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David Wellman

Free Speech Movement Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Lisa Rubens
in 2000

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INTERVIEW WITH DAVID WELLMAN

Interview 1: October 8, 1999

Tape 1

Rubens: It's Friday, October 8th 1999. I'm sitting with David Wellman in his office in the Institute for the Study of Social Change, where you are a fellow?

Wellman: I'm a research sociologist. I'm also a professor of community studies at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

Rubens: David, I want to jump right in because you've put aside an hour and forty-five minutes.

How did you identify yourself literally in the fall of 1964? What level of student were you? How long had you been here?

Wellman: I was a graduate student in sociology. I had been here two years.

Rubens: Your goal was?

Wellman: My goal was to get a Ph.D. in sociology. A couple of years before the FSM, I was involved with the Civil Rights Movement, so that was already making me a little bit concerned about whether I wanted to be an academic or not. I was in the process of writing a master's thesis on the [then current] civil rights leadership in San Francisco. So I had both an intellectual and a political interest in the Civil Rights Movement. And I was single. I had a roommate, and I lived over on Blake Street. The graduate students in sociology had a Graduate Sociology Club. I was president of that, which was like being a spokesperson for the graduate students in sociology.

Rubens: At that point graduate students had no representation in the ASUC, and no other representation on campus, really.

Wellman: Right, right.

Rubens: How did you become president of the Graduate Sociology Club?

Wellman: I had to run. A woman who was a very close friend of mine, who was a political activist, nominated me and promoted my candidacy. I ran against a guy named Jeff Schevitz, who later became a new lefty and wrote on engineers and peace and eventually ended up [laughs] being accused of being a spy for the East Germans by the West Germans. The last I heard, he was in jail in Germany.

Rubens: Was he German?

Wellman: No, but he had studied in Germany and he had married a German woman. Anyway, that's who I ran against.

Rubens: Were you in the South the summer before?

Wellman: No.

Rubens: What had you been doing that summer?

Wellman: The year before I had been actively involved with the civil rights demonstrations which took place on auto row, at the Sheraton Palace Hotel. I think the group was called the Ad-Hoc Committee to End Discrimination. The DuBois Club was involved. I was not a member of the DuBois Club. I was kind of contemptuous of it because I am the son of two Communists--former Communists, at the time. I didn't have a lot of respect for people who were calling themselves communists in the early sixties, when it was easy to be a communist. My parents had been through the hard period, during McCarthyism, and had both been in jail.

So I was involved with the auto row demonstrations; I was sitting in. Sterling Hayden, who became an actor, was one of the people who was involved with that. We made ourselves absolutely obnoxious. I remember being underneath a car with Sterling Hayden. We were kind of taking over the car showroom. Some people sat in the cars, and some people were underneath the cars. I never was a member of CORE [Congress of Racial Equality]. I was kind of unaffiliated. I didn't belong to any group at that point, but I would go to the demonstrations as an unaffiliated person. I wasn't an organizational activist because I wasn't involved in any of the organizational work around the Civil Rights Movement.

There was a CORE chapter on campus, and CORE had demonstrations. There used to be a Lucky's market right on the corner of Haste and Telegraph, which is now where that wall mural is. We had what we called a shop-in because they didn't hire black people. A shop-in was when you would go through the store, you'd put all kinds of stuff in your basket, you'd get in line, and you'd let them ring it up, and you'd say, "I'm not going to pay for it because you guys discriminate against black people." So we really screwed up their operation, and there was no way they could arrest us. I was involved with that.

All of that off-campus civil rights stuff had taken place the year before. Then the next summer of '64 after the FSM, Buddy Stein and I organized a freedom school in west Oakland. Maybe--I think the freedom school was after the FSM.

Rubens: Why didn't you go to the South? A lot of people were going to be involved with the Democratic Party, and trying to get the Mississippi delegation to

challenge the credentialing committee. Of course, Mario and other people went to a SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] training.

Wellman: Mario was part of the summer volunteers.

I didn't go for a couple of reasons. One was--you know, this is right after McCarthyism, and I was the child of two well-known Communists. I wanted to go south, and I had participated in civil rights work, demonstrations in Detroit as an undergraduate, and I spoke with some SNCC people. Some of my dear friends from Detroit went south and worked for SNCC, black friends of mine. They didn't think it was a good idea [for me to go to the South]. If I got arrested, my arrest would be used as a way of discrediting the Civil Rights Movement. Opponents would be able to say that David Wellman, the son of Communists in Detroit, is working as a civil rights worker in Mississippi.

Rubens: Did you go to college in Detroit?

Wellman: Yes, I graduated in 1962. Wayne State in Detroit.

Rubens: And you had been a general major, liberal arts?

Wellman: Yes, I was a theater arts major, sociology major.

Rubens: Why theater arts?

Wellman: Because I thought I wanted to be a theater person. [laughs]

Rubens: Did you used to go up to Ann Arbor, and were you around those folks who wrote the Port Huron Statement?

Wellman: No, I didn't get involved in politics--in part because my parents were so politically active. I didn't really get involved in politics until my junior year as an undergraduate, and then I got involved in student government stuff. For instance I got involved in the National Student Association. I went to the National Student Association convention in Madison, Wisconsin. It had to be 1961. That's where the people who later became SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] were somewhat of a force. It was called the Liberal Study Group, and I was kind of contemptuous of liberals, but it was the farthest to the Left that existed at that time. At that convention, I met Tom Hayden, Bob Ross, Casey Hayden, and Kenny Cloke, who was there from California. A number of those people from Michigan, the Port Huron group you referred to, were at that convention. Since you sat by region, Wayne State and Michigan sat close together, so we became fairly good friends, although I didn't participate in Port Huron. I didn't get involved in SDS until after the FSM.

Rubens: When you say you got involved as a junior in student government stuff, do you remember if there were specific goals?

Wellman: Well, yes. This was a period--*in loco parentis* was still reigning supreme, and student government had been gutted. Most people have forgotten this. We had a student faculty council. There was no student body council at Wayne. So they didn't even let the students have their own representative assembly. It was students and faculty, and you ran at large. You ran from among all the people on the campus.

So I was on the Student Faculty Council in my junior and senior year. At that time, it was the very beginning of the Civil Rights Movement; it was '60, '61. We picketed Woolworth's. There was an interesting chaplain on campus at the time, a man by the name of Malcolm Boyd. He was a former successful businessman who had become an Episcopalian priest and was popularizing Christianity and activism. He wrote a book called *Are You Running with Me, Jesus?* He came to Wayne as one of the campus chaplains. He had been involved in the freedom rides, so he was very supportive of those of us in the Student Faculty Council.

Rubens: Was he white?

Wellman: Yes, he's white. There was also a black student chaplain by the name of Hubert Locke, who was also very, very supportive of what we were doing. To the extent that they were part of the administration, they were supporting the students who were involved with civil rights activities off-campus. Locke later became the police chief in Kansas City, I think. Why he went that route, I'll never know. Actually I stayed in touch with him throughout the years. They were very supportive and ran interference for us with the administration.

So what were we interested in? It was mostly about a student voice in the running of the university.

Rubens: Was it about the running of the university, or the right to be politically active, to support civil rights?

Wellman: No, it was more the idea that students should have a voice. Then a number of us got involved in civil rights stuff, but we didn't run on a civil rights platform. There was a guy who was involved with the Student Faculty Council who actually encouraged me to run, a guy by the name of John Martilla, who later became a very famous pollster and advisor to the Democratic Party. I believe he was instrumental in running the Dukakis campaign. I lost contact with him after 1962.

Rubens: He was a professor?

Wellman: No, he was a student.

- Rubens: And you were starting to get involved in politics?
- Wellman: Yes. You know, retrospectively it was very interesting because a couple of the people who later were the founders of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers were at Wayne at the same time, and we were in classes together. But it's a commuter campus.
- Rubens: How black was it?
- Wellman: Oh, it was considerably black. It was thirty-something percent black: heavily black, Jewish, and working-class white. And I lived at home and commuted on a bus. One of the guys I commuted with was Ken Cockrel, who later became one of the major spokespeople for the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. Ken and I became dear, dear, intimate friends while we were at Wayne. We took classes together and traded girlfriends and went to parties. Ken was actually not that active politically, which is interesting, at the time. He was a guy who's a couple of years older than me, who had been in the Air Force. So he was like an older student. He had to work for a living, and he had kids, so he didn't play around as much as we did. He wasn't as political as we were, but he later was very instrumental in the development of the League. I stayed in touch with him until he died.
- Rubens: By the time you made a clear decision not to go to the South, you have had experience with civil rights activities and with challenging or at least being a part of a group that is pushing at the structure of the university. Could just say something more about not being affiliated, not being particularly an organizational person. Later on, you get involved with SDS and SNCC.
- Wellman: Sure. Before I get to that, there are two reasons I wanted to come to California. One of the reasons I came to Berkeley--I had been accepted at seven other graduate schools--I wanted to be as far away from my parents as I could be. It was almost impossible for me to develop an identity independent of my parents, particularly my father, who was a very famous Communist in Michigan and a very dynamic, charismatic kind of person. So in order to establish my own identity--this was unconscious--I had to get as far away from him as I could! The other reason was I read David Horowitz's book, *Student!* I'm sure he regrets 'til today that he ever wrote that book because so many people read it. It was an excellent book. It was so exciting--it was, like, the history of radicalism in Berkeley up to the sixties. I read that book and said, "Boy, I want to be there!" So David Horowitz, the reactionary conservative cretin, brought me here.
- Rubens: Many people have also said they saw *Operation Abolition*, and that was it, they knew they were coming to Cal.
- Wellman: Right. So I wanted to put that on the record.

Rubens: So of all these seven schools, you come out here. There must have been something about the sociology department.

Wellman: The sociology department was one of the best, and it was also considered liberal left. I mean, Seymour Martin Lipset was in the department at the time, and he was the only sociologist who identified as a Socialist, even though he was an anti-Communist. I wanted to go to Columbia and study with C. Wright Mills, but he died before I got there. Besides, he didn't teach graduate school. I wrote a letter to him and got one back from him. I wrote a letter saying I wanted to study with him, and got a letter back saying he was flattered but that he didn't teach graduate students, which was an interesting thing I didn't realize. Mills was not allowed to teach graduate students. He was not on the graduate faculty, because of his politics and his sociology.

He had written a book called *The Power Elite*, which was the first of its kind, in which he argued that there was a ruling class in the United States. He called this the "power elite," and he documented it empirically. He became a bad boy in sociology as a result of that. Prior to that he had been a very traditional sociologist, although a very interesting sociologist who kind of comes out of the Meadian (George Herbert Mead) tradition of social psychology, a pragmatist. Mills did his dissertation on pragmatism. Then, when the Cuban revolution took place, Mills wrote a book called *Listen, Yankee*, which was an attempt to represent to the American public why the Cuban revolution took place, through the words of a Cuban peasant. He was written off as a radical crazy.

I also went to Cuba when I was in college, in my last year or so. I visited Cuba with the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. Now, that's an interesting story. You know, I never liked my father's politics because I thought they were anti-democratic and authoritarian. These were more feeling-reactions to his politics than something that I had read. Most Communists that I knew who came in the house were real boring. The kids were even worse. So I didn't want any part of that tradition of the Left, strictly on personal grounds. Plus I thought that they were pretty benign, you know? They weren't doing anything. They were very liberal. What was my father doing? Putting out a newspaper, he went to trial, da-da-da-da-da. So, in 1958, when I was eighteen years old, I read in this little magazine called *Pageant* magazine--one of these little illustrated magazines--that there were these rebels in Cuba who had gone off into the hills and they were going to overthrow the government. They had pictures of them. They were young guys with long, long hair and beards, and guns, and they had gone into the hills, and they were going to take on the government.

Rubens: Was this an American magazine?

Wellman: Yes. And I remember saying to my father while showing him this article, "Wow! Can you believe this? These are real revolutionaries, not like you

guys.” And he said, “Ah, they’re purists. You don’t bring about revolution through military actions. You have to bring it through mass struggle, and these guys are going to do it with guns, and that’s not the way you make a revolution.” He said, “You know, there are Communists in Cuba, and they’re in the Cuban parliament, and that’s how you’re going to bring about change in Cuba.”

Rubens: Had you discussed his role in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade?

Wellman: Oh, of course. Yes, my father was a commissar in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Well, he would argue that Spain had a legally elected government and that they had asked for volunteers to their army, as opposed to taking up arms against the government, without a mass base. Anyway, so we talked about Cuba, and he put it down. He said it wasn’t going to work. It was the wrong kind of politics. It was juvenile. It was so on and so forth. By January of 1959, when they took power, I remember we were going out for New Year’s Day dinner, and I said something snotty to my father about “I thought they were going to get beaten. And here they are, at the gates of Havana. They’re about to take over.” I thought it was so great. And then I said, “And they’re not Communists. They’re real revolutionaries.” And my father said, “No, they’re Communists.” I said, “Well, you know, Fidel says he’s not.” And for a while there, we argued--“they said they weren’t Communists”.

So to my father’s credit, a year later in 1959, he said to me, because I couldn’t get my hands on enough stuff about Cuba, “Hey, look, you’re so excited about Cuba, why don’t you take off a couple of months and go down there and check it out.” So I went to the Fair Play for Cuba Committee and went down to Cuba for a month or so. I met Saul Landau there. He was one of the leaders of Fair Play for Cuba. And that was just a marvelous experience. Cuba just blew me away. It was like you could be passionate, you could be revolutionary, you could be excited, you could live your politics and you could really be bringing about serious change. I wanted to stay in Cuba, and the Cubans kept saying, “No, you’ve got to go back to the States. Your job is in the States.” So that had an important impact on me.

Rubens: I wish we had time to talk more about Cuba. Where did you literally stay? Were you taken around to different places?

Wellman: There was an organization in Cuba called the Institute for Friendship Among All Peoples, and they organized where we stayed.

Rubens: These were delegations of--

Wellman: It wasn’t delegations so much as they were tours. Yes, they took us all over the island.

Rubens: Was it hard to find Fair Play for Cuba? Detroit must have had a presence.

- Wellman: I wrote to New York.
- Rubens: Lastly, do you think *Pageant* magazine was a CP magazine?
- Wellman: No, no, no! It was like *Parade* magazine, a mass distribution.
- Rubens: By 1964 did these experiences enliven you or enlighten you, and help you argue with the Old Left?
- Wellman: But I wasn't organizational, if that is the question you were asking. I think one of the main reasons I wasn't organizational was because I was brought up in a Communist Party family. I didn't want any organization telling me how to live my life. I found the Communist Party very conservative. I mean, I liked to smoke dope and I liked to hang out with women and I liked to make love, and all of those things the Party said not to do. You know, not what serious revolutionaries did. So I didn't want any part of it. I still feel that way. You know, I don't want to be beholden to any organization.
- Rubens: What about SDS?
- Wellman: SDS was different, and we can talk about that later. But up to that point, I was not going to accept organizational discipline from anybody. I would still participate in the sit-ins and the shop-ins and so forth. And I would do organizational work by going to meetings, participating in strategic meetings, participating in organizing, and participating in this, that and the other thing; but I never belonged to any organization that had a line that I had to represent. I just had to be able to speak my mind.
- Rubens: Of course the Graduate Sociology Club did not have a line.
- Wellman: Right. It was more like a union of graduate students. I mean, we negotiated with the faculty.
- Rubens: So, fall of '64. A lot of these kids--Mario among them--are coming back from the South. Mario had been particularly enlivened by those sit-ins in the spring. This brouhaha starts on the campus. When are you aware that something's going on? How do you become involved?
- Wellman: [takes a deep breath] I'm trying to remember. It was September or October. I don't remember exactly when.
- [tape interruption]
- Wellman: There was a big rally that I didn't attend, and then there was a big march. And there's a picture, a very famous picture, of the FSM leadership coming through Sather Gate, and [Reggie] Zelnick is there and Mario and [Martin] Roysner and [Michael] Rossman--the whole bunch. It was that demonstration.

I wasn't at the demonstration, but I remember seeing that march go by. There had been a rally, and then that march took place, and they marched all over the campus. Maybe they were going to the Regents, yes, or to the Town Hall. I remember asking somebody, "What's goin' on?" And somebody said, "Well, there's this movement and there's this guy, Mario Savio, and he made this incredible speech." It was the first time I heard Mario's name. That was my first memory of the FSM, and I didn't think much of it. I mean, I was glad to see people active, but I didn't think much more of it than that.

I had kind of been rapped on the knuckles by my graduate advisor, William Kornhauser, for not being a serious enough graduate student because I had been involved in the Civil Rights Movement. And he kind of read the riot act to me about I had to finish my master's thesis, so I was going to do that that year, so I wasn't planning on being involved, which is why I didn't join that demonstration.

And then what's the next thing I remember? What came first, the car or the tables?

Rubens: The tables came first.

Wellman: I remember the tables. Let me back up again.

There was a guy who I think is an important figure, and I don't know how many people are going to remember him. His name was Lenny. He was like Lenny Bruce. He was crazy, Crazy Lenny. And he used to make speeches right in front of Sather Gate. He'd stand on an ashcan or something and he'd make speeches. He sounded crazy, but he sounded crazy like Lenny Bruce sounded crazy. He was really saying some important things about individual liberty and how you lived your life and freedom and freedom of speech. He got arrested a number of times. I remember being really moved by his speeches and shaken up by him getting arrested. It was so dramatic that this guy could be arrested just for saying outrageous things. But I don't think they arrested him for saying outrageous things; I think they arrested him because he was on university property.

So, I'm spending a lot of time going to the rallies, but I'm not involved at this point.

Rubens: Your fellow students seemed to be in their classes?

Wellman: Well, you see, the graduate students were a different lot. The graduate students were very stand-offish and skeptical. There were not a lot of graduate students initially involved. There was a lot of cynicism among the graduate students. That probably came out of their coming of age in the fifties.

Rubens: The FSM was this new set of people.

Wellman: Yes. But I'd go to the rallies, and I hung around the tables, read the literature, and made friends. Then the car incident comes, and I sat in front of the car. I stayed there all night, and then when they had people speaking, I spoke from the car, representing the graduate students in sociology. Then I began to organize the graduate students in sociology in support of what was going on. That was very difficult because there was, again, a lot of suspicion and skepticism. I called meetings of the Graduate Sociology Club to discuss how we were going to relate to this movement.

Rubens: How many do you think had been in that club before the FSM, or right when this was all starting?

Wellman: The meetings were usually thirty, forty people. But then, when the FSM hit, the meetings got very big.

Rubens: Where'd you meet, literally?

Wellman: In Barrows Hall, on the fourth floor.

Now, I'm a little hazy here, but at a certain point--and I don't remember exactly when--Bob Starobin organized me. Now, Bob Starobin, as you know, was a graduate student in history whose father, like my father, was a Communist. The difference being his father was a Communist intellectual and journalist who had been the foreign editor of the *Daily Worker* and had written a book on Vietnam, *Eyewitness in Indo-China*. And I knew Bob. We knew each other by name because we were red-diaper babies, and our fathers went to the same Jewish school when they were kids in New York. Bob, who was a senior graduate student--he was actually working on his dissertation then. He was working with Kenneth Stamp and did a dissertation on industrial slavery, which was eventually published by Oxford [University Press]. He was married and his wife was pregnant.

Bob was very, very active in creating and organizing the GCC [Graduate Coordinating Council], along with another history student named Skip Richheimer, who was kind of a wealthy kid from Chicago. I don't know what his politics were. And--

Rubens: And Buddy Stein. Is that right?

Wellman: Well, Buddy was in English.

Rubens: Yes, but in terms of the GCC was--

Wellman: But Bob Starobin was first. Bob was the person who brought me into the GCC. I remember this big fight in the Graduate Sociology Club about whether we should affiliate, and we prevailed, and so we affiliated. We were an

organization which was supposed to represent graduate students and faculty. We weren't a "political" organization. I think that was the argument.

And then Bob came up to me, right after the car incident, Bob said, "We have a new movement. It's called the Free Speech Movement, the FSM." I remember saying, "Boy, that's a weird name for an organization. Free Speech Movement." Starobin was just really excited about it and very much involved and infectious.

Rubens: Had the term "movement" been used before?

Wellman: No.

Rubens: You know, we use it all the time now.

Wellman: Well, yes.

Rubens: For civil rights, was that called a movement?

Wellman: The Civil Rights Movement was called the Freedom Movement!

So Starobin had a meeting at his house, kind of a social gathering at his house, of people who were involved in GCC and FSM. And that's where I met Buddy and Susan Stein. Buddy was married to a women named Susan. They were both in English. And then that's when I met Henry Mayer, who was in history. And--who else? There were all those science guys that were students of Leon Wofsy's or were around Leon, people like Brian O'Brian and Brian Mulloney, and who else?

Rubens: Do you have memory of Weissman?

Wellman: Steve Weissman shows up at the GCC; this was his first quarter on campus. He started speaking, and I just was amazed at his golden tongue. I mean, this guy spoke--he could give a public speech and he spoke full sentences and full paragraphs. He was as good as Mario, I think. And just as bright, but different. He was older, very, very thoughtful. I think they worked well together. Anyway, I met Steve at GCC, and we became very close friends. I just remember being very, very, very impressed with Weissman's oratorical skills. And then Weissman was also a wonderful leader. I mean, he really pulled the GCC together. It was, like, the first time I realized that most of us graduate students were still doing graduate work, and Steve wasn't. Steve was really putting in full time for the FSM and I was wondering, "How in the hell is he going to do this?" It didn't seem to matter to him. He was just brilliant at organizing meetings, pulling people together and dealing with differences. And then being a public speaker, he was articulate, intelligent, and bright.

Rubens: Doesn't seem manipulative?

Wellman: No, not at all. Dynamic. Well, that was the other thing. Both him and Mario-- it was, like, you trusted them. If there was a meeting, they told you about it. If there had been a meeting behind closed doors, they told you about it. And they told you what happened.

Rubens: Stay on that a minute. I'm assuming you're saying this was so distinct from what your experience of politics had been.

Wellman: Oh, absolutely. It was fresh, it was honest, it was open, and it was participatory. To me, that was very, very exciting that people were participating in all aspects of the movement. You know, I remember at one point--once the FSM got some momentum, it developed some organization with an Executive Committee and a Steering Committee and a this, that and the other thing. I don't remember what the issue was, but I remember pulling Mario aside and saying, "You know, we should be doing this, this and this instead of that, that and that." I don't remember what the specifics were. And he said, "That sounds like a great idea. You've got to come to the Executive meeting and share that idea." So it was like there weren't any meetings that were closed.

I remember that not all the Executive Committee meetings were open, but the central Steering Committee meetings were open. And you didn't have to be a member to go to those meetings.

Rubens: David Goines' book talks about one of the early meetings of GCC being in a Chinese restaurant. Do you remember at all where people met? I'm just curious.

Wellman: Oh, yes. I vaguely remember meeting at Robbie's, which was a Chinese restaurant here on Telegraph, between Channing--

Rubens: Somehow people found places to meet. Often University rooms, and people's apartments were used.

Wellman: Yes. The meetings were so open that you'd have meetings in a public place. Coming from a Communist family, my parents would say, "The walls have ears" and when you would start talking about politics they would put their finger to their lips to be quiet. Here's this movement--not only is it out in the open, but meetings are in public! It just took my breath away. I was actually kind of skeptical. It was like, you can't be serious if you're going to do politics like this because you're going to get infiltrated and you're going to--you know. But that was the difference between the New Left and the Old Left. My politics began to really flower at that point.

It was an intense experience--personal meetings, you know, over lunch and over dinner. We used to hang out on the terrace [The Terrace Café of the ASUC complex]. That was where you met every day for lunch. I can

remember having these long conversations with Buddy Stein and Steve Weissman and Bob Novick. Bob Novick was another important person, in the history department. And he knew everything there was about anarchism. He was the first person I had met who had studied anarchism. Nigel Young was another one. He was an Englishman who had come from Oxford, who had been part of the big English group, The Committee for Nuclear Disarmament [CND]. Nigel had been a leader of that.

Rubens: How old was he, about?

Wellman: My age. And he came over here to be a graduate student in sociology. And Nigel was a pacifist. He was a committed pacifist, but he wasn't a patsy and he wasn't a pansy. He was big; he was larger than life. He was exciting--not what your stereotype of a pacifist was. And Hal Jacobs, who was a graduate student in sociology and had been at the University of Chicago--very, very smart. He knew Marx. He called himself a Marxist. You know, he was the first person I met who could really discuss Marxism intelligently and explained it in ways that I had never understood, even though I had been in a Communist family.

So it's like this is: a big mix going on, where we were all involved not just in demonstrations but in our everyday lives--of course, you know, having lunch, having dinner, over beer.

Rubens: This is as much an intellectual discourse or educational phenomena as well as your classes?

Wellman: Oh, it was more exciting than what was going in the classroom. We were learning more from each other--and the Free University pops up! Doesn't it pop up in this period?

Rubens: The next spring. The formal FSM is over by March of '65. And your friend, Jeff Lustig, from the political science department is part of the Free U. Did you know him before that?

Wellman: No.

Rubens: Or right about then?

Wellman: That's when I met him. So, it's a new breed of politics which is emerging, and it's just a new kind of politics. It's not Marxist-Leninist, it's not communist in the old-fashioned sense of communist, it's not liberal. It's not anti-communist, which makes it very, very different because up to that point liberalism was anti-Communist, and this is a politics which is left, radical, but it's not anti-communist. It's not Marxist, but it takes Marx seriously; it takes the Anarchists seriously. It takes some Communists seriously, like Gramsci. We were reading Gramsci.

- Rubens: This is all on your own? Did you read his work in your classes?
- Wellman: No!
- Rubens: It's impressive that you're also taking each other seriously. Maybe this is too over-reaching, but is there no one professor that is shaping you more than any others?
- Wellman: No. In politics it was [Jack] Schaar and [Shedon] Wolin. A lot of the lefties who came out of politics were students of Schaar and Wolin. There was Frank Bardacke, Jeff Lustig--I don't remember what department Marvin Garson was in, but yes. John Leggett was a radical sociology professor who never got tenure here. But we didn't conglomerate around him because John was [laughs]--John was an old Trotskyist, and in a sense very traditional and not really a New Leftie. But he was dedicated and loyal to the FSM. He and Reggie Zelnick--and John Searle, the worm.
- Rubens: Another one from your department: what about Max Heinrich?
- Wellman: Yes, but Max was a graduate student in sociology, not involved in the FSM at all.
- Rubens: He was the observer, he--
- Wellman: He came to me and asked me for access to the FSM
- Rubens: Had he even been in the Sociology Club?
- Wellman: Yes. And, again, this is another example of the openness of the movement. You know, I introduced him to people and said we should let him observe us. But he was not involved at all except as an observer.
- Rubens: Would you have later called him a careerist? Or was it just that's who he was?
- Wellman: That's who he was. I think he had been a pacifist or a Quaker or something.
- Rubens: Was he a little older?
- Wellman: Yes, yes. Maybe he was with The Fellowship of Reconciliation. I don't know.
- Rubens: And the openness. Let's talk a bit about the FSM leadership: Weissman, the Goldbergs, Roysher, Mario and Bettina. You must have known who she was.
- Wellman: Oh, yes.
- Rubens: Say something briefly about Bettina, just in terms of how she operated.

Wellman: Well, as a fellow red-diaper baby, I was a little suspicious of her initially, but the more I observed her, the more I realized that she might be a Communist, but she was very much a serious and an important voice in the FSM. It was clear to me that she wasn't taking orders from the Communist Party because if she was, she wouldn't have been as radical as she was.

There was another interesting guy who was a Communist who was a very important guy, by the name of Bob Kauffman, who was a graduate student in history and an open Communist. He was one of the first Communists I met that I really respected, both intellectually and strategically. And he never denied that he was in the Party. And yet we respected him. So these were Party people who were not Party people. So that's why I kind of liked Bettina and really respected her. She turned out to be a very effective speaker and a very effective leader, and I was quite pleased that she was able to transcend Party politics. I guess I felt good that finally there was an open Communist. This was a breakthrough in politics in '64, that a Communist would be on the steering committee of a student movement which was very effective. Think about it. I mean, you're only five or six years away from *Operation Abolition*.

So this is a very important moment. It is when a movement begins to emerge that is not an anti-Communist movement because up to that point in time, the left was an anti-Communist left. The liberals were an anti-Communist left.

Rubens: Did you have a feeling at all that the graduate committee, at times, was more radical than the FSM steering committee, that they might have been pressing for a strike at the university before the others?

Wellman: If anything, I think it was the opposite. I think the undergraduates were much more radical than the graduate students.

Rubens: They had less to lose.

Wellman: Exactly. And I think had they listened to us more, the movement would have been less successful; because I think we were counseling a lot more, "Go slow and negotiate," and traditional kinds of political moves. We weren't as audacious as they were. Rossman represented a kind of politics on the Steering Committee that I didn't like. I mean, I don't want to do him an injustice.

There was a television show—was it "20/20" or "60 Minutes?" They followed him and two other people. And I watched it, and I was outraged because it was, like, he presented the Free Speech Movement as if it was some kind of hippie, flower child, poetic, identity seeking, mystical, unknowable group of people who loved each other and were trying to find love. And I remember sitting and watching with a couple of my friends and saying, "What is he saying? Who is this guy? What is his problem!? Where's the politics!?"

Rubens: And “politics” meant?

Wellman: Politics to me meant a struggle over power.

Rubens: Who was going to set the terms of--

Wellman: Exactly. Of debate--

Rubens: The University has the right to do place, time and manner.

Wellman: Exactly. You know, I thought we were fighting a political fight over space. More than space, but over political control, over how the University was going to be run. And here’s this guy--power didn’t enter into his thought, into his talk. And it was just too cute by three quarters, you know? And it was a lot of LSD and--

Rubens: Already then?

Wellman: He still does it, and I still have a similar kind of, Oooh! You know, stop! And the other thing was that of all the people, he was the most self-conscious, I thought, and the most self-promoting. That wasn’t Mario, that wasn’t Weissman, that wasn’t Bettina.

Rubens: Had you known Rossman before at all, or his father--who had been in the Party?

Wellman: No. I hadn’t known him at all.

Tape 2

Rubens: I do want to ask a little bit of the social life of the time, just the feeling in general. You said earlier, “I liked smoking dope and listening to music and being with women.” I asked Art Goldberg this question: “So what were your parties like?” “Oh, boy, we drank and we danced. We just really loved to dance,” and there was a lot of that. Is that what you remember, too?

Wellman: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

Rubens: Not many people talk about smoking dope, though. Was dope just coming in?

Wellman: Yes.

Rubens: Did you have dope in Detroit?

Wellman: Yes. I’d known about it.

Rubens: Was that a quote, “black” thing at that point?

Wellman: Yes. I had been introduced to dope in Detroit by black kids when I was in junior high school. So it was no big deal. And I had smoked dope probably from high school on. That’s when dope, pot, was a felony. And that is an interesting point. There was a very famous jazz musician by the name of Gene Ammons, who played saxophone. We used to call him Jug. He got busted for pot in Chicago, and the judge was going to make an example of him to jazz musicians. And he sentenced him to thirty years in jail for I think it was a joint.

Rubens: When is this about?

Wellman: Early sixties. And one of the first political buttons I remember wearing was Free Gene Ammons or Free Jug, one of the two. And nobody knew who Jug was. But anyway, it was very political to me that this black musician would get busted for dope.

There wasn’t a lot of dope. Some of my close friends smoked dope because they came from the East Coast--like Joe Blum and I used to smoke dope. Michael James and I used to smoke dope. We did it very, very cautiously because it was a felony, and we realized we were under surveillance to some extent. So there wasn’t dope smoking at parties openly. I mean, people might go into a room and smoke, but it wasn’t open the way it became.

And Motown music was just very important. I mean, you go to a party and you put on Aretha Franklin and Smoky Robinson and the Miracles, and the Four Tops, Ray Charles and you’d just dance your ass off, you know. I can remember coming home soaking wet from dancing. There was a fair amount of sex. People were very open. But parties were a big part of it, and drinking red wine. Cheap red wine, buy it by the gallon.

Rubens: I want to talk about women as serious politicians. Although there were important women leaders in FSM, on the faculty, in the graduate programs, there weren’t many women.

Wellman: Right.

Rubens: Considering your Sociology Club and your department, does it strike you as pretty male?

Wellman: Sociology wasn’t. In fact, a number of very important women sociologists came out of that period in Berkeley. There were, you know, obviously fewer women in the FSM and in that movement than later or than the larger population, but the women who were involved were very impressive. There was Jackie Goldberg, who was a sorority girl.

Rubens: You found her impressive.

Wellman: Oh!! Yes. Still do. Jackie Goldberg was a wonderful public speaker. She had an analysis of what was going on, and most important, she was able to bridge the gap between the Greeks and the movement, and she was self-consciously trying to do that. I don't think she succeeded, but I think she succeeded at least in neutralizing some aspect of the Greeks.

Then there was this woman who was a member of the Young Americans for Freedom. Mona Hutchins, and she wasn't nearly as impressive as Jackie or Bettina or Suzanne Goldberg, but she was impressive, to me, in her commitments to libertarianism. A couple of years later she got arrested for standing on the railing on a cable car in San Francisco. Women couldn't do that. So I found her--maybe impressive is too strong--but she was substantial.

Who else? Who else? Susan Stein! Buddy's first wife, was an incredibly powerful speaker--Oh! And gutsy and energetic. Boy, you couldn't restrain her. She was just full of energy and a wonderful organizer and an excellent public speaker. She was an important part of the Graduate Coordinating Council. A couple of years later they were trying to expel her from school, she and Hal Jacobs, and I forget who the third person was. And Mike Tigar defended them. Hal's another person you should try to talk to. Hal's at New Paltz.

I want to come back to the issue of political culture, because to me that was critical to both the beginning of what later became the New Left, but also it was instrumental in the new intellectual movements. You know, it's hard for me to do this because I'm trained as a sociologist and a historian to try to get back into the moment, instead of looking at the past through the eyes of today. And it's very hard to do because we didn't talk about a New Left during the FSM. But clearly a New Left was being born in the FSM. We didn't talk about the New History in the FSM, but clearly that was being born at the time, or a New Sociology. And those became, if you will, intellectual movements. There was a new history, a new labor history. There was a new sociology; it was a radical sociology.

And both of those were being born in not just the FSM but definitely the FSM played a part. This was the beauty of that movement, which is why it was a movement rather than just an organization; it was a cross-fertilization of ideas and disciplines and experiences. I learned the most I ever learned in that period. I mean, we were serious, Lisa! We had study groups, you know? We'd sit down and read--you know--I remember we read Herbert Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution*. Well, nobody would have read that unless it was assigned to you, and who was going to assign it to you at that time? We read Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*. We read Marx, we read Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*. I mean, this was before there was such a thing as cultural studies. This was before the word "hegemony"--nobody even knew how to pronounce it! And we would sit down, and we would self-consciously read these books and sit around and discuss them.

Rubens: And who is "we"?

Wellman: Oh, there was a bunch of us: Hal Jacobs, me, Nigel Young, Bob Novick. Steve Weissman--sociologists and historians. I'm leaving people out. Joe Blum, Starobin, although he left reasonably early.

We wrote stuff. I mean, we'd write leaflets. The first thing I ever published was with Buddy Stein, and it was published in *Studies on the Left*, which was a critique of the Scheer campaign. [laughs] Bob Scheer never forgave us for that. He accused Buddy and I of being responsible for him losing the election.

Rubens: That was the next year.

Wellman: '66. I know it takes a little away, but this is a good example of what kind of a movement it was both intellectually and politically. By then I was involved with SDS, but that's another story. And Weissman was an important leader in the Bob Scheer campaign for Congress campaign, against Jeffrey Cohelan, who was a liberal.

Rubens: He has a ninety-eight percent CDC rating.

Wellman: Right. And a bunch of us in SDS were absolutely opposed to it, and we opposed it on principled grounds. We didn't oppose it on, you know, the old--the two parties are the same. We did say that, but that wasn't our major criticism. Our major criticism was you don't build a movement off an election campaign. So we were debating intellectually and politically how did you build a movement. Our argument was you built the movement and then you moved to an electoral strategy, if you were going to move to an electoral strategy, but you didn't go with an electoral strategy. Historically the Left had gone with the electoral strategy to build a movement, and the tail always ended up wagging the dog.

Well, we got into a terrible argument, or an excellent argument, with Weissman about this. It was principled. It was passionate. And I'll never forget this. Weissman said to me, "You guys could be right, and I could be right. So let's make an agreement to keep track of what's going on and to keep track of what we're thinking and what our positions are, and when the thing is over, let's go back and analyze who was right." In a sense, it's kind of old-fashioned pragmatism, you know, Dust Bowl empiricism, Let's see what works. But it was also principled, and it was also intellectual in the best sense of intellectual, Let's be self-conscious of what we're doing.

When the campaign ended Scheer lost. And Buddy and I wrote a piece for an SDS publication, making the argument that what had happened--that the significant thing wasn't that Scheer had lost but that the campaign ended up focusing on Scheer instead of the war, and focusing on winning the election rather than building a movement. Weissman, to his credit, read it and came back and said to Buddy and I, "You guys were right, and this thing should be published in *Studies on the Left*." And it was. And you know who was on the editorial board and stays on the Left at the time? Ronald Radosh! [Laughs]

Rubens: You're laughing because?

Wellman: He is now a right-wing reactionary--

Rubens: Along with David Horowitz, who you mentioned in the beginning of our interview.

We're about out of time for this interview, and I'd like to summarize what I'm learning. I think one of the richest parts of this interview is talking about how you perceived a movement being built, and the fervor and the passionate quality of it, the intellectual principles and the level of debate and self-education. And it certainly was a movement with an amount of direct action. Then Mario basically says the next year, in March, "It's enough" the FSM should end. What lessons did you take from that? Was he killing a mass movement? You were skeptical of the Sheer campaign a year later, and you still say, "We don't have a mass movement. This electoral campaign is not the way to go." Is there some link that you see in terms of your observation about how a mass movement rose and fell?

I guess we need to talk about how you get involved in SDS.

Wellman: That's an important question because that's the link between the two.

Rubens: I assume you complete your courses that year. You're not kicked out of campus?

Wellman: Right.

Rubens: You do your thesis?

Wellman: I think I took a leave because I couldn't do what I was doing politically and write my thesis. I think I took a leave.

Regarding the FSM, I was one of the few graduate students that was arrested as a result of the occupation of Sproul Hall. After the arrests and the faculty resolution that supported the students, then there's some closure for a moment and the movement seems to be successful. We seem to have won. We get a lot of national attention from people all over the country in various left formations, and essentially the question is: How did you do it? A lot of times that question was posed to those of us who were graduate students who had been involved with the FSM because we were presumably more analytic about it. I think that was wrong but--. We were presumably more knowledgeable. And we used to say, at least the folks that I hung out with used to say, "We can't answer that question because each location is different, and we don't have a recipe for successful student movements." We also said, "The administration was mostly responsible for our success, if you want to know the truth. And you have to be blessed with an incompetent administration to win."

So we're being solicited for advice. Everybody wants us to join them or become part of them because this is a pretty big thing. I mean, this is the first student movement,

the first time since the thirties where students have, in mass numbers, taken on the administration and essentially licked them. So we're hot property, in a sense, in terms of left groupings. You know, none of them ever really interested me.

So at the same moment, this guy calls me up and says, "We have some friends in common: Bob Ross, Tom Hayden. I'm going to be on the West Coast, and I'm with a group called Students for a Democratic Society, and I'd like to meet with you and some of your friends." Well, there was an SDS chapter on campus, and it had been formed by a guy named Eric Levine, who was out of Columbia. Danny Beagle probably knew him then. Eric Levine died recently. He eventually became crazy. He became clinically crazy and eventually died.

Rubens: I think he wrote for the *Daily Cal* at the time.

Wellman: I don't know. He was a graduate student in political science or history. But it wasn't a really very lively chapter, and it wasn't really very influential. So I said, "Sure, I'll get together."

Rubens: Who was this who called you?

Wellman: Paul Booth.

Rubens: Paul Booth, who was head of SDS?

Wellman: At the time he was, like, an SDS organizer. See, there's this thing going on which, again, needs to be highlighted. It's hard to put in words--it's a period where people call themselves organizers and take it upon themselves to go around the country and organize. You know, you'd laugh at them today.

So there's this organization called SDS, and it has people who call themselves campus travelers--that's what they called themselves--and organizers. Booth was an organizer. And he comes--you know, he's not sent by any central committee. He comes out here, and he's a graduate student at the University of Michigan. I later find out that his father was a very important person in the Roosevelt administration, in the New Deal. So he comes out, and we have a meeting, and it's me, Bob Novick, Nigel Young, Hal Jacobs, Joe Blum, and probably some others. No women, mind you. No, maybe Susie Stein was there and Buddy. And this guy shows up. We just interrogated him: what is his organization, what do you mean "Democratic Society," what do you mean by "Democratic"? Are students going to make a revolution? Where do you stand on this? Where do you stand on that? What about Socialism? What about da-da-da-da?

He's just answering all the questions right! "We don't put Socialists in our name because it's not a word that people are friendly with, but we consider ourselves Socialists." "How do you feel about the Communists?" "Well, we're not communists, but we're not anti-communist. We believe that anybody who wants to should be able to belong to this organization. We got into trouble with our parent organization on this very issue." And that was the fight that they had with Irving Howe.

Rubens: The League for Industrial Democracy [LID]?

Wellman: Yes. Irving Howe and Michael Harrington were responsible for throwing the Student League for Industrial Democracy out of LID because they wouldn't put in a clause that excluded Communists. So every question Booth answered, and then he started talking about participatory democracy. We had this big discussion about participatory democracy. "What is participatory democracy? What is democracy? What do you mean by participation?" And it became clear that this was a political expression of a lot of what we had been thinking about. It was decentralized, it was autonomous, it was not hierarchical, it was very radical in the sense that all the decisions were made in the open. In fact, one of its slogans was "Let the people decide." And one of the things people used to talk about, one of the major slogans or points, was "People have to make the decisions that affect their lives." I still remember that.

It sounds so obvious, and yet in 1964, '65, that was a radical statement. The whole notion that people should make the decisions that affect their lives was radical. We're coming out of the fifties, you know? We're coming out of McCarthyism. We're coming out of *in loco parentis*. And SDS was very much involved in fighting *in loco parentis*. The whole notion of making the decision that affected--I mean, think of where that goes! Right? Again, now I'm jumping to the present and looking backwards. I mean, you know, the women's movement really has roots in that, even though they're unspoken, the notion of letting people make the decisions that affect their lives is absolutely critical in terms of what happens with the women's movement, what happens with the black movement, what happens with the anti-war movement, which is the critique of Vietnam.

Anyway, so we joined in '65. [laughs] And what happens? What does it mean to be a member of SDS? It means you're on some big fucking mailing list!

Rubens: You had a button, and you sent in some dues.

Wellman: And there's a magazine. There's a publication called *New Left Notes*. And it comes out once a week or once a month. I always fucking read it religiously. And who's writing it? People like Carl Whitman, Tom Hayden, Steve Max, Todd Gitlin, Paul Booth, Casey Hayden, and people you've never heard of.

Rubens: Max. I've never heard of him.

Wellman: Steve Max is another interesting character. He's a red diaper baby. But that's another story. And we became [laughs] Berkeley SDS.

By then I'm married, and we live on Telegraph and 50th, right across from what used to be Vern's Market, in a big apartment right over the Bon Gusto Bakery. It's a long ways from campus, in Oakland. It's in a working-class Italian neighborhood. And a number of us live in this area and in this building.

Out of the blue, somebody from SDS calls. I think it was Helen Garvey, from New York. She calls me and she says, "We don't know each other, but we have friends in common," da-da-da-da-da--because she was involved with Steve Weissman at the time. They were lovers. She was, like, the assistant national secretary. "There's a couple of our organizers coming through town, and they need a place to stay. Could they stay at your house?" Well, of course. It wasn't even, "Should I talk to Mae?" Well, who are these people? One of them is Mike Davis, who later becomes the writer on Los Angeles, Mike Davis. And the other is Roy Dahlberg. Roy Dahlberg is now a public defender in Sacramento. These two guys show up. They look so young. I mean, they were all of about six years younger than me, right? And Mike had just gotten kicked out of Reed College for organizing some kind of political demonstration, and Roy Dahlberg had just come back from Mississippi, where he had effectively been ridden out of Mississippi on a rail by some Klansmen. And they were these two SDS organizers.

So I said, "What are you going to do?" "Well, we're going to organize." [laughs] So they began organizing anti-draft stuff. And then Carolyn Craven and Ken McEldowney show up. They want to start a regional SDS.

[tape interruption]

Rubens: Carolyn Craven came out here from the national headquarters in New York, the same year it moved to Chicago. She later married Ken.

Wellman: Yes. And you know why she comes out here? She probably doesn't want this on tape, but--she's married to Eric Craven. Eric's in the Newark NCUP [New Community Union Project] with Tom Hayden. This is another whole side. Carolyn goes to the SDS national convention and has an affair with Ken McEldowney, who's also married at the time to a woman named Carol McEldowney. So SDS, which is known for its libertarian, libertine principles, effectively isolates them for this terrible thing that they've both done to their partners. So that's why they came out here! [laughs] But the organization allowed--allowed!--them to take it upon themselves to create a regional SDS. They weren't sent out here to do it.

Anyway, the other thing that's going on in SDS is a raging debate over whether people should stay in the university and organize for student power or leave the campus and go into the community and create an interracial movement of the poor. That gets funded by the UAW [United Auto Workers]. It's called ERAP, the Economics Research Action Project. It--SDS--doesn't split; that is, they don't become separate organizations, but it has two legs.

Rubens: You're talking about '66?

Wellman: Yes, '65, '66. And Hayden, Rennie Davis, Richie Rothstein, are big proponents of "get the hell off of campus." Carl Davidson, Greg Calvert, are a couple of other people who are proponents of not just student power, but they have a syndicalist, populist analysis of staying on campus and organizing.

Then there's a third leg, which is the older people in SDS, who begin the analysis and politics of radicals in the profession. They have a statement, and it's called *The Port Authority Statement*. And there's some pretty heavy hitters in that group. I think Stanley Arronowitz was one. That's what they called it. It was a joke, a play on the Port Huron Statement. But, I mean, that's what they called it. So there's really three legs.

Rubens: Would you say something about the *Port Authority Statement*?

Wellman: It's a statement on the direction that the Left should go in, and the argument is: many of us are not always going to be students, and we're not going to be organizers of poor people. We're professionals. That is, we've either finished graduate school or professional school or we're going to finish graduate school or professional school, and we want to be radicals. What do we do? So it was an analysis--a little self-aggrandizing, but it was an analysis of how the center of the revolutionary movement was going to be these middle-class professionals.

Rubens: We'll end for now and hopefully develop the links in another interview. Oh, I certainly want you to comment on Mal Bernstein.

Wellman: Ask me about that because that is very important. It has to do with the disagreement within the FSM over the trial strategy.

Rubens: Did your father have a strong opinion about the Free Speech Movement?

Wellman: Yes, but it's complicated. It's a wonderful story. Because it involves Bettina's father and Bob Starobin's father.

Rubens: Good, because I want you to explain why you thought it easy to be a Communist in the sixties, and you have some resentment about that.

Wellman: That's right.

Rubens: At another time I would like to discuss what was the sociological discourse that's taking place, the shift? You were saying the new sociology is birthing, just like all these other things are.

[End of Interview]