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University of California
Berkeley, California

Wilson Carey McWilliams
Free Speech Movement Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Lisa Rubens
in 1999

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[Interview 1: September 2, 1999]

[Tape 1]

- Rubens: Jeff Lustig, I think, told me they called you “The Jaw.” How did you know him?
- McWilliams: You've got to remember he was a graduate at that time. Whether he was still an undergraduate--but he was friends with lots of friends of mine. He knew Jerry Berman pretty well.
- Rubens: Who was Jerry Berman?
- McWilliams: Jerry Berman was a SLATE type from the late fifties, early sixties. Berman now runs a thing called Center of Information and Technology, in D.C.
- Rubens: Carey, let me just start by asking you why you were known as “The Jaw”. Did you know you were called The Jaw?
- McWilliams: Sometimes.
- Rubens: What was that about?
- McWilliams: Well, I was a talker. And I think that's what it's--
- Rubens: And did that moniker come to you as a result of SLATE stuff, or had you been known by that before?
- McWilliams: Earlier, earlier.
- Rubens: So let's hear how you got to Berkeley. How did you become a grad student?
- McWilliams: Well, I was an undergraduate at Berkeley. Started in fall of '51. I was there '51 to '55. And then I had a little more than two years, two and a half years in the military. I came back--
- Rubens: What section of the military?
- McWilliams: In the army. I was in Germany. Came back to graduate school in the spring semester of 1958.
- Rubens: And why graduate school and why poli sci [political science]? Just briefly.

McWilliams: Well, I came out of a family of teachers. My father really was the only person who wasn't a teacher anywhere along the line, so I spent a lot of time struggling against that, every known alternative to teaching as a career.

Rubens: And you mean public school teaching?

McWilliams: Yes.

Rubens: Not university?

McWilliams: Well, my grandfather was a university teacher. He was a provost at UCLA from '36 till 1940. Somewhere along in my undergraduate career, I just had this kind of sense that, gee, this is kind of a neat thing to do.

Rubens: Were there professors that particularly inspired you?

McWilliams: Yes, yes. So poli sci was also kind of iffy. I thought about history. But poli sci was attractive principally because when I came back to graduate school, I thought I was going to do international politics. That's what I'd done as an undergraduate. The great teacher in the department, from my point of view, in my undergraduate years was Ernest Haas, who was wonderful. He was a postwar émigré, actually. And I also did public law as an undergraduate because everybody did. [Jacobus] tenBroek was sort of the guru for all of us. But when I came back to graduate school, theory had become the great field. [Norman] Jacobson arrived while I was a junior or senior. I heard about him sort of offstage, but he wasn't a real presence. And I just was essentially charmed by [Sheldon] Wolin and by Jacobson, and later by Jack Schaar. Jack and I got to be good friends because he's only five years older than I am.

I stayed in graduate school--I was involved in--well, what passed as the radical side of politics during my undergraduate years. Politics in the fifties was pretty tame. But we did whatever disruption we could. When I came back to graduate school, Mike Miller was just starting--Mike I had a long-term relationship with. He had been a student--this is kind of the stuff that happens in a university--he had been a student in Chick tenBroek's introductory speech class that I read papers for when I was an undergraduate. Chick had a senior be his reader. So I got to know Mike in '54, '55.

I came back and looked him up. He was doing--he had been on the ASUC student council, quit it [laughs] and decided he was going to create this student political party to try to give student government some character. So I got involved partly because I thought Michael was wonderful and anything he did was okay.

Rubens: So you were in the early days of SLATE.

McWilliams: Yes, absolutely, just about as early as they could get.

- Rubens: That's a whole other story I want to cover so much but we'll have to wait for that later. But I have to interrupt for one second to ask about integration efforts. It seems curious to me that FSM grows out of the civil rights movement, but there is no issue raised by the virtual absence of black students, professors, etc. Jackie Goldberg had worked to desegregate the sororities and fraternities. So I guess SLATE had taken that on earlier. Is that your memory?
- McWilliams: Yes.
- Rubens: Yes, and then there were some deals with Governor Brown.
- McWilliams: Yes, that's right.
- Rubens: So you're in on the early days of SLATE.
- McWilliams: Right. I left graduate school to start teaching in '61. I went to Oberlin.
- Rubens: Had you finished your dissertation?
- McWilliams: No. So I was back in and around Berkeley pretty much every summer.
- Rubens: Poli sci you were teaching?
- McWilliams: Yes. I didn't teach in Berkeley. The only summer I taught was '64.
- Rubens: Okay. That's an important summer.
- McWilliams: Yes. But I was in and around, seeing people.
- Rubens: So you had been a spokesperson for SLATE? Is that sort of where The Jaw as a moniker became more commonly used?
- McWilliams: Yes.
- Rubens: And were you involved in the HUAC demonstrations?
- McWilliams: Actually, offstage. I wasn't there the day that--
- Rubens: The day when the demonstrators were flushed down the steps of City Hall?
- McWilliams: I was sitting in the *Daily Cal* office here, talking to somebody when the news came over the telephone. I helped put together bail money and you know that kind of stuff.
- Rubens: So the fall of '61 you go to Oberlin College and then you come back in the summer. Tell us, then, about the summer of '64.

- McWilliams: Well, I think actually there's a little preface. Oberlin had a little student magazine called *The Activist*, which was fairly influential and has become more influential since, actually, because it's kind of the journal of record for the student group. You find it cited all the time in places like Kirk [Kirkpatrick] Sale's book on the SDS. Because we had all these connections with Berkeley, we did some of the earliest writing on FSM. So there was this kind of connection to what was happening via friends of ours who were still on campus at Berkeley.
- Rubens: I want to make sure I get this. *The Activist* is a journal--
- McWilliams: Student-published journal.
- Rubens: Student-published journal, coming out of Oberlin.
- McWilliams: Yes.
- Rubens: Presumably, it's carrying a lot of information about the civil rights movement.
- McWilliams: Yes.
- Rubens: Were you aware at all of the Collegiate Press News Service? It was sort of a compendium--because that's just an aside. It won't go into our interview, but I had a friend who helped organize that. When he talks about the Free Speech Movement, he says Berkeley wasn't a part of that, and so they were really excited when FSM came along and *The Daily Cal* joined and went into the vanguard. So I am sorry to say I didn't know about *The Activist*. I'm going to check this out.
- McWilliams: Let me give you the best thing to look at. If you can find a copy of a book put together and edited by Mitchell Cohen and Dennis Hale called *The New Student Left*. It's a Beacon press book, published in 1966. Everything in it is out of *The Activist*. And it has all the really good Berkeley-FSM sort of pieces that we printed.
- Rubens: Great, great. So you're at Oberlin in '61, and there's obviously a lot of political activity there.
- McWilliams: Oh, yes, yes, yes.
- Rubens: How was Berkeley regarded by them? Before FSM. How many of you came from Berkeley that were there?
- McWilliams: Berkeley had an incredibly central role in the minds of radical students. I can remember when we got--I've forgotten who at SLATE, probably Dave Armour although he'd be terribly embarrassed to admit it these days. But Armour got a call from Tom Hayden, who was then working on *The Daily* at

Michigan, I think. You know, asking essentially how did SLATE do it? How could they participate in this stuff? Long before FSM, among these kinds of very minute germs of what became student radicalism, Berkeley had incredible status. At the National Student Association meetings, Berkeley as a presence was--

Rubens: People like Mike Miller? Who else?

McWilliams: I don't think Mike ever went to that, but Bruce Payne, who is now in the Public Policy Center at Duke. Runs the weirdest academic program. Does a program on leadership in the arts. Gets up to New York to watch opera. But almost everybody who became--there was certainly a connection to Berkeley. Everybody who was in the early leadership group, that became SDS, most of them came from a different route, the Socialist Party, League of Industrial Democracy--but they certainly were connected.

Rubens: Regarding the Berkeley connection, do you think it was people in political science, sociology and history?

McWilliams: The people who were around SLATE were an incredibly diverse set. I think mostly probably poli sci, but there's a special reason for that--poli sci or history. That is that sociology at Berkeley didn't really teach undergraduates. They had a curriculum, but that wasn't their strong suit. And they were very political, so they were relied largely on the political science department. At Michigan, sociology was the big animal. This is where Hayden and Bob Ross and all those guys came out of, the Michigan soc department.

Rubens: You knew, Mike Tiger and a lot of the SLATE guys and HUAC guys who we'll get to later. But I'm really interested in those people. They just loom as heroes to so many people.

McWilliams: Mike I knew first. One of the ways I made some money as a graduate student--I was assistant director of forensic science, so I ran the junior varsity debate team. Mike joined that when he was a freshman. So I sort of knew him before anybody else did. He, of course, also became active in SLATE very soon. It won't surprise you. Mike was always the sort of intransigent left faction of anything.

And I have a great Kenny [Kenneth] Cloke story. It was the time when--I can almost date this but not quite, somewhere in the spring of 1960--and we were sitting down, talking about freshmen and sophomores who would join SLATE, or we wanted to join SLATE. And we suddenly realized that we were talking like members of the high Tory caucus because we were talking about duties people have to generations of ancestors--sort of, you know--one of the things that you learned was the experimenter on the left was not reliable, particularly if things were difficult, and the people you relied on were

people whose fathers or grandfathers--but [laughs] we were having this incredible Conservative Party conversation about a radical movement.

- Rubens: What about Mike Meyerson, he later joined the Party. and--
- McWilliams: Sure.
- Rubens: Membership in organizations never seemed to matter to the FSMers; 1964 was so different from 1960.
- McWilliams: Yes, absolutely. It's very different. There were places at which we had to--occasions, where people would be surrounded by--they were trying to speak somewhere down on campus--they would be surrounded by a crowd of yahoos--you know, right-wing lunatics or anti-Communist lunatics. I shouldn't say they were right-wing. And you would actually worry about the physical safety of people. And again, one of the things that I can remember doing often--also Aryay Linsky--is getting into--trying to deflect attention from some more vulnerable person, to get him out of there. We were actually worried about physical safety.
- Rubens: What I was just trying to get at was when you're sitting there talking about two generations of political ancestry, is it a plus or a minus, or does it not matter if they're in the CP?
- McWilliams: It doesn't matter, doesn't matter.
- Rubens: You're not doing those old fights.
- McWilliams: No, no, no, absolutely not. That was one of the--
- Rubens: Nor are you CP. Nor are you worried about a Soviet line or anything like that.
- McWilliams: Yes. One of the funniest incidents of that period--there was some kind of movement--again, it's got to be '59, '60--just put together, a broad-based coalition of the left in the Bay Area, among Socialists. And they'd run, hold sort of a unity meeting in Berkeley, and they have to get a chair, so two or three people in Berkeley look around, and they decide that--of course, they can't have anybody who's a Socialist; they've got to have somebody who was a liberal or something. So I wind up chairing this meeting. [Bogdan Denic - pronounced DEN-itch] speaks for the S.P.
- Rubens: I don't know that name.
- McWilliams: Denic teaches at Columbia now, sociology. He was a graduate student in soc. And he gives some kind of nice conciliatory speech about unity and popular front. And [Tim Walforth?] spoke essentially for the Trotskyites. I've forgotten what the particular group was.

- Rubens: YSL?
- McWilliams: YSL. And Walforth begins by saying, "Well, Comrade Denic, we're so pleased that you're taking this conciliatory role, and we're really all in favor of unity. [Imitating fierce tone of voice] But, Comrade Denic, why did [Herman Zinger] steal our mailing list in 1939?" [laughs] From there it was downhill. Whoever was in for the *People's World* was the only really pragmatic person in there, you know, which [laughs]. It was really. The general feeling was ideology is a damn nuisance.
- Rubens: When I interviewed Brad Cleaveland--
- McWilliams: Okay. Brad I knew in SLATE, obviously.
- Rubens: He also told me you were known as The Jaw. He had been a poli sci grad student, and he spent the summer of 1964 writing a manifesto on educational reform, which then SLATE had to debate whether it's going to be in their catalog or not. He delivers it to all the faculty. He was upset that he was not more central to FSM.
- McWilliams: Well, it was particularly because he was also--within SLATE he was one of the more liberal civil libertarian, free speech voices. There were a lot of people who at least tilted towards sort of a repressive tolerance stand. Brad never did. Brad was always a believer in very broad, open discussion and very much a nonviolent-ist.
- Rubens: Now I'd like to get back to your narrative. You come to teach that summer of 1964. Would you have wanted to go to the South? How could you turn down teaching?
- McWilliams: That's right. Well, I had students in Mississippi, of course, from Oberlin. A lot of them. Oberlin students were all over the civil rights movement.
- Rubens: Well, of course, isn't Oberlin where the training for Mississippi takes place? There's an incredible scene in Connie Field's movie on Mississippi Summer--
- McWilliams: Yes.
- Rubens: --where they get the news about the death of the three civil rights workers. It's at Oberlin, isn't it?
- McWilliams: That's right.
- Rubens: And who's the contact person on the Oberlin campus? Or is it not--

- McWilliams: Gee, I don't remember. But Oberlin people are just all over the place in that. In a very odd way, without any sympathy from the administration. The president was an absolute horse's ass. He just didn't get it.
- Rubens: But didn't totally block it?
- McWilliams: No. And I've done stuff in some civil rights--well, back when--a little bit in '54 and more in '55, when I was at Fort Benning, actually. But here is a little bit of a Berkeley connection--Bruce Payne was very involved in the Mississippi Freedom Summer.
- Rubens: How do you spell Payne?
- McWilliams: P-a-y-n-e. Got shot at a couple of times. Had a wild chase to get over the border to Tennessee and all that kind of stuff that people don't believe happened.
- Rubens: What were you teaching at Oberlin?
- McWilliams: Gee, I taught everything at that time. I taught international politics. I taught a course in European politics. And I taught a course in the politics of developing areas, which I created at Oberlin: Africa, Latin America. And I did American politics one semester. That summer at Berkeley I taught a course in--what was it called--contemporary political theory, something like that. It was poli sci 110.
- Rubens: Oh, sure. That was Jacobson's theory course.
- McWilliams: Yes, right. And actually, when he asked me to teach the course in the summer, I called him up and talked to him. I said, "What constitutes contemporary political theory?" And he said, "Since Aristotle." [laughs] That was a big class.
- Rubens: By the way, did Brad Cleaveland consult with you when he wrote that critique of classes? Did you have anything to do with writing that?
- McWilliams: Gee, he may have talked to me. I can't remember, to tell you the truth. He may very well have talked to me. It's very likely he did. But I don't remember it.
- Rubens: So by the fall of '64 you're back at Oberlin. Why don't you mention how you hear what's going on at Berkeley and your response both intellectually and literally.
- McWilliams: It was terribly exciting, obviously. The first things we began to hear about were the impending demonstrations at Sproul --it came partly as a surprise and

partly not, because anybody who dealt with Clark Kerr knew how completely out of touch his administration was.

Rubens: Say a little more about that.

McWilliams: Well, Kerr was kind of a classic administrator. I don't think he knew five undergraduate students. Other people have said this, but if Bob Sproul had been president when FSM happened, Sproul would have gone out, picked up Mario [Savio] and ten other people and taken them into his office and shaken hands and slapped them on the back, and probably would have known who the hell they were. Kerr was insulated by layers of bureaucracy, and he was utterly unsympathetic. He had the pure bureaucrat's view of the world that as long as the University provided facilities and the satisfaction of private ends, that was all it had to do. And he just didn't get the sense that people--the desire of people to have some dignity in the process, that education is more than providing technical assistance.

One of the last things that I was involved in, in SLATE— The graduate students had been members of the student government at Berkeley and had representation. Of course, the administration was not entirely happy with this because this was a SLATE borough. We always won. And there was a lot of effort to--the university announced its interest in separating graduate students. They had a rationale that graduate students were not really involved in undergraduate life. Obviously, we weren't happy with that. But also the ASUC wasn't terribly happy with it because it was a source of revenue that they were going to be losing. So we had negotiations scheduled with the university.

Rubens: And when you say "we," do you mean SLATE undergraduate students--

McWilliams: People who were official representatives.

Rubens: Were you one?

McWilliams: Yes. Well, actually--yes, I had just been elected.

Rubens: At large?

McWilliams: Yes. I think me and [Marv Sternberg?], as I recall, who certainly was a grad rep at one point. We were negotiating with the university, represented principally by Alex Sherriffs about what was going to happen and how and so forth. And what was really startling is in mid-negotiation, with no warning, the university issued a decision separating graduate students. So Kerr had no sense that this is bad-faith negotiation or that this kind of arbitrary politics that would not go down easily. That was a kind of constant feeling. He had the Quaker sense, you know, that if he were acting rightly, with good intention and in the interest of the liberty of students as he saw it, then he was ok. It's

really very interesting. He just didn't have any feel for how much resentment there was on the campus about many things.

[tape interruption]

McWilliams: [tape starts mid sentence] —how anachronistic Rule 17 had come to seem. Because by this time--it was 1960. You're out of the high cold war, and you're past the worst of McCarthyism, and it just didn't make any sense to people. I mean, that's why the shape of FSM was really a long ways coming. But it was just sort of the proverbial tip of the iceberg [laughs], about how much resentment there was.

Rubens: It had built up.

McWilliams: Yes.

Rubens: And the continuity between the older generation and the newer wasn't there.

McWilliams: Yes.

Rubens: So there was Sherrifs. Anyone else that you had dealt with?

McWilliams: There was Garff Wilson. He was a vice president, professor speech--I think he was a vice president and he did a lot of stuff--handling public relations and would show up to give the university's position in any dialogue with students. One of their formulations grew out of the feeling that they were sort of embattled. They were protecting the university against intervention by political [inaudible]. And the image of political leadership was uniformly hostile, even after Pat [Brown] became governor. They just didn't get a sense that the world had changed, you know? They were still dealing with John Francis Neylan. And Wilson particularly. I can remember one forum in which he articulated a social contract theory in which the university had an implicit deal with the state that it would receive financial support if it refrained from any participation in state politics. I think this was kind of the image that Kerr had at this point, that if you violated this implicit contract, the state would kill you. So in his own mind, he's protecting academic freedom.

Rubens: This give even more substance to what you're saying about the FSM was long in the making. There had been debate about these issues.

McWilliams: Oh, yes, yes. I mean, a long, long debate about the use of Stiles Hall was where anybody at all controversial had to talk there.

Rubens: Jacobson remembers trucks that served as podiums —.Adlai Stevenson coming to Bancroft and being on a flatbed truck.

McWilliams: Yes, he was on a flatbed truck, absolutely. And any big gathering that you couldn't get into Stiles or that wasn't big enough for the flatbed truck went into the Unitarian Church that was on the university side of Bancroft, down-- actually, right across from Stiles and just across from the men's gym. That was what my father always thought when he came to Berkeley.

Rubens: Okay. So we've taken off from when and what you first learned about the FSM.

McWilliams: I was astonished, first of all. I knew as much about how to--had as good an ear as any outsider for how much unhappiness there was on campus, but I was astonished at the level of mass support for Mario's original appearance on the scene. Also I think the timing was really critical. The student politics takes some time to get started. You can't do things in September.

Rubens: Say a little more about that.

McWilliams: Because student politics--oh, one of the things everybody knows is university administrators--and Kerr was really good at this--would try to do everything that they can in May because everything comes to an end, and you could fool around in the summer, but everything has to be reconstituted in the fall: every association, every argument, every plan of action. And so there's two or three weeks in September in which it's very difficult to get anything done because you're so busy putting things back together.

Something I noticed, by the way, on the other side. Academic conferences or lectures are always in October. The first you're ever asked to lecture is the 1st or 2nd week of October. And I think the timing is very critical. There's stuff happening, but this is the right time for people to be able to--their academic world is settled into a routine.

Rubens: Another determinant I've heard is that SLATE had really started to burn out.

McWilliams: Well, one of the things that was happening with SLATE was the first generation of leaders—Mike Miller, Kayo Hallinan weren't around. SLATE either had people going somewhere else or they got a little long in the tooth and they're a long ways away from most undergraduates. This really did reconnect the organization. Gave it a whole new set of leaders, for one thing.

Rubens: Did you know any of the FSM leaders?

McWilliams: Yes. Actually, I certainly didn't know Mario. Actually, I can't remember who I had this conversation with, but it was right after FSM appeared, and I called somebody at Berkeley. It could have been Steve Weissman, but I'm not sure. And I said to him, "Tell me, is Mario Savio really the new whoever I said it was; and whoever I was talking to said, "No, he's the old Kerensky." [laughs] Which was, in retrospect, quite right!

- Rubens: Would you explain what is meant here?
- McWilliams: That he was fundamentally a liberal Democrat. Free speech was not, for him, an entree to revolution; it's what he was really about. Whoever I had this conversation with was suggesting that Mario might not know what he set loose. I think that's true, too.
- Rubens: The other thing I've heard often is that Weissman was really the Trotsky. He wasn't the Lenin. He couldn't be that initial person and have that charisma. Did you know Weissman?
- McWilliams: Yes, yes.
- Rubens: Tell me about publishing about FSM in *The Activist*
- McWilliams: We got a piece--one of the first pieces published about Berkeley, a serious analysis of what was going on, was in *The Activist*. And actually, because Berkeley students, of course, were so self-absorbed with this stuff that was happening, *The Activist* had maybe three hundred subscribers, maybe four hundred, outside of Oberlin, and after the FSM issue came out, it probably went up to seven hundred because it got all these people from Berkeley. You know, we put the magazine on the newsstands, and--
- Rubens: We're assuming Oberlin has that collection of *The Activist*?
- McWilliams: Wisconsin may have it. Dennis Hale, who's one of the authors of *The New Student Left*, teaches in political science at Boston College, and he probably has—
- Rubens: Were you talking to colleagues in the poli sci department?
- McWilliams: Yes.
- Rubens: Are they concerned about their own hides, or are they--
- McWilliams: No, not really. The person I was closest to personally was Jack Schaar.
- Rubens: I haven't talked to him.
- McWilliams: It's one of the things that's very interesting in that respect. The department itself was very--it was kind of an austere academic stance up until FSM. In 1960, some of us who were reluctantly supporting Jack [John F.] Kennedy put together an ad for *The Daily Cal* that quoted a *Nation* editorial, "Two Cheers for Kennedy." And we went around to see how many faculty we could get to sign it.

- Rubens: Why don't you say for the record--such a new generation of people will be listening to this--why were you reluctantly supporting Kennedy?
- McWilliams: Well, Kennedy had been very close to the McCarthyites. And very hostile to trade unions. He was, on the whole, seen certainly further right than Stevenson but probably, in critical ways, further right on things like civil rights than [Lyndon B.] Johnson. Johnson reconciled a lot of us to the ticket, as a matter of fact.
- Rubens: So you go around the faculty--
- McWilliams: There was Fred Stripp in the speech department--later became mayor of Berkeley-- But in political science, the only person I think we could get to sign was Jack, and he was very much criticized by Sheldon Wolin because you shouldn't involve yourself in politics. You know, it's--many years later Wolin sent me a piece he'd written in which he apologized for being so political, and I always got this comment from him--like, when I'd give him a paper that was good stuff, but there was too much advocacy. So there was this really austere, anti-political, you-don't-want-to-get-too-involved.
- Rubens: Probably true of Jacobson, too?
- McWilliams: Jacobson--well, you know, Jacobson--everything is sort of whimsical. There's a certain distance from real politics.
- Rubens: Maybe that's why he becomes a psychologist ministering to students. There's a more personal inter-action when you're dealing with it at a nonpolitical level or different political level.
- McWilliams: Yes, that's right.
- Rubens: Did you have an observation about Herb McCloskey then?
- McWilliams: I knew his work, but I never studied with him, although he was on my examining committee, so I knew him reasonably well and liked his work. I mean, he was a militant behaviorist, and that wasn't what I did.
- Rubens: But he's really going to be the hero in a certain sense. I mean, he's going to formulate the Academic Senate resolution in favor of the FSM that's going to be carried.
- McWilliams: Yes, right. And, you know, he and Jack had worked together on a study of anomie. I almost got involved with that study when I was a graduate student, but didn't, for whatever reason. I can't think of it. This was probably in '63.
- Rubens: Was this a published study?

- McWilliams: Yes. It's in *American Sociological Review*.
- Rubens: Interesting. All right. And so Schaar is criticized for signing--you're giving me an example in 1960.
- McWilliams: Right. What was interesting is how politicized the department became by FSM, very quickly. I think the interesting thing about FSM was there's no way that you can separate the free speech issue from the academy. It's the place at which politics outside the academy and politics inside the academy join. And it's why the university had always been vulnerable on it. And when it became a mass issue, there's just no way that somebody like Wolin doesn't get activated by it.
- Rubens: So there's the troika --Jacobson, Wolin and Schaar. Did you refer to them as at that point?
- McWilliams: I probably did. I can't remember, but yes. I also went to talk to Aaron Wildavsky. Aaron had been, was on the Oberlin faculty my first year there, '61-'62, and we got to be very good friends there. Actually, he's the reason I got hired at Oberlin. Other people in the department liked me well enough, but he and I had a really knock-down drag-out argument about C. Wright Mills in the course of my interview. And I thought--when I came back from this interview, I thought, well, you know, they're not going to take me." I subsequently learned that Aaron loves argument, or loved argument, and he thought this was just terrific, so, you know--So I talked to him all the way through FSM, too, about what was happening.
- Rubens: So he's at Berkeley.
- McWilliams: Right. And aside from being an anti-Communist nut--and he really was, in the way that somebody who grew up in Brooklyn in the forties might be. You know, he came out of a kind of generation or kind of experience that saw totalitarianism around every corner. That's really what was going on with him.
- Rubens: But did he believe, to your knowledge--feel FSM was being agitated from the outside that the Communists had--
- McWilliams: No, he just thought it was un-institutional, it's mass politics, it's--I'm sure he thought that Communists were—but that's not discussed with me.
- Rubens: I meant to ask, when you said that Wolin was protective of the discipline, in a way, and the role of the university, at the same time, he didn't share Kerr's view of the multi-university.
- McWilliams: No.

- Rubens: And my understanding is there was some discourse that wasn't explicit but had to do with discussion within poli sci about civil rights, civil liberties, but I suppose in the abstract.
- McWilliams: Yes.
- Rubens: The university should be maintaining those values and not turning itself into a bureaucracy or a technocratic--I'm putting words, now--
- McWilliams: Well, I think there was a certain amount of Wolin--as he began to work through the sort of stuff he got from [Hannah] Arendt principally. She had an enormous influence on his thinking.
- Rubens: Now, she's there, too.
- McWilliams: She was there briefly, yes. I think one of the things that happened with him is that he began to have a sense of first of all, the enormous disparity between democratic ideal, as he begins to define it, and American politics. Obviously, the practice of American politics doesn't square at all. I think he had a theory, for a while, of the university as a place which would preserve or articulate an ideal that was utterly impractical--you know, that just didn't have, at the moment, any real connection to American politics. Very similar, by the way, to somebody like Alan Bloom, now, who talks about it, who by the way supported FSM. Leo Strauss and friends have never forgiven him for that.
- Rubens: How do you know this?
- McWilliams: Bloom wrote a letter--
- [tape interruption]
- Rubens: You knew this because Alan Bloom wrote a letter to—
- McWilliams: To people at Berkeley.
- Rubens: Where was he then?
- McWilliams: He was then at Cornell.
- Rubens: Did you know him already?
- McWilliams: Yes.
- Rubens: And how come you knew him? Academic circles?
- McWilliams: Academic circles, yes. What was interesting--I mean, he was always a conservative, philosophically conservative, but he moved really to the right

when people showed up in the late sixties, when demonstrators showed up with guns at Cornell. That's the big--but there was a lot of similarity--in this kind of Weimar exile stance towards politics--Arendt and Strauss both had--politics is somehow--liberal democratic politics is kind of--

Rubens: Which Strauss are you talking about?

McWilliams: Leo. Liberal democratic politics is at best sordid. I think what happened in FSM is that Wolin saw, in what was happening on the campus, a kind of juncture of the theoretical world and the world of practice. He began to see some--by the way, nobody is more bleakly pessimistic than Wolin is now.

Rubens: I want badly to interview him. I'm just going to wait until I have a lot more facility and knowledge. He came to a position of wanting "reconstitution" of the university.

McWilliams: Right. Jack was temperamentally a very dark soul. We used to get together and be delighted because the world was just as bad as we thought it was. Jack had these moments of thinking this is really--there really are possibilities here.

Rubens: Hannah Pitkin is Jack Schaar's partner, and she had been KPFA reporter.

McWilliams: Was she?

Rubens: Yes! Bob Price mentions hearing her report on KPFA the night students occupied Sproul Hall. Did you know Pitkin?

McWilliams: Sure, because we were graduate students together. She was about a year ahead of me. I think Hannah is probably a year older than I am. But she was a senior graduate student when I was around, but I knew her pretty well.

Rubens: Do you have anything to say about KPFA particularly?

McWilliams: Well, KPFA was particularly, in the fifties and up until the sixties, was the light in the darkness. It was just absolutely all there was. And in terms of things like--particularly things like keeping even a newspaper like the *Chronicle* more or less honest. As liberal as it liked to cast itself, on local stuff the *Chronicle* was really behind the powers that be. Its reporting on the HUAC demonstrations was: scandalous. As bad as *The New York Times*, which was really awful. But one of the things that KPFA did was it kept those local papers more or less honest because there was another source of news out there.

[extraneous conversation omitted]

[Tape 2]

McWilliams: So when I learned about FSM, I was just astonished by how maladroit the administration was, because there were dozens of places at which they could have short-circuited this whole operation, and they just didn't do it.

Rubens: And you've explained earlier that was because—

McWilliams: Well, it's partly that I had a sense that A) that Kerr really didn't understand politics, And I think it's true that Alex Sherrifs was an evil genius.

Rubens: You know the one other player we haven't talked about? I don't know how key he was, but Robert Scalapino. He's was in your department.

McWilliams: Yes.

Rubens: Did you know him? He set up and ran the scene at the Greek Theater.

McWilliams: I can believe it. See, the style of the Greek Theater is typical of the way the administration worked. They really saw students as consumers, and it's part of this very individualistic, privatized view. They didn't have any sense of students as people who wanted a voice or who might claim to have one, who had loyalty to the institution--

Rubens: But still you were asking for reform.

McWilliams: That's right. A lot of conflict. A lot of the old-timers--people like [Welch Brown?], Brutus Hamilton--had a much better sense of it. Neither one of them, of course, even vaguely liberal, but they understood students as members of the community. So there was this kind of feeling that the university could control the terms, that the administration would appear and it would give an account and send you packing, right? They really had no sense of how arbitrary and autocratic that looked. I don't know who--they had to have been talking to students somewhere. Somebody has to have been, at least to some students, like the official leadership of the ASUC. But whoever they were talking to either didn't hear them or they got really stupid advice.

Rubens: Now, that's a good question, and I didn't ask that: Who was the university talking to? Probably ASUC people, probably Charlie Powell. David Goines writes that Powell wanted the ASUC to buy the contested strip of land, and then it would have been a student place--which I thought was a really progressive idea at the time.

McWilliams: Very clever.

Rubens: I don't think the university was acting at the bidding of William Knowland.

- McWilliams: I don't think so, either.
- Rubens: Other people in the state were upset that the students were organizing rallies at the Republican convention that summer, for Scranton and opposing Goldwater's nomination at the convention.
- McWilliams: Yes. I think there was certainly a lot of unhappiness. And there's no doubt that the aftermath of FSM contributes to 1966, Reagan's election as California's governor, particularly because Pat, God love him, was so good, right? But that also tells the story. The incumbent governor is more or less pro-student. And I don't think--after all, the governor is chairman the Board of Regents. I don't think the Board of Regents puts a lot of pressure on. I think they put pressure on for resolution. "Get this thing settled somehow or other."
- Rubens: I think already asked you about Robert Scalapino, if you knew him.
- McWilliams: No, just to shake hands. He taught different stuff.
- Rubens: Scalapino becomes a target of student opposition when he comes out publicly in support of the Vietnam War later in 1965.
- McWilliams: Yes. By the way, Vietnam is an interesting case because the fact that Vietnam succeeds so quickly changes and hardens some of the lines within the faculty.
- Rubens: That's a good way of putting it, yes. And the rifts that have occurred.
- McWilliams: Yes.
- Rubens: I want to ask about one other person who I'm trying to do a little research on C. West Churchman, whose initial appointment is in the Business school --his specialty was systems management- but then he is up at the space sciences lab, running some social science program there. It's under him that Brad Cleaveland gets the opportunity to teach a course which allows twenty students in the spring of '65 to write up their FSM experiences. Cleaveland claims that he had learned later on that Churchman was a CIA agent.
- McWilliams: No, I don't know the name. Brad's argument is not crazy because one of the things about CIA is that--it's hard for most people, particularly at this distance, to get a fix on--is that the CIA was mostly--tended to be at the operational level, dominated by left-liberal--anti-Communist liberals and social democrats, so it had to have a vaguely left tilt. You know, their interventions were very much designed to--they were interested in things like how do you preserve or enhance the credibility of American students at the international level. In the National Student Association, where the CIA subsequently revealed it had been funding them--invariably, the pressure of the CIA was to push the NSA to the left because--you know, you have these conventions of students from American colleges, and they would want to denounce Castro.

They're kids, right? You're nominated by Catholic colleges, schools in the South, for instance. And agency people would show up at those things, and everybody, by the way, knew they were agency people. And they would start saying, "You're not going to get any money if you do this because you'll be useless at the international level." So the anti-Castro revolution would be scuttled in order to give--and they were interested in student groups that would be credible at the international level. So it's not out of the question that they would be doing something to try to--

Rubens: Just to clarify here: are you claiming that CIA operatives were provocateurs, as we learned was the case with the Co Intel program. The Daily Cal got a copy of the FBI records on Cal under the Freedom of Information Act, but I don't think they showed any provocation.

McWilliams: What they were really thinking about--you see, until you get a mass student movement, they're thinking about this as kind of--you know--

Rubens: Ambassadorship?

McWilliams: Yes. They're thinking of students in--the American student movement isn't serious, right? So what's interesting is American students as a voice in international student gatherings, with student movements that are serious. And can we have American students who will be able to talk to people from Africa or east Europe or whatever. In a way, that makes them persuasive.

Rubens: So you're talking about movement among students which brought about the independence in Africa or were part of the democratic movements in Latin America..

McWilliams: Sure, yes. And FSM is in some ways the benchmark. Post-FSM, my guess is the agency begins to think very differently.

Rubens: Would you claim also that a lot of these people are former leftists and people who have now recanted?

McWilliams: Yes.

Rubens: They really are trying to stabilize the democratic regime, or bring them into power.

McWilliams: Yes, yes. Also it's like, what, a year before FSM, not much more than a year. The Kennedy administration has been in the pocket of the agency. The whole coup against Diem. It's very typical of that period that the agency is--yes—to create and stabilize liberal democratic regimes. And the agency isn't the FBI. That's the other big thing about it.

- Rubens: So in terms of just a dialogue about social science, behavioralism, and operations management, in the poli sci department, those divisions are there, but they're not--what's the word?--unbridgeable gaps.
- McWilliams: Yes, that's right.
- Rubens: The lines will become hardened and much more divisive as the Vietnam War takes center stage.
- McWilliams: That's right.
- Rubens: So, did Oberlin as a faculty, or your department as a faculty, write letters that supported FSM that you remember?
- McWilliams: Not that I remember, although I think it's a good bet--I'm sure as a faculty they didn't because the president would not have permitted it. They may have done it as individuals. Maybe the Oberlin student government.
- Rubens: Were you by then, or once you become a professor, active in the Political Science Association?
- McWilliams: Yes.
- Rubens: I haven't thought about the response of professional associations.
- McWilliams: The American Political Science Association had the same kind of ban that characterized the university. That is, it was not allowed officially to take positions on political issues. Now, this was, you know, hokie because they issued a very famous report about reforming the party system, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System,"--
- Rubens: That's not Michael Harrington's--
- McWilliams: No. I've forgotten who was chair of that committee. It was in 1951 or something like that. But the official rule was you don't do it. The first APSA meeting I ever went to as a faculty member, I can remember Samuel Hendel, from City College, got up in the general meeting and said, "Well, we should be able to at least take positions on issues that affect the university, like freedom of speech." This is 1962. And, you know, I guess he got a third of the votes in the meeting, because there were people who supported him, but the overwhelming majority said, "No, we don't want to do that." And it's only--again, it's post the relative opening of the association--the way the association has handled political issues subsequently is to create a caucus where everybody has his say. But the politicizing of the association doesn't happen until late in the student movement: '67, '68, when you begin to get radical caucuses.

Rubens: What about the. Center for Democratic Studies, in Santa Barbara. Did you have any connection with that at all? Know the people?

McWilliams: My father did, but I didn't know them.

[tape interruption]

Rubens: Norman Jacobson told me that Jann Wenner, who started *Rolling Stone*. was a graduate in poli sci. Did you know him?

McWilliams: To shake hands with, that's all.

Rubens: I don't know if he took any position or was active in FSM. Jacobson I think told me that Wenner's mother had been quite an activist and had given money--maybe not only for the start of the magazine but something else.

Regarding FSM, they called themselves a movement. Did *you* see it as a movement? And maybe comment if there's a distinction between how you've come to see it now versus what you thought then.

McWilliams: One of the things--we had no sense--at least I didn't have a sense of how long this would last. Student movements--you know, occasionally we had hit fairly significant student response this way. Never at the level of FSM. And typically it would go away. They're fairly short term. Student politics is very episodic, very dependent on the weather and all. We didn't know how long this was going to last and whether it would survive the examination period, which is a killer for student politics.

The fact that it captured the media was very critical because then what happens, I think--as opposed to the earlier things that I was personally involved in--is that students began to see themselves as kind of a reflection of the media. It's the same thing that happened with HUAC. Everybody within a few weeks of the HUAC thing, everybody had been there. But particularly FSM--FSM was less controversial than HUAC, so that it acquired kind of a quality of an avalanche. It fed on itself.

But I didn't expect that to happen. I didn't see it coming. Once it became clear that there was some kind of long-term quality, I did expect it to go in some of the directions that it went; that is, I thought you would get, in a fairly short term, a version of the kind of radically private libertarian radicalism of the cultural left, like Mike Rossman. That resonated so powerfully with the culture, with the world of students, and it was something that the university would give you, in the long term. I Remember Kerr always used to use that phrase that the university should be the "happy hunting grounds of the human spirit." There's a certain way in which if you want to go off in your apartment and do bizarre things, that's okay; just stay out of the public's face.

- Rubens: You're calling it a radically private--
- McWilliams: Cultural radicalism. I could see it coming. I didn't see the resurgence--again, of course, this is because of Vietnam, largely--the resurgence of Marxism and ideology. I don't think anybody in the early new left was so antediluvian. We just couldn't imagine that stuff coming back at you. But, you know, social democrats—Trotskyites were kind of jokes. [Art Leopold] is a nice guy, but gee, Art is just so [inaudible] at the social democratic stuff.
- Rubens: Bob Price--who was an Africanist in poli sci and was a GCC [Graduate Coordinating Committee] rep—commented that he was so struck with the level of principled debates that took place. That the university would make a statement or take a position and that the next morning there would be a leaflet from the FSM that was well-argued, not ideological, not jargon; that it basically answered line for line, point for point what had been argued by the university. He said there was an amazing public debate that was taking place. As these events started to speed up and collapse into each other, then it became jargon, slogans.
- McWilliams: That's very interesting. Yes. It's certainly right nationally, too, with what happens with the student movement in general. There's a great story about—I remember Tom Hayden was in my house at one point. Stayed overnight. It was some big anti-war demonstration that took place at SUNY-Buffalo: Three thousand students. Hayden--I look at *The New York Times*, and Hayden says, "Who the fuck do we know in Buffalo?" Because *The New York Times* had announced that this was an SDS demonstration. We didn't know anybody in Buffalo. Essentially, it was a media-recruited demonstration. Then you began to get this mass recruitment that escapes socialization. There's a product of long-term--
- Rubens: When do you think that is, about, when Hayden says that?
- McWilliams: Oh, it's somewhere like '65 or '6.
- Rubens: Tell me a little more about the NSA and the CIA.
- McWilliams: Well, NSA had two branches. There was an international affairs vice president of NSA, and the international affairs section was agency funded, and part of becoming part of this section was that you were made privy to the agency connection.
- There was a national affairs vice president, and the national affairs section either didn't or pretended not to know about the other.
- Rubens: Okay and it's that section that started the Collegiate Press News Service, or gave the money for the journal. It was in Philadelphia the first year and then moved to Washington. Tom DeVries, who headed up the service, says they

conceived of themselves as the first underground newspaper. It was a way of consolidating the reporting of activist schools, because I suppose interior, Midwestern colleges don't have FM, I'm assuming; I don't know.

McWilliams: Absolutely. Well, they were really isolated. And NSA--national officials would show up kind of like evangelists.

Rubens: Now, how come you are aware of this? I just want to get back to--

McWilliams: Well, because they always were around during the SLATE period.

Rubens: And they said who they were. You knew they were representing-

McWilliams: Yes.

Rubens: That's what I should look for a bit. There may not have been. They may have come from the East.

McWilliams: Yes, that came from the East, essentially. The guy who was around Berkeley most often was a guy named Dick Rettig, who was from the University of Washington, who later became president of NSA.

Rubens: I have not interviewed any Republicans. That's part of the FSM story that gets short-shrift.

McWilliams: There were a couple of Republicans in SLATE, which was always entertaining. It was the real proof of its multi--its non-ideological character. I can't remember who they were, but there was a girl, who was relatively attractive; that's why I remember her. And then there were at least a couple of others. And there certainly were student leaders who were Republicans, God knows. My guess is a majority of any ASUC body until post-FSM was probably Republican.

Rubens: As was the mayor of Berkeley and the city council at that time.

[tape interruption]

McWilliams: The important thing, I think, about FSM is that so much of what became the leadership was not recruited by anybody. SLATE, for example, was very much a recruited organization. It started out with Mike Miller and Hank DiSuvero and Patrick Hallinan and they recruited people. Mike really is the moving spirit. And subsequently that's how SLATE operated.

Rubens: People in the FSM, recruited people to be representatives to the ASUC, which at the time was based on housing units—sororities and fraternities, dorms, independents—those who lived in apartments or houses.

McWilliams: Yes. It's the feeling that--I don't know what it was like on the ground, but the [popularity?] of the movement sort of generated its own leaders. It politicized people by itself.

Rubens: And you called it a movement then.

McWilliams: Yes.

Rubens: And that word remained.

McWilliams: Yes.

Rubens: When you look back, is that right?

McWilliams: Yes.

Rubens: You weren't expecting Mario particularly to carry on, and in fact he didn't.

McWilliams: Yes. Well, you know, I had a sense that it would go beyond the free speech issue and that it would be a test for him. I didn't know him well enough to guess.

Rubens: Another question I have about the movement has to do with an observation that there were so many Jewish names. A lot of people from New York, who talked with their hands or-- Brad Cleaveland is very articulate about this. He felt attacked because he wasn't Jewish and also that he was--deficit would almost be the word because he thought it was dominated by such. A few other people mention it, but I wondered if in retrospect you had an observation about that.

McWilliams: Well, I certainly--you know, in any radical movement in the United States for the last hundred years you're going to get disproportionate numbers of Jews, for lots of reasons. And I think for lots of reasons that was likely to be even more true in the Bay Area because San Francisco aristocracy--intellectual aristocracy, political aristocracy--is Jewish.

But, having said that, I don't think that this washes. There are too many exceptions to the rule, and too many people--well, you know, two of the strongest leaders--take somebody from the SLATE area were Italian and Catholic in background--Hank DiSuvero certainly was, and Mario Savio--so what do we come up with? We come up with the theory that Italians run the movement, and it's really the reach of the Mafia. It just doesn't wash.

Rubens: And it didn't strike you then?

McWilliams: No, no. It's like saying, look, certain groups are disproportionately absent: low numbers of Asians. They're not political! The culture isn't political. The

low numbers of African Americans because they're not many there. Hispanics, the same thing. You have what a university population looked like, and certain people are disproportionately likely to be interested in politics, but that's--

Rubens: Yes. The student body at Cal was virtually all white –there were very few “minorities.” Did you know any blacks or Hispanics?

McWilliams: Unfortunately, the best name I know is a guy who's deceased, a high school buddy of mine. Daniel Fraire [pronounced FRAYR-ee], F-r-a-i-r-e. He was in and out of Berkeley and San Jose State at the time. But he was certainly around during FSM. He was Mexican American, from the Central Valley, Merced.

Rubens: All right. Let's take a segue here. Do you like to be called Carey?

McWilliams: Yes.

Rubens: That's your name, Carey.

McWilliams: It's my middle name, but that's what I've been known as. My first name is Wilson. My father and I have the same middle name and different first names.

Rubens: And yet you were both known as Carey.

McWilliams: Yes. I just use Wilson Carey because it enables people to make a distinction.

Rubens: Let's include a little biographical information. Tell me where you were born and went to school.

McWilliams: I was born in Santa Monica in September of 1933. Actually, today is my birthday.

Rubens: Oh, Carey, that is nice. November 2nd, 1933?

McWilliams: Yes.

Rubens: Happy birthday!

McWilliams: Thank you.

Rubens: This is a good thing to do on your birthday; record your history. Do you have children?

McWilliams: Yes, two of them. [Pointing to a photograph] Those are two girls in different incarnations; Helen and Susan.

- Rubens: How old are they now?
- McWilliams: Susan is now twenty-two, going on a hundred. And Helen is nineteen going on fifty. Susan is going to be applying to graduate school. She just escaped from a year working as a consultant in Manhattan.
- Rubens: Where did she go to school?
- McWilliams: Amherst. She'll do something in journalism this year. Helen is a junior at Brandeis.
- Rubens: I couldn't get my kid to apply to Brandeis, and she didn't get into Amherst, so--that's all right. She's a Californian, so--
- McWilliams: Californians have a different view of the world
- Rubens: I meant to ask you your father's first name.
- McWilliams: Edmond, actually, but he never used it. Hated it. He was a Los Angeles attorney, journalist--notable for involvement in radical liberal politics, most famous because he became Commissioner on Immigration and Housing in California in the [Culbert] Olson administration and had to deal with migrant workers and became sufficiently controversial that when [Earl] Warren ran for governor the first time, he made a promise that his first official act would be to fire my father. They became friends later on, but [laughs] it was a long time later.
- Rubens: Was he fired?
- Rubens: And then he became editor of *The Nation*?
- McWilliams: No, he resigned and went back to--did a little bit of practicing law and wrote books for, not quite ten years, eight years in Los Angeles. Then he went to *The Nation* in 1951. He went back to *The Nation* as associate editor, to kind of keep the peace between the editor, Freda Kirchway and Lillie Shultz, who raised the money. They did not get along well. Eventually this became intolerable, and he became editor within a couple of years and was editor of *The Nation* till just before he died. He died in 1980. He retired from *The Nation* in 1978.
- Rubens: And you had mentioned--1978 he retires.
- Rubens: What was your mother's name?
- McWilliams: Dorothy Hedrick, H-e-d-r-i-c-k. My parents were divorced in 1941.
- Rubens: And how had he met her?

- McWilliams: He met her when he was in law school at USC. She would have still been in school, I guess, at UCLA. So there's probably some fraternity party connection or something. He may have met her at the library; she worked at the library.
- Rubens: What was her major in school?
- McWilliams: Biology.
- Rubens: Was he in a fraternity?
- McWilliams: No, but he had fraternity friends.
- Rubens: I assume that she shared his politics, or vice versa.
- McWilliams: Well, she was a very left-liberal Democrat all her life. Actually, I have a great story about this woman. The first time I ever met Mrs. Roosevelt.
- Rubens: Whose picture is on your wall here.
- McWilliams: Yes. This was when I was in graduate school, actually. In the late fifties, anyway.
- Rubens: Was she the representative to the U.N. then?
- McWilliams: Yes. And I was introduced to her, and she said, "Oh, I'm so glad to meet you because I know your father and your mother." And I said, "Mrs. Roosevelt, I think you mean my stepmother." And she said, "No, dear, I mean your mother. She was chairman of the Al Smith for President Committee at UCLA in 1928." I said, "Mrs. Roosevelt, how in God's name did you remember that?" She said, "It's my job to."
- Rubens: What a great story
- McWilliams: Yes. Well, her father was a professor of mathematics at UCLA, came out from the University of Missouri. She was born in Missouri--and he came out from the University of Missouri in 1924 and was a professor at UCLA until he became provost in '36. There is a UCLA dormitory named for him, actually.
- Rubens: His name was?
- McWilliams: Earl Hedrick.
- Rubens: And when did he die?
- McWilliams: 1943

- Rubens: She did her full undergraduate years at UCLA?
- McWilliams: She had a year at University of Missouri. Her mother was a graduate of B.U. [Boston University], in philology [is this philosophy or biology?]. My mother came from a large family; she was one of ten siblings.
- Rubens: But then with your father had one child, you.
- McWilliams: Yes. My stepmother also had one child, my brother Jerry, who died in 1990..
- Rubens: Was your mother on her own politically active?
- McWilliams: Oh, yes. She was more conventional politically than he was on things like foreign policy, more likely to be certainly less sympathetic to the Soviet experiment. My father was never a Communist, but he sort of always wished these folks well, you know? Dorothy Healey was the 100-year-old chairman of the California Communist Party. She called my father a progressive, one of the guys who sort of--and my mother was much more suspicious of the Communists and much less attracted to protest politics, more likely to work inside the system. She was pretty active politically.
- We moved to--she went back to teaching. She taught before they were married from '29 to '30 in Burbank. And then when they were divorced, she went back to teaching. We lived in Merced from 1943 till the time she died. She died in 1972.
- Rubens: And why does she move to Merced?
- McWilliams: Job.
- Rubens: Okay. Beautiful town.
- McWilliams: Yes, it's a nice little town.
- Rubens: You didn't find it too constricting?
- McWilliams: No. It had all the difficulties of valley towns. The railroad divided the town into two social worlds: Mexicans and African Americans and Asians on one side and Anglos on the other, with an occasional Mexican that was passing as Hispanic. But the advantage of a small town is that these barriers are more penetrable.
- Rubens: Was there only one high school?
- McWilliams: There's only one high school.
- Rubens: So therefore the children of these diverse people--that's why you know--

- McWilliams: That's absolutely right, yes. Up to high school, all the education was segregated.
- Rubens: Did you have a couple of good teachers during high school that you liked?
- McWilliams: I had extraordinary teachers, because I benefited from the era of discrimination against women. Most of the academic teachers were very senior, and they had come to the high school in an era when women couldn't get other jobs. My geometry teacher had a Ph.D. in math from Stanford, and she ran--the best training in philosophy I ever had. Geometry was a class in logic. I had an extraordinary Spanish teacher, a wonderful woman named [Ann McDonnell?]. And good teachers in French, algebra. The only mediocre teachers I had were males, essentially.
- Rubens: A gym teacher who also taught shop or something like that?
- McWilliams: That's right, yes.
- Rubens: How did you get to Berkeley?
- McWilliams: Well, you know, the world of high school advising was really simple. Did you get good grades? If you did, have your parents got a lot of money? If they didn't, they don't go to Berkeley, right? It's sort of down the scale from there. It's very easy. Our kids either went to Berkeley--Stanford if they had money. Some of them went to UCLA, slightly down the scale, but then the next stage down: most kids went to either Fresno State or SC or, if they were Catholics, Santa Clara, St. Mary's.
- Rubens: Now--so you came to school in '51, right?
- McWilliams: Yes.
- Rubens: So the war years your father was under a lot of attack in '39, '40--
- McWilliams: And in the fifties he was even more because of McCarthyism, yes.
- Rubens: How does that impact on you? I'm sure in many ways. I don't want to be doing a psychoanalytic--or have you say things you--
- McWilliams: You know, it played out in a couple ways. All the way through high school, he was being--oh, there were places where he would be denied the right to use a public venue, even in San Francisco. The San Francisco County Board of Supervisors denied him the right to speak in the Civic Auditorium. This was while I was in college, so it's got to be something like '52 or so, the--
- Rubens: You said that he would come and speak at Unitarian Church.

McWilliams: Yes. But he had to speak at a black, AME church in San Francisco because the meeting was cancelled. The lecture had been scheduled, and the Board of Supervisors cancelled him on the grounds that he was a "controversial person."

Rubens: He also had debated--there was that famous debate with '40, I think, '41. Was it the Commonwealth Club or--I can't think of the guy's name. A really right wing state representative. I don't know where that took place.

McWilliams: Oh, Jack Tenney? Or which one?

Rubens: Well, there must have been many.

McWilliams: Well, you know, his testimony before the state Un-American Activities Committee is hilarious because the first question he's asked by Jack Tenney is "Do you advocate the intermarriage of the races?" That's actually verified. My father said, "I don't advocate. I just think that they ought to be able to if they want to." And Tenney said, "Doesn't that mean that you're in favor of racial intermarriage?" And my father said, "No, I rather thought it meant I was opposed to fornication." [laughs]

But even to think back--you know, until Harry Bridges successfully challenged the law, there was a law against miscegenation on the books. It was really bizarre. But, you know, he was in the news a lot from that. And it was difficult as a kid to have a father who was doing all this stuff. At the same time, you know, it's also very affirming because he was a person of absolute unyielding, very Calvinist moral integrity. And, you know, particularly if you're going to grow up separated from your father, having a father who's a wonderful example, a sort of tower of moral strength is very useful.

Rubens: And that's how you did perceive him?

McWilliams: Yes, absolutely.

Rubens: And your mother wasn't counter to that.

McWilliams: No, no, absolutely not.

Rubens: And did you see your father a lot?

McWilliams: Oh, yes. Actually, they were very civilized. They got along very well. They were friends.

Rubens: How much difference between you and your brother, your half-brother?

McWilliams: Nine years.

- Rubens: So you're pretty--when he was in high school--
- McWilliams: Yes. Well, actually, we've got a terrific relationship because my father was a rather reserved person, and my stepmother is very warm but very erratic. So I had something between being that much older--I had something between a sibling and being--it's almost an avuncular relationship, that level. We were, I think, very close. So I saw him a lot, partly because my mother's family was in L.A., so we could go down to Los Angeles -
- Rubens: He maintained his base there?
- McWilliams: Until 1951, yes.
- Rubens: And then to Washington, D.C. isn't that right?
- McWilliams: New York.
- Rubens: Of course. You mentioned meeting Eleanor Roosevelt. Were there other public figures you might have met and seen because of your father when you were--well, in those high school years, so those are the forties.
- McWilliams: Ronald Reagan. When I first remember him, he was with the screen actor's guild and always being dragged around to meetings by Don Healey and the rest because, you know, he read lines well. They would tell him what to say, and he'd deliver them beautifully.
- Rubens: Not so different than when he switched to the other side. I see, so--did your father keep company with these people?
- McWilliams: In Los Angeles politics. It was--
- Rubens: Inseparable.
- McWilliams: Right. Bob [Robert W.] Kenny was a close friend of my father's, and I remember him very well. They were really very close buddies. I used to--
- Rubens: Sure. He was a good liberal; had headed the Los Angeles lawyer's guild and became California's attorney general.
- McWilliams: They were both, you know, basically inclined to the left of the Democratic Party, and they both in their younger days drank too much and would get sloshed.
- Rubens: We know your father didn't have particularly political aspirations, for office. What about the U.N.? There's a young woman who is doing work on your father. I've forgotten her name.

McWilliams: Lee Ann Meyers.

Rubens: I need to get back in touch with her.

McWilliams: Did I tell you to see David Walls, by the way? He's a dean at Sonoma State. He's a person you should talk to, because he was around in those days.

[End of Interview]