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Michael Myerson
Free Speech Movement Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Lisa Rubens
in 2000

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INTERVIEW WITH MIKE MYERSON

[Interview 1; July 16, 2000]

[Tape 1]

Rubens: For the record this is tape one with Mike Myerson, and we're at his house in Courtland Manor, about a half hour out of New York and five minutes beyond Red Hill. Red Hill is the sort of infamous--certainly famous site of a leftie's artist collective in the twenties and thirties.

Myerson: Yes, five minutes south of where the Peekskill Riots took place.

Rubens: When did you come to Berkeley?

Myerson: I came to Berkeley in the fall of '58, as an undergraduate. I came as a sophomore.

Rubens: Where had you been before?

Myerson: University of Mexico and also at Los Angeles City College [LACC]. I actually came to Berkeley because I just wanted to live away from home. It was cheap--I think it was seventy-five dollars tuition to go there.

I went up to the Bay Area and heard this guy at a nightclub they call Ann's 440 on Broadway, named Lenny Bruce and fell in love with Lenny Bruce. I said, "This is Nirvana. I'm going to go to Berkeley."

Rubens: By the way, was that in San Francisco?

Myerson: Yes, that was in San Francisco. That was in the spring of '58.

Rubens: So this suggests maybe you ought to back up and tell me where you were born and when.

Myerson: I was born in Washington, D.C. in 1940. We left in the winter of '45. The reason why I'm told we left is my older brother had asthma, which is true. I suspect also my parents got out of Washington, my father was a government worker working for the War Production Board. I think we got out of there also because of the impending purges that were going to happen, the anti-Communists and anti-labor purges. My father had joined the Party--I found this out many years later--during the war.

Rubens: The Communist Party.

Myerson: Yes. I suspect that's also why he left there. But anyway, we moved out to Los Angeles, where my mother had cousins, and my father got a job in Hollywood, as a set designer.

Rubens: How did he have those skills? What was that about?

Myerson: He was an architect and a draftsman, so they needed people and he was good at it. He wasn't the set designer of name, he worked under--. But he is a set designer for a number of fairly good movies, such as *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* with Danny Kaye and *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dreamhouse*.

Rubens: So you're basically raised in L.A. What high school did you go to?

Myerson: I went to John Marshall High School; the same high school as Judge Lance Ito, the judge of the O. J. Simpson case.

Rubens: I want to just bring it back to Berkeley now and ask much more about your family. Was LACC first? Was there discussion of going to college?

Myerson: Yeah. I mean, my parents didn't send me to college. It was kind of, you worked your way through.

Rubens: Had your brother already gone?

Myerson: My other brother had gone to Pepperdine College, which was sort of a right-wing religious school in Los Angeles. Ask him about it.

Rubens: We'll do that. What was his name, and how much older?

Myerson: Allen Myerson. He's four years older. And he dropped out after a couple-- he was a pre-law student. Then he went to UCLA and took some screenwriting courses and dropped out of UCLA and went to New York to make his fortune.

Rubens: So he wasn't particularly urging you to go to college or anyplace.

Myerson: No, no. He was already in New York.

Rubens: And we'll talk about Allen later because he's just had a wonderful career in Second City and then The Committee in San Francisco and on to other things. LACC, is that your first year after graduation?

Myerson: What happened is my best friend in high school was a son of the Mexican consul general, Los Angeles. I got kicked out of high school. My day of graduation we took up a collection for a gift for a homeroom teacher. I was assigned to give the gift. I bought him a case of beer, and he kicked

me out of school. So I didn't get my diploma. Bill Guillermo, this friend of mine, and I left the next day for Mexico City to live with his family down there. So I went to the University of Mexico, the national university. I went to summer school and I think through the fall semester, and then I came back to Los Angeles City College for the spring of '58.

Rubens: Were you a good student in high school?

Myerson: I was good in the subjects I wanted to be good in. I mean, if the teachers stimulated me, I got A's, and if not, I took the path of least resistance. I was two years ahead, I graduated from high school when I was sixteen. All my friends were older. I was kind of a wreck. I was a drunk. I mean, I wasn't an alcoholic, but I drank all the time.

Rubens: What was that about? Youth culture?

Myerson: No, I think partly I was sort of a social misfit. This was in the mid-fifties. I was running with a Chicano gang, those were my friends, and I was Jewish. Some of my friends were beaten up, and one was killed by the cops. But also my friends, including my girlfriends, were two years older than me, and I didn't fit in. Underneath all that, I was a red diaper baby, which wasn't a real good thing to be in 1955 and so on. And then I had an older brother, Allen, who had been the student body president and everything else in my high school. He had a reputation that I could not and didn't want to live up to. So I became the fuck-up. But I did well to get into Berkeley.

Rubens: Yes. We see here that you came to the Bay Area after seeing Lenny Bruce, but you must have known someone or some of your classmates must have come to Berkeley.

Myerson: Actually, no. After me there was a whole group of people who followed, but I didn't know anybody there at the time.

Rubens: Let's unfold this. Where did you live in Berkeley, that first year?

Myerson: The first year I lived in almost downtown Berkeley. I lived in a room--not a rooming house--but a room an elderly lady had. So I had a bedroom and a hot plate. Fraternities [were] beyond anything and I had no--I didn't want group living. I didn't want to live in a dorm and I didn't want to live in a coop. I don't know if they still have co-ops, but they had co-ops then. So I lived on my own.

Rubens: And did you know what you were going to study?

Myerson: No. Actually, when I was at Berkeley I went through seven or eight different majors because I didn't like any of the core requirements. I think I started out as a history major in '58.

Rubens: Did you, that first year, encounter SLATE?

Myerson: The way I encountered SLATE was [because] I was a loner. I had one friend, who was a year behind me in school. He went to the high school I went to. His name was Richard Brown. He came to Berkeley as a freshman when I was a sophomore. He had a roommate whose name was Dan Greenson. Dan and I became quite good friends, and eventually we became roommates. Dan is now a psychoanalyst in Berkeley. Anyway, Richard Brown, I don't know what happened to him, but at one point he tried to recruit me into the CIA, many years later, to work in Brazil. That's a whole 'nother story.

So Dan was one of the few friends I had at this time. I was involved in campus politics. I read *The Daily Californian* and had sort of an awareness. At one point in the spring of '59--but I wasn't going to jump into anything anyway because I just wanted really to get my way around, I was working after school and spending as much time in San Francisco as possible. I wasn't a real keen student, but I had a terrific professor in Richard Drinon, who essentially saved me as a student. He eventually became the faculty advisor for SLATE. He was a history professor.

Anyway, in the spring was the city elections, the Berkeley city elections, and one of the things on the ballot of the city election was for open housing in Berkeley. One of the people who was running for city council, was the dean of students, Dean Stone. There were two deans. There was Dean Schaeffer, who was dean of students, and then Dean Stone, was dean of academic affairs. Anyway, Dean Stone was running against open housing. SLATE was supporting the open housing amendment, and they were told by the administration that this was an off-campus issue. They could only organize on campus around on-campus issues, not off-campus issues. But they decided to do it anyway. They were going to have a rally for open housing and essentially had Dean Stone banned it.

So then there was a rally in Sproul Hall Plaza--no, not Sproul Plaza, but right in front of Wheeler Hall [at Wheeler Oak]. So people would get up on top of that little wall around the tree and declare themselves for open housing. So Dan Greenson and I were walking by, and we decided to go with them. So I got up and made a three-minute thing--I mean, simply to essentially put my name down. And Dan did, too.

Rubens: An open mic? Was there a mic?

Myerson: No, no, no. There were only, like, thirty, fifty people at most listening. And then the result of that was that we were all called into the dean's office and suspended for a day or two, whatever it was. Then there was a defense committee, and I was in SLATE. I had a background of political activity. I mean, I grew up in a very political household, so I wasn't new to all this stuff.

Rubens: But it had been, certainly, several years where you had not put yourself in the forefront.

Myerson: No, except that, subsequently I read my FBI file, and I was leader of the Labor Youth League for a period, the teenage division in Los Angeles. I had gone to Marxist studies classes. I was telling my son, who just graduated middle school last month, that the day I graduated middle school, junior high school in Los Angeles, I gave a speech on the Rosenbergs. It was the day the Rosenbergs were being executed. I left the graduation, went down to the Federal Building to demonstrate for the Rosenbergs. Then afterwards went to the playground up the street from me, while I knew that they were being executed. So I had political genes. I had gone to a zillion demonstrations, picket lines, with my dad, and I knew the deal. Actually, as it turned out, in SLATE a good number of the kids who joined SLATE initially--I don't know if it was a third or half--but a bunch of them were red-diaper babies or had some genetic connection to one or another part of the Left. I mean, they didn't come in fresh-faced.

Rubens: Did it seem Jewish to you, too?

Myerson: No. When I think of the people I was first friends with in SLATE, there were Jews and so on, but--. There was a woman named Eilene Theodore. She was Greek, from Tuckahoe, New York. Debbie Crawford, who was black, from Berkeley. Her dad was a leader in the co-op movement at Berkeley, the grocery co-ops. Victor Garland, Mike Miller. Herb Mills from Detroit. I know he's not Jewish.

Rubens: Anyway, and you also mentioned two women right off, so there were some women.

Myerson: Oh, yes. Cindy Limpkey who was the head of SLATE at that point, and she wasn't Jewish.

Rubens: What we need to do is a history of SLATE, but this isn't it. So you now find your group at Berkeley.

Myerson: Yes. Of course, I'm still younger than anybody. I was a sophomore and I think I was eighteen then. But a lot of SLATE were graduate students: Victor Garland, Ron Sternberg, Herb Mills. They were grad students, so some of them were ten years older than me.

Rubens: Then, if we could just light on some of the activities you got involved with vis-a-vis SLATE Whatever you pick out as sort of the main feature to get us to '64. [telephone rings]

[tape interruption]

What brings you in to your work with SLATE? Open housing in spring of '59?

Myerson: Yes, open housing. My chronology may be off, but one of the big issues that I was involved with was ROTC and Fred Moore. The issue was great. There was a military draft, and Fred Moore was a student who refused to be in ROTC.

Rubens: He was in SLATE?

Myerson: I don't think Fred was, no. Actually, it was around that issue that a number of us in SLATE formed a Student Civil Liberties Union [SCLU], which was a parallel organization. The memberships were not at all the same, but there was an overlap. Maybe a quarter of SLATE members were also active in SCLU.

Rubens: What led you to do that?

Myerson: Because there was a lawsuit. It was a civil liberties issue. We worked with the American Civil Liberties Union. The lead attorney was a guy named Al Bendich, who was actually on the faculty at Berkeley when he was a speech professor.

Rubens: Was there opposition to this development by some SLATE people, or was it simply they didn't want to participate in this?

Myerson: Yes, SLATE was not a disciplined organization. People did what they wanted. I mean, some of us who were SLATE activists, who were in leadership, worked on everything. But there were committees and most people were primarily students. They came to SLATE meetings or they didn't come to SLATE meetings. They paid dues to SLATE or they didn't. But then there was an issue that would come out, and they'd get involved in that particular issue.

Rubens: Did you become a leader?

Myerson: Yes. Essentially, it was almost self-chosen. We had elections and so on, but if you were active, there was a place for you. The more active you were, the more you were desirable. So I was on the SLATE executive [committee] almost from the start. For a couple of years I was elected the SLATE president or chairperson. That was later on.

Rubens: The year before had been when TASC had been reorganized as SLATE

Myerson: That '57 before I got there.

Rubens: Then could you see the HUAC committee coming to San Francisco?

Myerson: Before HUAC, this was the thing that threw me into a hundred percent to be a non-student from then on, was the Caryl Chessman execution. Caryl Chessman, I subsequently found out, went to my high school. But Caryl Chessman was a kidnapper. It was a capital crime in California to commit a rape in the course of a kidnaping. So Caryl Chessman was accused and found guilty of that and was sentenced to death. It became the pivotal capital punishment, the Mumia issue of its time. I mean, it wasn't the same scope, there wasn't a racial implication, but it became a huge international issue. The Pope and the French parliament--. But in California, then the governor was Edmund Brown, Sr., who was a liberal who kept telling the world that he was against capital punishment. But he was going ahead with this. He was sort of like the Bill Clinton of his time except Bill Clinton now is for capital punishment, but it turns out the things he has to do, even though it's against his principle.

Anyway, it was a big issue, and Richard Drinnon, the professor I mentioned earlier, and there was another professor, a speech professor named Christian Bay, who was Norwegian, and who I think had also been an attorney at Nuremberg. The two of them were the two lead professors on campus around the capital punishment thing, and I was very moved to get involved in it. And celebrities came to the prison gates: Marlon Brando, Shirley MacLaine, and people like that. But we had a big movement around that.

Rubens: Could you say just one more time why you were drawn to this?

Myerson: Well, I have a deep anti-authoritarian streak in me forever. This was the state killing somebody, and that was it. I mean, I wasn't so much a pacifist, but it was the machinery of the state taking a person's life. And he hadn't taken anyone's life. It was clear he had kidnapped the victim, but it wasn't clear he had raped her. But whether he did or not--for me that was

the thing that got me involved. And then the hypocrisy and the governor's crocodile tears and all. Primarily what I was moved by then were moral questions. I wasn't real political. I didn't care too much about the political calculus, how this would affect whatever I did. It was what I thought to be right and wrong; that's what drove me.

And I became, like, the leader of that movement among students. We had petitions. We had thousands of petitions. We interrupted Governor Brown at some banquet he was speaking at, at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco. He was really pissed off about that. One of the people who was in our delegation was Michael Amber, a black student from Berkeley, and the governor saw us there. We were dressed in suits and ties, as befitting the Fairmont and he came over to shake hands with this black guy to recruit the NAACP vote or whatever he was doing. And we handed him the petitions with the press there and he got very upset.

But anyway, the execution was one of those things that was on again, off again, on again, off again. Several times we traipsed out to San Quentin gates for around-the-clock vigils. And we were there when he was killed. But that preceded the HUAC stuff. I think laid the basis for it because we had a sit-in at San Quentin. None of us got arrested, refusing to let trucks in or out of San Quentin. Before I get to that, this probably even set the stage for Caryl Chessman, was Southern sit-ins. Southern sit-ins were unquestionably the galvanizing force for the student movement and for SLATE. What happened when SNCC and the Southern black students refused to move the lunch counters at Woolworth's and so forth, we began to have demonstrations at Woolworth's on Shattuck Avenue.

Here's an interesting story for you to follow up with your future interviews. While I was leading the demonstrations on Woolworth's at that time, and there was a KPFA volunteer reporter, it was a sophomore student, Michael Tigar, who was there on a Navy ROTC scholarship at Berkeley. He came up and interviewed me, and we got in a conversation. Then that night he came over to dinner. I was then living in a house with myself, Dan Greenson, Aryay Linsky, who became a leader in SLATE, and David Rynin, whose father was a philosophy professor. David was a grad student in philosophy, and in SLATE

Rubens: The father was at Berkeley?

Myerson: Yes. And David was a philosophy grad student, I believe he still is, a perennial grad student. But anyway, Mike came over for dinner that night and was going through my bookshelves, and he found this book called Power Elite by C. Wright Mills. He said, "This looks interesting." I said, "Borrow it." After dinner he left at about nine o'clock at night, and I went

to sleep. At about 12:30, one o'clock my doorbell rings. I wake up and go downstairs, and it's Mike saying, "This was great. Do you have anything else by him?" So he borrowed White Collar. But anyway, that's how Mike and I became close friends. Mike started hanging out with us, and that's how Mike became involved in SLATE

Rubens: Did anyone you know particularly go to the South to engage in the sit-ins? Did you see people come back from there and talk to SLATE groups?

Myerson: Not at that time, but people from the South came North. Dan Greenson was elected by SLATE to become the National Student Association representative on campus. Because we had four or five people in the student government--Cindy Limpkey was one--we got funding. We set up a bogus thing called Students for Racial Equality, in which we brought people from the South. Another sort of fun group we had was Friends of SNCC And we brought some of the Southern kids North to speak on campus. Students for Racial Equality was just a mechanism to get funding. We brought Malcolm X there in '61.

Rubens: So he came a couple of times.

Myerson: Yes. We had concerts. We brought the Oscar Peterson Trio.

Rubens: Malcolm was allowed on campus?

Myerson: Yes. In the same year, 1960, was the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. There was a march on the Democratic convention, organized by A. Philip Randolph and Martin Luther King--a march for civil rights-- to try to get a civil rights plank in the Democratic platform. I was asked to organize. I was only known on reputation. Mike Michael Harrington and Bayard Ruskin in New York asked me to organize a West Coast student contingent as part of this march. And the two SNCC people who were heading up the march were Marion Barry and Bernard Lee. Bernard went on to become an SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Committee] minister.

[tape interruption]

Myerson: Also that same summer we had a retreat at Mount--, in northern California. I guess this grew out of the HUAC stuff. I'll come back to HUAC But after the HUAC thing, but the Un-American Activities Committee itself put out a film [Operation Abolition].

Mike Tigar and I were some one of the few people that sort of tracked that around to American Legion meetings and so on and so forth and spoke

against it, had debates. But anyway, the result of all this, the Un-American Committee and also our arrests at HUAC, we had this reputation nationally. So there were like-minded kids on different campuses that wanted to form SLATE-type things. So there was like an alphabet soup at UCLA and another at San Francisco State. Mainly in California, but then also elsewhere, at Michigan VOICE was formed, led by Al Haber and Tom Hayden. They all came out to this SLATE retreat and stayed in our living room, on our floors, whatever. That's how we all got together.

Rubens: Democratic Party: anything particular you can say about that? Greenson was the assigned person to the National Student Association, through ASUC or through SLATE?

Myerson: He was elected as the SLATE representative; it was an uncontested post. You ran for student body elections: student body president, there was a student council, and also the NSA representative, and he was elected.

Anyway, all these things were happening. The reason I mentioned the retreat is I know there had to be lead planning time. We were planning for that, we were planning for the Democratic convention, while we were doing the Chessman thing and while HUAC was coming to town. This was all happening at the same time. HUAC was really a big thing. They came, we staged demonstrations, and a bunch of us got arrested and washed down the steps of City Hall.

Rubens: What would you say politically--I don't mean impact on HUAC, but politically in terms of organizational growth, structure, consciousness at Berkeley--what would you say was the impact of that HUAC event? Did you connect with people at San Francisco State?

Myerson: Oh, yes.

Rubens: I was wondering. Also with Chessman, if you met other people.

Myerson: No. What happened is--because the newspapers reported what we were doing, that was kind of unique. Political activity was not a thing you could do with the students in those days. This was the end of the Cold War. This marked the end of the Cold War. I mean, the fifties were known as the Quiet Generation.

When I first got to Berkeley, you were asking how I first got involved. I remember SLATE kids passing out leaflets at the gate. You weren't allowed on campus. You couldn't do it. You had to do it on Bancroft Way and also on whatever the street is on the Northside, [Hearst]. And to hand out a leaflet was to declare yourself some mad Anarchist or something.

And kids wouldn't take it. That was the atmosphere in 1957-'58. So this all happened all within a year or two of that, all the things I'm mentioning. Also Berkeley, of course, had been a center for twenty-five years, that was where the Loyalty Oaths were first imposed and Oppenheimer came out of it. The faculty was terrified, people lost their jobs, and it was a very prestigious university. There was sort of a ruling class in California that had a big stake in what happened in Berkeley. So this was big news when we did these things, even though in many cases, like the Fred Moore thing it wasn't a mass movement, only thirty to fifty people participated in it. But because of what happened and it was the Army, it became news. It was reported on A.P., so we got a reputation. It wasn't like in the course of doing these things we met people, but in the course of doing these things people heard about us. People were sort of making pilgrimages to Berkeley to find out more. Kids came up from Los Angeles State College and came down from the University of Oregon or whatever.

Rubens: One thing that is said is that the Operation Abolition was one of the greatest recruiting ploys. But you are saying something else, I think. You didn't have to seek out people. The fact that it was reported on, and the succession and the number of events, it drew people on the campus and also to the organization?

Myerson: Right. Oh, absolutely, yes. Like any kind of mass movement, there's only the core people who are the most active, and then there are circular rings going out. Some people would come to demonstrations. Some people would sign petitions. Some people wouldn't do anything but if their boyfriend wanted to do it or their girlfriend wanted to do it, they wouldn't say no, whereas a year ago they might have. It was that kind of thing.

Rubens: And debates about whether the Communist Party should be visible at all.

Myerson: There were no Communists that I knew of at that time on the Berkeley campus. I was not a member of the Communist Party. I was not a part of a party until many years later. But everybody assumed I was a Communist Party member partly because I had organizational skills, so I was always suspect. But also the ideological debate then was--the youth wing of the Socialist Party was called YPSL [Young Peoples Socialist League], and there was the Young Socialists Alliance, which was the youth wing of whatever the Trotskyite group was called then. These were tough times. Internationally, Fidel [Castro] had seized power in Cuba, and there was Khrushchev pounding on the lectern [at the U.N.] and all that. So the debate was to declare yourself against Communism. Even though there weren't loyalty oaths, even within YPSL and some of the anti-Communist organizations on the Left that considered themselves Socialist, had their own litmus test about whether you were a true Democrat, a true civil

libertarian, a true revolutionary, a true radical, a true liberal, whatever. And that was that you declared yourself anti-Communist.

SLATE refused to do that. I was one of the people who was a stickler, but many others were. I had some sympathies towards Communism, but many did not particularly, but they were not going to be forced into that. So that was one of the things that distinguished SLATE and also that opened up the ideological breathing space for people, by refusing to do so. But because I was a fierce debater on those kinds of questions, I think people thought, "He must be."

Rubens: So it would come up at different times, and you would seek to keep that debate down, saying that was not an issue for our organization.

Myerson: Right. There was never any accusations that "You're a Communist." That was not the thing. It was, "You're aiding Communism by--"

Rubens: Yes, to declare your side.

Myerson: And that was significant also because that was really ideologically on the campuses of the United States, the beginning of the end of the Cold War. We were declaring an end to the Cold War in Berkeley, as far as we were concerned.

Rubens: When was it that SLATE, that the graduate students, were kicked out of student government?

Myerson: That was '62 or '63.

Rubens: Was that because there was such a growth of political--

Myerson: My graduations were something. I had the junior high school graduation on the Rosenbergs, high school graduation I was kicked out for the beer incident, and the week of my college graduation, which was June of '61, Clark Kerr kicked SLATE off campus. We were declared an off-campus organization. That really pissed a lot of people off because even people who were not involved in our activities understood that we had a right to do it by then.

Rubens: Why do you think he was really kicking you off campus?

Myerson: Oh, the Regents. You have William Knowland was a U.S. Senator on the *Oakland Tribune*. These were Regents.

Rubens: But ostensibly you were evaluating classes. Had you been too closely identified with outside--

Myerson: No, it wasn't I was kicked off campus--SLATE, the organization.

Rubens: SLATE was too closely identified with the anti-HUAC campaigns, Chessman--

Myerson: Yes, he had already declared these were off-campus issues.

Rubens: So was there a huge protest against that?

Myerson: Oh, yes. Yes, yes. Yes, there were petitions and lawsuits and all that sort of thing.

Rubens: There was a lawsuit.

Myerson: Yes. Al Bendich is the guy to talk to about that. So we got back on campus.

Rubens: Now, do you become a graduate student?

Myerson: No.

Rubens: So where are you in '64? What is happening? What happens between June '61 and--just to get us to '64.

Myerson: In '61, after graduating, I got married in November of '61. First, I went back to New York again right after graduation and hung out in New York for a few months. My older brother was living there, so I was going there a lot of times.

I decided I wanted to stay in New York, and I was offered, because of my reputation from Berkeley, this quadrennial international youth festivals, for peace and freedom. I was asked to head up the U.S. delegation to the next one, which was going to be in Helsinki, Finland in the summer of '62. So I spent most of the next year, eight months of that year, in New York as the head of the U.S. Festival Committee, and I organized a delegation of about 450 members. We had running debates at that time with Gloria Steinem, who was head of the State Department or CIA operation against the festivals.

Rubens: Through the NSA.

Myerson: She wasn't working for the NSA. There was an anti-festival committee which she headed up, which was funded by the CIA. She and I have talked about this subsequently, and she's apologetic.

Rubens: It's a public issue.

Myerson: In 1961, there was a debate that summer at the NSA convention. On my way back to New York after graduation, a group of us--Herb Mills and I and I can't remember who else--went to the NSA convention in Madison, Wisconsin. We were kind of the left-wing of NSA, and there was the middle-wing, which was Al Haber and Tom Hayden, who moved to the Left, but then there was the right-wing, which was CIA-funded people. And so the youth festival came up there because it was the year when they started to organize for the youth festival. That's what I did in '61-'62. I did the youth festival.

Rubens: So 450 members went. You were largely responsible for recruiting them?

Myerson: Yes, I was the head of the delegation.

Rubens: And how many from Berkeley, about?

Myerson: A fair number, thirty maybe. Mike Tigar was the West Coast regional person. Also in that whole time also, of course, we were running student elections, and we ran Mike for student body president one time. We had our own student body president, Dave Armor. I was his campaign manager. Then the next year we ran Mike Tigar, and that's after Fidel took power in Cuba, and the fraternities had signs saying AMERICA SI, TIGAR NO. That was going on then.

Rubens: You had already been president?

Myerson: Yes, I was president then. I wasn't president of the student body; I was president of SLATE during those two years. I was Dave Armor's campaign chair for student body president, and then Mike's campaign chair.

Rubens: When does Cleveland's quarrel come in? I believe Tigar or you, he claims, beat him to be chair of SLATE

Myerson: I remember Brad. I know he was active, but I don't remember him particularly being a leading person in SLATE.

Rubens: One other person I want to ask you about, because he was the first one who really got me thinking about the NSA and these youth conferences, was Carey McWilliams, Jr. Did you know him?

Myerson: Carey was another of the great non-Jewish graduate students who was very active in SLATE at the time, very smart, very articulate. My impression of him--he was significantly older than me--was he was very disturbed, I think, and very angry. He had no sense of humor, and very elitist. I don't know what his deal was with his father, but his father's politics were much more progressive than his ever were.

Rubens: So you, yourself, went to that festival? That must have been amazing.

Myerson: So then I came back. By then I was married. I got married. My wife, whose name is Diane Burke--she now is a teacher in Berkeley. Anyway, so we moved back to Berkeley. Lived across the street from Herb and Ann Mills, Mike Tigar moved upstairs. We had our own little commune on Roosevelt Road there. Not being on campus, I was not in SLATE then. But if you're there and a radical in Berkeley, you're around the campus and I had all these friends there, and I always went to the library.

About that time some people, not me, this happened before I got back from New York or from Europe. I spent several months travelling in Europe. I guess I came back to Berkeley in January of '63, and some people were organizing, in Berkeley or in San Francisco, a W.E.B. DuBois Club, a Marxist study youth group. So I knew a bunch of the people doing it, so they asked me to join. So I joined and I soon became a leader of that. It was off-campus. There were mainly study groups then. I guess I was not in the Communist Party at this time. What happened is that in '61, at the end of '61, there was a kid on campus named Doug Wachter, who was the son of Communists. He declared that he was a member of the Communist Party. Then soon after that, a guy named Bob Kauffman, who was a graduate student or who was going to UCLA, transferred to graduate school at Berkeley in history. Bob was a Communist. Bob and I became quite close friends. And then there was another--

Rubens: How did you become friends? Through the DuBois?

Myerson: Yes.

Rubens: Was the DuBois at that point out front a Communist organization, Communist sponsored?

Myerson: No. Bob was in SLATE, that's how I became friends with him. And then I had a friend from the age of thirteen in Los Angeles, from my Labor

Youth League days, named Carl Bloice. And Carl's intention was to become a Unitarian minister. He was a youth leader of the Unitarians nationally for a while, put out their newspaper. But Carl came to the Bay Area around that time, and actually joined YPSL. He wasn't in the Communist Party then. And eventually worked for *The People's World*. [Communist Party newspaper]. The Communist Party began recruiting '61, after the HUAC stuff. I don't think anybody was in the Communist Party at Berkeley on the campus until then.

The DuBois Club was an outgrowth of HUAC too, because the anti-Communism as a result, made Communism legitimate for people. So by the time I got back from the youth festival in '63, there was already a Communist Club on Berkeley campus, and I'm sure they were the key people putting together the DuBois Club of America.

Rubens: Did you join the Communists by attending?

Myerson: I never joined the Communist Party in all those years. I was the head of the DuBois Clubs, I enjoyed those.

Rubens: Was that the same with the Labor's Youth League?

Myerson: Yes, yes, because they were teenagers. You couldn't even join the Communist Party. But the Labor Youth League was an arm of the Communist Party.

Rubens: Sure, but that didn't mean when you were in it you thought of yourself as being a member of the Communist Party?

Myerson: No. Oh, absolutely not. Even in the thirties, when there was a Young Communists League, to be in the Young Communist League was not to be in the Communist Party.

Rubens: Dorothy Healey's clear about this. And Dave Jenkins insisted he didn't want to be in the youth club, he wanted to be right in the party.

Myerson: Right, so there was always a distinction. I think it was an age thing. You couldn't join the Community Party until you were eighteen or something like that.

Rubens: Wachter had been given a subpoena to attend before HUAC on campus. I remember something happened to him on campus.

Myerson: So Doug was a member of SLATE, but he was a silent member. He played no big role in SLATE. But when he was subpoenaed before HUAC, then

he was essentially outed. So, I was leader of the DuBois Club and the reputation of the DuBois Club was Communist, so people assumed I was a Communist, including Communist Party people. Communist kids would come up to me and start complaining about this, that and the other thing, and I'd say, "No, no. I'm not in the Communist Party. Go talk to Bob Kauffman."

So when I came back, I threw myself into the Du Bois Clubs, but I played a big role, and I can't say I was the one who did it, but at some point, the study group became an action organization. I remember the first thing we did was there were some riots or something in Panama. I wrote a pamphlet about Panama, and I think the Du Bois Clubs, had a demonstrations on Panama.

Then Madame Nu was coming to the Sheraton Palace. I was already on top of Vietnam. I wrote a pamphlet about Vietnam, and we had these demonstrations. Actually, that pamphlet, the Vietnam pamphlet, was put out by DuBois Clubs, but it sold over 50,000 copies because it was used at all the teach-ins and stuff. And all those people were using it. Anyway, so we had the demonstration around Madame Nu. We kept her from going into the hotel, she couldn't get into her hotel. That was a big deal.

And then, there's all this stuff going on in the South. I guess what happened is, in 1963, was the famous March on Washington. I was again asked to organize youth to come from California, which I did. We got big carloads and planes. That was also a summer that a number of kids, including DuBois Clubs kids, were going South working with SNCC, working in Mississippi and the Delta. And I remember very well, in Washington, seeing my friends coming off the buses in their little overalls from Greenville. Harold Supriano was one of the big [ones]. Phil Davis, who was the president of the Du Bois clubs, went for many months in Albany, Georgia. Do you know Dennis Roberts, an attorney in Berkeley and Oakland? He was another.

But around that time we decided we were going to go after racism in the Bay Area. So the DuBois Clubs met with others, including the NAACP and CORE, all the civil rights organizations, and we formed an Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination. And it was really a DuBois Club operation. But we got people from these other organizations involved and they became active in it. The two heads of it were a young black woman named Tracy Simms and myself. We had these demonstrations, first at the Mel's Drive-Ins, one of these string of drive-ins in Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco. And we were demonstrating for equal opportunity in hiring. These were all-white operations, basically. So they didn't respond, so we started sitting in.

The interesting thing about this is that at the time this was happening, this will show you the difference between DuBois Clubs and the Communist Party, John Shelley was running for mayor of San Francisco. John Shelley had also been head of the Central Labor Council. He came out of the labor movement, and the labor movement was supporting him for mayor. We were demonstrating at Mel's Drive-Ins, which were owned by--. Anyway there was some connection, and the Communist Party did not want us to demonstrate because it was going to fuck up Shelley's chances. There was big pressure on us not to do this, but we did it. This was at the time when there was a whole bunch of people, progressive people running for developers, including Phil Burton, who was running for Congress. John Burton and Willie Brown were running for Assembly. And not only did we win at Mel's Drive-Ins, we also became the shock troops, the door-to-door troops for the Burton brothers and Willie Brown getting elected. And Phil, Willie, and John were among the attorneys that were bailing us out when we were getting arrested at Mel's.

And from Mel's we did the Sheraton Palace Hotel, the same thing. The thing that was broken, there were 700 people were arrested there, and that deal was brokered by the ILWU [The International Longshoreman and Warehousemen's Union]. The kids of the leaders of the ILWU were all in with DuBois Clubs, SLATE or the Ad Hoc Committee: Harry Bridge's daughter, Lou Goldblatt's daughters, Richard Linden, who's head of Local Six's, daughters. So they brokered the deal. And then the same for Auto Row.

Rubens: You were using the C.P.'s opposition to these kind of sit-ins or direct actions because you would jeopardize the election. Where did The DuBois Clubs' refusal to follow that directive come out of? Yes, it was independent, but what else motivated them?

Myerson: It was right to do it. It was simply right to do it.

Rubens: A passion for integration took over. And also we were our own organization, a lot of us were not in the Community Party. I only know the Communist Party didn't want it because certain leaders of the Communist Party came and asked people not to do it.

Rubens: What I'm asking is was a disregard for electoral politics articulated or a feeling that electoral politics had not gone far enough?

Myerson: No, not necessarily. There was a distrust of politicians, but at the same time we were ready to support Willie Brown. So we wanted a different kind of politics than there had been.

The other thing was that the Communist Party in California was not the same as the Communist Party nationally. So they were much more open to us students, even though they didn't want us to do it, they felt tactically it was a mistake, they weren't going to come down on us with a hammer the way it would have happened had we been in New York.

Rubens: Yes. So there is Freedom Summer the next summer. We're giving such short shrift to these organizations, to these demonstrations. Those demonstrations you're talking about recruited a lot of Cal students, including Mario Savio.

Myerson: Yes, Mario got arrested at the Palace and Auto Row.

Rubens: It was from there that he learned about the Freedom Summer, so he then goes.

Myerson: He goes, and a whole lot of other people went on Freedom Summer, and then they came back.

[Tape 2]

Myerson: I was kind of wanting to become the head of the VISTA [Volunteers In Service to America] volunteers in California. While they were waiting for the legislation to actually make its way, I got some sappy job with the California Department of Public Health in Berkeley. I worked in the computer room and going back with those huge computer cards, trays of them, to Sacramento to be processed.

Rubens: How did you know you were in line for VISTA?

Myerson: Because of the political friends we had set it up.

Rubens: Who would have picked, though, the VISTA organizer? Would that come out of the state legislature, or out of federal?

Myerson: Pat Brown, the governor, it had to meet his approval. But the unions had to support who was going to do it. I can't remember how I knew it, really. But anyway, I also received my draft notice, had refused to sign the loyalty oath and refused to go to Vietnam. I had a war going on for a year with the draft board. I lost a whole series of jobs, including the Department of Public Health and so on because the Army intelligence would come on to a job to interview me.

Rubens: They didn't just jail you? I don't understand.

Myerson: I was declared a security risk, it was a 1-Y, which was a psychological deferment. And also in June of '64 was the founding convention of the national DuBois Clubs in San Francisco. I had been prior to that, circuit riding the country, meeting people around the country--Harvard and all the campuses and stuff.

Rubens: June of '64. So a lot of people are going--for instance, like Mario--to the training sessions at Oberlin and going South. A lot of other people are going to this founding convention. Literally where did it take place?

Myerson: At the ILWU at the Golden Gate.

Rubens: How many people do you think came to that convention?

Myerson: A few hundred, 300-400. Also in '64 are the conventions, too. The Republican Convention was in San Francisco, at the Cow Palace, so that's what I was doing that summer in San Francisco. While people were in the South I was organizing demonstrations against the Republican convention. I actually have a picture of me and Alan, linked arms, sitting at the Cow Palace. My brother, Al.

Rubens: Why are you sitting in?

Myerson: Protesting fascism and the Goldwater campaign.

Rubens: I say this because some of the first to-do's--over, "Can you hand out leaflets on the campus," and--had to do with Republicans trying to organize students for [William] Scranton's nomination, so that seemed a kind of progressive movement taking place within the Republican Party, to block Goldwater. So where are you, then?

Myerson: In Berkeley, helping to organize the demonstrations against the Republican convention. We also had demonstrations when Lyndon Johnson came to town because Lyndon Johnson was supporting the Vietnam War.

Rubens: When did Johnson come to town?

Myerson: In '64. He was campaigning for reelection in San Francisco during the summer and we were protesting Vietnam.

Rubens: So when do you first hear of this bruhaha that becomes the Free Speech Movement? You know, it starts on September 17th.

Myerson: Well, this is what happened. After Auto Row, we decided our next thing was the Oakland Tribune.

Rubens: "We" is the Ad Hoc Committee?

Myerson: The committee, yes. By now this has been going on for a year. A lot of people are flagging and it's sort of like a war, and people are dropping away, including some allies. Tracy Simms--

Rubens: With whom you had been jailed.

Myerson: Yes, many times. But Tracy dropped out. She became a heroin addict, actually, and moved to New York. There was a lot of attrition, but we still decided we'd go after the Oakland Tribune. The way we had mounted each of the previous things, the Mill's, the Sheraton, and Auto Row, was we started out with demonstrations. These built, until they had a critical mass, and then did waves of sit-ins. So that was the tactic we were going to use for the Tribune, too. Well, the Tribune was a whole different thing because it was owned by William F. Knowland, who was this right-wing Republican. He was a senator and had been a senator, and he was on the Board of Regents. He was, like, the de facto leader of the California Republican right wing. And this guy was not simply a businessman, like owning a hotel or an auto dealership. This guy had right-wing politics so he was a much tougher nut to crack.

Rubens: Did you have a feeling that he was a powerful person?

Myerson: Certainly in Oakland. So I was urging building demonstrations. Other people said, "Let's just go for the jugular and start having sit-ins." we split over that. Some of us started having sit-ins. I got arrested. The tactic that we decided to do was have picket lines, and then those who wanted to sit-in would go around the corner and sit-in.

Rubens: When is this starting?

Myerson: This is September. I got arrested as a result. I got arrested as a leader of the demonstration. I owed a year of jail to California because I was found guilty on two six-month things for aiding and abetting, and refusal to leave the scene of a riot.

Rubens: Riot? That was referring to the Sheraton--

Myerson: No, that was referring to the Oakland Tribune. But also at that time Knowland and some others were putting pressure on the University of California to stop these kids from coming off the campus to the Oakland

Tribune. It was leaflets supporting the Oakland Tribune, including Jack Weinberg being one of the people leafleting for the Oakland Tribune demonstrations, that [the University] stopped. And that's the contest over the line--the Free Speech Movement directly grew out of that. Not only in terms of people like Mario, who had gone through the process, but in fact there was--not a synergy, there was a direct line. What we were doing helped cause the university to react and set off events.

Rubens: So what happens to you? Do you leave?

Myerson: I left Berkeley in January of '66.

Rubens: So what are you doing during the Free Speech Movement? What is your observation, your position, and your participation?

Myerson: I was somebody who always believed that once you're not on the campus, you're not on the campus. That's why I never wanted to hang around Berkeley after I graduated because I thought it was a university town and I wasn't going to go on to get a job at the university. But I also felt out of place, sort of like an elder statesman coming on the campus to pass down the wisdom of my experience to people who were doing a perfectly fine job of what they were doing.

So I essentially had meetings with people. I tried to line up faculty support for them, from a lot of friends I had gotten and then graduate students: Bob Calpin, Carl Riskin, Myra Jaylin, his wife. The Graduate Student Union had representatives from departments. A lot of them were former SLATE, or whatever. From behind the scenes I did some organizational stuff. It was also about that time that--this was '65--that Bob Scheer decided he was going to run for Congress, and he asked me to be his campaign manager.

Younger people, students and so on, would follow me around. I mean, they would do what I said because I said it, not because they thought it was right. I didn't want the responsibility of that. Also I was so over-extended. I was doing this for really, sixty to eighty hours a week for now five or six years. I knew if I took the job for Bob we'd have kept going. That's one of the reasons I moved to New York, was to get away from Berkeley, get away from the responsibility. What I was basically doing in '64 and '65 was being one of the leaders of the anti-war Movement. Because, I told you, I had written this pamphlet that became, like, a best-seller for the teach-ins. We had a Vietnam Day. We had demonstrations. We had them all over the country.

Rubens: So you were very involved with the teach-ins?

Myerson: Yes, I was speaking all over the place because of that pamphlet. Nobody else knew anything about Vietnam, so I became a Vietnam expert. Then in '65 there was the World Peace Council, a Congress on the Vietnam War in Helsinki. Carleton Goodlet--the Black publisher of the *San Francisco Sun Reporter*--he was my doctor, and asked me to organize the American delegation to the Anti-Vietnam War Congress. So I did, in summer of '65. Because of all my--between the DuBois clubs and all my anti-Vietnam War stuff and so on, I had sort of a rep.

Rubens: Yes, and this other conference. You got on the delegation to Helsinki before.

Myerson: So I put that together and I went to Helsinki, and when I was in Helsinki the Vietnamese came up to me--both North and South--and asked if I had put out this pamphlet. I was surprised they even knew about it. The NLF [National Liberation Front] had used the pamphlet to hand out to troops and so on in South Vietnam. So they invited me to come to Vietnam. I subsequently found out that Robert F. Williams from North Carolina--[he wrote] *Negroes with Guns*--he had gone to Vietnam. He had fled into exile. He was a leader of the NAACP in North Carolina who believed in armed self-defense and got in some shooting matches with the Ku Klux Klan. He was forced into exile. During his exile he lived in Paris, and then he went to Vietnam apparently in '64, which I didn't know about. So as far as I knew, I was one of the first Americans who was invited to Vietnam. Really there were four of us, because I didn't want to come alone. So Harold Supriano, and Chris Koch, he is now in Washington D.C. producing TV documentaries. So then he was working for Pacifica, working for WBAI [in New York City], actually. And then there was a guy, Richard Ward, who was there for the National Guardian. So the four of us went to Vietnam, in August of '65.

When I came back, I went on a six-month speaking tour. We were the first ones to go, so everyone was interested. The Hawaiian Junior Chamber of Commerce invited me, so I spent a week in Hawaii. Also I was debating the U.S. State Department. There was a professor at Berkeley named Robert Scalapino. There was a big teach-in in Toronto, and there was supposed to be a debate between the two of us. Scalapino refused to debate me.

Rubens: Did he know who you were?

Myerson: Oh, yes, yes.

Rubens: Had you had classes with him?

Myerson: No. No, but he knew who I was. Since he refused to debate me, they set up a separate speaking thing for me. But when he got up there, there were chants of "chicken Scalapino." [chuckles]

So I did the circuit on the Vietnam War--demonstrations and sparking demonstrations in Washington and stuff. That's what I really did in '64 and '65. After the Civil Rights sit-ins, I spent the next three or four years of my life in Berkeley and in New York on the Vietnam War.

[tape interruption]

Rubens: What you really created here is a portrait, a context, in which political activity is speeding up. So you mentioned your book, *These Are the Good Old Days* [Grossman Publishers, 1970] that goes over some of this ground. I wanted you to say that it came out on the day of the Kent State killings and you said that you knew where you were.

I just want to stop you for one minute because you started to tell me about the book when I said you had really created a sense and a context in which the movement is speeding up. That the old debate of who's a Communist and who's not a Communist is not tarring these movements. Then you said it was a new generation, or a new set of students, that were leading this Free Speech Movement or this battle. Some of the older people who were still in school, with whom you had done a lot of political activity, asked your advice. They went to older people, as did you when you were starting out before. I just wonder if you had any particular moment when you were saying, "It's going too slow" or "It's going too fast" or you might have been concentrating too much on getting rid of the punishments rather than issues. I just wonder if you remember at any point feeling strongly, that if you were [in the Free Speech Movement], you would have done it differently.

Myerson: No. I was a big admirer of the Free Speech Movement. It was a mass movement. It was militant; it was principled. They had terrific spokespeople. What's to criticize?

Rubens: People within the movement say, "We should have done this then." I just want to get the thinking of the people.

Myerson: The people who I was closest to then were people who had a major say in what was happening and I agreed with them.

Rubens: Did you know Mario, by the way?

Myerson: Yes. I didn't know Mario well, but I admired him. I admired him as a person, aside from being so articulate.

Rubens: So as a veteran of a lot of combat, and as an organizer you didn't particularly say, "They could have--" or "We should--." You were full of heart that the movement was continuing.

Myerson: Yes. I always thought, and I think now, that people on the ground have the best view of what a movement should do. I always resented and argued and polemicized publicly against people who were telling the Southern Civil Rights movement; they should do this and they shouldn't do that. King should pick up the arms, and Malcolm X should lay down arms. You know, the people who were doing that were editorial writers and professors. You should get involved in the movement, and then us what we should do, and take part in the debates. It always rankled me that people, including the American Left and the American Communists, would say what the Vietnamese, or the AMC in South Africa, should be doing. Nobody knows better than the people who were doing the struggle.

Rubens: Let me ask you a few more questions. By then, '64, Drinnon is gone. He's gone through his battle. I can see now partly why he was not given tenure, because he was too political! Any other professors that were still there that you liked, that were influential to you?

Myerson: Well, Christian Bay was one. I mentioned him. And then Tom Parkinson. By the way, while we were doing all this stuff, there was a real reaction against what we were doing. There were all these anti-Communists, the John Birch Society was growing up then as well as all these virulent anti-Communist hate sheets against us.

Rubens: And "us" meaning?

Myerson: SLATE. And the kids were demonstrating against HUAC. One of the debates after the HUAC was with Goodwin Knight. He was a former governor of California, who had a television program in Los Angeles. He showed *Operation Abolition*, and I asked to go on with it. He agreed to have me go on. I went on with it. When I went into the parking lot of the television station, I saw all these guys with baseball bats and chains. I had a couple of friends with me, high school players, football players, who were former high school players. We went to the studio, and while I was there talking on camera, these people were pulling my feet or hitting me. I was photographed from the waist shot up, with me and Knight. Knight was baiting me and I was baiting him back. So my two friends called some other friends to come and sort of formed a phalanx to get me out. It was that kind of thing. That's when Tom Parkinson had his jaw blown off. They were going after Drinnon.

Rubens: No. They were going after Drinon, but the TA got in the way. I didn't know they were going after him for politics. I thought it was because he had gotten a grade he didn't want.

Myerson: No, it was a right-wing nut that did it. But anyway, then it was like the first shot fired in World War III or something crazy like that, he said afterwards. So this was pretty turbulent.

Rubens: I was going to ask you if you knew any rightists that might be worth interviewing. The one I want and try to get is Mona Hutchin because she was Young Americans for Freedom, in the Free Speech Movement, and it was a short time of great collaboration.

Myerson: On the campus there wasn't an organized Right. The people who were the right-wing were primarily not of the kind that would demonstrate and do stuff; they were the kind who would position themselves for a future run for governor. So they would do very legitimate things such as get in positions on student governments as a stepping stone to Bolt Law School. That's what they were doing.

Rubens: Right. So faculty--are there any other faculty that you thought of?

Myerson: There were a whole lot of faculty with the Free Speech Movement.

Rubens: Oh, absolutely. And there's also a nice correlation between the people who opposed the Loyalty Oath and supported the FSM. The real divide comes over the war. But you said Dan Brown tried to get you into the CIA later.

Myerson: No, no, no. That was Richard Brown. Richard Brown was a high school friend who was a year below me, but he came to Berkeley at the same time I did because somehow he knew Dan Greenson. Dan's dad was a very prominent shrink in L.A. He had been Marilyn Monroe's shrink, actually, and was the one who discovered her when she died. Richard, I lost touch with. He sort of showed up at stuff we did, but he kept his distance. When Dan and I got involved in that, he remained on friendly terms, but was not involved. Then after graduation, I lost touch with him. He came back to New York. He got some Wall Street job. He was working on Wall Street. Dan Greenson went on from Berkeley to USC Medical School, and is a psychiatrist. Now he is a practicing psychoanalyst in Berkeley. But Dan Greenson was always involved in sit-ins.

Richard Brown, had some stock or Wall Street brokerage job. Then I lost touch with him. After I got involved with the Vietnam movement, between that and doing this Army stuff--I was involved in a whole lot of solidarity stuff--I was very, very involved with the FMLN in El Salvador,

the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, and the AMC in South Africa. At one point, in the early seventies, Richard Brown showed up. I hadn't seen him in five years. He was a civilian working then in Brazil, in '64. Anyway, he was a civilian working for the Pentagon. He was working in Brazil clearing forests. The Brazilian military was making military bases with U.S. advisors. He called me in New York and wanted to chat. We started talking and had dinner. And he wanted to have dinner again. The third time he says, "You ought to come work with me." He knew that I had been working a month, making no money at all. He offered me some enormous amount at that time--\$5,000 to spend a month or three weeks at the Hudson Institute. The Hudson Institute was Herman Kahn's Institute. Herman Kahn wrote the book on thermal nuclear war. He was, like, the guru of the Pentagon right wing. He was like Richard Pearle's predecessor. He operated in social science, the way Edward Teller did in physics. He was the social science equivalent.

[tape interruption]

- Myerson: Kahn ran a thing called the Hudson Institute, which actually was located here in Ossining or Cortland. It was funded by the Pentagon. Richard was a civilian working in Brazil, coming to me with \$5,000 to spend a couple of weeks at this Pentagon institute.
- Rubens: To do what? What did they think--?
- Myerson: They thought I could be cultivated, recruited.
- Rubens: And the reason you said the CIA?
- Myerson: I said that generically. It was the Pentagon. I had a very bad reputation in the FBI.
- Rubens: How long was your report?
- Myerson: It was several thousand pages that they gave me. From the time I was a kid, literally a child in junior high school, they used to follow me to school. The FBI would pull me into the principal's office, and I always refused to talk to them. I always did. I don't know how well these agencies cooperate with each other now, especially on intelligence stuff. But this was the first time a friend approached me to do this.
- Rubens: Well, a friend legitimately got a job at a brokerage account because--they knew his politics--he could so acutely assess the situation. I would think that it would be about whether you had been many places, who do you know? You didn't tell me your parents' names.

Myerson: Seymour and Vivian.

Rubens: Did your mother work when you were in L.A.?

Myerson: No. When I was born she was an interior decorator. Then she was an interim school principal of the high school. The school principal got sick and she took over, and she became the principal for a long time. When my father became blacklisted in '47 or '48, and this was not around the Un-American Activities Committee--they became blacklisted around trade union stuff. They had a big strike there against the Mafia union and they went to jail. It was the first Taft-Hartley injunction. So he went to jail and got blacklisted. He was unemployed for about a year and a half. During that time, she went back to work, and she worked as a secretary, a stenographer for Southern Pacific Railroad. She did that pretty much until I finished high school.

Rubens: And then, of course, you had a younger brother.

Myerson: Yes. He was four years younger, named Mark or Reno.

Rubens: Three kids. Was your family at all identified as Jewish? Did they identify themselves?

Myerson: We were never religious. The story I'm told is my father ran away from home two weeks before his Bar Mitzvah. He grew up in an Orthodox family and spoke Yiddish. The household language was Yiddish. [They lived] in Chicago. Whenever there was a pogrom in Poland, the Poles in Chicago would whip out the Jews. So my father changed his name. It was always Seymour, but he changed his name to Mike, to try to pass as Irish. To the time he died, nobody knew his name was Seymour except my mother, who found out on the day of their marriage, when she saw the marriage certificate. But he was always Mike.

So he ran away from home two weeks before his Bar Mitzvah and was an Atheist ever since. I was raised as an Atheist but I knew some Yiddish. There were progressive shuls, Jewish children's schools, where you learned Yiddish. Paul Robeson would come and sing with us.

Rubens: They sent you to those?

Myerson: They sent us all. We moved into a Catholic neighborhood in Los Angeles, called Echo Park. Now it is largely Chicano, Latino, Asian, and so on. But at the time that I grew up, the entire block were Irish and Italian Catholics. We were of course Jews. And we had rocks thrown through the windows, I was beaten up several times, and stuff like that. So there was not a way

to hide it. The first time I was ever in a synagogue was when my father-in law got married again at age eighty, two years ago. I never was in a synagogue in my life. So I was never religious, but it was like a badge. We wouldn't be intimidated. So I was always withheld from school on Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah and stuff like that. To let them know that we're Jewish.

Rubens: What about the spelling of your name, Myerson. It's not a traditional spelling.

Myerson: Who knows? Bess Myerson spells it M-y-e-r-s-o-n. Maybe it came out of Ellis Island. I don't even know if Myerson was the name when they got here from Romania. My father's parents were from Romania. My mother's were from the Ukraine and Lithuania?

Rubens: But your parents were the first generation and you're the second generation.

Myerson: Yes.

Rubens: You said that your parents had been in the Party or were in the Party.

Myerson: Yes. As far as I can tell, they joined during the war, and left sometime in the fifties, but not because of a political split. It wasn't over all the political turmoil and Khrushchev, Poland or Hungary. It was because the Party was falling apart. So many people had left, and in the infrastructure, there was no place for them. They remain progressive. I think my father always subscribed to *The People's World* up to his death. But they were always fearful for me. They always told me to be careful. And when I would do something they would be very proud.

Rubens: Not to be too personal, but at some point along the line your marriage must have ended.

Myerson: Yes, we broke up in Helsinki in '65. Right after that we took a trip to the Soviet Union. I stayed in Europe to wait around for the arrangements to be made for me to go to Vietnam, as I had to be in Paris at a certain date three weeks later. She came back [to the United States]. We saw each other after that. The actual divorce took place the following year. But we never lived together after that.

Rubens: There are many reasons why people divorce. Do you feel your immersion in political organizing was that a strain?

Myerson: No, no. Not political. I think it was how I allocated my time, but never what I thought or did.

Rubens: Okay.

Myerson: Basically, I was too young to get married. I had too many things I wanted to do. She wanted to have kids and I was doing things I wanted. She wasn't doing what she wanted. She was one of my best friends from the age of ten. We went to junior high and high school together.

Rubens: How nice. But she was not a student in '64 either.

Myerson: No, but she came to Berkeley. She was actually engaged to be married to somebody in Los Angeles, and came to Berkeley in her junior year to woo me. She didn't want to get married to the guy she was getting married to

Rubens: I thought you met her in New York when you came back--you must have gone to New York then?

Myerson: Yes, that summer I went back and forth between New York and Los Angeles. Back and forth three times, round trip in car.

Rubens: Not done so much, plane flights.

Myerson: There were no planes at that time, just prop planes. It took, like, twelve hours with four stops.

Rubens: I find people talking about how they didn't talk to their parents and friends very much because everyone was so nervous about the phone call and how much it cost.

[End of Interview]