couldn't. And that was a kind of racial divide. I don't know how else to describe it. *All* the girls who were African American could skip Double Dutch, and they competed with each other vigorously to do it. But it was totally beyond me to try to do that. So that's where I would put the difficulty.

Lage: Right. That's interesting.

01-00:17:28

Fass: But there was never any sense in the classroom that there was a difference. Never. And then by the fourth grade, when— We were given IQ tests from the get-go.

Lage: Which again, you wrote about.

01-00:17:42

Fass: Which I've written about. From the get-go, we were given IQ tests. There were special classes set up. They were called IG classes, intellectually gifted classes. My class was full of African American kids. So it was—

Lage: It was the way it's supposed to work, it sounds like.

01-00:17:59

Fass: It was just the way it was. It was just the way it was. So at any rate, that was my first school. Then we moved. We moved from that particular area. So history was around me. History was something that I took naturally as, I think, a lot of young people—I've seen this even among my own students. It's a sensibility that never develops in some people. You develop language skills, you develop numerical skills. Some people never develop a sense of history. I had a very good friend who didn't have it.

Lage: It's interesting because you don't usually think of that as being something special.

01-00:18:45

Fass: I think it *is* something special. I think it's a particular kind of sensibility.

Lage: A lens on the world.

01-00:18:50

Fass: It is a lens on— You can't *see* history, you can't *feel* history. Mostly, you read about it. Or sometimes you have other kinds of visual cues. These days we also have oral things from more recent history. And that lack of the palpable presence, I think, for a lot of people, cuts them off from seeing it as a real thing. For me, it had a palpable presence, always.

Lage: Fascinating. So as you went into secondary school, was history something that you excelled in?

01-00:19:23

Fass: Absolutely. The situation was this. I went into secondary school in the sixties, which came after Sputnik. And anyone who was any good in school went into math and science. And I was very good in school, and I was very good in math and science. I got the chemistry award when I graduated from high school. So while I was definitely on a history track, it had to compete, when I was in high school, with the other stuff that was very interesting. I worked in the history office. We all did some kind of volunteer work at school, and I worked in the history office. So I was naturally drawn to that. I loved my history classes; I loved my history teachers.

Lage: You had good teachers?

01-00:20:12

Fass: I did. I had excellent teachers. I went to Erasmus Hall High School, which was a wonderful high school.

Lage: Was that a special high school?

01-00:20:18

Fass: No, it was not. It was special only in the sense that we had more languages offered in our school—I think there were twelve foreign languages—than any other school in the city. And so there were other people who would sometimes seek us out. And sometimes they came because they wanted to be at Erasmus. Erasmus got more science awards and all kinds of awards than other schools. Even more than Bronx High School of Science, even though it was not a selective high school. It drew from the community.

Lage: Self-selected, in a sense.

01-00:20:48

Fass: It was selective in the— Well, it drew on the whole community. It was *huge*. My class at Erasmus Hall had 2,000 people in it.

Lage: That is huge.

01-00:21:00

Fass: We started as sophomores, so there were over 6,000 students in the school. It was just a huge place. The most competitive place I've ever been in. By the time I got to college, or grad school, it was just—. Well, because at Erasmus, you knew that if you weren't one of the top hundred or so people in school, no one knew you and you would kind of fall out. If you were ambitious, you had to be known, you had to be kind of recognized. And if you weren't, then you wouldn't—

Lage: You might be forgotten.

01-00:21:39

Fass: You might be forgotten.

Lage: What was the ethnic mix there?

01-00:21:42

Fass: It was an interesting ethnic mix. There were Jews and Italians. There was a small group of what I'd call Anglo-Saxon Protestants. One of my very good friends, Ginny [Virginia] Lathrop, was. But she was unusual. But because it was in Flatbush, it was still an older Flatbush area, where there was still an older group of Americans. There were some African Americans. I'd say African Americans and Puerto Ricans made up maybe 10 to 15 percent of the class. And then a mixture of all kinds, a variety of others. But it was predominantly, I'd say, Jewish and Italian. Those were the two largest immigrant groups to New York City, beginning in 1900. So these were, in most cases, third- or fourth-generation immigrants, unlike myself. I consider myself a second-generation immigrant because I came here before the age of six. And my parents were the first-generation immigrants. But I'm a first-generation American. And people are sometimes confused about that, in that sense. But most of my friends in high school were third or fourth generation.

Lage: Did you still have this sense of being an outsider in high school? You sound so much an insider, as you talk about it.

01-00:23:07

Fass: I wasn't an insider. I was lucky. I was smart. And so there's always a group of smart people who hang out together, whatever their background is. And that was true for us. I wanted to be an insider, so that I became a cheerleader, for example. But when I was a sophomore, I went off to get my citizen papers. We had decided that I should get— My parents were already citizens, and I could be on their papers, but it's much better to have your own. So I went and got my own. So I took the oath of citizenship. It was a thrilling experience. It really was.

Lage: And that was when you were a sophomore.

01-00:23:54

Fass: I was a sophomore. And it was *the only day* I missed from school. And as I said— I'm going off. So no, I never felt like I was not different. But I didn't feel so much as a— I worked very hard at balancing things. Now, you have to understand that all of this time, as I'm becoming more American, I never speak English at home.

Lage: Oh, no?

01-00:24:22

Fass: Never.

Lage: Did your family ever learn English, or not?

01-00:24:25

Fass: Oh, yes. My mother learned English. My father less so, although he did, also. He was a businessman, and he had to learn a certain amount of it. And he was a citizen; you had to learn English. To become a citizen, you had to be able to read it and write it. But we never spoke it at home. So as soon as I hit the door, I would start speaking other languages.

Lage: Now, you say other *languages*.

01-00:24:44

Fass: Well, when I was younger, there were probably three languages that were common in my household, German, Polish, and Yiddish. Polish only when my uncle came over, because my mother and my uncle and my aunt [my uncle's wife] would speak Polish to each other. German was my first language. It was the first language I learned. And then Yiddish. In part, my father was really a Yiddish speaker. And once we came to the United States, the German seemed less obviously important, so my mother and I began to speak in Yiddish, too. But we also corresponded with each other in German. So when I would travel, we'd write letters to each other in German. So I *had* to feel like an outsider. It was not possible ever to feel like this was a completely coordinated experience. It was a dual identity. I much identify with Du Bois when he talks about the twoness of an African American. I was definitely— I fell into that category, absolutely.

Lage: And that's affected your work, obviously—

01-00:25:43

Fass: Completely.

Lage: —the choices you've made of topics and—

01-00:25:45

Fass: Definitely. Definitely.

Lage: Did you have a younger sibling?

01-00:25:49

Fass: I have a younger sister.

Lage: One younger sister. Who was born here?

01-00:25:51

Fass: She was born here. And she also knew—well, she knew Yiddish, but started speaking to my parents in English. And I didn't. I always, as I say, indulged, especially my father, by speaking to him in Yiddish. And while it bothered me when we spoke Yiddish on the street, I felt a certain pride in doing it at home. It's related to what I told you before, that there was a—I felt strengthened by that experience, not diminished by it. So that the sense of shame— And there was some of that. You want to be like everybody else.

Lage: Sure. And teenagers, especially.

01-00:26:37

Fass: Teenagers, especially. And so it was problematic when kind of the mixing took place, my parents came to school or— But otherwise, I felt strengthened by having these two places where I could feel at home.

Lage: It can strengthen you against the peer group pressures, too, I think.

01-00:26:58

Fass: Yeah, precisely. That's exactly what was the case. I felt that I did not have to give in to peer-group pressures. It wasn't always easy, but it did provide me with an alternative, which I respected. In other words, everybody's got an alternative. Their parents were always an alternative. But my parents were an alternative whom I really respected. They were heroic on some level, for everything they'd gone through. And then on top of that, I felt like I had to make up for all the losses they had had.

Lage: I can see.

01-00:27:35

Fass: So I wasn't going to embarrass them. And I wasn't going to put them to shame.

Lage: Or reject them.

01-00:27:43

Fass: Or reject them. That would've been the last possible thing. Exactly. You've got it exact— The rejection was simply not within my canon. It was something that was *immediately* put out of my mind—sometimes quite consciously—that this was not ever going to be the case; that they had suffered so much, they had lost so much, and they had given me so much that that was just not going to be the case.

Lage: Very interesting.

01-00:28:16

Fass: Unusual.

Lage: Are there other things you want to say about elementary and secondary school, in terms of shaping you, or your experience of it? Were there particular mentors that encouraged you in a certain direction?

01-00:28:35

Fass: I had several mentors in the history department, especially, such as Irving Berg. I had some *fantastic* math teachers. I have to say, I fell in love with math because the teachers were so dazzling, in terms of how they presented. And I always used their strategies as teachers for myself—their enthusiasm, their commitment to it, their desire to make it understandable, not just to tell you, “These are the formulae, you follow them, that’s what you do.” My math teachers never did that. They made us understand. And if we didn’t understand one way, they’d show us another. And I’ve always adopted that as a strategy in the way I teach.

The other thing I’ve adopted from math—I never thought I’d be talking about this, but—the other thing I adopted from math was the sense of the cumulative understanding of something. In history, that’s not usually emphasized, that you have to understand *this* before you can understand *that*. My lectures are always built that way, so that my lectures build over the course of the semester. And it’s one of the reasons I always dissuade students who haven’t been there for more than the first two lectures not to take the class, because they simply won’t understand it; that I literally build up my classes, and if they haven’t been there from when I discussed the geography and the constitution and the railroad network, which helps us to understand the economy, they’re not going to understand the society and the culture. So I really do build it in a kind of mathematical way. And I’ve prided myself and worked very hard at trying to explain things to my students so they understand it. So I never read my lectures, for example. You can’t explain things when you read a lecture.

And that was really the result of my math teachers in high school, who were brilliant. Just brilliant. Most of these people had been educated during the Depression. Many of them, I think, would have become professors in another time. They wound up at this wonderful school and became brilliant instructors of other people. And there were lots of my peers in school who went on to be scientists and mathematicians. Several of them got Nobel Prizes. And so this was a very unusual place. So yes, there was Dr. Sidorsky and Dr. Fischer. These were my math teachers. They had PhDs. And then I had wonderful teachers in history. Mrs. Stein, who was a brilliant leftist who had come— She was a red haired woman. Must’ve been a raving communist at one point. She was wonderful. And it was because of her that I always have a timeline in my mind, a historical timeline in my mind. It’s just there. It’s kind of engraved.

Lage: Well, there's that historical thinking that some people just don't have.

01-00:31:39

Fass: Don't have. But for me, it was obvious and she gave me a structure for it. For me, the history was so obvious, and then she gave me this timeline to carry with me. So I can always put things in that timeline. So yes, they were *very* important to me. And the people I met in the history office, who knew about my past—I never hid it. I never used it, but I never hid it—and took an interest in me. And once I went to college, I came back to visit them. I told them that I was going to major in history, and I was going to be a professor. And one of them, whose name was Mr. Weiss, who taught economics, looked at me and he said, “Oh, no, no. You can't do that.” I said, “Why? Because I'm a woman?” And he said, “No, because you're a Jew.”

Lage: Oh, gosh! Double whammy. Had you ever—

01-00:32:38

Fass: I, at that point, never thought of it that way. Because to me, that's the sort of thing that happened back there, where my *parents'* lives were, but *that's* not the sort of thing that happened in the United States.

Lage: Well, that might've been why some of these very fine teachers were in that high school.

01-00:32:52

Fass: Precisely. That's what I understood, that they had to contend with the fact that they had been Jews, and the universities and the colleges were still not hiring Jews in certain areas. In the social sciences and in the humanities, the Jews couldn't be seen as representing the culture. So I was kind of taken aback. I said, “Oh, no, no, no, no. I don't—” Because by that point in time, I just didn't experience that, but that had been his experience.

So the double whammy, it's not that I necessarily thought that I'd have *that* hard a time as a woman, and that wasn't going to bother me. None of those things were going to bother me, let me tell you. Because my parents had overcome so much that surely I wasn't going to be bothered by things like *that*. That those were just kind of ordinary nuisances, but they weren't life threatening. I would be able to handle it. I think that has always— So even on an emotional and psychological level, beyond just the induction into history, I think their experience was the strength that I've always drawn on; that I was willing to take on things because what's that compared to what they had to take on?

Lage: Of course, it wouldn't affect everybody that way.

01-00:34:16

Fass: No.

Lage: Some people might be devastated by it.

01-00:34:19

Fass: True. And I think that may have been more true of my sister, for example. So we can never explain ourselves completely. But I can talk about some of the elements that went into my willingness to do things that maybe other people wouldn't be willing to do. I suppose that's the—I was also strengthened by the environment at Barnard.

Lage: And why Barnard?

01-00:34:49

Fass: Ah. Okay. Well, you know I wasn't going to ever live away from home.

Lage: [chuckles] Yes.

01-00:34:54

Fass: So I dreamed about going to Vassar. And we actually, my mother and I, sat down at one point; we tried to figure out whether going from Brooklyn I could commute to Vassar on a daily—it was obvious that it wasn't going to happen. It was just much too far away. But Barnard was an excellent school, and it was a school that one of my junior high school teachers, Susan Landy, had gone to. I admired her a lot and I thought, well, this might be a good place for me. It was a place that girls from Erasmus went to. There was a quota of five. Most schools had quotas against New York high schools, because they were usually Jewish.

Lage: Oh, the quota was against New York. And this was '63, you went, was it?

01-00:35:40

Fass: So there was a quota of five students at Erasmus, this—I graduated in '63, correct. Oh, yes, because the expectation was that if you came from New York—These weren't overt quotas, they were latent quotas. If you came from a New York high school, you were likely to be Jewish. And no school, especially not Barnard, which was in the city, already known—Columbia was known as the Jewish Ivy League—they didn't want to be overwhelmed by Jewish girls from New York. They had to maintain their position among the Seven Sisters, so they had to have a kind of geographic distribution. It's understandable, on some level; otherwise they would become a very narrow kind of school. But it did mean that there were quotas. And it was much easier to get into Barnard from a school in California or Illinois than from a high school in New York. So Barnard was wonderful. I remembered only yesterday, as I was talking to my graduate students and suggesting to them that they read Betty Friedan's [*The Feminine Mystique*], that it was one of two books that we were all required to read when we came into Barnard. [The other was André Gide's *The Immoralist*.]

Lage: I'm trying to think when that [*The Feminine Mystique*] was published.

01-00:36:57

Fass: '63.

Lage: '63?

01-00:36:59

Fass: At least that was what I— I picked it up to see when it was published. So it had just come out, and we were required to read it, as freshmen.

Lage: Oh, fascinating.

01-00:37:10

Fass: It is fascinating.

Lage: So this was a women's college that wasn't just teaching you to drink tea.

01-00:37:14

Fass: They did that, too. We had teas every Thursday, we did, in a particular lounge. We had speakers come and we did take turns serving tea. And we learned to walk across the gym with a book on our heads, too. We did that, too. It was this special time.

Lage: A time of transition, I would think.

01-00:3:38

Fass: A time of transition, exactly.

Lage: For women's colleges.

01-00:37:41

Fass: For women's colleges. I think for other colleges, also, but for women's colleges, I think it was acutely felt. The kinds of things that she talks about, Friedan, in her book, were certainly the kinds of things that most of the women from Barnard would have expected to do. They'd live in Scarsdale and their husbands would be doctors or businessmen. And I think our teachers wanted us to recognize that there were discontents involved with that, and that one of the reasons for the discontent was the very education we were about to get; that the education we were about to get was educating us in other (less conventional) directions than just that.

Lage: Now, you talk about this [time of transition] in one of your books [*Outside In: Minorities and the Transformation of American Education*, 1989].

01-00:38:36

Fass: I do. You're right, I do.

Lage: And I wondered as I read it if you experienced it, as well.

01-00:38:31

Fass:

I did. I experienced sitting in classrooms as a sophomore with seniors, when you took various electives, especially in history, and the seniors all had their rings on. They were either already married— And Barnard was a school to which lots of juniors and seniors transferred from the other Seven Sisters because they married people who were in New York. So they were already married, and transferred to Barnard so that— For example, Phyllis Jordan, who was the wife of my colleague, Win Jordan, had transferred from Radcliffe to Barnard as a junior, when she married Win. Or maybe as a senior; I don't want to misrepresent it. That was very common.

So there were already lots of women there with wedding rings. Or there were women there with engagements rings. And so I experienced that. That transition was literally in my sight. That's one of the reasons I write about it. Nobody else has written about it that way, I think. And yet we were clearly being educated *very* well, to have other aspirations. I won't say higher; let's just say other aspirations. So we were at that point when it was possible for us to go either way. Many of my classmates from Barnard did have careers. Many others didn't. Many of them began careers and then dropped them. I went to graduate school with several of them, who began with me in the history department at Columbia and then dropped out. So that was not at all uncommon. They'd get a master's degree and then drop out. So it could still, at that point, kind of go either way. I was very encouraged by one person, whom I specifically would like to name.

Lage:

Okay, please.

01-00:40:32

Fass:

Annette Kar Baxter, who was a wonderful, wonderful teacher.

Lage:

And was she a historian?

01-00:40:38

Fass:

She was a historian. She was an American studies person at Barnard. She was not a professor, she was an instructor most of her life. After I left, she became a professor, eventually. But at the time I was there, she was still having her children, and Barnard was hard to get a job in. She hadn't quite finished her dissertation, I think. She was very encouraging. She herself was of Armenian background and understood me very well, and was just wonderful to me. We had long talks. And she followed my career all the way through Berkeley. I *never* went to New York and didn't visit her. Never. She would take me to the Faculty Club or down to the Century Club or whatever club she was also involved in in New York. To my great [sighs] sorrow, she died when she was not yet sixty, in a fire in her summer house on Fire Island—she and her husband (a well-known psychoanalyst in New York City) and a guest that they had staying there. When I learned about that, I was just devastated. She was a really important influence on me. We always kept in touch. So I want to very specifically mention her.

Lage: And she must have encouraged you to think that this was a possibility, that you could—

01-00:42:04

Fass: Exactly. She did encourage me to think this was a possibility. Although as I said before, I never thought of anything as *not* a possibility. [they laugh] It wasn't as if I was going to be dissuaded by much. I didn't know if this is what I should do; that was the only thing. But she definitely encouraged me. I went to her, she suggested the schools I should apply to for graduate school. Including, she was *very* insistent that I apply to Berkeley. And I was very insistent that I was not going to apply to Berkeley.

Lage: Because there again, across the country?

01-00:42:41

Fass: Across the country, and Berkeley was already a tangled web of student politics.

Lage: Oh, yes. [laughs]

01-00:42:49

Fass: Whereas most other places, when I was applying, in 1966-67, it wasn't on their radar screen yet.

Lage: Right. And you weren't interested, I'm gathering.

01-00:42:59

Fass: I was not— I was a literary type. I was the managing editor of the literary magazine, I wrote poetry, I wrote essays on Freud. I was that kind of an intellectual. I was interested in politics, but I had not taken part in demonstrations against the war and things of that kind. So it wasn't as if— I was always interested in politics, but I was not a student activist. And there were actually, truthfully, not many at Barnard at that time. It wasn't till a little later—

Lage: '68.

01-00:43:31

Fass: —that was the case. Exactly. And I graduated in '67. So there must've been some people who were already talking about it, but they weren't really part of my group, mostly. So I said, no, no, no, I wasn't going to go to Berkeley. I was going to go to Harvard. I got into every place I applied. The only place—and I want to note this, too—that I could not apply to, because women could not apply, even as graduate students, was Princeton. Princeton was still a male-only school. *Even in graduate school*. Now, Yale was already open to women. Now, obviously, Columbia was and Harvard. But Princeton did not admit women. So it was a place I didn't apply to. But all the other places I applied to, I got into.

I was going to go to Harvard. And then I had one of those episodes again. Well, I wasn't just going to Harvard, I had gotten a Fulbright to go to Germany and to study the influence of Freud on German society and culture in the 1920s. I had worked on Freud in the United States for my senior essay, and so I was going to do a comparison. And because my German was good and I had taken some German, too, so I thought I'd go to Germany. And I suppose by then, I was quite dazzled by how American I had become. And I thought, I'll go and find out a little bit about my, quote, "roots," having somehow persuaded myself that Germany was my roots. And so I applied. I got the grant.

Lage: Which was a big deal.

01-00:45:15

Fass:

Oh, it was *very* much a big deal for an undergraduate to get a Fulbright at the time. At the time, people weren't taking airplanes all that much; I had the ships tickets at home [on the USS Constitution]. I was supposed to study at the Goethe Institute first, in Heidelberg, and then go to another place, Freiburg, which is where I was going to spend the year. Oblivious to everything around me. And then suddenly, I realized my father was beginning to look quite thin and drawn. It was kind of senior obliviousness. Also I was still commuting back and forth on the train; I wasn't home all that much. I said to my mother, "Does Daddy not feel well because of me?" And she said, "Of course." I said, "Because I'm going to Germany?" And she said, [emphasizes, as if the answer is obvious] "Yes."

Lage: But they hadn't directly said anything.

01-00:46:13

Fass:

Well, no. My mother wouldn't have. And so we sat down at the round table, and we had a little conversation. And my father said, "You know, it's not so much your going away for a year, but to *Germany*. How could you have *chosen* to go to Germany?" In his mind, he was losing his child to Germany. It was incomprehensible to him that I would have made that choice. And as soon as he said that, it clicked. And whatever obliviousness I had adopted that final year, it went out the window. I said, "Of course, I won't go." By that point—this was in June—I had deferred my admission to Harvard, which I was going to when I came back, I'd turned down Columbia and Yale and all the other places I'd gotten into. And my father said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Don't worry about it. I'll figure it out."

Lage: It doesn't sound as if you felt resentful or—

01-00:47:19

Fass:

I felt like I was doing the right thing, first of all, which was always very strengthening. I did have regrets. I mean, I had looked forward to it. And I did feel that this was still my difference; that if I had been anybody else, I would've been able to go. So it wasn't as if it didn't matter to me. It mattered.

But I always let what mattered to me, if it really hurt them, be very secondary. And this was clearly an instance where it really mattered.

Lage: And you could really understand how it hurt them.

01-00:48:00

Fass: I definitely understood. Definitely. Definitely. It was so obvious to them, and they hadn't said anything. And he was literally--

Lage: And they were aware of your planning and the application?

01-00:48:01

Fass: Oh, of course! I was home, and they—at the time, you got a telegram congratulating you, from the German government. They were very, completely aware. All this mail came to my parents' house. I was still living at home. So they were completely aware of what was going on. But I guess I wanted very much, at that point, to be independent. I had gone through college. I had acquiesced in staying home, but I wanted to be independent. And that was going to be my independence. But that wasn't going to happen.

So I guess I decided that since I knew Columbia and Columbia knew me, I was going to call them and ask them if I could come. And they said yeah, no problem at all. And as I was on the phone with them, as we were talking about this, a Herbert Lehman Fellowship at Columbia was being rejected and so I got everything, the whole package that I was going to get anyway. So I wound up going to Columbia. So that was not, unlike most graduate school decisions, it wasn't in any way thought through. It was entirely just one of those things that happened.

Lage: Oh, interesting story. And maybe affected the direction of your history. You might've become a historian of Germany. Who knows?

01-00:49:26

Fass: No.

Lage: No.

01-00:49:28

Fass: No. I can tell you why. Although I think I might have become a historian of European influence in the United States, because of the way I was playing the Freud thing. I was very interested in Freud.

Lage: Tell me more about that and how that might've—

01-00:49:51

Fass: Because I wanted very much to understand myself, and I thought this would be a means to do it. So I became interested in that and I began to study it. And because my professors trusted me, they let me do basically what I wanted to. And so I wrote my senior thesis on the influence of Freud on literary criticism

in the United States—just to give you a sense of how much of a literati, in a sense, I had seen myself as being. And so it's possible that I would have gone to Harvard and studied with H. Stuart Hughes, who was interested in precisely those kind of intellectual questions and cross-border questions. So I might've wound up being another Marty Jay. But that's not what I did. Richard Hofstadter, with whom I worked and who had a *huge* influence on me, told me point blank, the first PhD seminar that we held, and we went around the room and people said what they wanted to work on— And I said I was going to work on Freud in America. And he said, “And have you done some of this before?” And I said, “Oh, yes.” I'd done a senior thesis and I'd done my master's thesis on A.A. Brill, who was the first American Freudian, student of Freud.

Lage: Now, your master's thesis at Columbia, this is?

01-00:51:24

Fass: At Columbia I had done my master's thesis on A.A. Brill. I had done a psychoanalytic study of A.A. Brill—who was also an immigrant, by the way—and that I was going to continue in that line. And he looked at me. He said, “Enough Freud.”

Lage: [laughs] Two words.

01-00:51:46

Fass: He said, “Enough. Something else.”

Lage: Was this—

01-00:51:51

Fass: And not because he wasn't interested in Freud. As you may well know—there've been, now, biographies of him—he was very interested in Freud. He had done a lot of reading in psychoanalytic stuff as a graduate student and as an early scholar, et cetera. But I think he just sensed that I had spent years in this and that I needed to do something fresh. And that's what happened.

Lage: And did those two words just open up things for you?

01-00:52:19

Fass: Well, initially, I thought, well, what *am* I going to do? But then I realized that yes, there were hundreds of things I could do and hundreds of things I was interested in.

Lage: Now, this was when you were a bit along. You'd already had your master's degree.

01-00:52:33

Fass: Yes, I was. Well, at that point, I had was about to take my oral exams. And the way they worked it at Columbia, you then took, technically, a seminar with

your doctoral advisor. And you met— We just met a couple of times, but just to figure out what our topics were going to be.

Lage: I see. Okay. Had you taken seminars with Hofstadter before that?

01-00:52:57

Fass: No, I had not. I had not.

Lage: Who were your main guides in your master's work?

01-00:53:03

Fass: I had worked with Walter Metzger, who did intellectual history of the United States. But we were all very interested, at that point in time, starting in 1967, in social history. It was the big thing. And Columbia had a very large grant from NIMH [National Institute of Mental Health] to do social history. And so I began to move in that direction. I never considered myself a complete social history—how shall I describe?—disciple. And always, the intellectual and cultural history that I had done, the literati stuff, was always very important to me. So I tried to balance those things, and so the Freud was going to be one of the ways that I'd rebalance things. But I asked Hofstadter to be my advisor, frankly, because—I told you—I never assumed, somehow, that I couldn't do it. I had never taken a course with him. The only courses he was teaching at the time were in colonial and early American history, and I knew I wanted to be a modernist. So I hadn't taken a course with him.

Lage: So why did you ask him?

01-00:54:16

Fass: I loved his work. I had heard very good things about him. And most of all, I loved his work. And I thought he was the best American historian they had in the department.

Lage: Aim for the top.

01-00:54:29

Fass: [laughs] So it was like why I went to Barnard. If I was going to do something, I was going to go to the best place that was available to me. Or why, when my mother asked me if Berkeley would matter and I said yes, it probably would. He was the best person I knew to work with. And I spoke to my mother about it and she said, "Well, you really think you can just walk into his office like that?" I said, "I'll try." And I did and he said yes.

Lage: But you didn't bring a project because—

01-00:54:59

Fass: No, but he must've looked up what I had done. People kind of knew who was around. And he said yes.

Lage: Well, after he said no to Freud, did he help you with coming up with—

01-00:55:14

Fass: [over Lage] Oh, no. You didn't work with Hofstadter unless you were a self-starter. He was not a hands-on instructor. He was very supportive. He was brilliant in his example. And by that I mean more than the fact that his work was brilliant. He was courageous in the kinds of things he was willing to take on. And I didn't feel I wanted to do conventional work, so working with him, I felt, would allow me to do unconventional work. And so I decided I wanted to do youth culture. Nobody had done youth culture, but I was watching youth culture around me.

Lage: [chuckles] Well, that's what I was wondering. Here you were, '68.

01-00:56:00

Fass: [laughs] That's exactly right. But I had watched youth culture even before '68.

Lage: Sure.

01-00:56:07

Fass: Because I'd always seen myself on the boundary, on the margin. I was an outsider. And so as you said before, I was not overwhelmed by peer influence because my parents were another form of influence, and I—

Lage: You could have perspective.

01-00:56:24

Fass: I could have perspective. So I had been watching peer culture, and I was watching another form of peer culture, as far as I was concerned. Even though it *all* looked political, I also realized it wasn't entirely political.

Lage: [over Fass] Well, and as time wore on, it got less political and more cultural.

01-00:56:40

Fass: Yes, but in '70, when I took on— Yes, you're right. By then, there were distinctly cultural dimensions to what was happening. And as I'd always done, I was going to understand history that I was experiencing. But I wasn't going to do it about the seventies. Nobody did that kind of recent history at the time. It was recent enough to do it about the twenties, at the time. And I had always been interested in the twenties; that was one of the things I had studied as an undergraduate, was the twenties, and I had written about F. Scott Fitzgerald in one of my classes. So I decided I was going to do youth culture in the twenties. Once I thought about it, it made complete sense. And so that's what I did. Hofstadter recognized it right away as a good topic. I have to really give it to him, that he said, "No, that's a really good topic."

Lage: I'm going to stop it right here.

[Begin Audio File 2]

Lage: Okay, we are back on with tape two, still in our first interview. And we have you with a topic at grad school.

02-00:00:10

Fass: We have me with a topic. But I have to say right away that my experience with Richard Hofstadter, which was wonderful— He asked me to be his research assistant—I was his last research assistant—and I finally learned colonial history, because I was researching his book called *America at 1750*. And that was *literally* how I learned it, because I hadn't taken it as a graduate student. And then he got really sick. That was really very devastating to me. I was very close to him.

Lage: Was it a quick illness? He died in 1970, I think.

02-00:00:48

Fass: No, it was not a quick illness. He got sick in 1968. No.

I had started working with him in 1969. I had been working on his materials, presenting him with my readings of things, bringing him books, and going over to his house and being incorporated into his family, in a way that was quite remarkable. I should add that Beatrice Hofstadter, his wife, was one of my colleagues. She was getting her PhD when I was getting my PhD.

Lage: Oh. In history?

02-00:01:35

Fass: In history. And she was working in colonial history, so I had gotten to know Beatrice even before I got to know him. So it's possible that he accepted me as a student because she had already said something about knowing me, I don't know. So I got to know both of them. And she and I finished the book after he died [*America at 1750: A Social Portrait* (1971)]. I went to her house several times a week, and we did all the footnotes, which were not in place. She did all the editing. I did most of the footnotes, filled them in and stuff. It was a very difficult situation for me. I felt that I was kind of left in the lurch. Although people at Columbia, despite the fact that Columbia is not your ideal place to be a graduate student because it's a very entrepreneurial, independent place, they were very kind. And the students who had worked with Hofstadter, people went out of their way to offer their services. People asked me how I was doing. Again, very independently, I didn't respond to the several people who asked me if I wanted to work with them. William Leuchtenburg asked if I wanted to work with him. And Eric McKittrick asked me if I wanted to work with him, because Eric took over several of the students that Hofstadter had worked with. And I decided no, given my topic, especially, that I was going to work with David Rothman. And I asked him and he said of course, he would do it.

Lage: And what was his—

02-00:03:15

Fass: He was a social historian.

Lage: I see.

02-00:03:17

Fass: He asked the kinds of penetrating questions about society that I was very interested in. The other two were really political historians, and I knew I was not a political historian. That was not my strength. Again, it doesn't mean I'm not interested in political history, it doesn't mean I don't think it's very important. But my antennas were all about society and culture. It's the way I had grown up. It was the topics that I thought I could make my particular contribution to. There were lots of people who could do political history, but I could do social and cultural. So I asked David Rothman. Again, I think in that case, I was being quite brave. It was not easy to turn down Bill Leuchtenburg, I have to say. Or Eric McKittrick. And I explained to them that I felt, especially since I was so distraught at Hofstadter's death, that I needed someone that I felt could kind of force me to work in certain kinds of ways, and that I thought David was able to do that. Now, David was only an associate professor at the time.

Lage: So you turned down these quite senior—

02-00:04:33

Fass: Yes. I did. Well, I should say something about David Rothman. The first time I met David Rothman he didn't know who I was. I was being interviewed for a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. And we went to Theodore Roosevelt's house—that's where all the interviews took place—and I was *very* anxious. Tremendously anxious. I walked into this room and there were six people there. One guy was sitting on the arm of a chair; everybody else was—I didn't know who they were, really. They started asking me questions. Very polite questions. And I answered very politely and very unimpressively. Then the guy who was sitting on the edge of the chair kind of started asking me much more aggressive questions. And it was only then that I started really doing what I was good at, telling things that I knew, getting into disputes with him. Of course, that was David Rothman. And when I went to Columbia and I took his seminar, I looked and I said, "Oh! That's the guy."

His seminar was like that, too. His seminar was a kind of no holds barred, you interacted with him and everyone; he never reserved himself. He always told you what he thought, and he sharpened your thinking, as a result. I remembered both of those experiences, and I thought he was the person I was going to work with. So I went to him, and it was the right thing to do. It was definitely the right thing to do. If I wasn't going to have Hofstadter, who was this independent thinker, who did political history, too, but always with a social and cultural dimension, then I needed to go to someone who would

force me to kind of think on my own. So that was a good thing. And he took over the topic. He let me make my own decisions about it. As he said to me when I walked into this office that day, he said, "I give people just enough rope so they can either fly or hang themselves." So.

Lage: Is that an approach you have adopted yourself?

02-00:06:39

Fass: Not exactly. I think too many people would hang themselves. As I said, Columbia was a very different place than Berkeley. Columbia's environment.

Lage: Talk about Columbia as a place. And also for women, since we are thinking about gender in this interview. This was a time there weren't that many women historians.

02-00:07:01

Fass: There were not *any* women historians in the department.

Lage: None at Columbia.

02-00:07:06

Fass: That I can remember [there may have been a woman in African history]. There were a *lot* of graduate students. Some of the most distinguished women historians of my generation, and just preceding me, came out of Columbia. So I should say that. Linda Kerber, Regina Morantz-Sanchez, who I knew quite well, actually, because they'd also been Barnard people. Dorothy Ross. And I'm not even mentioning the Europeanists. Lots and lots of people in European, and in Chinese and in Latin American. And in Jewish history, Paula Hyman. Literally an entire generation of women historians came out of Columbia.

Lage: So they went to Columbia, but not because there were role models for them.

02-00:07:50

Fass: No, there were no role models there. But Columbia—

Lage: So what was it like for them?

02-00:07:55

Fass: You sank or you swam. And that was true for everybody, male or female. And you did it on your own. There was no coddling. There were no real directions that you were aware of. You never knew how you were *doing*, until you took your orals. It was like this loose sort of experience and you really had to be very much a self-starter. I think all these women were entirely that. They were strong and they went for it, and that's why they rose to the top the way they did. And they defined a generation of women. Now, there was a woman before me, very well known, Gerda Lerner, who was also a Columbia graduate, who came out of an even earlier and probably truly hostile generation. None of my professors were hostile. None of them. Which I think

was crucial, that they were never hostile to us. We were just like everybody else in that room. They were going to put us through our paces.

Lage: But you don't think that some of the male students might've had a little more camaraderie or—

02-00:09:05

Fass: I don't think *anyone* had camaraderie. [laughs] That was what Columbia was like. And my male colleagues, we were comrades together. So that that's how we hung out. We hung out among ourselves.

If they did, I wasn't privy to it; they may have had their own drinking parties, too, where we weren't included. And probably, they did. And one of the people in my program, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, who's a very distinguished historian, did say, when she got her degree, that she was going to—and I'm not going to mention the person—she was going to show one of her male colleagues, also now a very distinguished and well-known historian, that— She was going to get back at him for what she felt was a kind of exclusionary process. So there must've been some of that.

Lage: Some people experienced it, or felt it but you—.

02-00:10:01

Fass: I was— What can I say? It was hard to insult me. [they laugh] I suppose that's it; it must've been hard to insult me. I was tough in that way. Sensitive in lots of ways, but tough in that way.

Lage: Were you tuned in to the women's movement at all? It really was rising in those years.

02-00:10:28

Fass: Yes, it was. It began to rise.

Lage: Consciousness-raising groups and—

02-00:10:31

Fass: Yes, there were. I was not ever a member of a consciousness-raising group, so I was not— That was also not—

Lage: You were busy.

02-00:10:39

Fass: I was busy. I was also going home almost every weekend to visit my parents.

Lage: But you did live on—

02-00:10:45

Fass: Yes. I finally lived on my own. It was when I went to graduate school that I finally lived on my own. But I was still there for my parents. And when my

uncle got really sick, I was the one who found the doctor for him and things like that.

Lage: Helping sort of intercede with the medical world.

02-00:11:00

Fass: Yes. Still an intermediary. Yes, definitely. Because by that point, I had made contacts with people who knew various kinds of things and could be helpful, yes, I remained very much an intermediary. And I think that may have restricted the kinds of things I could do, so I was selective. And the women's movement, we were definitely aware of it. We talked about it, and it gave us an additional sense of rights. I think it articulated those rights for me. For me, it was always an individual thing, but it then articulated it in a more group way. And that was a good thing. I'm not going to dispute that.

And it was certainly the case that when I took my orals, in 1970, that— [chuckles] I'll try to say just a little bit about this. I was very sick, actually. I was running a fever, I had gotten very sick. My mother came the night before and brought me grapefruit juice. I called Richard Hofstadter and I said, "I hardly have a voice." And he said, "Oh, I know you're very nervous," he said, "But I think you should go through with it." I said, "It's not just a matter of nervousness. I'm really sick." He said, "Yeah, but you've worked up to this point." He said, "If you take the exam and you pass it, then you'll be finished. If you take the exam and fail it, chalk it up to being sick. And so what have you got to lose?" It was a very Hofstadter thing to do. I didn't know. In that sense, I was very insecure. So I sat there with—

Lage: You didn't know—

02-00:12:44

Fass: Whether I passed. Yes. He was taking me to lunch afterwards at the men's— at the Faculty Club. And he told me to meet him at the Faculty Club. So they never gave me the result, so I left the exam not knowing. I was *really*— I had a box of tissues on one side and nose drops on the other.

Lage: [laughs] Oh, dear.

02-00:13:07

Fass: I left the exam not knowing if I had passed. And so I arrive at the Faculty Club and I waited for him and waited and waited. At that point, I figured [gasps] I haven't passed and he doesn't have the courage to come here, that we were supposed to celebrate, to tell me that. He finally comes with his wife, with Bea, and he said, "What's the matter?" I said, "Did I pass?" He said, "Oh, yes, of course, you did. And you probably should tell your parents." And so I then went and called my parents. I went to a pay phone and called my parents—there were no cell phones at the time—came back to the table and they urged me to have some consommé for my cold. And I said, "Why did it take so long?" And he said, "Oh, my God. I didn't even *think* that you might

be nervous.” He said, “We were talking about what impressive and smart women like you, how their careers were going to go.”

Lage: Oh, my! Fascinating.

02-00:14:14

Fass: So people were thinking about it. And I think that was partly the women’s movement. So that they would take time after an oral to sit around and ask the question. These were people who didn’t have female colleagues.

Lage: Yeah, and they may have wondered what the future opportunities would be.

02-00:14:27

Fass: And what the future was going to— what we were going to do.

Lage: Which they did for Jewish students a generation before.

02-00:14:33

Fass: Exactly. So this was at the cusp. It really was at that point where they were asking precisely those kinds of questions. We haven’t had any experience with these women as our own colleagues; what’s going to happen to them when they go out into the real world? And they were talking about part-time. Were women going to do part-time work? If you read my essay, you know that that was still part of that sixties discussion about women, whether they were going to be part-time, whether they were going to do it after they had their families; they would train first, then take time out—

Lage: Or not have families.

02-00:15:07

Fass: —or not come back, or have families. Exactly. So this was a continuation— this was 1970—of that discussion. It was April, 1970. So I remember it vividly because I was so nervous that I hadn’t passed, and here they were talking about what would happen to women like me, who had clearly passed and were as good as their male colleagues. But there wasn’t an obvious path for us yet. It wasn’t obvious.

Lage: Now, what were your aspirations, in terms of family? Marriage and family.

02-00:15:47

Fass: Oh, I expected to get married and have children. And the reason at the time— and it continued to be a reason for me, too—but the reason at the time was that I had to make sure that my parents’ lives continued in some way. I really felt that tremendous sense of obligation for all those losses. And so whatever my own particular feelings about children—and I’m not sure I had any at that time—that I was going to have children. And so I had no idea, frankly. *They* were thinking about it, but I wasn’t. About how I was going to do it, how I was going to coordinate it. I’ve kind of run by the seat of my pants. I haven’t really thought the next step out all that carefully. I always wanted to do the

best that I could, always wanted to study with the best people, who would be good for me, but I never really strategized a career.

Lage: And they didn't ask you, the professors? Maybe they already were sensitive enough to the women's movement not to ask, how are you—

02-00:17:00

Fass: Possibly.

Lage: "Are you going to stick with this?"

02-00:17:02

Fass: No. They never asked. I think they assumed that if I took my orals, that I was committed to doing this. I was less sure than they were, I think. I was really not so sure.

Lage: Because you do hear stories of not wanting to give fellowships to women because they'd just get married and all this education would be lost. It might've been wasted.

02-00:17:22

Fass: I never— Just a little before, I wouldn't be at all surprised. But at that moment— And when I went to graduate school, in '67, that was before the women's movement. Now, Betty Friedan's book had been out, as I told you, because I had to read it. And so things were percolating, but it was really— And it was before the big campus revolts, where women saw themselves marginalized and they became more conscious of what was going on. But we went in numbers to graduate school. Women, I mean. A lot of us did.

Lage: So things were changing without—

02-00:17:58

Fass: Well, they *must* have been. As I said, they were percolating. It was almost below, just beneath our consciousness. And those consciousness-raising sessions were there for a reason, because it was there. But we didn't articulate it very effectively. One on one, we might have. And I lived initially, for two years, in a dormitory, a women's dormitory, when I was in graduate school.

Lage: Was it a graduate women's dorm?

02-00:18:22

Fass: All graduate women. And we certainly talked among ourselves. So in that sense, it was a kind of substitute for consciousness raising. And we were all very committed to our careers. Okay? I didn't know what my career was going to be, to be honest with you, but—

Lage: So you weren't certain about—

02-00:18:39

Fass: No.

Lage: —the professorial—

02-00:18:41

Fass: Not at all. Even though I had seemed so certain when I spoke to Mr. Weiss, I was not at all certain. And maybe because, except for Annette Baxter, I didn't have any models.

Lage: Right.

02-00:18:54

Fass: I really didn't. There were other women at Barnard, but they weren't a model in the way that Annette was. Annette was a model in part— And I'm sorry to go back to this, but it was—

Lage: No, no, that's—

02-00:19:06

Fass: It continued to be there in my mind. There were no models at Columbia. Annette was a model because she had a family, she had children, she was very feminine and lovely. And some of the older women at Barnard, who were professors—and I remember several of them—came out of that older feminist movement. And they came into school wearing really severe suits. One of them wore a monocle. It was that generation, still, where we still had some of those early feminist women. They were not a model for us, I have to say. Not for most of us in school at the time. There were those girls sitting there with their rings, and we were serious students asking, how were we going to do it?

Lage: How is it going to work?

02-00:20:09

Fass: How is it going to work? And we didn't know. So our professors at that [time]—and they were all men at my orals—were shrewder than I was. I have to say that. They were shrewder. They were asking the question. Maybe because they were more aware of what the obstacles would be.

Lage: They knew the labor market more, perhaps.

02-00:20:30

Fass: They knew. And I—just like I said, “Well, I'll just ask him”—I just assumed I would just do it.

Lage: Right. Well, it did happen that way, after all. [laughs]

02-00:20:39

Fass: It did happen that way. It is true, it did happen that way. But as I say, I know that things were percolating. And that was a good sign of it. A good sign. And

Hofstadter, of course, understood the difficulties that different groups would have. First of all, he was one of the first people to study and write about African Americans. He was one of the first people to supervise dissertations on African Americans. He himself described— He was half Jewish, but he identified with being a Jew. And he told me that he had never been invited to the president's house for dinner. I mean, there were the obvious kinds of cocktail things. He had never been invited to the president's house for dinner, until he gave the commencement address in 1968, when Columbia fell apart, and President [Grayson] Kirk was not allowed to give the presidential address because he had called the police on campus, and he was held responsible for all kinds of things. Hofstadter, as one of *the* most distinguished members of the faculty, and someone who had worked on higher education and on academic freedom, was asked to give the commencement address—in this much more limited venue. It wasn't on the campus, it was in this theater, small theater [the Harkness Theater]. And he said, "Only after that, was I invited to dinner at the president's house." And I said, "And why was that?" And he looked at me. "It was because I'm Jewish."

Lage: That must have shocked you.

02-00:22:14

Fass: It did. *Again*, it shocked me. But he was sensitive to those things. He was sensitive to the fact that he was one of the first Jewish members of the history department.

Lage: Right.

02-00:22:29

Fass: And by the time I came, there were several. I'm not going to say many, because in '68, there probably *weren't* many, but there were several. And there were Jews in art history by then, and Lionel Trilling was in the English department. The campus was not without Jewish professors. But Hofstadter's memory went back much further than mine. So he understood, and people understood, that there were going to be barriers, significant barriers. So let me tell you about the first one.

Lage: Okay.

02-00:23:07

Fass: It was the first time, I think, that that barrier was right in front of me, okay? By the time I was applying for jobs, Columbia decided that they needed to do something in a more organizational way. They had been very catch as catch can. It was a very entrepreneurial place.

Lage: About getting jobs for their students.

02-00:23:28

Fass:

There was a time you called up and you said, “I have this great student. Do you have a place?” That’s how you got jobs. And things would have to be more systematic as the government began to ask questions. There were issues about the 1964 Civil Rights Act. So they began to get their act together. And there were *very* few jobs. The market then was at its worst when I initially went out on the job market, in 1972. Or 1974, rather, because I had gotten this Rutgers job through that telephone call.

Lage:

Now, wait. You didn’t really tell how you got the Rutgers job.

02-00:24:08

Fass:

[laughs] Well, I had run out of fellowship money. I had had five years of fellowship money. There was basically not going to be any more. I had gotten my four-year grant from the fellowship and then I got a Woodrow Wilson dissertation fellowship, and I was running out of fellowship money. So I went to David Rothman, and I said, “I’m going to need to get a job.” I said to him, [chuckles] “I’m not going anywhere in the middle of the country. It’s got to be on the coasts.” And he said, “Why?” So I said, “I’m a Jewish woman. And I just don’t see the possibility of my getting a husband in the center of the country.”

Lage:

Oh. Interesting.

02-00:24:51

Fass:

So he said, “Okay, fine.” And so I came back to him a few weeks later, and I said, “There’s this job at Rutgers. And Phil Greven is the chair of the committee. And you know Phil Greven, and I’d like you to call him for me.” I had been writing my dissertation at that point, one and a half chapters. But I had my master’s thesis, which was on A.A. Brill as a psychoanalytic prophet. I didn’t know at the time that Phil Greven was doing a psychoanalytic study of Protestantism in the eighteenth century. So David called up Phil and said, “I’ve got this really good student,” and so they called me in for an interview. I brought my master’s thesis, because I had nothing else to bring, and I gave it to Phil. And it was a very good interview. We had wonderful interview. But they didn’t know that I really had very little dissertation in place yet. There was a year that I did nothing because of the Hofstadter stuff [and because I did not know yet who my adviser would be]. I mean just literally nothing.

Lage:

Well, you worked on the Hofstadter—

02-00:26:03

Fass:

Yes, I did. I did. And so a week later, they called and offered me the job. And as I look back on it, he must’ve loved my master’s thesis at that particular time. It was just one of those serendipitous things. He would’ve liked my dissertation, too; but the fact is I didn’t have it. So I got this job. I was a lecturer. Until I got my PhD, I couldn’t be in the professor ranks. And I didn’t actually defend my dissertation— That year, actually— I’m going to go back

a little bit. Once I got the job—I got the job in January—I worked on my dissertation like crazy, and was literally putting out a chapter every two weeks.

Lage: While you were starting your teaching—

02-00:26:52

Fass: No. It was in January. The job was starting in September or late August. I was working like crazy and finished everything except the last chapter. So by the time I got to my job, I had finished the entire dissertation, except for the last chapter, which I wrote during Christmas break, when I was teaching. I don't, frankly, remember how I got on this. So I had a job. But in the meantime, Columbia had organized this job market thing. And I didn't know they'd put my name forward for a job. They put my name forward— They made an agreement on whom they were going to put forward for particular jobs. And when I got the rejection letter, it was only then that I realized that they had put my name forward for Sweet Briar Junior College in Virginia.

Lage: Oh! Now, there's some evidence of--

02-00:27:54

Fass: It was then that I said to myself, oh, my God!

Lage: Now, that's quite— It kind of goes against the other things you've been saying.

02-00:28:05

Fass: Exactly! That's what I'm trying to tell you. [Lage laughs] I didn't know the person who was in charge of that committee, and he didn't know me. All he knew was that I was a young woman. And therefore, Sweet Briar— And I don't know whom he put up for the other jobs; there were not that many. But he didn't put me up for those other jobs, including the Rutgers job. And by that point, I had the Rutgers job, but I got my rejection from Sweet Briar.

Lage: Oh, that's amazing. That's a wonderful story.

02-00:28:35

Fass: So I realized at that point that as an institution— Individually, my professors were incredibly encouraging, and they worked with me as a person. But as an institution, they assumed the place for me to go to would be Sweet Briar Junior College. So I laughed. But I laughed only because at that point, I had the Rutgers job.

Lage: Right. Oh, you might have been— this might have made you a more furious person.

02-00:29:04

Fass: It might have made me a more furious person. I laughed.

Lage: Did any of your fellows, women students—did you hear any stories like that from them?

02-00:29:10

Fass: No. No, I did not. No. And by the time I got to Rutgers, there were several women on the faculty.

Lage: At Rutgers.

02-00:29:22

Fass: At Rutgers. They were young, but they had hired several women. As I say, Rutgers was a terrific place. We had an organized group in social history. We met once a week, we read books together. We read them across boundaries. So we read books in French history and in German history, in English history, in American history. It was just a *very* dynamic place. Had a lot of young people, several of them women. And it was a collegial and excellent place to be. So by then, I knew Columbia was a— [pause] I don't know how to phrase this exactly. I don't even know exactly what word to use for it. It was a snobbish place. And it was more snobbish than it deserved.

Lage: Academically snobbish? Intellectually snobbish, or—?

02-00:30:23

Fass: Socially snobbish.

Lage: *Socially* snobbish.

02-00:30:26

Fass: It deserved its academic snobbishness. It was, after all, a major intellectual hub in New York City, which was an intellectual hub. It was a socially snobbish place. And I think that's what Hofstadter was trying to tell me when he said that he had never been invited to dinner at the president's house. It was a socially snobbish place. And that's how they operated. And the women then came into that snobbishness. It was a fellow's place. On an *individual* basis, they treated you really well. But as an institution—

Lage: Not so good. Now, you didn't find that at Rutgers, it sounds like.

02-00:31:05

Fass: No. At all. No, it was not at all a snobbish place. It was a workman-like place. It had an inferiority complex. Rutgers was twenty minutes away, by car, from Princeton. And so, even though in some ways, the faculty we had in social history was *much* better than Princeton—because they were willing to take chances. Again, in a way that Princeton would not have been willing to take chances at that point. They were willing to take chances. The chair of the department was Peter Stearns, who to this day is a friend of mine. He was one of the great innovators in social history and one of the smartest people I have *ever* known. Just a *remarkable* writer and everything else. So he had a very

good influence on me, too. And so no, it was not a snobbish place. That was a relief, I think, finally. There was a kind of snobbism at Columbia.

Lage: You might not even have been aware of it till you saw another institution.

02-00:32:04

Fass: An alternative. And I didn't become *truly* aware of it until I came to Berkeley, which was the opposite of Columbia, where it was totally un-snobbish and where there was so much greater democracy between the students and the faculty. At Columbia, I continued to call my professors Professor, after I had gotten my degree. When I was at Rutgers, I invited David Rothman to dinner, at Rutgers. He came and had dinner. I don't remember exactly anymore, but it might've been Phil Greven and several other people in my little, tiny kitchen [actually Daniel and Judy Walkowitz]. And as he was coming up the stairs, he said to me, [whispers] "Paula, please don't call me Professor Rothman at the dinner table."

Lage: [laughs] But that was the first time.

02-00:32:59

Fass: First time!

Lage: That's an interesting little insight.

02-00:33:02

Fass: Exactly the first time. Now, it was the first year I was away from Columbia. But nevertheless, he had to say it to me because it was such an ingrained habit. We all did it. Male, female, older, younger, didn't make any difference. We would call them professor. There was a *tremendous* divide between professors and students. It was partially why Columbia was the site of this kind of revolt. Columbia was not a nice place. It was not a kind place. It was a very institutionally rigid place. Again, not because the individuals there couldn't be kind and nice and supportive; but as an institution—

Lage: But just how to—

02-00:33:48

Fass: How do you differentiate those things?

Lage: Yeah.

02-00:33:50

Fass: Well, my Sweet Briar experience is the way to differentiate them. The guy there didn't know me and he did institutional kinds of placement. So he went with his Columbia mentality, in terms of how that should be done.

Lage: Did the professors invite students to their home for dinner, or end-of-year parties?

02-00:34:12

Fass: There were occasional Christmas parties, yes. And David Rothman was very good about inviting his students and his seminars to his house. Remember, he was still an associate professor at the time.

Lage: There was probably more hierarchy there.

02-00:34:27

Fass: There was a *tremendous* hierarchy. There was *tremendous* hierarchy. We knew, as students, that if a professor was late—we knew this even at Barnard—if he was a full professor, you waited fifteen minutes; for an associate professor, you waited ten minutes; for an assistant professor, you waited five minutes. And if they were a lecturer or an instructor, you gave them a couple of minute, and then you just got out of there.

Lage: [laughs] So even the students internalized it.

02-00:35:00

Fass: Even the students. Absolutely. It was a tremendously hierarchical place.

Lage: That's very interesting.

02-00:35:07

Fass: And so Rutgers was a relief. It was a state institution. It was a relief. I finally realized that you could have an intellectual life that didn't necessarily have to be attached to this kind of formal, hierarchical spirit. And then when I came to Berkeley, it was proven to me. In fact, you could have a richer intellectual life that way. Not entirely. I mean, there're different forms of intellectual life. But it was a very different experience.

Lage: Let's just stop for a minute and think where we are and how our time is. This seems like a good stopping place.

02-00:35:46

Fass: Okay. Good. Because I'm just on the verge of being here at Berkeley.

Lage: Right. And you've led up to it, but—

02-00:35:52

Fass: Okay. I've led up to it. In fact, I began with it, because of the story of my mother.

Lage: Right.

02-00:35:55

Fass: So we're kind of just at the right moment.

Lage: Okay. We'll take up with this next time.

**Interview 2: May 1, 2009**

[Begin Audio File 3]

Lage: All right. Today is May Day, May 1, 2009, and this is the second interview with Paula Fass, tape three. We are going to talk today about coming to Berkeley, beginning with how the job—I don't know if it was a search or they came to you—how you got the appointment at Berkeley.

03-00:00:26

Fass: They came to me, which was what was so amazing, I think. I had a job at Rutgers. I was perfectly happy with my job at Rutgers. And I got a letter inviting me to apply for the job at Berkeley. I thought it was almost a joke. Well, partially because it was out in California. I'd never been to California before; I hadn't thought of going out to California.

Lage: Did you have a view of Berkeley as a school?

03-00:00:53

Fass: Well, I knew it was a very important history department. I knew that. I had rejected, if you remember, going to Berkeley, even applying to Berkeley as a graduate student, because I hadn't wanted to get into that. But when I told this to some of my colleagues at Rutgers, they all said, well, you'd have to be mad *not* to follow up. So I followed up. And I sent off my dissertation, as they had asked me to do, and sent off whatever was in my file. I had three letters. And then very quickly after that, I got a letter saying that I had been put on the short list, and would I please meet with them at the American Historical Association meeting? And I don't remember where it was. I had never done a job interview at the American Historical Association, and I wasn't about to do it. As I said, I had a job and I thought of this as a kind of lark, but I wasn't going to take it very seriously. So I said no, I wasn't planning to go to the American Historical Association. And then a few weeks passed, and it must've been just after the meeting of the American Historical Association, which I had not attended, and I got a letter saying that they would like me to come out for an interview.

Lage: Do you remember who wrote all these letters?

03-00:02:09

Fass: Oh, yes. It was Winthrop Jordan. I remember very well. And Win followed that up with a phone call. He said that they were very interested in having me come out. And I said, "Well, of course. If you want me to come, I'll come. I have nothing prepared." And he said that was not necessary. They just wanted to have a look at me.

Lage: That's an interesting terminology.

03-00:02:31

Fass:

Which was very, literally, interesting. And that it was all going to be very informal. I was going to have dinner with the committee and there was going to be a party for me, and I didn't need to give a talk, and he'd be my host and he'd show me around. I was going to stay at the Durant Hotel. So he gave me a couple of dates when I might come out, and I took February 1. So [laughs] it was very interesting. I took my mother's cashmere coat. I was *totally* unprepared. She had a very nice cashmere coat. I had something that was more raggedy, and it had a fur collar on it, and I figured I didn't want to come out wearing a fur collar.

Lage:

[laughs] You thought about presentation.

03-00:03:17

Fass:

I did think about presentation. I wore culottes, which dealt with the problem of skirt or pants. And it was a culotte dress, actually, I remember very well, in navy blue, that I wore with a white silk blouse. And Win was wonderful. He picked me up at the airport. He put me at my ease, and I just loved talking to him. We talked about a variety of things. I even told him— because he said something about— There was some dispute about whether they wanted to hire a colonial historian or a twentieth-century historian. And I literally recommended the name of three of my colleagues in colonial history, and I said they were really wonderful and that they— I was just not taking this *seriously*. I think it's because I didn't take it seriously that I came across as relaxed, ready and— My eggs were not in this basket, quite literally.

Lage:

I'd like you to say a little bit more about why you didn't take it seriously.

03-00:04:17

Fass:

I didn't think I'd ever get the job. I just didn't.

Lage:

But here they'd sort of come after you.

03-00:04:21

Fass:

They did. I have to be very honest with you in telling you that I was not a careerist sort of person. I did what I loved, and I was doing it. I was writing, I was teaching.

Lage:

You liked your department.

03-00:04:35

Fass:

I loved my department at Rutgers. Loved, not just liked. And I was close enough to my parents, but just far enough away so that I could go home on the weekends if I wanted; I was able to see them. So there was nothing that I was searching out. So I had nothing really at stake in this. It would have been *nice* to get the job, but it was not essential in any way.

So I had an interview. I remember very well that at the party—there was a reception for me at the Men's Faculty Club—Henry May came up to me and

asked me just one question. He said, “Did it happen during the twenties,” literally, he said it this way, “or before the twenties?” Because I had written my dissertation on the twenties. But he knew I would know what he was talking about. I said, “Well, of course, the ground had been set before the twenties, and so by the twenties, these things fell into place.” He must’ve liked my response. He had, by the way, been one of the people I admired the most as a historian. I had read *The End of American Innocence* when I was an undergraduate. It was one of my favorite history books. And I saw my own book as positioned after the end of American innocence. He obviously liked my answer to that. Then I met most of the people who would subsequently be my colleagues; I remember only a few of them.

But then there was this wonderful dinner party at Win Jordan’s house. I sat between Larry Levine and Kenneth Stampp, and their wives were there. And Phyllis Jordan, who was married at the time to Win, was there. And Natalie Davis was there, without Chandler, her husband. So it was a very high-powered committee. This was the committee that hired me.

Lage: Oh, this was the committee.

03-00:06:34

Fass:

It was a very high-powered committee. And I just enjoyed myself. I enjoyed the dinner, I enjoyed the attention, I enjoyed meeting Ken Stampp for the first time. He had been a very good friend of Richard Hofstadter’s. When they had started out at their first jobs at the University of Maryland, they had been together. So we talked a little bit about Richard Hofstadter. Ken is and was *enormously* courteous. When he talks to you, he’s all there for you. So this highly distinguished and older historian was really all there for me, and we had a *terrific* time at dinner. And Larry, who was always a tremendous amount of fun, and funny. So I had a *wonderful* time. And meeting their wives. I just enjoyed myself.

Lage: Did you feel you were being interviewed there?

03-00:07:27

Fass:

Well, I felt I was there having dinner with these people. I never felt, frankly, that I was being interviewed. I always felt that I was being introduced to people. And I think that was probably key, that I was relaxed, I was having fun. And they had fun with me. I must’ve said the right things, although I couldn’t tell you, apart from that one question with Henry, what I specifically said.

Lage: And you were only twenty-six.

03-00:07:58

Fass:

I was only twenty-six. I was, yes, just twenty-six at that time.

Lage: Did you get any sense that gender was an issue here, that they were looking for a woman?

03-00:08:10

Fass: I think Natalie made it clear to me, even though I met her only that time at dinner, very briefly. She kind of said, "I'm really pulling for you in this one," or something like that. Those weren't her exact words. She may even have said something about, make sure that you have a good conversation with Ken. But I don't think I needed to have that said. But it was only at that moment that it occurred to me that there might be some kind of gender issue. It was only later that I discovered that I was the only woman interviewed. I did not know that at the time. I didn't know anyone else was being interviewed at the time. It was only later that I also discovered that my subsequent colleague, James Kettner, was also being considered for that job, and he was the colonialist. He was already teaching in the department on a temporary position, and so they were either going to continue him in a regular position or hire someone from the outside. That's all I knew. I could have made more inquiries, but I'm the sort of person who doesn't. I went home. I told my mother I had been in Disneyland.

Lage: [laughs] And what did you mean by that?

03-00:09:30

Fass: Well, what I meant by that is I arrived on the first of February— I remember very distinctly. My taxi going to John F. Kennedy slid all the way, because we had had an ice storm and it was completely covered in ice. It wasn't snow, but really ice. The trees were hanging with icicles. And I arrive [in Berkeley] in one of our fantastic February springs, and everything's in bloom. It's about seventy degrees. I never needed to use my coat. It's about seventy degrees, it is *fragrant*, there're colors everywhere. I'd come from gray, gray, gray New York. And here I found buildings that were colored yellow and pink and purple. I felt like I was in Disneyland. [Lage laughs] I had never been to Disneyland, but this was my Disneyland. So it was quite remarkable. I just thought it was a beautiful place.

I felt very privileged to have had the opportunity to come out here, paid for, meet all these wonderful people. It never occurred to me that it would actually lead to anything. But two days later, I got a phone call from Win Jordan saying that I had been approved by the committee. And he kept me informed at every stage. Then told me it was going to go to the department and that he would let me know. It was going to go to the department in ten days or something, and that then it needed to go to the dean. But that if it went through the department, then they would make me the offer, probably. I said, well, I was very flattered. Obviously, I felt very good about that. But I still didn't take it seriously, I have to be honest with you. I had had a good time; they had obviously had a good time with me. It had to go through the department.

And then it just went bump, bump, bump and I eventually got— Delmer Brown, who was chair at the time and who is, gloriously, still alive, called me and said that the department had unanimously voted to invite me to come. And he also then explained that it had to go through the dean, and he asked me what salary level I should be at. So I told him the salary that I had at the time and what I thought, given that it would be a new job, I should get. If I remember correctly, I was asking for \$14,000, and there were no start-up packages at the time. I did say that I wanted the fact that I had taught, if I was going to get the job, that I had taught for two years at Rutgers to be taken into account, and I didn't want to start out as a beginning assistant professor. Which subsequently, I was told, might've been a mistake because if I had had more time, if I had needed—I didn't—but if I had had more time, I might— At any rate.

Lage: Oh, to get your book out?

03-00:12:07

Fass: To get towards tenure. But I was completely naïve about those things, really naïve. So I just said no, I felt I had taught for two years and that should be taken into account. I told you I was not shy, first of all, and I was not afraid. So I just felt this was the appropriate level I should come in at. So he explained that that would mean that I'd have my mid-career review in two years instead of in four or three— in one or two, instead of— I don't remember the details now.

Lage: But that didn't set you back.

03-00:12:43

Fass: Didn't stop me. No, I thought I had worked for two years and that should be taken into account.

Lage: And did you ever express to them your hesitations about moving out here?

03-00:12:56

Fass: At that point, I didn't say anything. And then I got the offer. And at *that* point, I told my mother. And she was distraught. I actually called her. This is after I got, not even a letter, but a call from the dean. I called her at her friend's house to tell her because I was so excited. Because it was only then that I *allowed* myself to be excited about it. And she said, "You call me here to tell me something like this." And for the first time in our relationship, it was clear that she was not happy about something I had achieved. I think she was very, obviously, shrewd and realized what that would mean. And I've already told you that eventually, she's the one who told me to go, but I—

Lage: Right. She came to embrace it.

03-00:13:56

Fass:

Yes, she's the one who said that the bird has to leave the nest, and the mother has to push the bird out. But at that moment, all she realized was that she was going to lose me. Or potentially would lose me. And so I didn't press it. And they kept asking me. I got phone calls from Win. I subsequently learned that a lot of people thought I was holding myself— that I thought I was too good for Berkeley or something. They didn't realize. And I had an absolute deadline of the fifteenth of April. I had gotten my news about getting the offer sometime in late February. And I did not respond. I didn't say anything. I didn't send a letter. I said I was still thinking about it. Because it was clear that my parents both, but my mother especially, was quite upset about it. And so it wasn't until sometime in early April that we had that conversation at home at our table. And she said, "No, if you really think this is going to make a difference in your career—" It's going to make me cry, actually, if I talk about it. "If this is what you think will be important, that it'll make a serious difference, I think you should go." And that's when I first told the people at Rutgers. Nobody even knew at Rutgers. I wasn't playing any kind of game.

Lage:

You weren't trying to—

03-00:15:25

Fass:

No, no, no, not at all.

Lage:

—pump up their—

03-00:15:27

Fass:

No, no, no. I never knew about those games. As I said, I didn't have any sense of those kinds of career moves. And then I finally went in to—it was Edelstein who was the chair at the time. I went in, I told him that I had just put into the mail my acceptance for the Berkeley offer. And he said, "You didn't even give us a chance to come up with a counter offer." I said, "Well, that was never in my mind." The only thing that was in my mind was whether I should or should not go. It never *occurred* to me to bring the letter in and have them bump up my salary or give me tenure or anything like that. Never occurred to me. So he said that he was somewhat disappointed that they had not had a chance to do a counter bid. And I said, well, I'm sorry, but that I was going to go. And that was it.

At that point, I started thinking about how I was going to get across the country. They were going to pay for 60 percent of the transportation of my goods. That was the only part of the moving expense. And the payment by mail, fourth class, of all my books and papers. So I started packing up my books and papers and sending them off by mail. And I left all my furniture behind, including a sofa that I had personally reupholstered during the time that I wrote my dissertation. I would write my dissertation during the daytime and reupholster this sofa at night. This red sofa. It was a wonderful little sofa. I left all of that behind. I came with a suitcase. I had sent some other clothes and my books, and I came with nothing other than that. And luckily, Richard

and Marcia Abrams had gotten an apartment for me that was furnished. So I sublet that apartment. It was on Cedar Street, 2287 Cedar.

Lage: Now, how did they happen to be the ones that got you the apartment?

03-00:17:28

Fass: Because they knew the best friend of the woman who was living there. And the woman who was living there was going off to Wellesley to start up a women's center at Wellesley College. She didn't know if she was going to stay. She taught at Santa Cruz. She lived in Berkeley, taught in Santa Cruz. She did political science of India. So I had this lovely apartment with beautiful prints on the wall, wonderful modern furniture, Indian and other— Oriental rugs. So it was a perfect place for me, and I was very comfortable there. Although I have to say, when I first arrived— First of all, because she wasn't leaving until the end of August, I couldn't move in. We were on the quarter system then and we weren't starting until the third week of September. I stayed with a friend of mine who had gone to graduate school with me for the first couple of years at Columbia, who now lived in San Francisco. I stayed with them for three weeks in August. And I was *freezing*.

Lage: The winter in California.

03-00:18:34

Fass: Freezing. Yes, Mark Twain's saw came back. You know, "The coldest winter I had ever spent was a summer in San Francisco." They went off to Florida and left me in their apartment. It was one of these very chilly apartments. A whole flat. And I walked around with the heater at my feet. I had come with nothing except a small suitcase of summer clothes. I'd left in August, from New York, and I didn't have anything to wear that was warm except a sweater, and I'd thrown in at the last minute a pair of woolen socks that I had forgotten to pack. And I froze. [Lage laughs] I had to buy myself things. It's a little warmer in Berkeley. I came across. I was also terrified of driving California highways. My car, which was driven across the country for me, finally arrived. I got my California license in San Francisco. So then I was all kind of set. And the first day I came over to Berkeley to live in my apartment, I got one of the biggest migraine headaches I have ever had in my entire life.

Lage: Is this something you get frequently?

03-00:19:45

Fass: I had not had a serious migraine since I was a teenager.

Lage: Oh, my.

03-00:19:49

Fass: I had had migraines regularly as a child. They clearly had a tension and psychosomatic component to them. I was incredibly ill. So this was my entry into Berkeley. I came with a huge migraine. Which I had to literally sleep off.

The day that I came into the apartment, a woman was there cleaning it for the woman I was renting it from. And she left and I was completely asleep. She just left and closed the door. I hadn't even paid her or anything. I was so sick. I had this tremendous migraine. So that was my entrance into Berkeley.

Lage: That's not a happy beginning.

03-00:20:35

Fass: It was not a happy beginning. I have to be perfectly honest with you. Everyone was very kind to me, but it was not a happy beginning. I also then came the next day to the university. I had volunteered to give the introductory US history course, the lecture course.

Lage: Now, when you say volunteered, how does that work?

03-00:20:54

Fass: Well, when I had spoken, at a certain point, to Win, he said, "Well, now you have to think about what courses you want to give." And I said, "Well, I've been giving the introduction to US history, the first half." I'm a modern historian. I'd been giving the first half, and I'd be happy to give the first half again. And he said to me, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yes." Well, what I didn't know was that unlike my thirty students in my introductory course at Rutgers, there would be five- to six hundred students in my introductory course here. Which was why he said, "Are you sure?" But he didn't give me the details.

So when I arrived the next day, after having settled into my apartment, I came into the university, I signed up with Mary McAllister, who at the time was the MSO in the department. And I saw Libby Sayer, who was the assistant for undergraduate affairs. And she said, "Here's a list of your TAs." And I said, "What TAs?" And she said, "Well, you have eight TAs." And I said, "Why?" She said, "You know you're teaching—" At the time, it was called History 17A-B. Or A-C. And I said, "Yes." And she said, "Do you have any idea what this class is?" I said, "It's the introductory class to US history, the first part." She said, "Do you know how many students are in it?" I said, "No." She said, "Well, I'll tell you what. Why don't we go over to the room where it's taught?" She took me over to PSL, Physical Sciences Laboratory, which is one building that's nothing but one room. It's one auditorium.

Lage: The round—

03-00:22:46

Fass: The round auditorium. And I walked in and my jaw dropped. I was utterly and completely unprepared. Looking at the room, I realized that I was going to have an *enormous* lecture class. It never occurred to me. I don't know what I was thinking, quite literally. I think I was thinking about my parents and leaving them behind and starting up this completely—

Lage: Well, you were thinking what you taught at Rutgers, also.

03-00:23:11

Fass:

And what I had taught at Rutgers. My jaw dropped. The way I taught at Rutgers, which subsequently became the way I taught at Berkeley, was by giving my lectures off the cuff. I never read lectures. You don't, in a class with thirty people. Wouldn't *dare* to pick up and read from your lectures. So I'd have an outline, I'd put the outline on the board, I'd have it in front of me. I'd always written out my lectures, but I never read from them. And so because it was now the end of August, I had no choice except to proceed and lecture the way I had always lectured. Which turned out to be the right thing to do, but it was certainly not the way Leon Litwack lectured, for example, who was teaching the second part of 17. So Leon and I were teaching these two completely disparate ways. And so my lectures were quite spontaneous. I would have prepared very well, but they were always without notes. So here I started lecturing to this large classroom. I was teaching them social history, et cetera. And every single one of my TAs, except for one, was older than I was.

Lage:

Ooh. That's a wonderful— And were they men and women?

03-00:24:32

Fass:

Yes. They were mostly men. The people I had real trouble with that semester were not my colleagues—who were *incredibly* gracious and hospitable, every one of whom took me out to lunch and invited me to dinner, I think, at their homes—but my TAs. Except for one woman, Ruth Bloch, who was wonderful to me. All the others, who were, as I said, mostly men, were *horrible*.

Lage:

Now, in what way?

03-00:25:00

Fass:

They were all trying to trip me up. They were trying to demonstrate that they knew far more than I did and that I was this young, female person, who had mistakenly been hired here, and that *they* should've been hired instead of me. So I literally had people sitting with their ducks, as I called them after a while—in other words, their students in the class—having them titter while I was lecturing.

Lage:

Oh!

03-00:25:29

Fass:

They'd talk to them while I was lecturing, cracking jokes or something like that.

Lage:

To their own students?

03-00:25:34

Fass:

To their sections. So maintaining control over that class took every ounce of self-discipline, every ounce of sangfroid that I had. I managed.

Lage:

How did you approach it?

03-00:25:53

Fass:

Well, I did the best that I could. I tried to be friendly. I remembered what one of my students had told me when I was at Rutgers, “Remember to smile.” I may have talked about that. I was always very well prepared. But my TAs gave me a very hard time. At the time, unlike today, the 17 class was divided into two. We didn’t have enough sections for everybody. So some people in the class had sections and some people in the class didn’t. And my pals in that class were the people who didn’t have sections. They were *my* students. And the others— And I think eventually, I won over the TAs. But it was a real battle.

Lage:

Did you ever confront them directly?

03-00:26:38

Fass:

I did. Over the years, I got letters from my former TAs, apologizing to me. One of them quite specifically, who said that he’d obviously been very infantile and asinine, basically, and that he now, as a teacher, understood what I had to cope with in that class. And one of the people who did not become a professor has now become a friend of mine. But it was a *very* difficult semester. It was a semester after which— I also took on my own two sections, because I wanted to know what was going on in the class. I got no credit for it. So I was teaching another class, plus 17, which is a *huge* lecture class, and two sections of 17. By the time Christmas came around, I fell very ill. I had a very high fever, a very bad throat, and no doctor.

Lage:

You hadn’t had time to get a doctor.

03-00:27:42

Fass:

I was very overworked. It was tremendous. I lost a lot of weight. It was a very overworked semester. So it was trial by fire. And it wasn’t just during the week, because in their gracious attempt to make me feel at home, and in their desire to kind of look me over, I got invitations from— I never had a weekend to myself. So I never had a weekend even to recuperate. I had a dinner party to go to on Friday night and Saturday night.

Lage:

That’s a lot of dinner parties.

03-00:28:16

Fass:

It was a lot of dinner parties. Well, that was a very different time. It was a time—

Lage:

Now, do you really feel they were looking you over?

03-00:28:22

Fass:

I think it was mixed. I think it was mixed. Some people were truly, genuinely extending themselves to me. But I frankly think the wives were looking me over.

Lage: [laughs] Tell me more about that. I think that's interesting. Because there were four now, four women.

03-00:28:39

Fass: No, there were three. I was the third.

Lage: Oh, Lynn Hunt hadn't come yet.

03-00:28:42

Fass: Hadn't come. She was still at Michigan. She was at the Society of Fellows at Michigan for three years. So even though she had been hired at the same time, she didn't come until a couple of years later. And so there was Natalie [Davis] and there was Diane [Clemens]. Both of these women were married with children, and I was young and unmarried. And I think some of my colleagues' wives probably were looking me over. I have no other way of describing it. But they were very kind, very generous. As soon as they realized that I was for real and that I had no intention of preying [Lage laughs] on my colleagues, I think we just became quite good friends, with a lot of them. But I was an unknown quantity and kind of a strange duck, frankly. I had kept them waiting. I had kept them waiting for two months, before I accepted, and people wanted to get a sense of who I was. I think I put most people at ease because I, frankly, am who I am. And so as I've said to you, I'm both not shy, but also very friendly. I was not a raving feminist. I don't think I ever challenged the wives of my colleagues about their roles. And I think that was the right thing to do.

Lage: I think women were quite sensitive at that time.

03-00:30:20

Fass: Exactly.

Lage: Women who had chosen the marriage route, and no career.

03-00:30:25

Fass: I think that's exactly true. And I respected them for it. I was always the kind of feminist who felt that the importance of a feminist movement was to make it possible for women to make choices, but not to insist that there was only one way. And that people had to make the choices that were right for them. I respected their intelligence. Everybody I met were very intelligent women. And they were interesting to me. I had lots of things to share with them, too, both intellectual things and non-intellectual things. I was interested in furnishing an apartment, for example. I liked those things. I was the kind of person who had sewn my own sofa. So I was not just interested in my books. I had a lot of—I'm interested in cooking.

Lage: Did you like to cook?

03-00:31:19

Fass: Yes.

Lage: And did you—

03-00:31:20

Fass: I reciprocated.

Lage: When they had parties, did you get to bring food, like all the wives did?

03-00:31:23

Fass: Nobody did that at the time. They were not potluck parties; they were parties where people really did do their own cooking. And there were some extraordinary cooks, including Isabel Stamp, who was— Actually, I have to say something about Isabel Stamp, because she was an amazing person. I loved her. She was a wonderful hostess, a *wonderful* conversationalist. She knew all about the arts, and she knew all about everything. She knew about clothes; she had a beautifully furnished home. It was elegant, as she was. And she really wanted to make you feel comfortable, and she invited me repeatedly that first year. I will always be grateful to her. When she died, I was devastated. Truly devastated. So my entrance into Berkeley was not just an entrance into this department in Dwinelle Hall, it was an entrance into the homes of these people. And I genuinely appreciated the women who made their homes open to me. They were my surrogate families. I think they realized that. And so that made a big difference. I also opened my home to them. I told you I was not afraid. And even though I had this very small apartment, and my study was the same place as the dining room, I made dinner parties. I cooked and— I felt it was my role to reciprocate. So I reciprocated all the time. So the second quarter, I had dinner parties for people who had invited me the first quarter. I wanted them to be my family. So the second quarter was much better. The first was—

Lage: You didn't have as heavy a load?

03-00:33:17

Fass: I didn't. Although I was developing for the first time— Actually, I take that back a little bit. But it wasn't History 17. I developed, for the first time, the first part of my social history class. So I was writing new lectures all the time. I had been able to use some of my old lectures from my Rutgers days, but these were entirely new. I'd not taught social history before. I was very keen to do it. And remember, we were on the quarter system. So I did lectures the second quarter, these new lectures, and they were a lot of fun to me, too. Taxing, but fun. But there were only forty people in my class, so it was easier to try out new lectures on a smaller class. It was not as much of a challenge as having those TAs in my class. [Lage laughs] And the final quarter, I gave just one class. It was History 275, the introduction for the incoming class, that Larry Levine and I were developing for the first time.

Lage: For the graduate students.

03-00:34:18

Fass: For the graduate students, correct. And so I only had the one seminar. And it was a lot of preparation, but it was just once a week in class and meeting with Larry, too. That was the time at which I was able to really start revising my dissertation in a serious way.

Lage: That you had the time to do so.

03-00:34:36

Fass: It was the first time I really could get back to doing that. And I wanted to do that very much. I was very keen to get my book out. I felt the dissertation was close already to being a book, and that I didn't want to let a lot of time go by. So I worked *very, very* hard, whether I was working on my classes or that. But I also then began to relax, and for the first time, began to explore the area. And the Levines were very kind about that. One day, I have to tell you, I was sitting, still in my bathrobe—which is my usual way of writing; I get up in the morning, drink coffee, smoke cigarettes and write, without getting dressed—and there was a knock at the door. It was Larry and Cornelia and Joshua and Isaac. They hadn't even prepared me. And here I was in my bathrobe. "Come on. We're going out to Point Reyes." I said, "I was going to work today." "Oh," Larry said, "You're either going to explore the area or you're going to get stuck working all the time." So I said, "Well, give me a chance. I'll get dressed." I went in and the kids and Larry and Cornelia were in the front room. I went in and got dressed and we went out to Point Reyes. I mean, we just went. And that literally was the way I started exploring things. Or Ira Lapidus said, "Come on, we're going to Napa. You have to come to St. Helena."

Lage: People were very welcoming.

03-00:36:04

Fass: Oh, they were totally wonderful. When I gave that talk for the history department, that's one of the things I was talking about. I was talking about this place as being much more than just a department of colleagues; it was a department of families who included you into their homes. So one of the things I talked about was the role that the wives of these people, and their children, played in our lives. I got to know all their children. I knew Debbie Feldman, I knew all the children. And Ann Litwack. I used to tutor Ann Litwack in chemistry. I'd go into the house once a week and—she was in high school at the time—tutored her in chemistry.

Lage: This is a very nice aspect that I haven't picked up before, interviewing the men.

03-00:36:54

Fass: Well, because the men wouldn't tell you these things.

Lage: Right. It's not that they weren't aware of them.

03-00:36:58

Fass: No, they were *quite* aware of them, but they think of a department as exclusively what goes on in the studies and in the offices.

Lage: Or on the squash court.

03-00:37:11

Fass: [laughs] Well, that too, I suppose. But I didn't do that. I played a little bit of tennis with a few people, but was never a good enough tennis player—

Lage: But this very family-oriented thing and knowing the children—

03-00:37:21

Fass: It was *very* family oriented. And when I went to the Litwacks', I did bring desserts with me, because they had me over just for the family, not necessarily in a dinner party. Or Larry brought me over just for the family. And if they were eating hotdogs, I ate hotdogs. So my memory of Berkeley is very much that. You also have to remember that I was lacking a family.

Lage: Right. You were a young, single woman, too, and they kind of—

03-00:37:50

Fass: I was a young, single woman. And it was more than just being a young, single woman; I had been very close to my family. And I no longer had one nearby. I didn't have a mother and a father with whom I'd always participated. And so was prepared to allow myself to be incorporated into their family, in a way that wasn't necessarily the case for others, who either had families of their own or they'd stopped being so close to their families in the way that I had continued being close. So on some psychological level, on some emotional level, I responded to that. And so to me, that became as important as whatever happened in my classrooms or in the offices. It allowed me a place for my emotional life. To be attached to their children, to be able to bring little things to their children was meaningful to me.

Lage: Right, right. Now, how did that affect your work? Did this create community, an intellectual bond, as well?

03-00:39:10

Fass: Yes. So let me talk about that, as well, because I'm talking about this kind of family; there's also an intellectual family that, I have to say, doesn't really exist anymore in this department. It's one of the great losses that's taken place. Both of them are losses. One is the sense that when you were brought into this department, you were brought into the families of your colleagues, that you got to know their families. The other thing that has been lost—at least to me; I don't experience it to the same extent—is the sharing of our manuscripts. We shared our manuscripts. A lot of people had read my work before I had arrived. People outside of my field.

Lage: Right, because you had sent it.

03-00:39:53

Fass:

Because I had sent it, and because we took very seriously at the time, reading whatever was sent by people. So Gene Brucker or Randy Starn, people who were quite distant from my field, or Fred Wakeman, had read my dissertation and took me out to lunch to talk to me about my dissertation and what they thought was wonderful and the areas that they thought I might do some work in. All of that was incorporated into who I was and what my work became. This was a very shared endeavor. Sheldon Rothblatt, we had long conversations about these things.

And they also asked me to read their work. So I, very early on, read Leon Litwack's *Been in the Storm So Long*. In fact, he gave me chapter by chapter, which I read. And after reading a chapter, I'd go to his house, we'd have dinner, then we'd sit in his study and we'd talk about his chapter. So this was all a *very* integrated way of life. It was, by the way, I should say, also difficult because I didn't have any balance wheel to it. I had no family of my own. So it was all the people that I knew, where I spent my leisure time and my work time. And that could have its drawbacks, too. I just want to point that out, that there was no place to decompress from that. Or at least not very much. I also didn't have a lot of time to make other kinds of friends, including male friends. There was just no other time. My time was all taken up in work or the social life of the department. They used to call me the Mary Tyler Moore of the department. I don't know if you knew that.

Lage:

[laughs] No, I never heard that. And now, what did they mean by that?

03-00:41:57

Fass:

Well, so let me explain. The first year I was here— No, it was actually the second year. The second year I was here, I was invited to join an initial group of people at Berkeley, for the Aspen Institute of Humanistic Studies. And so we were basically kind of being interviewed about whether we'd be good going up to Aspen, to their conferences. And there was going to be a conference on television. I had never worked on television stuff but [it was] something I was willing to do. So we had these initial interviews and they chose, I think, two people from Berkeley to go up to Aspen. I was one of them. And so the assignment I was given—we were given assignments—was to write about some television programs and how they would be understood from our disciplinary angle, if you were a sociologist or if you were a historian. So the first paper I wrote was about television as a cultural and historical document. And the programs I chose were *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *M\*A\*S\*H*. And it was really very heavily about *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, which I had been watching for a while, because when I was in graduate school, my mother had called me and said, "You have to turn the television set on, because there's a woman there who looks a lot like you." So I started watching *Mary Tyler Moore*. I personally didn't see the resemblance, physical resemblance; but in fact, the more I thought about it, there was not so much a physical resemblance as a personality resemblance, I suppose is the

word for it. And she had dark hair, and we, coincidentally, wore our hair alike. So my hair was long when her hair was long, and my hair was bobbed when her hair was bobbed. So when I started writing about *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and when I finished the paper, which I wrote very quickly, and gave some people the paper to read, people started calling me Mary Tyler Moore. [Lage laughs] So for a long time, when I was younger—well, she was a little older than I, but she looked young—I was the Mary Tyler Moore of the department.

Lage: Oh, that's funny.

03-00:44:17

Fass: And she, of course, was also a single woman in a work situation and where everyone around her became her family. And that was exactly my experience.

Lage: So you really did see a correspondence with her.

03-00:44:29

Fass: I did really see a correspondence. And I must've not been the only one to see a correspondence, because other people saw it, too. So I was the Mary Tyler Moore of the history department.

Lage: That's amazing. We were going somewhere before that and now I'm thinking.

03-00:44:50

Fass: Well, we were talking about sharing work.

Lage: Right, sharing work.

03-00:44:53

Fass: And so we definitely shared work with each other. And that was a fundamental part of who we were as a department. It wasn't just with me. I know that Irv Scheiner and Fred Wakeman— Fred *always* passed his things by Irv. We became acquainted with each other's work in a very intimate way. That has declined. Now, it may be happening, I should say, among my younger colleagues, who may be sharing their work with each other. They rarely share their work with us—although for every generalization, there is an exception. I just read some of the work of my junior colleague, Mark Brilliant, and just talked with him about it. So he did pass it on to me. And I passed on one of my articles to him. So it does occasionally still happen, but it doesn't happen as regularly as it used to happen. It used to happen very regularly.

Lage: And do the social contacts happen?

03-00:45:49

Fass: No.

Lage: Have you had Mark Brilliant to your house?

03-00:45:50

Fass:

Oh, I have. Because of my experience in this department and how important it was for me—and we haven't even talked about when my mother died, when everybody really extended themselves to me—but how important it was for me, I have made it a point of *always* inviting my junior colleagues to the house. Always. They come at least once. Many times, if we become close and friendly. But there will never be a person in American history or a woman junior colleague whom I do not invite to the house. I always do that. And the women junior colleagues, that holds for whatever fields they're in. I make it a point of trying to invite them to the house, and for them to know that we're more than just a set of plaques on our doors. So that has carried over. At least for me.

Lage:

Can you say how the sharing of your work might have affected that first book?<sup>6</sup> Did you take any different directions as a result of the feedback?

03-00:46:58

Fass:

I have to say two things about that. The first book, Kenneth Stampf—who had read it very carefully, he had been on the committee—in an elevator at one point—and I no longer remember where it was; it may have been at an AHA that first year I was here—said to me, “I really liked your dissertation very much. But you had *nothing* about Southern schools, Southern universities.” So I took it upon myself to then study two Southern universities and I chose them carefully. One was the Deep South, Louisiana State University, a state university; and the other was in the upper South, in a private university, Duke. And I read the students' newspapers. I was able, luckily, to get them on microfilm. So I had spent quite a bit of time doing that. So I responded to that criticism and then incorporated it into my writing.

Lage:

Did you find anything that made you alter your conclusions?

03-00:47:57

Fass:

No. In fact, one of the wonderful things about it was that I was able to use that to demonstrate that my arguments had actually been correct, because they now seemed to be true about Southern schools, as well. And so it allowed me to reinforce my arguments in a way that was very, very nice. Even having to do— Not with LSU, because they never talked about African American students, but there was some discussion of African American students at Duke, so it was very interesting. And the gender issues—all of the things were very much alike, with very small exceptions, that I noted. It was an extremely useful suggestion. I did also incorporate suggestions that were made to me about some of the writing style, where it was too effusive or too long-winded. I cut certain things out, I tightened various things up. And one of the very important things that Ken did— Ken was a wonderful colleague to me. He

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<sup>6</sup> *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (Oxford University Press, 1977).

introduced me to Sheldon Meyer, who was the editor at Oxford University Press. He had me over to dinner with Sheldon Meyer.

Lage: That's a nice introduction.

03-00:49:14

Fass: That was a wonderful introduction. Ken had enough regard for me to think that Oxford should publish my book, and that mattered to Oxford. So I think in the end, I'm enormously grateful for that, too. Sheldon subsequently became my editor for three books, and he became a friend of mine, as well. He came over to dinner, I had him to dinner, at one point, with Ken and Isabel. So those were the kinds of things that colleagues did for each other. And so while that first year was difficult, I was completely right when I told my mother that it would make a difference, coming to Berkeley.

I think the other thing that it made a difference for me in was the direction that my work took after my first book. Because so many of my colleagues, especially people like Larry Levine and Leon Litwack—and Winthrop Jordan, although to a lesser degree—made it clear to me that they felt that I needed to look at African Americans in my work, to an extent that I had not actually done in that first book. I had taken some account of them, but they were not central to what I was doing. And so the next book I wrote, I was very keen on making a very particular point of including a look at African American experiences of a certain kind. So it did change the direction of my next book.<sup>7</sup>

And I think the kind of work and theoretical frameworks that were common at Berkeley also changed how I was looking at things.

Lage: Tell me about that.

03-00:51:10

Fass: I will. I was trying to think about that a little bit before I came over today, because that has been true at Berkeley all along. Berkeley historians influence each other, even if they don't necessarily read each other's manuscripts. And that is that the Berkeley history department takes up new ideas. In fact, we create new ideas. And because of that, those new ideas are around. They're part of the air that we breathe, they're part of the talks that we go to, they're part of our discussions at lunch time, when we have lunch with each other. So the willingness to be innovative and the courage to be innovative is something that Berkeley provides you. And at the time that I came, one of the things that Berkeley was doing was a particular kind of cultural history. Cultural history from the bottom. Now, I had been doing social history from the bottom and from the middle. My work, of course, was largely about middle-class students, but I wanted to demonstrate that groups who had earlier not been taken into account could have an influence on history.

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<sup>7</sup> *Outside In: Minorities and the Transformation of American Education* (Oxford University Press, 1989).

Lage: The youth.

03-00:52:35

Fass: The youth. The youth, and these college youth, in specific terms. I came here, and that became very important in a somewhat more diffuse way here; that in fact, ordinary people could have an influence on the structures of their own lives. And that was something that Larry was doing; it was something that Leon was doing. They were very keen on— And Ken had been there, even in writing *Peculiar Institution*, understanding that the life in the slave quarters could have very different meanings than the life in the big house. And that was part of, literally, the air we breathed around here. And so the second book that I wrote was about that, was about how an institution like the school had to adapt itself to the particular populations within it; and that this was a dynamic that took place in American history, that it wasn't just a top-town social control—

Lage: It wasn't the school providing for the immigrants—

03-00:53:37

Fass: Exactly. But that the immigrants were enforcing something within the schools, and that institutions of that importance, which at the time were seen by most revisionist historians of the school as a kind of exercise of social control, that they were trying to conform immigrants, that they were trying to conform people to American citizenship. Yes, that took place. I mean, that's what schools are all about. But that if we only saw that in schools, that we would be missing a big part of the picture. And that moreover, education took place in other places than just in the public schools. And so my second book really was formatted around that. That school took place in army encampments, that that was very important for African Americans; that schooling took place as a result of things that the New Deal did; and that the contribution that particular groups would have, like Catholics had in forming a whole other school system, the Catholic school system, that this was something that historians of education had to take into account.

So that had a tremendous influence on where I was going. Later on, other books would also be influenced by where we were going. I have to say that historians of education had a very difficult time, initially, with my book because it fell outside of the paradigms that were operating there. It has taken them fifteen years [laughs] to catch up to my book. And it's only now, I think, over the last, I'd say, ten years that I have gotten incorporated into that literature, and that I get letters from historians of education saying, "Oh, gee, you really started us off on a whole new direction."

Lage: Do you think that's because you did kind of reverse the paradigm?

03-00:55:28

Fass: [over Lage] I was way ahead of things. I reversed the paradigm. Reversed is too strong a term. But I opened up the paradigm. It was closed down. There

was a kind of shut-down quality about it. And I wanted to open the windows and the doors to it so that there was a more integrated flow into other kinds of issues in the society, and into the populations in the society. So I think it was a difficult thing for them at first to understand. First of all, because I was dealing with a whole bunch of different groups in different places. I wasn't just looking at public schools. I was looking at college education for women, for example. I was looking at different levels of education. I was asking large questions about education in general. What is the nature of education in the United States? Why is it so central? And how do different groups fit in or alter the structures of education? So that was very new. Most of the history of education had really been about public schools. So it took a while.

And because it was about education, other historians kind of didn't pay a lot of attention to it, either. So I thought I was doing something really significant, and yet as I discovered, as I discovered over time the importance of careers, it didn't get the attention that, to this day, I think that book should've gotten.

Lage: It was sort of thought of as something coming out of—

03-00:57:10

Fass: The history of education. And the history of education didn't quite know what to do with it. It did get several important treatments in their journals, but it was still an outlier. And since the history of education is an outlier in history, it was looked at only kind of on the edge, even though it was a very important book.

Lage: [over Fass] Although it's central to the cultural life of the nation.

03-00:57:31

Fass: Exactly. Which is my point. Which is precisely my point. And it wasn't until Michel Foucault actually came to Berkeley at a certain point, and he said that his next project was going to be on education, that people in history began to realize, not just in American history, how important it is, but that education has been central to the development of the state, to everything, since the nineteenth century. So some things are a little too ahead of their time. And I think *Outside In* was a little too ahead of its time. Let's hope it gets taken into account at some point.

Lage: Let's change the tape here.

[Begin Audio File 4]

Lage: Okay, we're back on, tape four, with Paula Fass. And let's see. When we first met, before we started recording, you mentioned how you'd been given the impression that everything was rather laid back here at Berkeley.

04-00:00:16

Fass: When I came, I was a gung-ho New Yorker. And even though, as I said to you, I was not a careerist, I was always very ambitious. And I worked very hard and never wasted my time. I've always been very conscious of not wasting time. And one of the things that my colleagues always conveyed to me is that that was an attitude that I absolutely had to drop. I was now in California. This was the place of laid-back lives, where we're enjoying ourselves.

Lage: [laughs] Were these people like Larry saying that, Larry Levine?

04-00:00:46

Fass: Absolutely, Larry Levine. He said it in several different ways. And at the same time as it was always very, very clear that everyone was working very, very hard, and that their work was very meaningful to them, that they were going to do big and important things. So I knew very early that the laid-back stuff was an outer appearance, and that inside, this was one of the most competitive, driven places that you could be in. But I have to say that that impression, that overt vibe that was let off, I think could have been deceptive to some people. And I think it can still be deceptive to some people. That the sense that out here, having a good life is as important as having a good mind and having a good book can be problematic. Now, it's less so now. The seventies, of course, came after the sixties, when the whole idea was to emphasize the fact that you stopped and smelled the roses.

Lage: Right. And in the seventies, I think, it was even stronger.

04-00:02:01

Fass: It was even stronger. Absolutely. I agree with you. So I had to struggle hard against that. It wasn't hard for me because I'm not a laid-back person naturally. My problem was to try to find ways of actually enjoying an environment that was so obviously beautiful. And I resisted that. I literally resisted it. I used to tell my colleagues—I told this to Peter Brown once—that I would more than occasionally, at least once a week, go to Oakland, because Oakland seemed like a more real place than Berkeley. I needed to feel the cement growing between my toes. [Lage laughs] Everyone's [saying], "You have to get into nature and the grass and the trees."

Lage: Go to Point Reyes.

04-00:02:50

Fass: And go to Point Reyes. Whereas I'd come from a no-nonsense urban environment, and that's where I felt comfortable. There was something problematic for me to spend all my time here, so I had to reconnect with that other side. I would go to Oakland all the time. I'd go to San Francisco, also, but I'd go to the Mission District—the *old* Mission, not the new Mission—where there were different ethnic groups. The sense of Berkeley as being a non-ethnic environment was difficult for me, initially, too, I have to say.

Lage: Now it has the reputation of being so diverse.

04-00:03:30

Fass: Yeah, well, it had the reputation then, too; but in fact, its diversity may have been real as a historical phenomenon, but it was very conformist, in terms of the practices and beliefs that people shared. And if there was one ethnicity that reigned in Berkeley, it was French. French food, there was Pig by the Tail, which was a kind of French—

Lage: A charcuterie.

04-00:04:02

Fass: Charcuterie, exactly. French bakeries. It was the Upper East Side of Manhattan, not the Manhattan or the Brooklyn that I came from. When I thought ethnic, I thought *ethnic*. And Berkeley didn't even have a pizza place that was a real ethnic pizza place. It was a drinking place, rather than a real pizza place. So I needed to go to places that were ethnic. And Mexican places were very ethnic in the Mission in San Francisco, or African American places or other places in Oakland felt much more homey to me on that level. I mean, the hominess of the people I knew, which was very real; but the environment—as I say, beautiful as it was—I did not feel terrifically comfortable in it for a long time. And while I'm saying that, I may as well say that I felt like I was in exile for about eighteen years.

Lage: Oh!

04-00:04:54

Fass: Seriously.

Lage: Now, that's a very long time to—

04-00:04:56

Fass: Yeah, it's a very long time. And when I talk to women, my colleagues' wives, for example, they had the same experience. My colleagues who came from the East Coast—Richard Abrams or Larry or Reggie Zelnick—*loved* it here from the get-go. But wives did not necessarily feel the same way. It took them longer to feel at home. I didn't really feel like this was my home and that I wasn't in exile from New York—remember, I have an exilic kind of experience anyway; even New York was a kind of exile from other places—until I had children, and then I felt like the community was created around my children, then I felt that Berkeley had an enormous amount to offer to my children, and to us as a family. And then suddenly, I began to feel like I was really a Californian. My husband didn't have that experience at all. He *loved* California from the get-go. And when we wanted to buy a house, I wanted to buy an eastern house; he wanted to buy a California house. By the way, he won. [Lage laughs] Because I figured, well, I was here, I may as well experience—

Lage: Well, while you've mentioned your husband and children, why don't we talk about meeting your husband and—

04-00:06:12

Fass: Ah, well, that's part of my family here in the Berkeley history department. After my mother had died—

Lage: And how long was that after you came here?

04-00:06:24

Fass: Three years.

Lage: Three years.

04-00:06:27

Fass: I came back to Berkeley. Everyone was extremely kind to me. And I felt very much at loose ends. Things were just out of place. I think that's true when any mother dies. It was especially true when my mother died. She was young, it was unexpected that she would die, and we had been extremely close. And I felt guilty about having left her behind. I mean, there was a whole set of complex emotions. And Jack Lesch had come at that point to the department. He had, coincidentally, also been hired by Natalie Davis, who turned out to be our matchmaker, in that sense. And he came here as a historian of science. He was a junior faculty member, and because he was alone, also, I got to know him. But in fact, as he tells the story—and he's quite right—we got to know each other because we shared a graduate student. Because there hadn't been a professor in his field, which is the history of biology and the medical sciences. I had done some psychology and psychiatry, and she had come to me to do some graduate work with. When he came and she then went to him, he called me to talk about her. And we decided we were going to have lunch and discuss her. And that was that strange time in my life, and I stood him up.

Lage: [laughs] Oh. Consciously, or you forgot?

04-00:07:59

Fass: No, totally unconsciously. I had nothing against him whatsoever. Why should I? Didn't know him at all. I had never met him because he hadn't been interviewed here, he'd been interviewed in Jerusalem, where he had been spending two years. And Natalie was in Jerusalem and interviewed him there. He never went to the AHA, either, to be interviewed.

So no, I stood him up quite accidentally, because I was not carefully writing down my appointments. For a long time, I did not keep an appointment calendar, to preface it by that. I had an extremely good memory. And so all my appointments were in my head, and I never kept a calendar. It was only after I stood him up that I started getting a calendar. [Lage laughs] And it became clear to me that even if I still had a good memory, it was necessary to. So then I said, oh, I felt absolutely terrible. He was a young, new assistant

professor, and I had stood him up, and it was just an awful thing to do. So I invited him to my house for a drink. And I almost stood him up again, because I had forgotten about it. And I rushed home, and he was just this lovely, very gentle, very nice person, who was like also a fish out of water.

He had just come from Israel, where he had spent two years working with the American Friends Service Committee, trying to bring a dialogue between the Palestinians and the Israelis. So he had come from this very fraught and intense environment, had stopped off in Princeton to defend his dissertation, and then gotten on an airplane—all this had happened within a week—and was just lumped down into this strange place, this Disneyland, right? And so we had a lot to share, just both of us feeling kind of in exile. And we became very good friends. There was nothing romantic. But I kind of started taking care of him and made sure— He didn't have a car. If there were parties or something, I made sure that I gave him a ride or somebody gave both of us a ride or something. So we became really quite close as colleagues and friends. And Jack was so sweet. That was the year that I got tenure. And when I got tenure, finally when it came through the university and everything, I found a huge bouquet of flowers standing outside my door from Jack. He was just that kind of person.

Then things developed. But it took a while. We were friends for almost a year before there was any kind of romantic involvement between us. And I was reluctant about that, too because I had been very clear in my mind when I came here that business was business, and my colleagues were going to be exclusively my colleagues, and that I was not going to allow romance to enter into that. That was one thing I was absolutely clear about.

Lage: And yet you had no chance to meet people other than your colleagues.  
[laughs]

04-00:11:00

Fass: That's exactly correct. Or very little chance. So I was determined for a long time that there would be no intradepartmental romance. That was not going to be anything that happened to me. But it did, and we initially would meet in San Francisco. But the world is a very small place and if we were holding hands in San Francisco, one of my students from my History 7 or other big lecture course, "Hi, Professor Fass." So there was no place to hide. And eventually, we decided it was better just to tell people.

Lage: Was it frowned upon at that time?

04-00:11:44

Fass: I don't know about frowned upon. My own kind of inner sensor suggested that there would always be complications, that mixing— It's one thing to have friends at work; it's another thing to have romantic relationships at work, which could lead to all kinds of fallings out, and that there was some potential

danger in it. When I arrived here, I think there were still anti-nepotism rules. And so it probably would've been frowned upon then. But that dropped away at a certain point. And I know, for example, that Martin Jay and Catherine Gallagher got married, and she had been his student. And there were other relationships of that kind. I just thought it would introduce complications. It would introduce complications. I wanted to be very clear about that. And I have a very clear moral kind of compass. So there was a lot of initial queasiness. But it was clear that we really genuinely cared about each other. And so when we did get married, and my daughter was born a year and a half after that, the scuttlebutt in the hall— It was an *amazingly big* department event. *Everybody* had to come and meet Bibi. *Everybody*.

Lage: Oh, the birth, not the wedding, was the big event.

04-00:13:14

Fass: Not the wedding. Oh, we had a big wedding event, too. We got married in New York, where my father was. And Jack's family came, too.

Lage: And where was his family from?

04-00:13:24

Fass: His family was from Ann Arbor. His father was the science officer, the liaison between the University of Michigan and Washington science granting institutions. And he grew up in Ann Arbor. So the wedding was there [in New York], but we had a huge party at our house in Kensington. And we invited the entire department. It was a departmental party. It was just a *huge* party. I even invited people, the widows of people who had been my colleagues, like Mrs. Alexander, Eleanor Alexander, who was Paul Alexander's wife. He was the Byzantinist who had died. Several others, as well. It was just a department bash.

Lage: Everyone.

04-00:14:13

Fass: Everyone was there. And so that was a big event. But then my daughter became the first child to be born in the department to a female faculty member.

Lage: Oh, now, that's an event, too.

04-00:14:26

Fass: That was a huge event. And everybody came to visit her. Everybody came with a gift. And it was a really lovely outpouring of departmental unity. Just a sense of who we are. I have to say, she got her first cold at the age of two weeks, because everybody came to visit her and everybody wanted to hold her. But it was a kind of wonderful event. And Jack brought in candy, boxes of candy to the history department. And when Charlie was born, he brought in cigars. You know, the whole thing. But the talk around the department when

she was born was whether they'd have to get an FTE ready for our daughter.  
[they laugh]

Lage: Well, it's interesting, you were the first unattached female hired.

04-00:15:22

Fass: Yes. And the first unattached female to get married, and to marry one of her colleagues within the department.

Lage: Right. And then the first woman to have a baby—

04-00:15:30

Fass: In the department.

Lage: These were all firsts—

04-00:15:43

Fass: They were all firsts. [And the first woman tenured.]

Lage: —that seemed to be well accepted, embraced.

04-00:15:38

Fass: Maybe I was impervious to it. I've told you that I just do what I think is right. But I don't think there was any reluctance or any resentment. Not towards me, at all. So it couldn't have been a happier kind of event for us. Certainly, insofar as I experienced it, I think that's the case. What can I add to that?

Lage: Do you want to say something about managing a family and a career?

04-00:16:20

Fass: Oh. I have a lot to say about that. [Lage laughs] I will start with the birth.

Lage: [laughs] Okay.

04-00:16:26

Fass: Robert Middlekauff, at the time, was the chair of the department. There were no university provisions for maternity leave. But Robert Middlekauff, who had also given me a leave when my mother was dying, so that I could take care of her—because I was flying back and forth, and he said, no, that was just unacceptable—called me into his office, and he said, "Now, what are we going to do about this baby." And he said, "I assume you want a semester off." We were, by then, on the— Oh, no, quarter.

Lage: We were still on the quarter system.

04-00:16:57

Fass: Still on the quarter system. My daughter was born in October of 1981. And I said (now, this was my feminist side), "I'm not sure I'm going to need it."

Because I didn't want to make it appear that just because women—precisely because it was a first—just because women could potentially have children, that there had to be certain special circumstances around that, and that they had to have special provisions made for them. And Bob said, “Well, if you don't want to, but I would think about that.”

Lage: [over Fass] He was a father. [laughs]

04-00:17:39

Fass:

He was much wiser than I was. Much wiser than I was. And he also knew me, because he had insisted on the leave with my mother, and I had resisted it. Again, because I didn't want to seem unprofessional. Seeming professional was very important to me. And that was related to why I didn't want to get involved with anyone in the department, either. I wanted to be very clear about that. And that women had an obligation to be as professional as anybody else. And so I did not initially take a leave. But then as I got more and more pregnant— I was deathly ill, by the way. I happened to be on leave during the morning sickness. But I was so sick I couldn't do anything on my leave, until the fourth month, when I went off, starting to show, to New York City, to research my chapter on ethnicity in New York City high schools in the 1930s and forties, which required that I travel to all these high schools, including the South Bronx and all kinds of very unpleasant places and unpleasant neighborhoods, with an increasingly big belly.

I stayed in New York for two months. I was, by then, seven months pregnant. And felt great. At that point, I felt great. And I was doing all this research. But it was then that I realized that I was also kind of endangering— People would start saying to me, “Are you sure you should be doing—” Oh, I'm doing this research, it feels great. But I decided at a certain point that I was going to take taxis instead of the subway, when I found myself the only person left on an entire subway car, going to the South Bronx.

Lage: And New York was a little more hazardous then than now.

04-00:19:35

Fass:

Oh, my goodness, yes! This was in the late seventies and early eighties. It was *very* hazardous. At one point, I went up to a police car after I had gotten out of the school I was visiting in the Bronx [Theodore Roosevelt High School], to ask for directions to the subway because there were no cabs on the street. And the policeman looked at me and said, “What are you doing here?” Took me in the car and took me to the subway—to give you a sense of how much more hazardous New York was. It was a very different environment. It was *very* crime-ridden at the time. And the subways were crime-ridden. But New York was my place and I wasn't going to be put off by what— As I said, I realized at a certain point that I was taking some unnecessary chances. So I came back. Did a lot of writing that summer.

My daughter was born in October. So by that point, I said to Robert Middlekauff, “I’m going to take the quarter off.” But she was born in the middle of the quarter, and I barely had enough time to turn around and breathe before I had to go back for the second quarter. And anybody listening to this [Lage laughs] who’s having a baby, please take note. Instead of going into this obviously friendly and wanting-to-be-helpful chair and saying, I need another quarter, I went back to work. And that was the *stupidest* thing I ever did. As a result, it took us six years to have another child. It was a *very* difficult time.

My daughter was not an easy child. She was very insistent on her own way. She didn’t like to stay with babysitters. We had a very hard time finding childcare. I didn’t want to turn her over to a kind of permanent childcare arrangement. Luckily, Jack was on leave that semester. We tried to hire repeatedly, and people stood us up. We hired, we paid them a week in advance, and they didn’t come. It was a time before there were really effective means that people had determined to do childcare. And we got caught in that. We tried to hire an au pair, and she left us and went somewhere else. Here I have to pay complete tribute to my husband, who always did at least half of the work. It wouldn’t have been possible if he had not done that. I was tearing myself apart. I would come to work, I’d come to my office, and I’d only be thinking about my eight- or nine-week-old baby.

Lage: Oh, my goodness! Were you nursing, also?

04-00:22:17

Fass: I was. Not very successfully, as a result. Very tense. I lost a lot of weight. Well, that happens when you’re trying to live two very different lives, trying to continue your teaching at the same time as having a young child. My daughter was sick a lot. She’s now a *very* healthy person. But at the time, they thought she had meningitis when she was six weeks old.

Lage: Oh, my goodness!

04-00:22:41

Fass: So there were a lot of very unpleasant and very difficult times. And I’ve always shared that. But I think the real solution was for me to have admitted that at that time, I was a mother first, and that while I was always going to be a historian and obviously, went back to being a successful historian, that that time needed to be taken out, for myself as well as for the child. For us as a family, as well as for the child. And so when my son was born, I took a year off. I got a semester—we were on the semester system at that time—and I took another semester on my own. Luckily, now—I just spoke to one of my colleagues who’s pregnant and will have her baby next year—we have an entire year of maternity leave for our female faculty.

Lage: That’s *very* good.

04-00:23:35

Fass: And this was partially the result of my colleague and co-author Mary Ann Mason's work when she was the graduate dean, that she made that part of the new maternity leave. And Judy Gruber, my old friend who died a couple of years ago, was very influential, also in make those kinds of provisions [child care at the university] for people.

Lage: Is it a paid leave?

04-00:24:02

Fass: Paid leave.

Lage: For a year. That's excellent.

04-00:24:03

Fass: Yes. It's remarkable. And the university is to be lauded to the skies for that, because I can speak personally about the difficulties that having a child and wanting to continue your career, and being an important member of your department—how difficult that can be. You were going to ask me a question. I just wanted to get that out. [laughs]

Lage: Yes. Do the current rules also give you an extra year towards your tenure?

04-00:24:31

Fass: Yes, it does that, too. Now, I was tenured by the time I got pregnant, so it was not an issue for me. But it does give people— And it gives men, also a year, an extra year towards their tenure.

Lage: So new fathers benefit.

04-00:24:48

Fass: Absolutely. And as I said before, Jack was 100 percent doing his father work. And he never got a paternity leave. So I think it's totally the right thing to do, because family time is an important time. The university has recognized that. And it made me a much happier historian. Having my children made me a much more productive historian and a better teacher. So I don't think those things have to be in conflict, but they can often be very difficult to manage at the same time. And it was extremely difficult for me. I had no assistance. There was no one around who had done it, to give me guidance.

Actually, when I first knew I was pregnant, I went to visit Natalie [Davis] at Princeton. She had moved to Princeton at that time. And we took a walk, and I told her I was pregnant. And she said, "Oh, children are easy. [Lage chuckles] You don't even need equipment for them." Which was largely true, because there were no places to buy equipment at the time. She said, "You just need a drawer for them, basically." I subsequently discovered that she and I had very different children. My children were not easy. My daughter was very difficult. She didn't nap, and she had kind of irregular hours and always wanted her mother or her father, couldn't leave her with baby sitters. I'll just tell one

story. I had a wonderful undergraduate student, whose name was Karen Sacks. She's herself a professor at UCLA now in sociology. She wanted to be a baby sitter for Bibi when she was little. I wouldn't have trusted many people, but I trusted Karen. She was a wonderful person. And so she came to my house in the evening. We had never gone out in the evening before this. Bibi was eight months old. So we had never taken any time for ourselves.

We decided that it was time. We left Bibi with Karen and she was *yelling, screaming!* So Jack said, "Well, the only way to have her stop screaming is to leave." So we left. We closed the door. I stood outside the door for five minutes. She was still *yelling, screaming* at the top of her voice. He said, "Let's go." And we went. We went to a friend's house for dinner. I picked up the phone, I called Karen and asked whether she was still screaming. She said, "Well, she's still screaming, but I'm sure we'll calm her down." We came back. It was eleven o'clock at night. My daughter was standing in her crib, holding onto the rails, still yelling. As soon as I walked in, she saw me at the door, she let go of the rails, [claps hands] collapsed into the crib and went to sleep.

Lage: [laughs] She was a very perceptive little baby.

04-00:27:43

Fass: But she had been screaming about 80 percent of the time, for the entire four hours that we were gone.

Lage: A persistent—

04-00:27:53

Fass: This was a very willful child. And I shouldn't really say this on tape. My husband called her Bismark. [Lage laughs] So this was a very willful child. And children are different. She's a *brilliant*, remarkable young woman right now, and her willfulness has come into play in doing the things that she's done. But one needs to be able to adapt to the children that you have, not to other people's children.

Lage: Right. Not all of them go in the drawer.

04-00:28:24

Fass: Not all of them go in the drawer, exactly. And I think we, as mothers and as citizens, want to be able to raise these brilliant, willful children and not shunt them to the side, at the same time as we don't want to give up our careers. So having the space, paternity leaves and maternity leaves, crucial. Crucial.

Lage: Good. I'm glad we got that in.

04-00:29:49

Fass: Yes, I really wanted to get that in.

Lage: Good. Let's talk a little bit about how you related, or was there any special relationship, with the other women faculty in the department or on campus?

04-00:29:02

Fass: Yes. I did have special relationships with the women in the department. Natalie [Davis], who had hired me, really saw it as her role to kind of take care of us, the women in the department. And she did that. And I am very grateful to her for that. She had us over, she shared things with us. Natalie was an *amazing* person. She *is* an amazing person. She always had—there were always visitors who came to give talks. Natalie *always* had a party for them, always invited people. There was just a kind of continuous exchange of ideas. Even though we were on the West Coast, we had visitors from Europe that Natalie brought over. We never felt provincialized. There was a constant back and forth of new ideas. And in my field, social and cultural history, which was at the time developing, it was very important to have connection with French historians and others. It wasn't just an American experience.

Lage: And Natalie was one of the ones who—

04-00:30:02

Fass: Oh, absolutely.

Lage: —kind of made that happen?

04-00:30:04

Fass: She made that possible. Natalie made that possible. She was known everywhere. It was always just Natalie. Wherever you went in the world, oh, do you know Natalie? She is just a remarkable person, remarkable human being. She, when she had decided to go to Princeton, called me. She said, "I'd like to have lunch with you." I was one of the first people she told. She didn't want me to feel like she was abandoning me. She told me about the dream that she had had and that it said that she should go. And we both believe in dreams. So yes, that was a very important, a *very* important person for me.

So was Diane. Diane Clemens is a different person than Natalie, but she was a very important influence. We had lunches, we shared things. Less intellectual things, I think, than personal things. She had had a more difficult time in the department than Natalie, and she wanted me to be aware of that, too. But she was extremely kind to me. And when my mother died—or when she was dying, actually—Diane dropped everything she was doing and took me to the airport so I could get on an airplane. Larry did that too, at one point. So she understood how important family was. She understood that our lives were not just the things we write. And I was very grateful to her for that. Yes, so that was all very important.

I also had a relationship with Lynn [Hunt], although it was not a close relationship, I have to say. Why that was the case, I'm not sure. But Lynn was extremely ambitious. And I think her ambition—To this day, she's

extremely— She's done everything. And I did not have the same kind of career orientation. I was very ambitious for my work, but I was not ambitious for my career. And we just were going in different directions, I think. But when Beth Berry came—

Lage: Which I think was '78.

04-00:32:33

Fass: —we became very close friends. Very close friends. And we were and are close friends, and have been for a long time.

Lage: Are they friendships that discuss women's issues in particular?

04-00:32:45

Fass: Oh, yes, absolutely. Well, certainly, with Beth. I was about to call her Mary Elizabeth Berry. Now that's she's chair, she's Mary Elizabeth Berry, but everyone knew her as Beth. So yes, there were lots of things of that sort. And of course, I became friends, at a certain point, with Mary Ann Mason, and I think Mary Ann and I always had those discussions. And my friend Judy Gruber, also, in the political science department. We got to know each other because we were together on a book project that was a Berkeley/Stanford co-chaired project on schooling and the funding of schooling. Judy had an article in that and I did, and so we got to know each other. So those were some of the first people I knew seriously from outside the department. And Ann Swidler was on that, as well.

Lage: Because you talk much more about the department connections, more than the campus. But have we just—

04-00:33:04

Fass: Well, I think that's because initially, my connections were very, almost exclusively in the department. I had a few other—

Lage: Who had time for anything else?

04-00:33:48

Fass: Exactly. Who had time for anything else? And it was that kind of department that served as a substitute family. And so there was a great deal of intimacy within the department, and we did a lot of things together. It wasn't until somewhat later—I'd say mid- to late eighties—that I ventured out. I was asked out. I mean, there were things going on that I was interested in. There was this new circle of people studying family and childhood. They were interdisciplinary, came out of the psychology department and the law school, and I attached myself to them. And they became indispensable to my life at Berkeley.

Lage: So that was kind of interdisciplinary.

04-00:34:30

Fass:

Philip Cowan and Stephen Sugarman, Mary Ann Mason, and a variety of other people. Judy Stacey at the time, who came down from Davis. Those were very important. And I had met David Kirp and Judy Gruber as a result of this Stanford/Berkeley project. But it took some time to move out of the department in a serious way and to begin to see that my work, while it's deeply historical and very much about history, also has serious connections with other things happening on the campus. And that became essential to the way my work developed in various directions, and has been true ever since. Ever since. And Mary Ann and I talk about everything. I mean literally. She just wrote me an email saying, "I'm in Berlin. I just went to the Holocaust Museum in Berlin, and I just wanted to tell you about it." We went to Chile with both of our daughters. We have daughters who are about the same age. And so yes, we do lots of things together.

Lage:

Did you get involved at all with women's studies at Berkeley and all the sort of controversy that whirled around that?

04-00:35:47

Fass:

No. The simple answer is no. I was asked to review women's studies [sometime in the early 1980s—added during narrator's review].

Lage:

As part of a committee?

04-00:35:57

Fass:

Yes, as part of a committee, as the chair of the committee. And it was because I wasn't involved with women's studies initially that I was asked to chair this committee. And our committee recommended a women's studies department. So what was here initially was a women's studies kind of major, group. It was a—

Lage:

Program.

04-00:36:28

Fass:

Program, thank you. I'm no longer remembering all the details. But it wasn't doing what a women's studies department should do. And we felt very strongly that women's studies needed to be legitimated, and that the way to do that was to anchor it deeply. And so the appointments would initially be made in a department, plus women's studies. And that once that was institutionalized, then women's studies could have its own appointments. So that's exactly what's happened over time.

Lage:

And was this an effort to make it more academically— I'm going to say elite, but—

04-00:37:07

Fass:

Acceptable.

Lage:

[laughs] Acceptable.

04-00:37:09

Fass: Yes. Some of us were very concerned that at the time, there were people who just didn't consider it worthwhile. There was no there there. And for people like me— And I don't do women's studies per se, but I *couldn't imagine* working in what I do without studying women and gender issues. The relationship between women and men, girls and boys. All those things. It just never occurred to me. And so it was very important, I thought, even though I wasn't in women's studies, that the kind of work that people who were in women's studies were doing should be taken very seriously. And so I think I helped to make that happen. I chaired that particular committee.

Lage: So you were important in it. You started by saying no. [laughs]

04-00:38:03

Fass: Well, I wasn't involved initially in women's studies.

Lage: I see.

04-00:38:08

Fass: So if you mean, was I important in helping to establish it, the answer is yes. Yes, definitely.

Lage: Now, was that a controversial decision, the recommendation that you made?

04-00:38:21

Fass: Probably. We made the recommendation and then kind of stood back. The recommendation was made when Robert Middlekauff was provost. And I think Bob Middlekauff took what we had to say very seriously, and he made it happen.

Lage: Do you like the idea—or did you at the time—of having [a women's studies department]? I suppose you could do women's studies in many departments and not have a home department.

04-00:38:56

Fass: Well, to be honest, to be *completely* honest, I didn't think we were going to hire someone in women's history if we weren't pushed. And this was a way of getting someone in women's history.

Lage: I see. So the history department would hire someone in women's history, who also would—

04-00:39:12

Fass: That's exactly what we did. That's exactly what happened.

Lage: When you hired Mary Ryan, was it?

04-00:39:17

Fass:

Precisely. So it was because there was women's studies, for which we then got a half FTE, and Mary was going to become the chair of women's studies, and I and some others had certain names in mind, and Mary was very high on that list, that we were able to get Mary here at all. So I suspected, for all kinds of reasons, that getting someone in women's history would be a fight in the department. And it was, even so. But that it would be *less* of a fight if it became a kind of anchoring thing, where we shared it. And it was less of a fight.

So there was some self-interest involved in establishing it the way it was established. I will admit that. It was also the way women's studies was going at the time in most universities. That was true at Wisconsin, it was true at Yale, it was true at a variety of places—that this double [appointment] was exactly what was happening; that it wasn't that people first hired people in women's history. Now, this was early. It needed that push, and the women's studies would allow it to be legitimated. It's still a fraught question.

On the other hand, I'm the kind of historian who believes in interdisciplinary work. And so I don't want to dismiss women's studies even today, because it's an interdisciplinary arena. I think it has all kinds of virtues, by being interdisciplinary. I also like the idea of just having women's historians. But I don't think one should necessarily exclude the other, and I don't think we've allowed it to, anymore. Once it became established and once we got over that hurdle, we have people who do women's history in the department. And I hope we'll continue to have women who do women's and gender history in the department, if for no other reason that we have students who insist on it. So I don't think that there's any problem in having it in both places. And I think women's studies on the Berkeley campus has served a very good purpose. I have no regrets about having set it up that way, helping to set it up that way, not—

Lage:

Okay. Just one more topic, and then I think we should conclude. Were you involved at all with the Women's Center or the Committee on the Status of Women?

04-00:41:52

Fass:

I was never involved with the Committee on the Status of Women. Diane Clemens was the first person to head that one up. I was involved in the Women's Center, yes, in the sense that when we were all asked whether we would like to be part of a center of that kind and whether we wanted to be kind of affiliated faculty, I said yes, that I would want to be an affiliated faculty. But I've never been deeply involved. We've had this other group on campus, in a sense, which has been about families and childhood, that were much closer to the nature of the work that I was doing. But yes, I was definitely one of the affiliated faculty, and my courses were listed among their

courses. But you also probably know that I've never given a course in women's history.

Lage: Yeah. I know. It's not your field.

04-00:42:45

Fass: And I've tried to make that clear, too. And I've tried to make that clear to my colleagues, occasionally.

Lage: That childhood is not necessarily women's history.

04-00:42:53

Fass: It's not the same thing. Not only is childhood not women's history, family is not women's history. Because a lot of people also assumed that family was women's history. And so I have said and I continue to say, and I am saying it right now to colleagues, that we need to have a women's historian in American history, or a gender historian, here in the department, because that is not what I do. Because a lot of people have leaned on the fact that I'm here to justify the fact that we don't need anyone in that field. And so I have been very clear that that is not the case. And this is not because I don't think it's a legitimate field or I want to dissociate myself from the field; it's only that it's not what I do.

Lage: And you want someone who does do it.

04-00:43:37

Fass: I want someone to do it.

Lage: [laughs] Right.

04-00:43:39

Fass: Exactly what I want. Since we're talking about it, I want to be very clear on camera and on record, that that is something that we still need; that we have not replaced Mary; and that we had Jen Spear, who also did women's history, and she left and we have not replaced her. So we have no one doing this area. And we have graduate students right now who come with the expectation that they'll be someone here in this field, and there isn't.

Lage: Now, if they go to the women's studies department, will they find a women's historian or not?

04-00:44:15

Fass: No.

Lage: Not a historian.

04-00:44:16

Fass: Not really. Not really.

Lage: That's quite a hole, I would think.

04-00:44:22

Fass: It is a chasm. Yes. I should say, we've hired Ruth Rosen to teach the undergraduate class in American women's history. But she's not a regular member of the department. I don't want to obscure the contribution that she's making, because we do want someone to teach it. And we had others who also came to teach, but these are temporary appointments.

Lage: It's very different.

04-00:44:52

Fass: *Entirely* different. We need someone here, not only because it says that we've committed ourselves to the field in a permanent way, but also because we have graduate students who need that person.

Lage: Okay, I think this is a good place to take a break. And we have more to do. I think one more visit.

**Interview 3: May 18, 2009**

[Begin Audio File 5]

Lage: Okay, we are ready to start interview number three. And today is May 18, 2009. We're on tape five. Last time, we discussed your coming to Berkeley and getting settled those first few years. And we thought today we'd start with around 1978, look at how the department has changed, how women were incorporated, some of the turning points and maybe battles, if there were some.

05-00:00:33

Fass: Well, there *was* a turning point. And I think '78 is probably the right year, because there were two women who came up for tenure. It was Lynn Hunt and me. And as far as I'm aware, there was no dispute over my tenure. But there was a dispute over Lynn's tenure. And it became a notable event in the department. [break for microphone adjustment]

Lage: We got all that, it just wouldn't have been as loud, so you don't have to repeat.

051-00:01:14

Fass: It was a notable event in the department, which Natalie Davis was extremely upset about. I did not hear all the details, but I heard enough of them.

Lage: You weren't in the meeting.

05-00:01:26

Fass: No, because we were both being tenured the same year. As a result, I was not yet on the tenure committee. So all I got was whatever was around in the halls. And it was clear that there was some opposition. First of all, it wasn't a lot of opposition. But second of all, it came from certain particular individuals, who were actually discredited in the meeting itself, and that was part of the controversy. That part of the controversy was that some members of the department felt that it was not appropriate to try to discredit other members of the department.

Lage: Oh, I see. It became kind of *ad hominem*.

05-00:02:12

Fass: Exactly. That the attack became that this person had no right to speak at all and shouldn't have been at the meeting. And so it was an event of that kind. And Natalie, from everything I heard, was extremely effective and made a huge difference in the whole presentation. Surprises me not at all, given her role in the department as being someone who quite *emphatically* insisted that it was time for the department to incorporate women much more regularly, rather than making it an event, a kind of one-time event. And of course, it was Lynn Hunt who went on to an *illustrious* career, including being president of

the American Historical Association. And I think that event was a turning point, because to my knowledge, that sort of thing did not happen again.

That doesn't mean there weren't occasions, more with hiring than with tenuring, where issues of that sort embedded themselves in the discussion. That's the best way I can put it. Because it wasn't overt in any way, but it was choices of topics or the kinds of history that was being done, rather than the particular individual.

Lage: And were these related to gender? Or is this another kind of—

05-00:03:50

Fass: Well, it was related to gender in terms of whether the history, which included gender dimensions, was as vigorous and as important—those are the words, I think that would have been used—as other histories. And I think that was the real battle, that there were kinds of history—some people called it fluff, some people called it soft—that not only deserved, but that we needed to include among the things that we offered. And all of that stuff got combined with a transition in the historical profession, in terms of the kinds of history that was being done.

Lage: You can't really separate out the gender issue.

05-00:04:41

Fass: [over Lage] You can't, exactly. You can not separate out the particular cases of hiring and/or tenuring—although as I say, tenuring was not, after that one, a real issue—from the change in the department. When I came, as I said, I was kind of the first social historian. Not the only one, because at the time, Tom Laqueur also was doing social history, although subsequently, he would move on to do cultural history. And as you may know, I've stood my ground in saying that I'm both a social and a cultural historian. I always was. I always did cultural history as well as social, so it wasn't a transition. But many of those issues got woven into what became a transition into a much more emphatic cultural history, where different groups were being studied and where the point of view of those groups was being taken into account—which is how I would describe the divide. And interestingly, it didn't happen, at least while I was here, around African American history, because that battle had already been fought and won.

Lage: Mm-hm, by Litwack and—

05-00:05:56

Fass: [over Lage] By Leon Litwack and by Larry Levine. And by, I assume, Ken Stampp, as well. So there were lingering qualities of that, but it became more transformed into what became a much more widespread set of groups—women among them; what later became known as gender history—and the adoption of a more fragmented historical narrative, as some would put it, that some people found difficult. Now, I have to say, I can appreciate it. And

therefore, I'm not at all convinced that it was a way to hide an animus against women. Now, it might have been. I may have been blindsided. But history is a contentious arena. And the methodologies in history and the focus in history and the sense of a satisfactory text, I think, is a very complicated one. And certainly, when I first came to this department, the requirement uniformly, was that the first book demonstrate a kind of coherence and a vision, regardless of what the topic was, where the beginning and the end fit together quite well and one had a sense of having read a monograph that didn't fall apart, that didn't have—

Lage: Not a collection of essays and—

05-00:07:35

Fass: Not just a collection. And so I think that that has remained, to some degree, true in the department, and a sticking point, as a result. Because a lot of these, quote, “alternative histories,” frequently their intent is to break up this coherent vision and to argue that we can't reestablish coherence until the fragmented Picassoesque picture is— where we have all the pieces. And that a too early reconstruction would disallow some of those pictures to be part of it.

Lage: Is this the kind of thing that would be discussed in a—

05-00:08:23

Fass: Oh, in the meetings, the question of coherence, the question of logical development, the question of the penetrating intelligence and creativity would all be discussed.

Lage: How about archival research? Was that something that was wanted?

05-00:08:41

Fass: I have never, in my time here, heard anyone rejected because they didn't do archival research. Now, that's different than saying, this person has uncovered a whole new set of sources. The archival stuff is really kind of old-fashioned, nineteenth century stuff. And I think this department, since I've been here, has not demanded that that be the sine qua non of admission to the department. But originality has always been an important component. Imagination. The ability, in a work, in a book, to bring the reader into the historical realm and make it convincing. Those have all been very important. And that can be more difficult, if the whole method now begins to question the coherence. So it's not a battle that has been left behind, in a way.

Lage: It's still something that's brought up.

05-00:09:52

Fass: It's still an ongoing matter, I would say.

Lage: Now, I was interested when I interviewed Fred Wakeman, he talked about, with no sense of wanting to qualify it, “girls' history” and “boys' history.”

[laughs] He said, of course, they're not all girls doing girls' history, and vice versa.

05-00:10:16

Fass: Well, he was talking about the softer and the harder stuff, I suppose.

Lage: But did you think it was gender related? Did more of the women tend towards the less coherent?

05-00:10:32

Fass: Let me tell you the reason I didn't. Let's leave coherence aside for a moment because I don't think any of the women who first became part of the department did not do *entirely* coherent manuscripts. So I don't think that was an issue. I'll bracket my own work for a moment. If I look at the other women who came right after I did or when I did, like Lynn Hunt or Beth Berry or Linda Lewin, they all did the guy stuff. [they laugh] Lynn Hunt's first book was as much— It's all about politics, and you would not have been able to label that girly history. And Beth Berry's was *deeply* about politics in Japan and about those bloody fights that they had. That was certainly not girly history. And neither was Linda Lewin's very important work on Brazil. Her later work, which was still— I wouldn't describe as girly history because it was about the law, but it was about the family. And if you want to call family stuff girly history— Which I absolutely would not, by the way, because some of the most important historians who have done family history have been men—in French history, in American history, in world history in general. So I wouldn't have seen that alignment at all.

Now, if you want to return to my own work, I don't think the methods I used were girly at all. And I do think my first book was probably the most vigorous, coherent book I've ever written. But it was about a topic which was certainly not political in an obvious way, because I wrote about youth culture. But I did, in the end, talk about the politics of youth culture and how it tied in with the rest of the politics of American development. And I think all of those things have political dimensions. But I did talk about youth culture, I talked about sexuality, I talked about gender. And horror of horrors—this was the most cultural stuff that I did—I talked about dancing, music, smoking and things like that. In other words, cultural practices that certainly, an anthropologist would recognize as cultural. I also vigorously was interested in the structuring elements of the institutional networks. But it was, as I say, social and cultural history, from the get-go. I had never been exclusively a social historian.

And so who knows what they were saying? I wasn't at the meeting. I never got an accounting of the meeting because I never, ever asked. I think I've said this before. I've *never* kind of wanted to see what other people said about me. And it's possible that Fred Wakeman or someone else called it girly history. I don't know. I just find it— I'll call it capacious history. I'll call it catholic

history. I'll call it more integrated history. The kind of history that includes a wider vision of who makes decisions, whom they affect, and how the course of history actually takes place. And it allows into that vision, people and groups who maybe in the past were not allowed into it. I would have defined myself from the get-go, before I came here, as that kind of historian. And that's what I thought social historians did, that they looked at other groups who had not been included before. And in that sense, they both tested the power of those groups in the questions they asked, the historical questions they asked—which was what I did when I looked at youth—and also in the process of doing that, endowed them with power. Because if you ask if these people have power and if you show that they do, on a cultural level or on a social level or on a political and economic level, then you're searching out power in nooks and crannies that you hadn't looked in before.

Lage: And that others hadn't been looking for.

05-00:15:17

Fass: Precisely. That *no one* had looked at before. And that, in some ways—and I can get very hot under the collar about this—is what social historians were all about doing.

Lage: Now, why would you have to get hot under the collar?

05-00:15:32

Fass: Because there has been an assault on social history by cultural historians. And some of the cultural historians have argued that, in fact, they were wasting their time, that the social historians were looking for kinds of positivistic demonstrations of behavior and things that they would never be able to find, because positivism doesn't exist, to begin with. But also that it's all refracted through this cultural lens, and if you look at it in a Foucauldian way, the cultural lens always comes from the top. And I severely question that. I've actually written an article where I talk about the dialog between social and cultural history. I think that's what good about it is that they're constantly at each other, requiring that they pay attention to just those kinds questions.

Lage: And I did actually look at that article, which was very interesting. But you also indicate that you always saw yourself as doing both.

05-00:16:31

Fass: Yes, and I do see myself as doing both. I do think that first of all, I have used theory in my work, I continue to use theory in my work. Not in as overt a sense as some cultural historians do, but it would be a mistake not to try to understand issues that allow us to look across different domains in history, which is what theory really does. It allows you to associate one domain with another domain, and moving it out of just the empirical realm into a larger realm of interpretation. And I've always done that. But I reject the idea that there is one theorist, whether it's Foucault or anyone else, who has the field all to himself. I think that historians are obligated to constantly be incorporating

into their work, newer theoretical perspectives. But also to not just demonstrate the theories, but to test the theories, to use the history as a platform for which this conversation between the theorists and the historians, the social scientists and the historians take place. So it has to be an ongoing deliberation. What I don't accept is just the idea that you can take a theory, plop it onto a set of materials and say, there. Done.

Lage: That this is something new.

05-00:18:03

Fass: Or this is something new, or that you've done your work.

Lage: Right. Did you find graduate students wanting to do that a lot?

05-00:18:11

Fass: There are a lot of people wanting to do that a lot. It makes life simpler, to do it that way, because you've got the answer when you start out. And all you need to find is the evidence for the answer you already have. But I think that defeats the historian's quest. Not only because the historian has an obligation to seek out, as truthfully as possible, a terrain in the past, but also because you don't get the *surprise*. I wouldn't do this if I didn't want to get surprised. History is an endless arena in which we find new things.

Lage: Now, would this kind of discussion go on as you were talking about who to hire?

05-00:19:03

Fass: Yes. In that sense, this has always been a great department, that we like people who surprise us and who challenge us. I think some of the discussions which centered around cultural history were discussions about un-theorized texts. And I think that can often be misleading. As I say, I think theory is very important in history. But I do think there are historians for whom theory is not that meaningful. And they are archival historians or their understanding— They need to dig out sources that have never been translated before. And a lot of their work really goes into that kind of nitty-gritty. And I personally don't think that should be dismissed; it's really significant work. Those historians sometimes don't have enough material to go much beyond that. But I don't think we've ever hired anyone, and certainly have never tenured anyone who doesn't ask intelligent questions about the past. Some of them were more highly theoretized—meaning they're making connections across domains, I think. Others are less highly theoretized and are more empirical in their approaches. I enjoy that, too.

I think that was a controversy in the department. And I have to say, it remains a controversy in the department. There are those among my colleagues—I don't need to mention who they are—who will largely dismiss anything—and I mean dismiss—that doesn't have that larger theoretical, philosophical set of encounters. And again, I think that's a mistake. Because I think today's

philosophy is tomorrow's junk heap. As long as the history is vigorous, as long as we've learned something from it, as long as the mind that's operating on the material is doing something important and innovative, I'm not ready to dismiss that at all.

And this comes back to this question of a coherent vision. Theory, of course, allows you to have coherence because you start off with coherence and you can move up these steps and gradients easily. Other things are sometimes harder to create than coherence, because historical stories don't necessarily have their own coherence. But some historians, even without theory, can present a coherent narrative that makes a lot of sense in its own terms and doesn't require theory, necessarily. And I would uphold those. I also look for coherence. I want to have a satisfactory book, a book that doesn't just tell me stuff, but makes sense of it. And I think that's a valid basis upon which to make evaluations. I do not think it is a valid basis upon which to make evaluation that everybody has to have read all the right stuff.

Lage: All the right theories and—

05-00:22:35

Fass: All the right theories.

Lage: —brought it to bear.

05-00:22:39

Fass: And demonstrated that they've read it, which is more likely than brought it to bear. And demonstrated that they've read it can sometimes come in the most annoying ways—dropping *the right term* or *the right citation*. I had an extraordinary colleague, Peter Brown, who read everything— theoretical, analytical, sociological, literary—and knew—I don't know, fourteen languages. And you know when you read Peter Brown that he has thought these things through. But he *never* brought it to bear in any obvious way. And I would much rather read him, usually, than people who are constantly bringing it to bear and overbearing the history with this.

Lage: It's a real balancing feat, isn't it?

05-00:23:38

Fass: It is really a balancing feat.

Lage: Now, would you have allies for your point of view? You've mentioned Larry Levine and Leon sometimes as—

05-00:23:48

Fass: Larry was a very un-theoretical historian, and Leon *is* a very un-theoretical historian. You could never accuse either of them of not asking important questions or asking big questions that relate to large matters. So yes, I think I

could've brought them in on those kinds— And they also would have wanted very coherently presented arguments and— They're *smart*.

Lage: And good writers. That seems to be something—

05-00:24:24

Fass: And *superb* writers. And I think both of them would've rejected all this bringing of all this stuff to bear, just on the basis of the writing. That sometimes get seriously disrupted as a result of the—

Lage: Does that get considered and discussed vigorously, the quality of the writing?

05-00:24:42

Fass: It depends on who we're talking about. And I think it's very difficult to disconnect good history from good writing. Because if it's persuasive, it's been written well. And if it's ponderous and difficult to keep you going, then it probably hasn't been written all that well. But occasionally you have to make the distinction, especially when you read unfinished manuscripts, as we do all the time. We're always judging both people whom we hire and people whom we tenure—although less likely for the tenuring, but certainly, whom we promote—on the basis of manuscripts that are not complete or still in the process of revision. And so you have to get past some of the writing and make those evaluations. So I think we do disconnect to a certain degree.

Lage: So are you saying that—it's hard to talk in the abstract—but that there will be a clear division in the department, based on these issues that you've just brought up, over evaluating a candidate or—

05-00:25:49

Fass: I think the division, as it stands right now— And there've been different divisions over the course of time. Over the course of the thirty-four-plus years I've been here, there have been different divisions. The division that exists now, as I would read it, is a division— Interestingly, it's not a division between older and younger, it's not a division in terms of gender, it's not a division even in terms of subject matter. It *is* a division in terms of what we just talked about. And that is, there are those who are very demanding that the historian be engaged in these theoretical discussions. And there are those—and I would include myself among them—who do not make those demands. That doesn't mean that we don't like some of the work.

Lage: It doesn't mean you'd reject somebody who was.

05-00:26:58

Fass: No, no. No, I would not. And I think some of that division now has to do—not always, but sometimes—between people who are doing more recent history and people who are doing older historical subject matter. The older historical subject matter, which often requires various kinds of language skills and other kinds of what I'll include here as archival skills—paleographic, the ability to

decipher handwritings, things of that sort—which are frequently true, or *always* true of older history, as opposed to more recent history. There is something of that divide, because those historians often need to do a *great* deal of just cumulative work before they can even get to figuring out what they've got. And so I think there is something of a divide. There was a divide this year in a hiring in Chinese history, which represented that divide. And as a result, we hired two people in Chinese history, one representing one side of the divide and one representing the other side of the divide. And that meeting was a very unhappy meeting.

Lage: I'm not totally clear in how this breaks down. Are you saying those who have to do this long period of reconstructing are less theoretical?

05-00:28:35

Fass: Yes. Exactly. Then tend to be less theoretical.

Lage: Because I could see someone like that being tempted with just taking a book from that time period and spinning a lot of theory around fewer data. [laughs]

05-00:28:47

Fass: Right. One could do that, but our department tends not to. You can see that happening in a literature department; you're less likely to see that happening in a history department. But we did hire two different Chinese historians, in order to satisfy what I think are really that divide within the department.

Lage: And did they have separate time periods?

05-00:29:12

Fass: Entirely. So the much more theoretical person was a modernist, and the person who accumulates an *immense number* of new pieces of data was a historian from a much earlier period.

Lage: And that's a solution that takes a certain amount of budget, which is challenged over time, also.

05-00:29:42

Fass: We were very lucky. But you can see those divides. And I've seen those divides before and I've been in the middle of one of those divides, as the chair of a committee.

Lage: Do you want to talk about that? Whatever you can say without compromising—

05-00:29:58

Fass: Well, yeah. I certainly wouldn't want to compromise the committee. But my frustration with that is an unwillingness to recognize the amount of not just hard work, but *intelligent* work, thoughtful work, even philosophical work that's required to do that kind of hard work. We were talking about archival history before. This is in some ways that kind of archival history. As I said,

our department has never asked for that. And now, when it's sometimes offered, it sometimes is on the verge of being rejected. And I just think that's a mistake. I don't do it, but I certainly recognize and want to admire the kind of people who have those capacities, interests, talents. They're laying out whole fields.

Lage: Yeah, they're the building ground for the next generation of historians.

05-00:31:04

Fass: Absolutely. And if we can't lay out the field, there won't be any history. And people who will theoretize in some ways are frequently—and this is ironic, I think—those for whom there are a lot of sources. And of course, maybe because there are so many sources, you're required to do selection. And the selection is sometimes guided theoretically. Your ability to feel confident about your selection can also be guided theoretically. And that's why I'm not surprised at all that it's often the historians of the more recent past that will use the theory. Having started out as a twentieth century historian myself, I know how difficult it is to just plow your way through what could be millions and millions of sources. But I think that this is a divide that is going to linger in this department, past my tenure here. And I have no way of predicting how it's going to fall out. What I hope is the case is that we can appreciate the different kinds of work that any department this size and of this importance has to do; that it can't be just a boutique history department. We can't afford that.

Lage: Well, you must make these arguments. [chuckles]

05-00:32:33

Fass: I try to.

Lage: Is it contentious? Is it lacking in civility?

05-00:32:41

Fass: I don't think so. I've been in some contentious meetings. The recent ones were contentious. I think the recent ones were not lacking in civility. I think what they were lacking is any real attempt to see that there is some justification on the other side. That's different. They were always civil, because we're composed of really, mostly civil people. There are only a few of us who really get angry. There was a time we had a lot more angry people than we have now. But I don't see the divide being healed, if you're asking. I don't see the divide being healed.

And I think it's the result—and again, one of these paradoxes—it's the result of cultural history having come in and having taken over the field, in many ways. So that whereas previously the contention had been to try to keep cultural history out, now that cultural history's taken over the field, it's like cultural history is the *only* way to do history—which I emphatically reject. I just think that's just basically wrong. And again, I'm a cultural historian.

Maybe it's my personal background, I don't know. But since I was an undergraduate, very attracted to logic and a kind of super-coherence, analytic coherence, I have tried to prevent myself from falling into that trap.

Lage: The trap of?

05-00:34:39

Fass: Of logic—

Lage: Oh, I see, I see.

05-00:34:42

Fass: —coherence, overtaking reality.

Lage: I see.

05-00:34:45

Fass: Because I think logic is the great deceiver. That if you *only* allow logic to take over, that is not the way the world operates. It doesn't operate by logical principles. I have no evidence for it [Lage laughs] in my life. So logic is a wonderful relief from, sometimes, the incoherence of reality.

Lage: The messiness.

05-00:35:10

Fass: The messiness. Yes, the messiness. And that's why we do what we do. Intellectuals need coherence. And therefore, we try to bring coherence and a kind of consistent meaning to things. But by overreaching, by making it *too* consistent, and too neat, we're losing the reality.

Lage: And that's what you think this over-reliance on theory is about.

05-00:35:33

Fass: I do. I do. I do. Because I just think history is messy. And the interpretation of history is messy. And I think theory allows you to bring some coherence—which again, is good, but within limits. Not so that it overcomes every other kind of historical endeavour, because then we're really going to get caught. And we will also become old-fashioned very quickly.

Lage: Because this won't last forever, probably.

05-00:36:03

Fass: Exactly. We need multiple places of methodological ferment in the department, because nothing lasts forever. No particular fad lasts forever, whether it's an archival fad or a social history fad or a cultural history. It just doesn't. Because it can't. History's constantly being informed by present day, not only methodological perspectives, but present day understandings. I just don't see that as a possibility. So I'd hate us to fall into that trap.

Lage: Did you have a very strong reaction to your article about social and cultural history?

05-00:36:46

Fass: My disappointment is that I had very little reaction. A few people wrote to me and told me they had come across the article and liked it very much. I distributed it to some of my colleagues, who liked it quite a lot. Robert Middlekauff liked it *a lot*. And I can't figure out whether there wasn't a strong reaction because I split the difference— Although I don't think I'm splitting the difference in that article, actually, because I go back to arguing very strongly that we have to keep our noses to the grindstone. I don't know.

Lage: Maybe they knew your views.

05-00:37:29

Fass: They probably did. They probably did. That's likely. Of course, the article was published in the *Journal of Social History*, so it's possible that the reason I didn't get any strong reactions is that people who read the *Journal of Social History* would not have disagreed with me; whereas truly absolute cultural historians wouldn't have been reading the *Journal of Social History*.

Lage: Yes, that's true. Now, in your most recent book, I believe, on global childhood,<sup>8</sup> your introduction is also very interesting, in talking about how the cultural turn influenced you.

05-00:38:10

Fass: Oh, as I've been trying to say, [laughs] I would be very unhappy if this interview suggested that I was anti-cultural history. I *couldn't* be. It's what I do. I'm just thinking about where history has to maintain its balance, that's all. But the cultural turn, as I say in *Children of a New World*, was fundamental to the development and flowering of childhood history. And the reason for that is actually very simple. Social history tried to open up different arenas, different groups, to historical study; they could not have opened up children's history. And when the attempt was made, it fell apart very quickly. And the reason for that is that social history required that people be heard in their own voices. And children are hard to hear in their own voices, historically, because they leave so few obvious records. There *are* records. And I think one of the things we've discovered in now plowing ahead with this field is that there are records that we can mine. But the cultural turn basically said that you don't have to hear all these groups in their own voices, that it's okay to hear them through the perspective of others, to see them through the lens of an adult camera—opening up an *enormous* pictorial record, for example—and that as long as we understood that we weren't hearing their voices, but we were

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<sup>8</sup> *Children of a New World: Society, Culture and Globalization*, NYU Press, 2006.

talking about *childhood*, that we had lots of texts. And suddenly, as I say in that introduction, it was like a screen lifted up, and that what social history had opened up, the desire to study these different groups, now allowed us to study this last group, which we could not have heard in their own voices because of all the limitations on that. So I am extremely happy about the cultural turn, because it turned over the possibility of this kind of history. And now it's a very flourishing field. We have a huge conference that's coming this summer, in children's history. And we have a journal and we have a major organization.

Lage: Which you've been president of.

05-00:40:47

Fass: Which I've been president of. And I feel very honored to have been able to help in cultivating this field. There are limitations, as there are in all historical work. But knowing that power, from even a Foucauldian point of view, is exercised within families, between parents and children, and that the symbolism of children in our political process is *so there*. And to think that we hadn't noticed this before! The metaphoric use of childhood, the constant invocation of childhood by politicians. As much as they invoke the city on the hill, they invoke our children. And that was true historically. It's been true for the last two centuries. Almost two centuries; say a century and a half.

Lage: So then it's kind of the idea of the child or of childhood.

05-00:41:31

Fass: And that needs to be studied, too. But what's interesting is, once we liberated childhood from the need to hear children in their own voices, many people began to actually hear children in their own voices, because they were able to use a little bit of that in the context of other things. And suddenly there were letters by children and there were notebooks by children and there are diaries, and of course, art, and photographs that children have taken. So there are a variety of things that children have done that we can actually hear them through. But it required the cultural turn before we could even discover the other [childhood], because there was a kind of too easy dismissal of the other, initially. So I just think that it made a world of difference. And some historians of childhood still, to this day, think that we're not really doing the history of children unless we're listening to their voices. So that hasn't completely gone away. And those things never completely go away. But I think it has been a very liberating thing. And all to the good. All to the good.

I think it puts us in a better position to judge—or not judge, as the case may be—what's happening to children in the rest of the world—which we have a tendency to do. Puts us in a better position to understand our own history, which has been full of miserable experiences and exploitative experiences, in terms of our children. We are not innocent of the kinds of things that are going on in the world today, in the West, even though we sometimes act as if we are.

Child prostitution, child labor, child exploitation of all kinds. Dickens didn't come out of nowhere, nor did Harriet Beecher Stowe. These were responses of a new sensibility, to what they were observing about children. And that's what's interesting. It's the new sensibility as it now observes children. And these are the kinds of things, actually, I've been very much interested in and that I've been writing about. So yes, there wouldn't have been a childhood history, at least as we know it now, without the cultural turn. And when I did the encyclopedia, which was three volumes—and this was in 2004, it was published, five years ago; it needs major revision now. Seriously. But we had three volumes.<sup>9</sup>

Lage: Because so much has been written and studied since?

05-00:44:02

Fass: Oh, my goodness! I'd say more than 70 percent of what's been done in the history of childhood has happened since then. History of childhood in China and the history of childhood in Japan and the history of childhood in Russia. A major book just came out in Russia, which got a featured review in the *American Historical Review*. So it's just happening. And I couldn't get anyone to write about Russian children when I began to do this.

Lage: Isn't that amazing, how that—

05-00:44:32

Fass: But just being able to kind of stake a claim to the territory and say, look, this is what's been done. It's uneven. There are big holes. But now that we know a field exists, go for it. And I think that's really what happens. I just feel that was a critical turning point for us to do that.

[I have also been working on the *Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*, in which I commissioned and edited twenty-seven articles on the subject. This volume examines the subject for an even more dramatic period of time, since antiquity, and traces its modern development. These articles are from important scholars on two continents and give a sense of how this field has exploded over the past decade and one half. The subjects covered include childhood in ancient Greece and Rome, in the Middle Ages, in the Enlightenment, and in Judaism and Christianity, as well as a wide variety of articles on subjects such as family, work, consumption, the state, social welfare, and war.—added during narrator review]

Lage: And is this a field that involves a lot of approaches?

05-00:44:58

Fass: Absolutely.

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<sup>9</sup> *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*, three volumes, Macmillan Reference, 2004.

Lage: The society. I forget the name of your society.

05-00:45:01

Fass: The society is interdisciplinary, the Society for the History of Children and Youth is interdisciplinary. And we look at children's health issues, children's literature—children writing literature and literature about children. We look at children in education. The school, of course, as a modern institution, really created with modern Western society, is a serious node for an examination of children. Children in politics; children's organizations; children in families, obviously; issues of gender in children.

Lage: And this global perspective, too. Is this an international society?

05-00:45:47

Fass: It's international. Before this meeting here in Berkeley, our last meeting was held in Sweden. Our next president, after the next one, is a Swedish historian. And this particular meeting, we made a serious effort to enlist people in Asian history, Latin American history, African history. So oh, yes, we see ourselves very much in global perspective. And I actually—

Lage: But what about historians from these other countries?

05-00:46:13

Fass: Oh, they're coming, too. Absolutely. We actually think that the history of childhood—and I've written about this<sup>10</sup>—is an excellent place to do this much more global, world, international history, because some of the questions that you ask about children are— Because the questions don't fit into traditional political time slots, necessarily. The children in World War II, it's interesting, but I wouldn't divide the history of childhood by World War I and World War II.

Lage: Right, not those traditional markers.

05-00:46:47

Fass: No, exactly. So there are different markers. And I think some of those markers are only meaningful in an international context, rather than within one culture. So the history of childhood allows you to break through some of those national boundaries, which of course, and in many ways, are artificial. The nation-state is an artificial creation. If you go back to ancient times, there is no nation-state. There are empires and there are local areas. So once you do the history of childhood, you really can liberate yourself from some of those assumptions that you have to study things within the nation-state. And there's my rebelliousness coming out all over again. I don't like to allow myself to be confined by those traditional categories.

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<sup>10</sup> "The World is at Our Door: Why Historians of Children and Childhood Should Open Up," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 1 (Winter 2008), 11-31.

Lage: Like nation-states.

05-00:47:35

Fass: Like nation-states.

Lage: Or history of a certain— Even though you are a historian of the United States, basically.

05-00:47:39

Fass: I am a historian of the United States.

Lage: Do you think if you were starting out today, you would define yourself differently?

05-00:47:47

Fass: I might. I might, in fact, define myself differently. At the time—and I talk about this in my memoir—I was not prepared to do European history, for all kinds of personal reasons. And I could have.

Lage: You were going to spend that year in Germany.

05-00:48:09

Fass: I was going to spend that year in Germany. I had good linguistic skills; they would've gotten better. And I had access to several languages that most people didn't know. But I couldn't. I somehow just couldn't. No one starts out as a historian at the age of sixty-two, which is what I'm going to be next week. At the end of this week, actually. So I couldn't start out now, and hard to say. But I would be starting out in a different context. And maybe I would define myself as looking at childhood across national boundaries—with certain limitations. I'm never going to read Chinese.

Lage: Would there be a place— [laughs] We're talking about "woulds," which I know aren't the best kind of questions, but just to get a better sense of the department now, would it be difficult to be hired if you came in as a historian of a big topic, rather than a place?

05-00:49:07

Fass: It would be easier now—because we've now had people who've done imperialism as studies and who have looked, certainly, across nation-states—but still unlikely. I think ten years from now is a different matter. So if I were starting out in graduate school now, I think it might be worth hooking yourself to that star. I don't expect that the next year or so, people will be hiring a lot across those boundaries. Although gender historians cross boundaries. And certainly, people who look at the African diaspora cross boundaries. So a lot of those areas, which were just being cultivated when I started in graduate school, or even before—gender wasn't being cultivated when I started in graduate school—those areas are now moving beyond boundaries. And I think it is because they broke through those boundaries that they're willing now to break through other boundaries, as well, including the nation-state boundaries.

And I say all the more power to them. Again, that doesn't mean I don't think we need to have histories of nation-states; we absolutely do.

Lage: We need big history departments. [laughs]

05-00:50:22

Fass: Well, that's true. That is a limitation, and resources are always a limitation. And that's part of what the fight is usually about.

Lage: That's right.

05-00:50:32

Fass: You have finite resources. But if I thought that was the *only* thing the fight was about, I wouldn't be so upset about it. I think sometimes the fight is actually about limited imaginations. [laughs]

Lage: Well, you mentioned to me when we first met, and not on the tape, that you thought the department was less innovative now—

05-00:50:52

Fass: I do.

Lage: —than it had been. Talk more about that.

05-00:50:55

Fass: Well, it's related to what I was just suggesting about the attempt at hegemony, because it hasn't succeeded. The attempt at hegemony of cultural history. Or the sense of superiority that some cultural historians seem to have, that only what they do is really important. And maybe it's a response to having been on the outside for a while, I don't know. I don't want to do what my good friend Bob Middlekauff calls nickel psychology. But I do think that one has to imagine beyond the boundaries of what you do.

Lage: So that's the lack of innovation.

05-00:51:39

Fass: And that's what I think the lack of innovation is. And I think to be able to imagine that your students will be doing things other than what you do, and to push them towards reaching for their own boundaries and moving them beyond their own boundaries, I think is what we should do, as graduate instructors. And I always take tremendous pride in my graduate students who have moved way beyond where I am. I *love* that. Because that's what we're supposed—

Lage: That's what you're there for.

05-00:52:09

Fass: —to encourage.

Lage: But you think there're those who are uncomfortable with it, who rein them in more?

05-00:52:16

Fass: Yes, I do think there are people uncomfortable with it. I think there are people uncomfortable— And there have always been. I think that was true of my colleague and good friend Jerry [Gerald] Feldman, that he was uncomfortable with history that was not like what he did. Not that he didn't read it. I think people often underestimated the degree of what he read. He did read it. But he was critical of it and felt more comfortable with the kinds of things that he was familiar with. But I have much younger colleagues who are not comfortable with reading different kinds of history. Clearly, we all have a stake in what we do. And I think maybe it's partially their passion about what they're doing and their stake in that that explains it, so I don't want to attribute bad motives. But there are mixed motives, I think. And you want the whole world to look like you. I have *never* wanted the whole world to look like me. Maybe because I've always been accustomed to the world not looking like me at all.

Lage: Right. [laughs] Well, that may be a personality characteristic, as you say. I think this is a good time to change our tape here.

05-00:53:40

Fass: Okay.

[Begin Audio File 6]

Lage: We're now on tape six. And we wanted to go back and talk a little bit about that nebulous field of departmental governance. Leadership, how it's exercised, how it's chosen.

06-00:00:32

Fass: This is a department that's governed much better than a lot of other places. I just spoke to a good friend of mine. I was giving a talk at Penn State University. And there, you basically choose a chairman for life. It's just awful.

Lage: Still?

06-00:00:51

Fass: Still. So the chairman—or chairwoman, for that matter—can go in there and exercise power, allocate resources, without very much input by anyone, except someone who really rattles her chain or his chain, forever. And from that perspective, this is a much, much more democratic department. At the same time, I know that when I first came in here—and this, again, I'm more than willing to say this was my own personality or whatever—this was a very paternalistically governed department. It had something to do with the fact that we overtly admired each other. So there was a kind of faith, good faith

that the people we admired would take good care of us. And for the most part, they did. They certainly took good care of me. I generally had no complaints.

It never occurred to me to be a chair of a department, so I didn't look into it too much. But others did. And there were others who were not so happy about the fact that— I'm thinking of Beth [Mary Elizabeth Berry], who for many years, felt that— She has a much clearer sense of politics, in the raw and in the traditional sense, than I do, I think. And she felt there were all kinds of goodies that were being distributed that had to do with who the chair was and things like that, and it riled her. Now, maybe because she's too attuned to politics, she was much more upset by things that I just didn't even notice. But I felt for most of my time here, that people were rewarded effectively.

Lage: And what kinds of things would that be? Granting leaves or choosing people to be chairs or—

06-00:02:59

Fass: [over Lage] Well, no. When I first came, you could not get a leave more often than— You had to teach for three years and then you could get a leave. That disappeared. As the possibility of getting leaves became more difficult and as there were fewer and fewer, literally, grants around and fellowships, basically people got leaves whenever they got money or were able to support themselves. And that remains in place today, to a degree that I think is unfair and unfortunate. I think there are some people who get off all the time and teach less. But we gave up on that particular— No, we operate on the basis of merits. What goes into the merits, how the letter is written, how much emphasis is put on teaching, how much emphasis is put on citizenship, those things are within the realm of the chair to decide. Who comes up for promotion, when they come up for promotion, that's largely within the realm of the chair, with the assistance of the personnel committee. And some people were riled that they were not on the personnel committee. Again, I didn't care. I was eventually put on the personnel committee and discovered that they made very few decisions, in fact. And that most of the decisions are still made by the chair.

Lage: Ah. Interesting.

06-00:04:16

Fass: And I was also a vice chair twice, for curriculum, and I did my work in the curriculum area. I was not the vice chair for personnel, so I guess I wasn't included in that. But again, I never found much to complain about. Until once—and this was under the administration of Reggie Zelnik—and I felt I was being bullied, when I was a member of a hiring committee. And I was furious. Precisely because I felt that when we are given a committee assignment, it's our job to do our work, to find the best person in that field, together with your committee, and to put them forward. And I didn't think it was the chair's role to in any way interfere in that, that that had to be based on

our considerations of merit. Maybe I was naïve. Maybe I hadn't experienced someone quite as strong as Reggie before. But we had a *terrific* falling out about that. Really a terrific falling out. Which still hurts, because I truly felt that my own independence on this committee was being undermined.

Lage: What were the motives for putting pressure on you?

06-00:05:39

Fass: He thought we should hire someone who did a particular kind of history. And I thought that person who he had in mind was not a good enough historian for our department.

Lage: So this was not a gender issue or a race issue?

06-00:05:52

Fass: It was related to things related to that, but it was not someone I thought was good enough. And I'm absolutely persuaded that I was right, as the subsequent career of this person has demonstrated. And I was just really, really angry. Because I felt that went against what I understood departmental governance is about. I never interfered with his work; he shouldn't interfere with mine. But I also discovered as a result of that experience, that chairs can, and apparently do, sometimes oversee these kinds of hirings. And I'm still saddened when I think about that, that there are political issues that enter into the hiring, and those political issues may be taking place *entirely* behind a closed door, that we don't know about.

Lage: So you might not have been aware.

06-00:06:52

Fass: Exactly, that I might not have been aware of. In either direction. Either people unfairly treated because they were women or minorities or whatever; or the opposite, that people felt we have to give this person a chance, and therefore, regardless of the quality of the work. And that, I have never felt was appropriate. I do and have always felt it was appropriate for an extra little bit of attention to be given if you're looking for more women or you're looking for more African Americans or you're looking for an Asian historian, who we still don't have in American history, for example.

Lage: Asian American.

06-00:07:32

Fass: Asian American. But that that can not be the primary consideration. I think that's patronizing in the worst way and, ultimately, undermining. You don't want to hire people on two different bases, because those people will always feel that difference in the department. That's a terrible experience. You want to feel like you've been hired on the same level as everybody else. The department's a much too intimate place for that to happen, as I know. So I thought that was really bad interference. And as you say—

Lage: And did you win?

06-00:08:14

Fass: I did win, at great cost. At great cost. Because as I also discovered, Reggie was manipulating some other members of my committee. And so the committee had a falling out. It was an extremely painful experience.

Lage: My goodness. But do you think that it was an unusual experience, or it was more—

06-00:08:43

Fass: That's what I don't know.

Lage: You don't.

06-00:08:47

Fass: And I refuse to let it make me cynical, so I'm going to assume it was a very unusual experience. If I wanted to be cynical, I'd have plenty of things to be cynical about, and so I don't dwell on those things. And I don't mean in the department, I mean in general. So I try to give people the benefit of the doubt. I'll just assume that this was an unusual experience, because I wasn't the only one to have it. There was quite a lot of unhappiness, with people feeling that Reggie put the screws on too tightly. And Reggie was a brilliant, fascinating person, with an *enormous* personality. And so I think it would've been easy to kind of overbear occasionally, and I think he did that. To the detriment of the department, I think. A good chair, as I've learned over the years, is someone who's very cool and who lets the department, for the most part, operate on its own and pulls—

Lage: That's what I've heard in interviewing chairs, that they really have no power. [they laugh]

06-00:10:06

Fass: Well, it depends. The power is there, if they want to exercise it. And I think a good chair doesn't exercise it.

Lage: Doesn't exercise power, but lets his committees work.

06-00:10:18

Fass: Precisely. And that allows for a good feeling. Everyone thinks that he or she is doing what they need to do, they all have their own little bailiwick, they happily do the work in the department, and there's lots of work to do in the department. If there's an overbearing chair, then there's enormous unhappiness. And there was enormous unhappiness during that period of time. And again, Reggie was, in all kinds of other ways, a great member of the department. But I thought he was a terrible chair, to be very honest with you. And I've had some wonderful chairs. And those are the ones where you hardly know they're there. They walk on cats' feet.

Lage: But do they choose the head of the committee to do the hiring search and—

06-00:11:12

Fass: Yes, they do. They do make those choices.

Lage: So they do have—

06-00:11:15

Fass: Oh, absolutely! I think it's nonsense to believe that the chair doesn't have power. As I say, some chairs can exercise it with a much more light touch than others. But a chair does have a lot of power over personnel matters, but more than just personnel matters. The chair has power in terms of the staff. And when Reggie was the chair, the staff was *very* unhappy. They were just miserable. Despite Reggie's kind of efflorescent personality. So everyone was miserable. And the less personality in a chair, the better.

Lage: [laughs] Why no women as chair until Beth Berry, very recently?

06-00:12:02

Fass: It's actually a good question. And I don't have a ready answer. I do think the other power that the chair has is basically to appoint his successor.

Lage: Oh. By recommending a successor to the dean.

06-00:12:17

Fass: Yes. Absolutely. And I don't think any dean would go with a chair that didn't pass muster with the previous chair. So a chair might not make an outright recommendation, but could say, of these three possibilities, yes, yes, no. So the chair has that. And I think that that may— There was—and Beth will, no doubt tell you about this—a kind of clique in the department, where this passing on of chairs became part of that. And I think the chairs feel they have a responsibility to maintain the department and are fearful of letting it fall into hands of people who might be destructive. And I think that's a mistake. I said that, actually, at that time, in the department. There should have been more leeway allowed earlier, to the younger members of the department. And I think that would've been better.

Lage: Instead of passing it on to one of your own generation.

06-00:13:27

Fass: Absolutely. I definitely agree. And I think if that had happened, it would've been more likely that a woman would've been appointed at that time. Because the women tended to be of the younger generation.

Lage: Sure.

06-00:13:39

Fass: So I think that's maybe my best answer to why there hasn't been a woman until now. And that is that chairs tended to pass things on. And they look for certain characteristics in the chair.

Lage: Like?

06-00:13:56

Fass: It's a good question, because I would not have described Reggie as having those characteristics. But Reggie became chair because he was the vice chair when David Keightley had his heart attack. And so he became chair, and then he was continued as chair. He was continued, to be voted in as chair. I'm not convinced he would've been voted in on his own.

Lage: Did he have an agenda, do you think?

06-00:14:23

Fass: Probably. And I think that's not a good thing. I think you have to let the department define its agenda. But beyond that, I think it's this big personality issue. And so I think that's probably why there haven't been women. And that is, certain kinds of characteristics. And maybe there is still this sense that women are too emotional and that women can't see the bigger picture.

Lage: Now, that's not saying much for the—

06-00:14:59

Fass: Which is totally nonsense, which is completely nonsense. But one never knows. I'm just—

Lage: You're just supposing.

06-00:15:08

Fass: I'm just supposing here.

Lage: Has there ever been a women's caucus, a sense that they have common interests?

06-00:15:16

Fass: No, there has not. There has not. The closest that we ever came— And this was when there were three of us. Lynn [Hunt] had left, I think. Beth Berry, Diane Clemens and I had dinner together a couple of times, but it wasn't a caucus. And it was more on Beth's initiative, because she really did want a caucus. Beth liked caucusing, Beth likes political things. She wanted to do a caucus of the younger members of the department, too. And I just have never been inclined in that direction. But as I look back on it, maybe it was a mistake. On the other hand, I never felt like I was missing out on anything. I was able to do *my* work, I was able to teach *my* classes, I was able to write *my* books, in ways that I felt was never interfered with. And that's what I thought I was supposed to do, as a scholar/intellectual.

Lage: And what the department's supposed to create an atmosphere for.

06-00:16:21

Fass: Yes, precisely. What the department was supposed to allow me to do. And so I never felt the need for any of the other stuff. I have to say one more thing. I'm sitting in my third office while I was here. When I was first here, I was upstairs on the main floor in Dwinelle, and it was a very busy corridor. And there was a lot more kind of informal caucusing that took place up there. People knocked on your door. But I never even got to open my mail, it was so busy. People were just always in and out of your office.

Lage: Your fellow professors?

06-00:16:58

Fass: Professors, professors, yeah. We'll talk about students in a moment. And I felt that was a little much. But I never complained about it. But after my daughter was born, Bill Bouwsma, who was chair at the time, called me into his office and said, "I'm wondering whether you might not like to have a quieter place."

Lage: Without your even mentioning it?

06-00:17:20

Fass: I never mentioned it. And he asked me if I would like Win Jordan's office. Now, I wanted Win Jordan's office for all kinds of reasons. Win had hired me; I had tremendous admiration for his work as a historian and for him. I really admired him personally. And so I said, "Absolutely." So I came down here and I was in 2409, and I was next to Gerry Caspary, who became one of our *very* good friends. And actually, Peggy Anderson was across the hall, and then Susanna Elm moved in on this hallway, as well. And I liked it down here. It was quieter and a little out of the way of the developments in the department. And maybe I lost touch a little bit with that kind of semi-caucusing gossip, and, what do you think and what do you not think. And I'm not going to say I never regretted it, because there were moments when I suppose I did. But it was fine. And I stayed out of those things.

Lage: Was Bill Bouwsma wanting that office for someone else? [laughs] Or was he perceptive about your needs?

06-00:18:34

Fass: Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no. Bibi had just been born. And I think he said, given that you have a young child, you may just need a quiet place here, as opposed to not having one at home. No, he was being extremely thoughtful, actually. And while I'm speaking about Bill, I want to say one more thing. When I was pregnant with my son Charlie, I had terrible morning sickness. Terrible morning sickness. And my husband would pick me up—I may have said this before—every time after my lecture, with the car outside the office, with a pot in the car.

Lage: [laughs] Oh, you didn't tell me that detail.

06-00:19:14

Fass: Yes. Oh, yes. And actually, giving the lecture, the usual adrenalin rush prevented that from happening at the time. But I did ask my colleague Bill Bouwsma to change lecture rooms with me, because his lecture room was close to a bathroom and a water fountain. And the lecture room I was in was *very* far from that. And I said, "Bill, if I could just change with you." And he, without blinking, gave me his *much* better room for my class. And knowing that the water fountain was there and knowing that the bathroom was near, made all the difference to me. And actually, also helped so that just when I had done a few—

Lage: Make your getaway. [laughs]

06-00:20:00

Fass: And make my getaway. And every single time, I would then throw up in the car.

Lage: Oh, my goodness!

06-00:20:06

Fass: Yes. But while I was lecturing, it was great. I had terrible morning sickness. I mean, really intense morning sickness. Lost nine pounds. It was very intense. But that was the kind of things they did. Now, I don't know, and I will never know—and frankly, I don't want to know—whether Bill then said, Paula is pregnant and therefore, she needs this special kind of consideration and therefore, maybe we shouldn't hire any more women because they need these special considerations. But it never occurred to me that he would say that. Never. Because I was never treated that way.

Lage: Are you implying that maybe he did?

06-00:20:52

Fass: No, I don't want to imply that. Maybe if it was someone else in the office, they might. I don't want to imply that. I never had that experience. I never did. And so as I said, I did my stuff. And I was grateful to be able to do it at a place like Berkeley.

Lage: Yeah. Now, one other kind of political question. What is the politics of getting a chair—not becoming chair, getting a chair—and all the goodies that come with a chair in the department?

06-00:21:31

Fass: I think you just have to be productive. I think that's really what it—

Lage: But who decides?

06-00:21:35

Fass: Oh, the department makes that decision.

Lage: Oh, the department as a whole.

06-00:21:37

Fass: When a chair comes open, if the chairman of the department decides that the chair should be filled at that time—so the chairman still has that power, too—they put out a call to the members of the department to make nominations for chairs.

Lage: I see.

06-00:21:56

Fass: And then a chair committee is appointed to go through the nominees that have been made, and they decide on who does the best work, is the most productive, whatever. That can be very contentious, actually.

Lage: I would think so.

06-00:23:23

Fass: Some of the most contentious things in the department have come at those points, having to do with chairs.

Lage: And then again, do we see this divide about the type of history? It must come into play then.

06-00:22:28

Fass: I have to think about that. I have to think about that. [pause] I haven't seen that. I haven't seen that. Some people argue that it has become a popularity contest. And if that's true, it would be very unfortunate. There's always a little of that, because you have to be nominated by your colleagues. And many of your colleagues don't know the work that you've done. The senior people in the department who would be chair worthy have often published many things. And junior colleagues can make the selection and assistant professors, and it's unlikely those people are familiar with all the work of all the senior colleagues.

Lage: They haven't gone through the tenure process.

06-00:23:24

Fass: Yeah, exactly. They haven't read it. So a certain amount of popularity, whom they know, who looks good, may enter into it. You can't take that out of it. And it is possible that in that context, some senior people are overlooked, in terms of the nominations. I wouldn't be entirely surprised. I do think that once the chair committee is appointed, I think they're very good about reading everything of those who have been nominated, and not making just an appointment on the basis of popularity. So I think the people who eventually

get chairs, keeping in mind that they have to have been pre-selected by the— There are people who may not have been ever nominated.

Lage: They have to be nominated by someone in the department.

06-00:24:13

Fass: In the department, and then selected. So it's not impossible that some people have been bypassed. But it is certainly the case that the people who get the chairs are usually worthy of the chairs. So I think that's a pretty good— Well, there're going to be resentments, especially the junior colleagues, where they forget how much the senior people had to go through to get to where they are, how much work they've done, et cetera. And they say, oh, well, these people don't do as much work as we do and they're getting higher salaries anyway, and why should they have the chairs, in addition? And I've personally never felt that, but I can understand it. You work very hard, as an assistant and associate professor. Those are the hardest times of your life. And you look at the senior people and say, "Well, what makes them so special?" But they've had years of that. [they laugh] Speaking as a senior person.

Lage: Yes, now you can look at it from that point of view.

06-00:25:13

Fass: Yeah, I can. I would like to talk about students, if I may.

Lage: Okay, I think that's very good.

06-00:25:18

Fass: I have taught thousands of students in this university, and they have always been a wonderful part of my life. And I include there not just graduate students—who obviously are wonderful and you see their careers develop, they become your friends; I have an entire shelf of books of graduate students, my graduate students, who have published books; it has the place of honor in my house, so I'm very proud of them—but also undergraduate students, whom I've met and whose lives I've become part of, and who tell me about their lives and tell me about their pasts.

Lage: And does that happen a lot, in this big university?

06-00:26:03

Fass: It happens to me. Maybe because I'm the kind of person who's interested in them. I'm fascinated by the different ethnic groups, I'm fascinated by their different backgrounds. I have an unusual background; I'm interested in unusual backgrounds that are a part of other people. And they do come, and they tell me things. So I have felt that that's been one of the highlights of being here at Berkeley, having the range of different students with their very different experiences, and learning about them. And opening myself up enough so that they're willing to open themselves up to me, too. I've told them about my immigrant past, and so I hear a *lot* of immigrant stories. And I

always value them tremendously. I always feel, if I have had a role in their lives, very good about that. I went to Blue Camp, or maybe it was Gold Camp, a few years ago. Maybe it was ten years ago. I was giving lectures.

Lage: This is at the Lair of the Bear.

06-00:27:08

Fass: Exactly.

Lage: The alumni camp.

06-00:27:09

Fass: And I was giving lectures. I don't know if you know what it's like. You share meals at these long tables, and I had several people come over to me and tell me that they had been students in my class. They reminded me of my lectures, and they told me that I had this, that effect on them. And it was just the most amazing experience.

Lage: That's very rewarding.

06-00:27:31

Fass: Because you stand up there—and I'm talking here about large lecture courses, not the seminars—and there're all these, sometimes hundreds of faces. And you do ask yourself, what difference can I possibly make to them? And you don't, to many of them. So to get that kind of feedback, or have people write you notes and say, thank you for doing this and that— I do think that I've let them in on my enthusiasm for history and I've been able to generate some of that in them. And I've made them aware that they're historical actors, and I've made them think about themselves in their historical context. And that's a very satisfying thing.

Lage: Now, how have they, possibly, changed the way you teach or what you teach?

06-00:28:26

Fass: Oh, first of all, my students are constantly affecting my lectures. [chuckles] When I first started lecturing, if I looked out at the faces of students and saw puzzlement, bewilderment, I'd stop, and I'd go over what I said or I'd ask them if something was unclear. So it became clear to me that the interaction with students was constantly important. I wanted them to understand. I think I said at one point that my lectures have a kind of mathematical quality; they build on each other. And if they don't understand this, they're really not going to understand, not *fully* understand what I'm saying here. So I've always interacted with them, even in class.

Now I've moved beyond that, and I ask them questions. So that even in a class of 150 or 200, I will stop and I'll ask them a question. I'll ask them, what do they think about this? So that my lectures, as they've evolved, are very interactive. There's not this barrier. And I think they've made my lectures

better lectures, so that I know what to cut out, what's not interesting. And as I shape them over time, I know what needs more explication. I know what affects them and how to tailor things so that what it is that I have to teach—which I won't change, necessarily—can be taught more effectively by using an anecdote or finding an individual to ballast it with. So absolutely, what I teach is tremendously affected by their interest. And I'm not going to say the topics I teach, because those we really have to decide. Students don't know that. Graduate students, I sometimes ask them, what would you like a seminar on? But that's at the graduate level. On an undergraduate level, I think that's harder.

Lage: Well, you already incorporate immigrant groups and—

06-00:30:27

Fass: Oh, absolutely.

Lage: —all of that, but I would think—

06-00:30:30

Fass: Oh, I now incorporate more immigrant groups.

Lage: —a school like this, there would be much more—

06-00:30:33

Fass: Oh, absolutely. I've revised my lectures. I always revise my lectures.

Lage: So that's [affecting the] topic.

06-00:30:40

Fass: Oh, yes, that's right. I meant the general topic of the lecture course. But my lectures are constantly being revised. So I've now included a lecture on California. Because at a certain point, I said, "I'm talking to a group of Californians. How can I not give a lecture on California?" And I hadn't, initially. I was an East Coast person. But now I give a lecture on California. And I also give a lecture on Asian Americans, and the Southwest, Hispanic Americans, which I had not given before. So I've opened up the aperture, definitely, of what I teach, in terms of the immigrant groups. And I will alter my lectures in response to those kinds of things all the time. Yes, definitely.

Lage: Do you think that a public university such as Berkeley teaches history differently?

06-00:31:36

Fass: I hope so.

Lage: [laughs] You've written about how the students have affected the school system.

06-00:31:42

Fass:

Absolutely. That's what I'm saying. I hope so. Now, I think there's always a very subtle calculus that takes place. And that is, we have an obligation as teachers to teach something to students. We can't just take our cues from them. We know more than they do. We know *a whole lot of things* more than they do. And so tailoring it, to a certain extent, to the audience is an absolutely appropriate thing to do. But we also need to take them beyond what they already know. We don't want to just teach them what they know. I mean, why come? But we have to find ways, we have to find hooks that will make them want to learn more history and want to come to you more and explore more things. That's our obligation. And as a public university— I think *any* university has to take account of the students that are there in their classrooms. Absolutely. That's one of the reasons I think we should have an Asian American historian here. I really think we have that as an absolute necessity. It's a real, experienced history. So that's a battle I've been trying to fight.

Lage:

Another one. [laughs] Have you been involved in the American Cultures initiative—

06-00:33:04

Fass:

Yes. I was on the American Cultures committee several times. I was on the committee that approved of courses for American Cultures. So yes, I have done that. I have to say, I'm not so sure it's working anymore.

Lage:

Now, why?

06-00:34:02

Fass:

I think it's being blown off. It's one thing to take it seriously and to know that you have an obligation to incorporate some evidence of your awareness of the students at the university; it's another thing to follow some bureaucratic process. And everything gets bureaucratized after a while.

So we'll see. I haven't kept up. I was part of that seminar one summer, and I did tailor a couple of courses to it. My childhood course is part of it. When I tried to submit my—this is a peeve on my part, actually—I submitted my American social history class to the committee on American Cultures, and it was rejected. It was rejected because I didn't lay out in detail all these different groups and tell exactly how many hours— And I felt that truly was bureaucratic, and I wasn't going to do it. I was not going to change my course for a bureaucratic standard. I would change my course in response to my students, but not for a bureaucratic standard. So the course never got approved for the American Cultures requirement. But the childhood history class is approved for American Cultures.

Lage:

Because it probably more definitely deals with the different immigrant groups or whatever.

06-00:35:34

Fass: I don't remember why. The approval was done, actually, through UGIS [Undergraduate and Interdisciplinary Studies], and they took care of all of that.

Lage: And there was the American Institution requirement you had something to do with; I saw on your vita.

06-00:35:49

Fass: I was also a member of that committee on the American Institutions requirement. I think we no longer do that. There is no longer an American Institutions requirement.

Lage: Maybe American Cultures might've replaced it?

06-00:36:03

Fass: No, it's not at all the same thing. The American Institutions requirement was a kind of civics requirement. And those requirements always address particular issues at particular times. And I think the American Cultures requirement was a good thing at the time that it came up.

Lage: And probably was more energized in the early days.

06-00:36:27

Fass: Oh, it was energized precisely because that was an issue. But now, not so much. But yes, I've done a lot of various things for the university.

Lage: Yeah. Let's go to one more, since we're on that. The Academic Senate, particular the statewide body, has that been something of note, something of interest that we should record?

06-00:36:54

Fass: I was interested in it. As you know, I'm interested in academic institutions, their evolution, their history. I do think that Berkeley has a remarkable history of democratic participation. I was told that when I first came here, and I always admired that, and I think it's an important thing to keep up. And so I became involved in the Academic Senate, as a result. It's not so clear to me anymore that, in fact, we had that much say so.

Lage: You think that faculty governance has been weakened over the years?

06-00:37:33

Fass: Oh, I have no question that faculty governance has been weakened over the years. Even over the years that I've participated, it has *manifestly* become weaker. There's *much* more power that's in administrative hands.

Lage: In the chancellor or the statewide?

06-00:37:49

Fass: Both. The statewide has taken over, in the course of time that I've been here. But even the chancellor now makes a lot more decisions that in the past were more slowly developed from within the faculty. But I just think that governance matters; we get decisions at the end and—in the senate—the amount that we actually can do about them is limited. The chancellor appoints more and more ad hoc committees, which are outside of the standing committees of the senate. The standing committees of the senate have certain terrain that they have some control over, and the chancellor is required to consult with them. But a lot more kinds of things are just being taken care of more efficiently from the center. It is more efficient.

Lage: Yeah, no one ever said it was efficient to have faculty governance. [laughs]

06-00:38:48

Fass: Yeah. No, it wasn't efficient. But despite all that, I'm glad it's there. And I think that it can be re-energized at the drop of a hat. The faculty knowing that it's there means that if something truly egregious happened, we can call a senate meeting. Any one of us can call a senate meeting. And I think that's a good thing, and if there was something really serious— But there has been, not a tendency, a strong trend towards centralization. And with that, there's less and less that goes on in the senate.

Lage: More like a sandbox? They used to accuse the ASUC of being a sandbox.

06-00:39:33

Fass: It's not quite a sandbox. There are some strong personalities and there are some people who care a lot about the senate. I don't think you're going to completely take the power away from it yet. But it's harder. On the statewide level— You know I was involved in the creation of Merced.

Lage: I didn't know that, no.

06-00:40:02

Fass: I was on the dean and provost selection committee.

Lage: For the site selection?

06-00:40:10

Fass: Not for the site selection, for the appointment of the dean and the provost.

Lage: Oh, the appointment of the dean.

06-00:40:14

Fass: I was on another committee I no longer remember, and I was on an appointment committee that made the decision for the first appointment in history there, which was a very important appointment. So I have been involved in Merced—with some mixed feelings, because the other thing that I've experienced over the course of my time here is that Berkeley has become

a less significant campus. It was Berkeley and then all the others, with the exception of UCLA. UCLA was already a very important place when I arrived. But all the others weren't. And all of the development of the UC system—and it is an admirable system—has come at the expense of Berkeley. You can't build things up without losing other things.

Lage: If you had unlimited budget, perhaps, but when you don't—

06-00:41:12

Fass: We're back to the financial issues, yes. We don't have an unlimited budget. We now share our library among all these schools. It's one library. And so there's never anything on the shelf. And in the senate, specifically, we're one among ten campuses. And all delegates have an equal vote.

Lage: In the statewide senate.

06-00:41:34

Fass: Absolutely. In the statewide. And we're always outvoted.

Lage: There's a lot of resentment towards Berkeley, I've noticed.

06-00:41:41

Fass: A lot of resentment towards Berkeley. And I've experienced that because I've several times been on the statewide senate, the university-wide senate. And we find ourselves *very frequently* in the minority on those issues, whether it has to do with how students should be admitted, has to do with budgetary matters. It's a serious matter. And increasingly, as that happens, Berkeley loses more and more power, because these issues do get— They're involved in governance. And so that's why I say I had mixed feelings about appointing yet another campus, clearly a weaker campus than we are. And other campuses have their own concerns. Irvine does not have the same concerns that Berkeley has, and Riverside does not have the same concerns that Berkeley has. So it is a mixed blessing. And I know our past president talked about the power of ten, but there's also a declension in power when there's ten. While there're great strengths to being part of a large system, and we have an obligation, as one of the ten campuses, to teach to members of the entire California community—and I absolutely uphold that—Berkeley has lost some of its glow and its power, over the course of these thirty-five years.

Lage: Some of its star power.

06-00:43:22

Fass: Absolutely, it's lost some of its star power.

Lage: Are there issues that you found yourself outvoted on? I'm wondering what kind of issues Berkeley—

06-00:43:35

Fass: I'm trying to remember. I wish I had thought about this before I came here, because there were distinctly issues. But I honestly just don't remember them right now. I'm sure as soon as we stop, I'll remember some of them. But there were quite a number of issues where we were seriously outvoted. Anyway.

Lage: Did you represent a vote here at Berkeley?

06-00:44:13

Fass: Yes, a vote at Berkeley.

Lage: So you would be taking a position that had been decided here.

06-00:44:15

Fass: Yes. When the votes are taken, there are a certain number of people, depending on the size of the campus, that— representatives from each campus. And when there's a vote, I become one of five votes, say, from the Berkeley campus. And we can take individual votes. We tend to caucus ahead of time, but we've also been known to vote separately about whatever issue it is.

Lage: But did you vote on your own opinion? Or are you representing a previous vote?

06-00:44:48

Fass: Oh, we are representing Berkeley. And obviously, we can have different opinions on how best to represent Berkeley. There was recently a vote about the new admissions policy, on which there was a division in the Berkeley contingent. But usually, it's pretty united about these kinds of issues. And there will be individual votes by the one representative from Merced and the eight representatives from UCLA and the two representatives from Santa Cruz.

Lage: But you said earlier that every campus has the same vote.

06-00:45:34

Fass: Well, that's not entirely the case. When we vote, we vote—

Lage: Does Berkeley get five and Merced one?

06-00:45:41

Fass: Yes, we do have a larger number, that's true.

Lage: Based on size.

06-00:45:44

Fass: But if you add up all of the non-UCLA, non-Berkeley, they're *much* bigger than we are. And so if there are issues where the smaller, somewhat weaker campuses see an advantage, at the cost of the stronger campuses, they will

outvote us. And they have outvoted us. So that's something that can definitely happen. This is one of the reasons—I should just say this—that there were moves, and have been moves over the last ten years by members of the Berkeley community, including members of the Academic Senate, to privatize the university campus. To go our own way.

Lage: I've heard that from UCLA. But I didn't know it was a seriously considered here.

06-00:46:31

Fass: Also here. Considered in both places. For the same reason. And UCLA may actually pull it off, because their endowments are fantastic and they come out of that very wealthy community down there. But we have often talked about it, because there are certain kinds of matters that we— Our vote is diffused into this larger vote. And there are those who think since we only take a certain proportion of our budget from the state at this point, and that we should just let go.

Lage: So it would be seceding.

06-00:47:11

Fass: It would be seceding.

Lage: But also giving up state support.

06-00:47:16

Fass: Yes, and that's the calculation that some people have made. You do get state support, but there's also money that goes into other campuses that we pick up. So if there is support— I remember Mary Ann Mason talking about this. If we get certain kinds of monies into the graduate faculty, some of that money goes to the other schools. So it's not so clear that we would be losing. But I think the calculation has been made that we are not going to try that. But it reappears, because of this loss of autonomy on certain kinds of issues.

Lage: Have you noticed the ads that UCLA is running?

06-00:48:03

Fass: Oh, my goodness, [Lage laughs] have I noticed it! How can you miss them in the *New York Times*? Entire—

Lage: Two pages every day.

06-00:48:08

Fass: Every day. Every day. And as one of my former graduate students says to me— She's in advertising and marketing. She had excellent jobs as an academic and decided not to do it. She said, "We are our own worst enemy. We do not know how to market ourselves." And we have allowed others, like the *San Francisco Chronicle*, to define us, rather than to define ourselves, as UCLA is doing, for example, in that advertising campaign.

Lage: And [University President Mark] Yudof says he wants to do that. He's hired a marketing firm.

06-00:48:45

Fass: Yeah, but why doesn't Berkeley do it? Yudof would represent the entire university, but we've got campus issues at stake. Especially when it comes to the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The *San Francisco Chronicle* is not looking over the shoulder of the University of California at San Diego; they're looking over *our* shoulder and UCSF.

Lage: And the system.

06-00:49:06

Fass: And the system, but we get the flak.

Lage: Right.

06-00:49:10

Fass: So the fact is that we are not doing ourselves a service by not going out there and saying we are helping to make California's economy, its society, its civility, its level of education—all of those things. We're fundamental to that. But we're not doing all that.

Lage: We may go into that after the election tomorrow. [a special election in California to vote on budget reform measures]

06-00:49:35

Fass: We may well have no choice but going into it after the election tomorrow, because it looks like the measures are going to lose.

Lage: Okay, now, what have we left out? We haven't covered everything that I'm sure there is to cover on your research and writing. We haven't even mentioned *Kidnapped*.<sup>11</sup>

06-00:49:53

Fass: No, we have not mentioned *Kidnapped*.

Lage: Would you have energy? We've talked a lot about the others.

06-00:49:59

Fass: We did.

Lage: Maybe not in great depth. Would you have energy to talk some about *Kidnapped*?

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<sup>11</sup> *Kidnapped: A History of Child Abduction in the United States*, Oxford University Press, 1997.

06-00:50:03

Fass: Just for a little. I'm getting tired and it's getting late.

Lage: We have ten minutes left on this tape.

Fass: Ten minutes. You ask me a question.

Lage: I have a question. It may not relate to *Kidnapped*. But we didn't put this on the tape, that when your children were born, you stopped traveling for a time.

06-00:50:21

Fass: I did.

Lage: And that affected, in part, the kind of work you did.

06-00:50:25

Fass: Yes, I did stop traveling for a time. Again, these are obviously very personal, but I was terrified of flying. I was afraid that something would happen to me. And as much as I was concerned about never seeing my children again, I think I was even more concerned that my children would not have a mother. And so I didn't fly. A couple of times we went across the country—once by car, once by train—with the kids. So I couldn't *completely* not go across the country. My father was across the country, Jack's family was across the country. We wanted the kids to be there, et cetera. But I had a very difficult time. My anxieties came out in the flying. It was partially related, as I now realize, to the fact that when my mother was dying, I was flying back and forth. And I did not know, the last three times, whether she would still be alive when I arrived there. In my mind, I made the association between mother's dying and flying, and I couldn't divest myself of it. So I carried it over.

I did then try to find ways of doing research that didn't require my looking at, for example, the New York City high school archives, that I did when I was pregnant with Bibi, or the archives in Washington, D.C., that I did for *Outside In*. And so I started looking at the kind of cultural representations of kidnapping. I was concerned about kidnapping. It came right out of my gut, as I say; I was afraid of my children being taken. And it was a terrible time, where the news media were *totally irresponsible*. Every time there was *any sense* that someone had been taken, regardless of what the source was or the cause, there was a big issue made on television. So they had created this frenzy, on the part of parents, that their children were totally unsafe.

Lage: Everyone was having them fingerprinted and—

06-00:52:37

Fass: Having them fingerprinted, having their pictures taken, registries—just all kinds of things. I, as an anxious mother, participated in the anxiety. And I decided I was going to find out whether there was a history of kidnapping in the United States or whether this was something new, that had just happened;

and if so, what and why. And so I started digging back. Digging, digging, digging. Since I was basically dealing with public representations, I found this first case, in 1874, of Charley Ross. And I became absolutely *addicted* to this case. I needed to find everything there was to find out about this case. It was one of the most fascinating research experiences of my entire life. My son's name is Charlie, too, by the way. People ask me, did you name him after Charley Ross? [Lage laughs] And I say, never in a million years, would I have done anything like that. Because Charley Ross never came back. But the case totally fascinated me. And once it did, I knew I was going to write a history of child kidnapping. But trying to figure out how to strategize it, how to do it, was not at all easy, for all kinds of reasons. We still don't know how many children were ever kidnapped, because the United States doesn't keep records. We're dependent for these things on individual police departments, individual localities. Even the states didn't collect records. And kidnapping wasn't even considered anything more than a misdemeanor until the Charley Ross case. So until 1874, it was a misdemeanor, like stealing someone's purse.

Lage: [laughs] That says something about children in society.

06-00:54:27

Fass:

Well, it says a lot of things, also about the nature of our police force and law, et cetera. So Charley Ross was a truly remarkably important case, for all kinds of reasons. As I say in the book, it set the paradigm for all subsequent kidnappings, both in terms of the way the police dealt with it, the way the media covered it—not both, many—the way families responded to it, the way even kidnap notes were presented, right? It became really a defining case. This is my truly cultural history, because it was a culturally defining case. But then trying to decide, even after 1874, which cases to choose was not so easy. So I did an enormous amount of research and tried to find strategic cases that demonstrated the trajectory over time, of what was going on.

I moved then from kidnapping for ransom, including Lindbergh, to the most recent cases, which were sexual kidnappings. And I have a story to tell in this book about that trajectory. In some ways, it's a story about the creation of a kind of pornography, the sexual violation of children, which I think is what's happened over the last twenty-five to thirty years in the United States. Not that there had never been sexual abuses of children before, but that this *tremendous, lurid* fascination on the part of the media and then on the part of the public in the sexual violation of children, is a modern phenomenon. And that's part of the story I tell, that in fact, since the media is so crucial to the development of kidnapping and to this trajectory, that the media has created this pornography of child violation. And while initially, it starts out as a violation of the family, it becomes a sexual violation of the child.

Once I did that book— And I really, I thought after writing that book—it was *totally* fascinating to me—that I knew, A, that kidnapping was crucial in this society— By the way, one of my colleagues, not in this department but

elsewhere, when I first said I was doing a history of kidnapping, he said, “There is no history of kidnapping. There’s the Lindbergh case and that’s it.” He said, “You’re wasting your time.” I said, “Well, there is no history because no one’s done it.” But it was again, one of those fluffy subjects, one of those subjects that no self-respecting male historian would put his hands on. But male sociologists, by the way, have dealt with it. But after that, I was convinced not only that kidnapping was important, but that *children* were important.

Lage: Now, that’s when you really—

06-00:57:26

Fass: That’s when I began to see that what I had been studying all the time had been about children, in one way or another, but that I hadn’t really seen it that way. I’d seen education, I’d seen youth culture. But now I saw that I had looked at different aspects of children and childhood over the course of my career. And after that, I did *Childhood in America*, which is this big collection; and after that, I did the encyclopedia.

Lage: Right. You embraced the idea.

06-00:57:54

Fass: I definitely embraced the idea. In part, because this colleague had rejected it, as if it’s just not important. Once again, things that you don’t see are, therefore, not important. But once you bring them into the lens, you realize that they’re important. You *make* them important. And you make all those parents, especially mothers out there, who have this knot in their stomach about their children’s kidnapping, you make them historically important. It’s important.

[It was only after I wrote *Kidnapped* that I felt I had the ability to tell my family’s story, to write my family memoir. *Kidnapped* made me realize that I had spent a lifetime thinking about lost children (my own siblings), and in writing the book I learned to write stories, as they were experienced by both the participants and the audience for the stories. This allowed me to imagine that I was capable of adopting a new writing style, less analytical and more personal in tone. Because I wrote *Kidnapped* for a larger audience, I now also believed that I could stand apart from my professionalism as a historian, to write for a different audience and toward a different purpose.

Only then, in realizing that I had been haunted by these children who had been ignored as historical subjects did I dare to undertake to write about my parents, their parents and their children. *Kidnapped* was a turning point. It emboldened me and also made me realize that the obligation I had always felt to tell their story could now be fulfilled. *Inheriting the Holocaust*<sup>12</sup>, which I

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<sup>12</sup> *Inheriting the Holocaust: A Second-Generation Memoir*, Rutgers University Press, 2009.

began to write after I completed *Kidnapped* and *Childhood in America*, was only published recently, but it took many years to get just right, precisely because of my deep sense of obligation. It is the shortest book I ever wrote and the most intense. It is obviously personal. I had always written history that had a personal dimension, but this was personal in an entirely different register, and it was a wrenching experience.—added during narrator’s review.]

Lage: Yes. And is this a good place to end?

06-00:58:30

Fass: I think we should end that way.

Lage: But let’s just mention, was this topic—kidnapping—accepted in this department? You mentioned the critical colleague was not here.

06-00:58:38

Fass: I have no reason to believe not, but then I’m the kind of person who doesn’t want to hear. I’m a chair, so I assume some people have accepted it. [laughs] Actually, it gave me more television and radio appearance than anything else I’ve ever written.

Lage: And was that one of your goals, to reach a wider audience?

06-00:59:00

Fass: Absolutely was my goal. It was my goal, because when I went out with my kids to a playground and I told people what I was working on, women would say, oh, my God! You’re really doing something *so important*. I’m so glad someone’s finally working on this. Because, as I said, this book has got to be for people like them. That’s what history is supposed to be. You have some books that are for historians and some books that are for the public. I was willing to make this for the public.

Lage: Very nice. We will stop right there.

06-00:59:34

Fass: Okay, great.

**[End of Interview]**