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Mike Rotkin on the Rise and Fall of Community Studies at UCSC, 1969-2010

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Mike Rotkin
on the
Rise and Fall of Community Studies at UCSC,
1969-2010

Interviewed and Edited by
Sarah Rabkin

Santa Cruz
University of California, Santa Cruz
University Library
2013

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Introduction

On campus and in the Santa Cruz community, Michael [Mike] Rotkin has for several decades been a widely recognized public figure. He has served as a community organizer, a multi-term mayor and city councilmember, a board member for the Santa Cruz County chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), a local and statewide leader in the UC-AFT (the union representing lecturers and librarians in the UC system), and a teacher and field study coordinator in UCSC's Department of Community Studies. This oral history focuses on Rotkin's experiences in community studies and his reflections on the evolution of that undergraduate major from its inception in 1969 to its suspension in 2010.

Born in 1945, Rotkin grew up in a semi-rural Maryland suburb of Washington, D.C., absorbing a sense of civic engagement and a penchant for community activism from his politically active parents—a high-school history teacher and a U.S. Patent Office employee. Before graduating from Cornell University in English literature in 1969, Rotkin spent a year as a community organizer in Florida, working with Latino and African American migrant workers under the aegis of Volunteers in Service to America—the domestic version of the Peace Corps, founded in 1965 and eventually folded into the AmeriCorps program network in 1993. The VISTA experience contributed to Rotkin's developing critique of American political and economic institutions while providing on-the-ground training in community organizing. This education deepened upon his return to campus, with his involvement as a leader

in the student anti-war movement and in fieldwork with Cornell's Migrant Labor Program under mentors Bill Friedland and Dorothy Nelkin.

Rotkin came to Santa Cruz in 1969, initially to work as an assistant to Friedland, who had been hired to organize an undergraduate program in community studies at UCSC.¹ Accepted in the fall of 1969 into the second cohort of graduate students in the interdisciplinary History of Consciousness program, he began working as a teaching assistant in community studies courses taught by Friedland, Michael Cowan, Ralph Guzman, and other faculty members. An enthusiastic teacher, Rotkin continued taking on TAships every academic quarter, until eventually community studies hired him as a lecturer (in 1976) and coordinator of field studies (in 1979). Four years into his graduate work, he also began teaching in the Extended University, an experimental experiential education program designed to provide university-level education to employees of the Model Cities Program (an offshoot of Lyndon Johnson's Office of Economic Opportunity) in Fresno, California. While a student in histcon, he started a graduate study group on Marxism that ultimately led to the development of his widely popular, long-running undergraduate *Introduction to Marxism* course.

In this series of four oral history interviews, conducted on January 7th, 10th, 15th and 22nd, 2013 at my home in Soquel, California, Rotkin traces the evolution of the community studies curriculum in detail and discusses its philosophical underpinnings. He emphasizes the distinctive pedagogical approach—envisioned by Bill Friedland and developed with program colleagues—in which

¹ See Sarah Rabkin, Interviewer and Editor, *Community Studies and Research for Change: An Oral History with William Friedland* (Regional History, UCSC Library, 2013). Available in full text at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/friedland>

students took preparatory courses prior to embarking on extended field placements, then returned to campus for analytical and synthetic work. Courses emphasized an ethnographic approach to field study, a structural understanding of social inequities, the development of critical thinking, and a dialectical relationship between theoretical and experiential learning. Individually tailored study programs were built around each student's primary interests, while all students in the major underwent training and practice in the theory, art and practice of participant observation, including the preparation of field notes. The oral history also covers the board/department's consensus-based approach to self-governance and the involvement of students in curricular decision-making in the program's early years.

Rotkin describes the challenges of training, advising, supporting, and overseeing undergraduate students doing field work with local, national and international community-based organizations. He provides examples of the varied types of field placements to which students had access as well as the senior theses they produced, and he describes the educational and professional trajectories of some of the department's graduates, many of whom went on to elite graduate programs or became founders and leaders of influential nonprofit social justice organizations and community service agencies.

He also assesses criticisms levied at the major's experiential emphasis, asserting that the most dismissive of these were often based on ignorance of the program's rationale, curriculum, and achievements—including a series of laudatory external reviews that extolled the "master's-level" quality of departmental senior theses.

“I think from the very beginning,” he says, “community studies was perceived by many of the other faculty and by the administration—*perceived*—as a somewhat flaky program, based on absolutely no factual information. ... We have allies in other departments on other campuses, but we’re also deeply disrespected by the general senate faculty, because we’re involved in experiential education. They know nothing about our senior theses or our external reviews, or that we have a coherent curriculum that requires students to ... come out of this prepared to do work of a certain kind that’s very rare at the undergraduate level. ...So we’re having constant running battles about resources.” He offers a detailed narrative and thoughtful analysis of the department’s eventual decline and dissolution and, more broadly, of the related social, political, cultural and economic forces that caused the UCSC campus to retreat from its early emphases on pedagogical experimentation, interdisciplinarity, experiential learning, and undergraduate education.

Mike Rotkin and I came to this collaboration as collegial acquaintances, having worked together previously for several years on the coordinating committee of the UC-AFT union local. As in that setting, his participation in these oral history interviews was lively and enthusiastic. An indefatigable raconteur, clearly not a stranger to the process of pondering his experiences and constructing narratives about them, he readily drew on an abundant store of anecdotes and memories—some poignant, some startling, some amusing. Had we not confined this oral history largely to the subject of community studies and relevant background material, we would easily have exceeded the eleven hours and 450+ transcript pages that these interviews generated. Ideally, a future oral history can be devoted to other topics that deserve documentation, including his

involvement in and perceptions of union organization on the UCSC campus and in the UC system.

I transcribed the interviews verbatim and edited the transcript lightly for readability. Mike Rotkin carefully reviewed the transcript for accuracy and returned it with corrections and clarifications. I deeply appreciate the time and energy he dedicated to this project.

Copies of this oral history are on deposit in Special Collections and in the circulating stacks at the UCSC Library, as well as on the library's website. The Regional History Project is supported administratively by Elisabeth Remak-Honnef, Head of Special Collections and Archives, and Interim University Librarian, Elizabeth Cowell.

—*Sarah Rabkin*

Regional History Project, University Library

University of California, Santa Cruz, September 2013

Early Life

Rabkin: Today is January 7th, 2013, and this is Sarah Rabkin. I am with Mike Rotkin in my house in Soquel, [California,] and we're here for the first of our interviews. Mike, why don't we start with when and where you were born?

Rotkin: I was born in New York City in 1945, and my father was away in the army in World War II. We lived in the Lower East Side when I was born, but because my dad was in the army, almost within a month of being born, my mom took me to Blacksburg, Virginia, where my father was given a choice of going to officer candidate school. (He'd been a sergeant, both in World War II and then in the Korean War, and this is back in World War II when I was born. He was in both theaters in the war.) Or he could go to engineering school. So he decided to go to engineering school. He got a master's degree in engineering. He had a history degree from the City College of the City University of New York. My mom had taken classes there, but only finished years later, at the University of Michigan and the University of Maryland.

My dad worked for the patent office after he left the military, in Washington, D.C. He started at the bottom, like a GS-2 or something, reading patents, and then eventually became a patent classifier, which makes him a kind of librarian. He organized how to go find the patents—how are they structured, and where are they—because the whole job of the patent office is, "Is this new, or has somebody done it?" So they've got to go search, and someone has to set up a

system. Because a lot of times, things have electrical and mechanical and other kinds of elements. And so, where will you file this new invention that's got two or three parts to it—some are chemical, some are electrical, some are whatever? So his job was organizing that system.

Rabkin: So that's how the engineering training came in handy.

Rotkin: Right. He also had a law degree—

Rabkin: Wow.

Rotkin: —which he got after coming out of the Korean War. He served there again. I could go off on my father on a big tangent, probably not necessary. My family comes, on my father's side, from Russia, Jewish—

Rabkin: Do you know where?

Rotkin: Yes. A little town called Mikuliena (halfway between Smolensk and Moscow), I've never been there, but it was a very little rural village. My great-grandparents owned a bath, which was used by the Polish peasants in that community. And—showing their own, I guess, ethnocentricity, or whatever—they'd talk about how ridiculous it was: "The Polish peasants came for a bath once a month whether they needed it or not," you know, and that kind of thing.

My grandfather joined a Jewish socialist Bund and was a revolutionary just before the turn of the century, and eventually was arrested and spent thirteen months in solitary confinement for being caught with the handle of a printing press. They would take the press apart every night and people would take the parts home, and he had the handle—the crank. It was this little crank. And so that was thirteen months in solitary. And after that they let him out to be in the army. He wrote a short autobiography after he came to the United States. So he came here in 1905, running from the Czarist police. They had sprung one of their comrades out of jail and he was wanted by the police. He got here and then later sent for his wife, my grandmother. She was active in that group as well, but [the authorities] didn't know it, so she was able to stay a little longer, and he had to get out immediately. Then they moved to Brooklyn.

On my mom's side: my mother was born in Lodz, Poland. It's a fairly large city. (Never been there, either.) I don't know anything about her father. They don't talk about him. But I knew my grandmother. She came to live with us. She had diabetes. I kind of remember her having to shoot up insulin, and being shocked by it as a little kid when I was growing up.

Anyway, until I was six months old, we lived in Blacksburg, Virginia. Then we moved to Washington, D.C., and actually to College Park, Maryland, near the University of Maryland. We lived in a rural community. We were the only Jewish family in about 300 Southern Baptist families.

Rabkin: Whoa.

Rotkin: And a fair amount of antisemitism, but nothing open or overt, but just more like kids taunting me because 'my mom must have bought my wagon in a Jewish store' kind of stuff. I don't know what the hell it even means, but it was hurtful at the time.

My parents had been socialists when they were younger. My grandfather and my grandmother were active in the Socialist Party in New York, and labor organizing. My grandmother on my father's side was a seamstress, and joined the ILGWU, the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. My grandfather was a house painter and active in that union.

My grandparents were Jewish atheists, [as] I guess I would describe them. Not atheists in the sense of proselytizing, going out and fighting religion, but they just didn't believe in God, or care. You'd almost say "agnostic," but if you asked them point blank, "Is there a God?" the answer was, "No! What are you, like backwards or something?" (laughs) My parents were also Jewish atheists. I never went to temple with my parents. I wasn't Bar Mitzvah'd. But we were culturally Jewish. We celebrated Hanukkah every year, lit the candles, got eight days of presents and felt, you know, "We got *that*; the Christian kids only got one day of presents." Even though a lot of our days were nothing but (laughs) a couple pieces of chocolate, it still was *eight days* of presents, woo-hoo! And we'd take all the Jewish holidays off for school. So that was sort of my Jewishness right there. Not a whole lot more. But a lot of Jewish cultural values about change and stuff.

Rabkin: Did you celebrate Passover?

Rotkin: We had Passover with the family together. We didn't eat kosher. My parents ate pork and shellfish, lobster, whatever—*treyf* of all different kinds. I never learned to read or speak Hebrew. My parents both spoke Yiddish fluently. It was both of their first languages. [My mother] lived in Poland. Her mother came to the United States, was also a needle worker, a garment worker, but left my mother behind with her older two siblings, a brother and a sister. She was able to bring first the brother and then the sister. My mom lived with a German family for a couple of years. They treated her pretty shabbily, apparently. They were paid to keep her, and they didn't feed her very well. So she came to the United States when she was six, and she moved to the Lower East Side with her mother.

My parents were active in the socialist youth movement, YPSL—Young People's Socialist League. I didn't know that when I was growing up. I grew up in the Cold War, and so they didn't talk about it. They would have both probably been fired from their jobs if anybody had thought of them as being socialists, although I found out a lot of interesting stuff later. They met when they were thirteen, on a Socialist Party hike, and never separated (laughs) until my mom passed away in—now it's eleven years.

Rabkin: So they were teenage sweethearts.

Rotkin: Teenage sweethearts, yeah. He asked to carry her backpack on the hike.
(laughs)

College Park, like I said, was a fairly rural community. We were at the end of a little dirt road. Three hundred families. It had been built by a guy who had got an exemption to develop domestic housing during a wartime construction moratorium because he was a developer during the war, but his brother got killed during the war. And so he built this really inexpensive housing for GIs. It cost three thousand dollars total, the cost of the house—

Rabkin: Wow.

Rotkin: —which at the time was a fair amount of money, but still not a bad deal, with a 3 percent interest, which was really low even then. It was a small, little house. Our neighbors were mostly Southerners, all white people. As I said, we were the only Jewish family there.

What can I say about that earlier period? So when I was growing up, we were Democrats. We hated Dick Nixon, watched him lie about his little doggy and his wife's mink coat, or whatever it was, on television.² I didn't know they [my parents] were socialists; I didn't know anything about it. I found out later my mom actually testified in front of HUAC, and is reported to have said the

² On September 23, 1952, Richard Nixon—then a senator and vice presidential candidate—delivered a televised address that became known as the “Checkers” or “Fund” speech. In it, Nixon responded to accusations that he had committed financial improprieties. In defending his actions and attacking his accusers, he announced that he intended to keep one gift, a dog his children had named Checkers. He also contested implications that he had spent political funds on personal luxuries such as a mink coat for his wife—Editor.

folll[owing] (I have a transcript of it I saw at one point)—said, “Sonny, we’re not communists, and this man that you’re investigating was never a communist. We were *socialists*, and we were fighting communists when you were still in diapers.” (laughs) I thought that was kind of interesting.

This has a lot to do with who I am, I’m sure: my parents were community activists when I was growing up. My father and his brother, who lived fairly close, built a cooperative swimming pool, for which they gathered 250 families, and everybody contributed like 350 bucks, which at the time was a lot of money. That made you a member, and was enough capital to build a pool. That’s where I spent my summers, for years after it got built, because there was no access to swimming pools where we lived out in the middle of nowhere.

Rabkin: Where was the pool?

Rotkin: They found a piece of property where they were building Connecticut Avenue into D.C., and they actually got an empty place that was cheap and nobody could do anything with it, and they managed to make a swimming pool work there. They had to fight the planning department and everything else to get the permits, and where they were going to dump the water, and where the water was going to come from, and upsize some mains, and a bunch of other stuff.

Rabkin: This was in your community?

Rotkin: It was in our community, yes. But my father was active all his life in things like Yiddish of Greater Washington—so, even though, again, not religious, but very committed to Yiddish. We had two Yiddish typewriters in our house. (I could never figure out why he had two.) Our dining-room table always had a mimeograph machine on it. We'd have to push it aside for dinner. And my dad was active in CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality. I got arrested with my dad at a kneel-in at a church in Baltimore when I was, probably, fifteen. We got the *Washington Post*; we watched the news every night; we talked politics at the dinner table.

My dad was a jack-of-all-trades, and did everybody's plumbing, electrical work, and carpentry in the neighborhood. We shared a lawnmower—which is pretty rare in America, I think—with three other families. We had back yards that were contiguous and we didn't have fences between them, so we had this huge field that was our back yards—which were not that big, but if you put them all together, you get something decent. So my dad would take care of the lawnmower because he had the mechanical skills to do it; he was a mechanical engineer and had all these kind of things. His father had taught him about how to fix things and make things and whatever, which he passed on to me, which was very helpful.

I got a sense of community activism and commitment to working on neighborhood stuff and helping people. There was a big fight in the swimming pool, for example, about whether they would allow African Americans to belong to the pool. There were none interested; we didn't have any applicants. There

were none in our neighborhood or something. It wasn't like that was likely to happen. We were in a kind of lower-middle-income neighborhood, but no African Americans lived there. But the question was, we had members who said, "Well, we're not going to *join* this pool if there are going to be black people swimming"—or, as they would have said, "niggers swimmin' in the pool." And my dad and my uncle, who were the ones that mainly started it—they fought like hell about it, and they eventually made it clear that anybody could join the swimming pool, didn't matter what your race or religion or anything else was, and it was a big fight. Some people left over it, and it was kind of an economic crisis for them for a period. But they stood up on that issue, and made it happen.

Rabkin: What was the nature of the governance of this pool organization?

Rotkin: It was a cooperative. They formed a cooperative board. My father was also a member of the Maryland Cooperative Association; he was on the board of directors as a volunteer. Maryland Cooperative Association, which ran grocery stores, and things like that, which became Giant grocery stores, eventually. They sort of took it over.

I don't even know all the causes they were involved in. I spent a lot of time as a kid licking stamps and envelopes for Democratic Party candidates—ironically, sometimes. A lot of the people I worked for—the Tydings brothers in Maryland, who were corrupt Democrats, on the take and everything. I remember fighting like crazy against a guy named McCloskey, who was a Republican, and turned out to be an antiwar, liberal Republican. So I was, you know, ashamed of that

later. (laughs) But at the time: “He was a *Republican*, by God! That’s Dick Nixon’s party! We’re not having *that* in our neighborhood or our community.”

We did political stuff, political activism. They probably more than tithed their income in terms of contributions to liberal groups. The NAACP—my father was a member of that. My mom belonged to stuff. My mother was an early labor organizer for the teachers’ union, back when they were saying things like, “Well, teachers are professionals. They don’t need a union, they’re white-collar workers. That’s for, like, teamsters and stuff.” I remember her walking picket lines, and getting us involved in picket lines with them.

So I was involved in racial issues, civil rights issues and labor stuff, pretty early on. Didn’t follow much what was happening, but my mom took me to these things. I stood in line, I walked around in a circle, I carried a sign. As I said, I learned to run the mimeograph machine and cut stencils and things like that. So I got an early political education.

It was certainly not a socialist education. They never talked socialism to us. It was *liberal*. It was liberal values in America: openness, tolerance for other people. We had a maid that came to our house once a week to help clean, after my mom started teaching. When I was in seventh grade, my mother started teaching seventh-grade history and English, and eventually focused more on history, and then moved to high school eventually. In order to do that, she had to go back to school and get her BA, which she went back to the University of Maryland for. She had gone to Michigan after she left City College, and then she still was short

units, and so she finished up at the University of Maryland and got her teacher's credential and her BA in education, at the University of Maryland.

She taught American history. And I had a hell of an education in American history, and I was reading college texts. I remember failing some tests in high school because I was a smartass and I knew too much. I'd be writing about the economic causes of the Civil War when the teacher would say, "Well, it was *slavery*. That's the wrong answer." *Bam*, you know: "You failed the test." Literally an F on a test, (laughs) even though I was mostly a straight-A student. But every so often we'd have this run-in, and I'd say, "You're *wrong*, you're just wrong." I was not going to back down. I went to the principal's office over stuff like that.

Rabkin: Was your mother teaching at the school you were attending?

Rotkin: No, different schools. She taught at a different school, never the same school.

Rabkin: Tell me more about your schooling, K through 12.

Rotkin: I was a very precocious student. I learned to read when I was about two and a half, and could read simple things. I read *War and Peace* in elementary school. I read a lot. I just loved reading. I would read anything. Read the newspaper from one end to the other, and read books.

Rabkin: Did you go to the library a lot?

Rotkin: Yeah. My mom took me. We didn't go to the library at first. Until I was eight, we lived in this rural community. So we would go to the bookmobile, which came out on this little road by the mailboxes.

I also grew up in the period before we had an environmental movement, so I remember standing on the side of the road by those mailboxes, and they'd say, "Close your eyes and hold your nose!" And they'd come by and spray DDT all over *us*—over the kids, literally give us a little coating of DDT, just to stop the spread of anything that might harm us, or something. (laughs) Pretty shocking.

My parents raised me pretty tolerantly. I got spanked three times in my life. I can remember each one. One was playing chicken in front of the bread truck; I got a spanking for that. Once we were just messing around and I lassoed my brother around the neck. I wasn't trying to harm him, but I got a spanking for that. (These were hairbrush spankings.) And I don't remember what the other one was now. Oh, I broke a neighbor's window. It wasn't that I broke the window, it's that I didn't go tell them, and I tried to run away and hide it or something. So those were my three spankings in life. So it was pretty much spare-the-rod, generally. What else can I tell you about that stuff?

Rabkin: School?

Rotkin: Oh, I was a good student. I liked all my subjects. I got basically straight A's on the final grades, all the way through elementary school, until the summer

before sixth grade. At the end of fifth grade, the teacher gave me an F in writing, after getting straight A's in writing. Because I wrote a lot—wrote stories and everything. But my handwriting was atrocious, completely atrocious. Non-readable. Nobody could read it. *I* couldn't read it after I'd finished writing it. [The teacher said] "I wouldn't be doing any favors to let you think your writing was good." So, "Writing is about writing, but it's also about handwriting. So here's your F," you know. It was the last grading period. I was going, "*What?!*" My mom freaks out. I spent the entire summer practicing cursive writing. You know: *a, a, a; a, b, c*, and stuff, half an hour every day. It was only a half an hour, but to me it was like *death*. It was like, *I hated* it: "This handwriting stuff is just awful."

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: When I went to junior high, I had a lot of problems, because I had gone from being maybe the best student in my elementary school to—there were lots of other kids who were just as bright as I was, and did as much stuff as I did, because it was a feeder from several elementaries. Teachers didn't know me. Elementary school, the classes were smaller. Joseph E. Belt Jr. High was a more urban kind of a school, a lot of fairly rough kids. It was a racially mixed school. Eventually I'm going to end up at a vocational high school, and I'm going to get a sense that the junior high fed that. A lot of these kids were not going to college, and didn't plan to. Parents were blue-collar workers, low income. I went to the principal for a snowball fight. My grades started dropping.

I would do a map, freehand map of Africa in which I knew where every border was. I could do it from a blank piece of paper.

Rabkin: Wow.

Rotkin: And all of the capitals, and what their major products were. But my printing would be—you know, when someone would print something and they run off the end of the page, and you run out of space? That would be my title. It would be sloppy, and I would erase stuff, and I wouldn't clean it up nicely. Neatness didn't count for me. Well, it counted for my teachers. Something about the kinds of classes I was taking. I ended up in an English class which was not for advanced students. They had us [do these] little workshops on how to do grammar. You know, conjugate-the-verb sheets, which I found boring. I didn't take it well. I was making trouble. I'd make jokes, and disrupt, because I was bored and uninterested. So I got in a fair amount of trouble. I got a bunch of C's and D's in several things, in history.

Also, in my junior high, every morning we'd say the Lord's Prayer, and we're reading from the New Testament—

Rabkin: This was a public school?

Rotkin: In Maryland, which was all very Catholic at the time.

Rabkin: But public school.

Rotkin: Public school. First in Prince George's and then in Montgomery County, which was a fairly wealthy county, actually, outside of Washington, D.C. Most people there commute to the city for work. But, I, at one point refused to read the Bible selection when I was supposed to do it, so I was sent out in the hall. So I spent the mornings, homeroom, out in the hall. Everyone else was in the classroom. I was proud of myself. That didn't bother me; it was sort of a good thing as far as I was concerned.

Rabkin: Were you making a Constitutional argument?

Rotkin: No. I wasn't making a Constitutional argument, but it just seemed wrong to make me read somebody else's religion, even though I would have been just as upset if it had been a Jewish or Old Testament text or something.

I hated junior high. It wasn't much fun; I wasn't doing well at it. I was doing okay. I would get a couple A's and a bunch of F's and C's. In the end, I didn't fail stuff. I got C's and a couple D's or something.

Rabkin: Did your parents have a sense of what was going on in the school?

Rotkin: My parents, particularly my mother, defended the teachers against me. It was like I should shape up. Sure, I was smart enough to do it—and I was just making trouble, and I should accept it. This is the way the world is, and they were trying to get me to accommodate or adjust to the world. Even though they

had been activists and everything else, they were not my defenders against the stuff that was happening to me in school. It was more like, what was *I* doing wrong, not what were [the teachers] doing wrong. When I'd bring home a test and show [my mom] my answer, which would be this essay explaining the complexities of the many causes of the Civil War, didn't cut it again. She said, "Your answer's right, but she's the teacher. You have to give her what she wants." I remember her saying that. It was kind of shocking to me, but that was their view. I should find a way to make it work.

So finally by ninth grade I was back getting A's and B's again, not so much the same problems. My mom tended to favor me over my younger brother, who's three years younger. She would always say, "Oh, we love you both equally," but there was something—and I think it was just because I was first born, and nothing more than that. She always had misinformation. She'd always assume that I had done much better in school than my brother. But my brother never got anything less than an A, ever, from kindergarten until he graduated. He was always on the dean's list, and I think he was [salutatorian]. He did better than me in school, but her perception was I was [a better student]. Because he had trouble reading when he was in second grade, so he was always the kid that had trouble, supposedly—even though he shaped up and took school more seriously than I ever did.

We moved from College Park to Wheaton, Maryland, which was sort of the suburbs of D.C., further out than Silver Spring, more towards rural areas. I went to Wheaton High School, which was a vocational high school. They had a college

track. About 2 percent of my class went to college. Most of my buddies went to Vietnam; a lot of them got killed. A lot of names on that Vietnam Memorial wall in there, which has an effect on me later, which I'll talk about, in terms of the draft.

I grew up thinking people should be community-spirited, that people should help their neighbors. I believed in helping other nations. I didn't exactly understand why those foreigners were so ungrateful for our foreign aid. It seemed wrong to me, somehow. You know, we were so generous, and they just kicked us in the teeth all the time. (I didn't get it.) But I believed we should *have* foreign aid. We weren't antiwar, particularly, and because my parents were socialists, not communists, the whole battle against the war in Vietnam—they started off in favor of [the war]. Not *actively* in favor, but passively, just living with it, accepting it—which is where I came from. In, say, '65, I wouldn't have thought anything was wrong with the war in Vietnam. Certainly in '64, when they were starting—it never occurred to me there was anything wrong. Had to stop communism somewhere, and the domino theory kind of appealed to me, I think. I thought of myself as kind of a—"activist" is not a term I would have used, but a liberal, a committed liberal, somebody who would fight to make good things happen around civil rights issues. And [I was] political, in the sense of work on campaigns. You should definitely vote if you have the right to vote. I was too young to do it myself, but worked on campaigns. I couldn't understand people who wouldn't vote; that just seemed wrong to me.

In Wheaton, we had some Jewish neighbors, not right next door to us, but on our street, and it was a more racially mixed neighborhood. Mostly white, but a couple of Japanese families. And—we didn't even know that they existed—Latino families, I would say now. At the time it was not a category that made any sense to me. I thought they were white. They weren't black, and they weren't Japanese or Chinese.

I was a kind of leader of a little gang in my neighborhood. It was not "gang," because it wasn't violent or anything, but we played. We'd gather, and I'd kind of organize the games. We had a very extensive World War II game that went on from the time I was about eight to eleven or something, in which different neighborhoods would be—we were the Americans. We had a tent; we had uniforms, we had fake guns, and we would actually have battles, and there were rules of how you won. It was like war games or something.

I also was an active boy scout. I went camping basically every other weekend—winter, snow, didn't matter, whatever—with my scout troop. It was a camping troop. We were not marched around like little fascists, like some boy-scout troops are. Ours was camping. We went hiking and camping between the ages of eleven and eighteen. So that's a lot of backpacking and camping—in the snow, and learning to carry all your stuff. Sometimes we went on car camping with the troop and other times we'd go on actual hikes, down the Appalachian Trail for three or four days, five days. Somebody would drop us off in Pennsylvania, and we'd walk to West Virginia. Long hikes. It was a lot of fun. I loved camping, being outdoors.

Rabkin: Did you do the whole badge-earning thing?

Rotkin: Yes, interesting—*there's* another story. I got way more merit badges than you needed to be an Eagle Scout. All the things you could get. Everything: swimming, hiking, climbing, rope tying, signaling, Morse Code—whatever. Did it all. The most basic merit badge you can win, the first one that everybody gets, is called Citizenship in the Home. You basically have to design a fire plan for your house, how the people will get out, and talk about where your house is, and—I don't even know what else is supposed to be in it. Be a good citizen in the home, and whatever. And my mom—this was before the feminist movement, but an early feminist—said (she had to sign off for me to get this merit badge), “I'm not signing that you're a good citizen in the home! You're a little bastard around here! You whine every time I make you dry the dishes,” and everything else. So I never became an Eagle Scout. I was a Life Scout, which was the next step below Eagle. More merit badges than you ever needed to do it, but my brother was the youngest Eagle Scout in the Washington, D.C. history, at twelve years old—

Rabkin: Oh, my goodness! (laughs)

Rotkin: —which means within fifteen minutes of the time you had, minimum, to be at a step, he was on to the next one. (laughs) Now, he had a problem, because you had to have a professed belief in God, which he did not. And whereas I would have fudged anything to be an Eagle Scout, he wasn't admitting to it. And so he had to get all these letters that he was a moral person despite the fact that

he didn't go to temple or church or something. So they overlooked it, or they made an exception for him, even though he would not swear to believe in God, or whatever he was supposed to do.

Rabkin: So you would not say prayers in school, and got kicked out of the classroom for it—but you would have had no qualms about professing a belief in God you didn't feel, in order to become an Eagle Scout?

Rotkin: It's easy for me to say that now. I was never really confronted with it, because I didn't get to that ceremony, or that step, to make it happen. But, well, my parents didn't like the "under God" phrase that Eisenhower added to the [pledge of allegiance], so I would never say that when I said the pledge of allegiance. I would just be silent when it came to that part of the pledge. So I had some idea about these issues. On the other hand, my view was, "What's God anyway? Yeah, I believe in God. My God is the god of nature, and the god of, you know, science"—or something like that. So I would have found a rationale for working around it. That's the way I would describe what I would have done.
(laughs)

Rabkin: But it's a moot point, since your mother got in the way of your Eagle Scout aims.

Rotkin: Yes. You can imagine the crying and the begging and the gnashing of teeth, for years. It never led to anything. She was implacable; she was not moving on that question.

Rabkin: Wow. Anything else about your high-school years?

Rotkin: I played sports. I was on the football team. I had been very overweight as a kid, quite a bit. I was skinny as a *little* kid, but after about seven or eight years old I started gaining weight, and I was way overweight, I mean not *way* over, but I was heavy—fat—as a junior-high kid. And then I got a big growth spurt and gained almost a foot in height. I always had big feet. I had size twelve feet when I was in sixth grade, which was big for anybody. I looked like Bozo, I think, is my sense of myself. Maybe not, but that's what it felt like: bigger feet than I was tall.

Rabkin: Or a puppy.

Rotkin: And everybody thought that I was going to grow really tall, which never happened. But I did get almost nine or ten inches in height between junior [high] and the first year of high school. So I didn't lose weight, but I gained height, and I went out for the football team. And I was not very good.

Baseball was what everybody played in my neighborhood. I was afraid of baseball pitches. I couldn't see the ball. Turned out I probably went a year, sixth grade, without knowing I needed glasses. I got them in seventh grade, and then I could *see* things. I used to have to sit in the front of the room, and I couldn't see the board, and I couldn't figure out, how could everybody else see it? And my parents, who paid attention, took me to the dentist, the doc, you know,

everybody—but for some reason it slipped by everybody, and I just didn't know. So it went from being able to see okay to then I had a vision problem, and nobody seemed to catch it. Maybe my intelligence got me around things that otherwise would have been— I mean, I could memorize stuff. I'm sure I could look at an eye chart and read it back to you a couple minutes later. Anyway, I wasn't aware of it. So baseball was hard for me. I was never good. In elementary school, and middle school, I was always picked last. Girls would be picked before me for a baseball team. It was embarrassing.

So when I started playing football, I wasn't very good. I played on the line, you know, which is blocking people. I never handled the ball. I played defensive end for a while. But I was dogged about it. I really wanted to do well at it. I can remember these speeches which would really piss off my peers. The coach would say—and this was the way they would talk to you in my high school, saying [adopts a peevish, bullying tone]: "You bastards, you don' know howta *work!* Look at Rotkin, he's got *no* fuckin' skills, but *look* at 'im, he's like [mumbles]— Give me eleven guys like him, I can rule the world!" And then afterward they'd just beat me up— (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: —"*brown noser!*"

I didn't see what—I wasn't doing anything, you know.

So I was on the bench a bunch. I played some games. And then I went out for the wrestling team and I wrestled. In wrestling I couldn't beat anybody. I weighed about 170 pounds by then, and I couldn't beat anybody at 170 pounds, so I just started losing weight. They used to do that. You would not drink water, you would eat a hard-boiled-egg diet, and you would wear rubber suits to lose weight—all day, not just when you're wrestling, but walking around during the school [day], so that you'd sweat, perspire, and lose weight by water loss.

Rabkin: Was this so that you could be in the next weight class down, and be in the top of that—

Rotkin: —and be stronger than the [other competitors in that class]. So eventually I went from 170 to 139, to a weight class where I found— I kept going down until I beat somebody. And when I beat somebody, that was my weight class. (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: So I did that. I wasn't a great wrestler, but I got a letter in the sport. I got a letter in football. Then I went out for track. I used to wake up late and miss the bus. I lived two miles from my school, and I would run to school. The track coach heard that I ran two miles every morning to school, and said, "Well, you should come out and run." It turned out I was actually pretty fast in the mile. I could never sprint; I was never good at that. But I had stamina. I could run for two miles. So I went out for the team, and I had no experience, practice. I didn't

get the training you're supposed to get for track, so I ran the mile, and I just thought, "Well, you run fast," and I got in front. So, the first race, I led for three laps around—three quarters of a mile—and then I finished almost last, because I just totally faded. I didn't know. I'd pass people on the outside of a curve, where you're never supposed to pass somebody. Stupid stuff. But did okay. I had a pretty fast time.

Rabkin: Did you get some good coaching, eventually?

Rabkin: Yes. And I went into a state track meet. Good enough to do that. Didn't place, but did reasonably well there. So I got three letters in high school, and I got a school letter, which was a combination of academic and athletic stuff, so I [got] a letter sweater in high school.

I identified a lot more with my peers than my parents by the time I got to high school, which was never the case earlier. I was very much identified with my parents and their politics and their world. When I got to high school, I had more time for my friends. Given a choice, I would miss dinner and go to my friends' house for dinner, or hang out with them or do something else. I'd been backpacking every other weekend, pretty independent and able to do stuff for myself. My mom taught me to cook. I could cook—not lots of stuff, but enough for myself. I could make breakfast—eggs and pancakes and things like that. And basic dinners—put a roast in the rotisserie and put spices on it and tie it up and turn it on. Stuff like that. Take frozen vegetables, which is what we ate, and put them in boiling water. (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: [in little-kid voice] “Make a potato.”

Rabkin: You mentioned that you went to a vocational high school. Why was that?

Rotkin: It was because it was the high school nearest to me. I could have gone somewhere else, but some kids [at the vocational school] were going to college. They had college [prep] classes, and I took advanced placement classes, which would give you an extra [grade] point. So I would get a B in an advanced placement [class] and count it as—got a 4.0. So I was a B student in these advanced classes in my high school, which is how I got good enough grades to eventually go to college. I also did fairly well on the SATs. The first time I took them I got, like, 500s, which wasn't very good. And then I got a book and studied, and I got 800 on both the verbal and the math scores.

Rabkin: That's a perfect score, right?

Rotkin: And I did that by learning the tricks of how you do tests, which I knew nothing about the first time I took it. It was all about the tricks, you know, how to look at five possible answers and immediately get down to the two it might be (laughs), and then you have a fifty-fifty chance at that point. And if there's something that can tell you how to get to the next one— Because the way I did

the test the first time, I did every answer till I got it right, and I finished about half the test, and did not do that well.

Starting College at Cornell

I had a high school counselor that had recommended me for the advanced-placement classes, and to go to college, to an engineering school. I picked Cornell because my best friend's older brother was a Cornell student, and [the friend] went there, too. We became, first, dorm-mates and then eventually roommates, later, in college.

We went to a party when we were in eleventh grade. We drove up to Cornell. It's about a five-hour drive from where I lived. The two of us drove up, and we went to a party, and we got drunk. Of course, I had never been drunk before, and it was like, "Oh, wow, college, that's great! So we got sick the whole way coming home, throwing up, stopping every ten miles to throw up.

Rabkin: Driving drunk?

Rotkin: We weren't drunk. By then we were just hung over and sick. No, we weren't driving drunk; it was the next morning. No, but just really sicker than a dog. It was really horrible. But I loved it. I thought, "Wow! College parties! Fraternities! Woo, how exciting!"

When I went to Cornell, I was terrified I wasn't going to do well, because I'd gone to this vocational high school, and all these other kids were prep-school kids. I stopped being political when I went to college. There were no civil rights opportunities that I was aware of. I still thought about things like that, or I would follow the news, but I wasn't *doing* anything. I had been doing more under my parents' influence.

I studied *so hard*. I remember going to see the advisor. I was an engineering student; I went to the engineering school. I wanted to be a nuclear physicist, and bring "the peaceful atom" to India, was my idea of what I would be doing, you know, nuclear power. (I didn't know anything about negative consequences. I'd never heard an argument against nuclear power in my life. Nuclear weapons, sure, but not nuclear power.)

I studied so hard. When I went to my advisor, you were supposed to fill out a sheet of your schedule. So my schedule was classes, classes, classes, and studies, and *nothing* fun. So even the advisor says, "Don't you want to go see a movie sometime, or do something for fun, or have any hobbies, or anything like that?" (laughs) "Well, I've gotta study! There's midterms coming!" So my first three midterms, in chemistry, physics, and calculus, I got 100's on my exams. And I thought, "what kinda *assholes* get 100s on exams?!" So I said, "This is like high school! You don't have to *study*, you just show up!" Because I was teaching everybody else how to prepare for these exams, because I was so on top of it]. I did extra problems, and was *so ready* for it, understood everything. So I said,

“Well, this is like high school. I don’t have to study.” So I stopped studying. And my next exams were 58, 64, and 15 or something, out of a hundred possible.

Rabkin: Ouch. (laughs)

Rotkin: (laughs) So then I thought—and I can’t describe this as a rational thought as much as a feeling—“If engineering is that easy, that you can do it if you want to” (and of course you have to study a little bit; I went too far, I realize that), “then it’s not challenging, really. I’m not really that interested. You know, I kind of like this English class. They gave me a D on my first English paper.” It was on George Orwell’s “Why I Shot the Elephant” [“Shooting an Elephant”]. I didn’t understand what we were supposed to do with that. I didn’t understand literature. I did a paper as a high school student on Richard III, in which I thought the job was to figure out whether he killed those nephews or not. (laughs) Not the literature. So I went down to the Library of Congress and read Holinshed’s *Chronicles*. I’d go into the rare book room, and a person would come with me, and they’d have to, with white gloves, turn the pages of these ancient manuscripts for me. I sat there reading—with f’s for the s’s—reading this stuff and trying to figure out, “Well, what were the sources for Shakespeare’s play, and did [Richard] kill those guys or didn’t he?” Rather than, “What was he expressing in the literature?”

So my first George Orwell paper was more, again, about sort of elephants, and I didn’t get it. You know, we’re supposed to tease out— (laughs) Imperialism? It didn’t make any sense to me. I mean, I sort of saw that, but I didn’t think that’s

what we were supposed to write about. And my writing style was kind of tortured. I wrote these long sentences that wandered all over the place, which I still have a tendency towards.

So I got a D. I was shocked, because I had, as I said, gotten A's by then, or knew I could get A's in writing. But then it was a challenge, so then I was excited. I loved my English class, and so I took it more seriously, and I spent my time doing that, and I got an A in English—well, it wasn't an A, we had decimal-point grades, but it was a ninety-three or something. And did okay in the engineering, passed everything my first semester, but not with A's anymore. I got some, what would be C's or B's, but in numbers.

And decided I really didn't want to be an engineer. I wanted to be something else, I didn't know what. Something more social, or something more, I don't know, liberal-arts kind of thing. So I transferred from the engineering to the liberal arts school at Cornell.

Rabkin: So you let go of this image of bringing the peaceful atom to India?

Rotkin: That wasn't going to happen anymore. So now I was going to study something else in college. Then I started having a crisis, already, by the spring semester of my first year. My girlfriend broke up with me, who I'd had since high school, for two years. It was traumatic, and I was miserable. I stayed in bed for days, and was moping around, and I'd sit out in the quad and look at the girls and just feel miserable.

Rabkin: Had your girlfriend gone to Cornell also, or were you separated?

Rotkin: No, she went to a different— Well, we *saw* each other during the school breaks, and she broke up with me by letter. And it was traumatic; it was horrible; I couldn't believe it. I didn't understand anything about why. I won't go into those details. That's off on a tangent. But it was devastating to me. So I was very unhappy. And in college—because I was supposed to be in college—I didn't really want to go to class. I was moping around. I joined a fraternity as a pledge—Delta Chi. I was the only Jewish guy in the house.

Rabkin: Was there antisemitism?

Rotkin: No. Cornell had a fraternity system with Christian fraternities and a small number of Jewish fraternities. I wasn't interested in being in a Jewish fraternity. I wasn't Jewish in the sense that these guys from New York were. I wasn't Bar Mitzvah'd; I didn't know Hebrew; I didn't want to go to temple; I didn't want to go do Jewish things—whatever those were, you know? (laughs) I can remember, my parents—they wouldn't have sent me to Hebrew school or for Bar Mitzvah, but they wanted to send me to Yiddish school to learn Yiddish, because that's what my grandparents spoke as a first language, [even though] they spoke English well. You know, that's part of what I should learn, because it's part of our culture. And *I* wanted to play *baseball*, you know. It was like: "No, I'm not going to Yiddish school. It's the *weekend*. I'm going to go play baseball." I was bad at it. (laughs) It didn't matter.

So, going to back to Cornell: so I joined this fraternity, and that was a source of some tension. It wasn't that I was Jewish; they were totally accepting of that. I think it was more that I was an atheist, and somewhat not religious. So at some point, in my sophomore year, I ran for chaplain of the place, on some kind of goof, and got elected because nobody wanted the job. So I would do these prayers about George Washington Carver and the peanut, because they had peanut butter for lunch every day. I'd talk about George Washington Carver and the peanut, and how we should understand what he had done. Eventually I was recalled from the position. (laughs) Appropriately so, I think.

I should say I joined a fraternity in a place where there were fifty-three fraternities. Ninety-five percent of the men joined fraternities. The only thing you could do if you didn't was you could be a loser and stay in the dorms, or you could be something I couldn't even imagine: live on your own in an apartment in town, which nobody did at Cornell. I mean, no frosh did. Older people did. So my choice was you should go pledge a fraternity, so I did. And my best friend pledged that fraternity, so we both did. His brother had been in that fraternity. So off we go to the Delta Chi fraternity.

I picked up guitar. I played in band and orchestra from fifth grade on—played clarinet. Then I learned some other instruments. Played saxophone in jazz band in high school, but also, in the marching band. I was big enough to carry the tuba, so I learned to play tuba—sousaphone. I also had a really good sense of melody. I played glockenspiel in the parade. We used to go to Washington, D.C.

for parades all the time because we were so close. So I marched in Kennedy's inaugural parade in '61.

Rabkin: Wow.

Rotkin: And also the bass drum. I'd pick stuff up and could play it, a lot of different stuff. I was not great at any of these things. I had never really learned to read music very well. So in band, they used to have a way where you'd challenge somebody to move up to first clarinet. I would be first clarinet, and somebody would challenge me, and part of the challenge would be a sight-reading, which I would always do badly at. Then I would be replaced and moved back to second clarinet—which, ironically, was much harder, because there, you could only read music, because there was no melody. You were just playing counterpoint. So in most of the band marches, I would be playing, you know, “doot-doot-doot” [all on a single note] on the upbeat or something, and I couldn't read music well. I wasn't that good at it. But then I would decide to challenge somebody, and I would do so well—I had a really nice tone on my clarinet—so they would put me back to first clarinet. So that was my (laughs) past band experience.

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: I had conflicts between football and marching band. I broke my wrist playing football in my senior year. I was back in the band playing regularly, although I'd been missing a lot of band performances because the football games were on the same day; I couldn't do both.

Rabkin: So guitar, you said.

Rotkin: So after I graduated from high school, that summer I got a guitar. It was a Gibson with an adjustable bridge. It was a second, and it was not that expensive at the time. It was like 100 dollars. It was probably a 300-dollar guitar or something for 100 bucks, because it had a hairline crack in the neck or something—which didn't affect it, but it wasn't new; it was used and damaged. But I started playing. I played a lot, and I used to go down to Dupont Circle and sit at people's feet and learn how to play chords, and follow, and see what was happening. My best friend took up banjo, and we played bluegrass for a while. We used to sometimes play in clubs, actually, in D.C., in a bluegrass band, for a while. I played guitar and he played banjo, and we had other people who played mandolin or something. I only knew three or four chords, but that's all you needed in 1963, '64, or '65, to play, because people were not that sophisticated in the folk-music stuff. Folk music could be played mostly with three chords!

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: I didn't have a great voice, but I could sing, and I was good at memorizing words. I liked Joan Baez. A lot of her songs were the first songs I learned on guitar. And my friend was learning Pete Seeger's banjo stuff, so we started playing some of his other things.

So let's see, what am I up to now?

Rabkin: Back at Cornell?

Rotkin: So I transferred into liberal arts. Okay. I didn't know why I was in college. My parents sent me because I was supposed to go to college. They went to college; I should be in college. Everybody has to go to college. *Why* would you go to college? Again, my mom had been an activist; my dad was an activist. And somehow they had a very strange—my mom, especially—kind of a strange philosophy between, “You can't really do much to change things,” but “You want to know what's going on. You want to be smart. You want to be understanding. You want to have analysis of things. So you've got to go to college for that, because you've got to develop your understanding of the world. Not because you could make it better, necessarily, but because you don't want to be an idiot and not know what's happening around you.

Rabkin: Did they pay for you to go to college, or were you working your way through?

Rotkin: They paid for my first two years of college, and I'll tell you a story about that in a moment, but, yeah, they totally covered the cost. I contributed something for my expenses, but they basically paid for the tuition, which was expensive. It was four thousand bucks a year for room and board and tuition, which was a lot of money back then. So they paid that, first time. No scholarships or anything when I started, because even though I did well on the SATs, my grades were *okay*, but I went to the wrong school, or something.

Anyway, so then my grades weren't great. I was kind of slipping. I was getting through stuff. I remember one semester I got two A's and two F's, or maybe two A's and three F's. I would just not go to class for some of the classes. I remember pissing off teachers—not deliberately, and I wasn't disruptive, but I couldn't care, and I didn't care to hide it.

I'll give you two examples of that. A history teacher, in world history. [I] never went to class, never showed up. One day I show up. She's trying to embarrass me, because I've never been there. And we had seating charts. "Mr. Rotkin, would you like to come up and talk to the class about the Hanseatic League?" So, well, I'd been a serious history student in high school. I didn't know shit from college, but I knew all about the Hanseatic League. Got up and gave a talk on the Hanseatic League. She was so pissed off, because she'd thought she was going to be shaming me. Didn't work at all. (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: She not only failed me, she gave me a *forty*. Fifty's failing, but she gave me a forty, which is, like, really sticking it to you.

I took a chemistry class. They have little bluebooks you take your exams in. A pop quiz. Again, never showed up at class. Finally show up one day: "Three examples of nuclear decay." "Okay, nuclear decay... Ah..." I knew there was something about U-238 becoming U-235, an electron goes off—so I made a little

arrow, and a little electron, an “e.” That was Page One. Page Two, I draw a big picture of a mushroom cloud. Page Three, I wrote, “Would you believe, *dry rot*...?” (laughs) Just a smartass, you know, and just failing and not giving a shit. I also wanted to get out of school. My parents were not having it: “You’ll be drafted if you leave school.”

Rabkin: Ah.

Rotkin: The Vietnam War was happening by then.

Rabkin: Right.

Rotkin: This is ’63, ’64, beginning of ’65.

Rabkin: Were you worried about the draft?

Rotkin: I wasn’t so much worried about the draft. I even had fantasies: maybe I’d go join the Marines or something. I don’t know. I just wasn’t happy in college, and I didn’t know why I was there. I was wasting my time and spinning wheels. Every so often I’d find something exciting I liked and read about it. I spent a lot of time in the music room, listening to classical music, sitting in the quad feeling sexually frustrated and just imagining things could be better than this.

So after two years, I failed out of school. They expelled me: “Go away and never come back.” And my father—who, as I mentioned earlier, was an attorney—had

to take the bar twice. He failed it the first time, and our house was a miserable place to be after that. Then he studied for a year, and took it again, and passed. He was qualified to pra[ctice] in the patent court, and the U.S. Supreme Court; for Washington, D.C., Maryland—passed all these bars, and had all this stuff that he'd done, but he'd never practiced as a lawyer. It was kind of useful to know the law, because of the patent stuff he did, but he just did it because he did it, I guess. And he didn't become a lawyer. So he continued his work at the patent office. But on his legal stationery, which he had, he wrote a letter to Cornell University in which he explained that they had mismanaged his investment. He had been spending four thousand dollars a year, and it had been two years, and he had never heard a word, and all of a sudden I'm gone? And his investment's come to nothing? "I'll see you in court!" So they changed it to a suspension from an expulsion, based on his letter, and said I had to go see a shrink; I had to spend at least a year out of school and get them three letters of people who would say I was ready to go to college. Fair enough.

I had started the summer coaching a swimming team, which I had done before, and teaching swimming lessons and lifeguarding at a community pool—not ours, but another one.

Rabkin: Had you swum competitively in school?

Rotkin: Yes. I started at Cornell, actually, on the swimming team. I swam breast-stroke competitively. In the summers I swam in competitive community meets. And then I became a coach for swimming. They made me a coach at this job

because I was a Cornell student who had been on the swim team, which I had. But I could only do one stroke: breaststroke. I couldn't swim the other stro[kes]. I could swim them, but not fast. Breaststroke I really had down. To this day, I can swim miles. I could swim across the Monterey Bay in breaststroke, but not anything else. I have no ability to point my feet. Swimming requires *this*—(you can't see it on this tape here, but) pointing your toes. And I can't point my toes. So my feet chop the water. They don't make me move forward; they slow me down. So I have to swim all arms, and my feet are heavy. They sink. I don't float. If I float on my back, I go to the bottom.

Rabkin: So your feet work more like clubs than swim fins.

Rotkin: Exactly. More like clubs than swim fins. That would be my feet. So, but breast stroke is a different kind of stroke, and that I did well at. But I was not *that* good. So in a college meet, I could finish second or third in breaststroke at various lengths of distance. So I could swim in the home meets, but they wouldn't pay for my plane fare to go to a faraway meet, or even a bus fare to some longer place, because I couldn't do enough for 'em. I mean, if you could finish first, they'd take you in one stroke. But most of the people that were going to swim meets were swimming in three strokes. I was just kind of dead meat. So I got off that. I ran cross-country for a little while, and didn't like that as well. I went to try rowing, and they told me I was the wrong body shape, and they wouldn't even let me get in the boat and try, saying I'm not tall and thin enough to make it happen, or something. So that was that—adding to my sense of embarrassment at my weight.

So after the summer was over, I took some work in construction. I'd have to wake up at 4:30, 5:30 in the morning. Had a little scooter, a Vespa scooter, that was hard to start. I'd have to run half a block down the street to get it started. It would be cold, even though it was the end of the summer.

Rabkin: Had you moved back with your parents?

Rotkin: I was staying in the basement. My parents went to Europe that summer. I was in the basement. They kicked me out of the house because they found out I smoked dope. I hadn't done that until—the summer after my senior year [of high school] I started. A friend of mine from high school who was a jazz musician in D.C.—an actual, serious, professional jazz musician—turned me on to marijuana. So I smoked. My parents found out that I smoked marijuana, and my mom was just, “Well, you're going to have to leave. We can't have you smoking in the house.” My parents loved me and cared about me, but it was just tough love as they understood it.

Rabkin: So that was the summer after you graduated from high school?

Rotkin: Sixty-three. After high school, summer of '63. And then they let me move back if I promised I wouldn't smoke in their house, which I didn't.

Rabkin: This is after you got kicked out of Cornell?

Rotkin: Right, that summer after Cornell, I was back in the house, and stayed there that summer. They went to Europe again. My mom figured out how you could lead tours to Europe and they would pay your way. So my dad and mom went together, and they would go all over Europe, or Japan, or—everywhere, Latin America. They traveled the world in these—where they got their way paid. They'd never been to these places, but they would read up about them and they would be the tour guides, having read stuff. (laughs)

Rabkin: For high-school groups, or for adults—?

Rotkin: No, no, for teachers. Teachers' tours.

Rabkin: Teachers' tours.

Rotkin: Teachers go to Eastern Europe, or Scandinavia, or Italy, or Israel, or wherever the hell it went. I think they went to Mexico. Various places, all over the place. And the East: they went to Japan, I think, once. Anyway, so most summers my parents would be gone. And they left me alone, even, to look after my brother, I think, my senior year [of high school]. These were usually eight-week trips, or seven-week trips.

So then I got a construction job, doing that kind of work. The summer after high school I got a job working at an R&D place with a guy named Jack Rabinow, who was a prolific inventor, had thousands of patents to his name. He invented the pneumatic brake. He invented the— When you look at taillights, they both show

lights through, but they also act as reflectors? That's not as easy as you think. How does something both reflect something and show stuff through it?

Rabkin: Yes.

Rotkin: He taught me how to think about stuff creatively. Here's an example. He said, "Well, how could you make a light that would dim your headlights automatically? People keep blinding each other and there's accidents because people don't turn down their headlights when you come face to face." I said, "Well, you could put something that would measure the intensity of the light, and when it got too bright, it would turn your lights off." He said, "Yeah, but every time you go under a streetlight, it's going to turn it off." I said, "Well, how would you do it? I don't know." He said, "Is there any difference between the way the streetlights work and the way car lights work?" I go, "They're both light. I don't know. Oh! Streetlights run on AC, cars run on DC. You can design a receptor that will be able to tell the difference, and will only turn the lights down if it's coming from a car, not from a streetlight." That kind of stuff.

Rabkin: Wow.

Rotkin: He once described something I always thought was fascinating. He said his first invention was the catapult. Someone told him the Romans had done it 2,000 years earlier—

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: —and he worked his way up until he was making new stuff. (laughs) So I had a job there wiring circuit boards for the summer. Actually wiring them, soldering them, because this was before there were printed circuits. You know, a circuit *board*, made of Masonite or something, and on it would be leads, and you'd have to solder stuff together. I worked for a while in the storeroom, sorting various kinds of components that I would give out to the other people that were looking for stuff. I learned how to use a lathe. The people I worked for were in a battle with the people that gave us ZIP Code for mail. We had an optical scanner we had developed at our place, way back. This was 1963. And we lost the contract. ZIP Code got it, which is why you now have to have a ZIP Code next [to a mailing address]. Because our thing would read your city and your address and would sort it automatically based on that stuff. It was visual scanning. It's stuff that everybody does now, and it's easy. So it was early-on stuff. That's when I'd left high school and I was on my way to college, going to be an engineer. That was supposed to be useful. And I had a job part time in the pool as a lifeguard and swim coach in the mornings.

My sophomore year, did the swimming thing, but then took a job in construction. I had an interesting alienated work experience there that's worth recounting. I had been on the job, and my job was shitty. I was chipping concrete with a sledgehammer. You pour concrete forms for a big apartment building or office building, and the forms leave some mess sometimes, and you've got to put a steel thing in place, but you can't because there's extra concrete. So my job was smoothing out the job when it was done, and it was just with a big

sledgehammer, chipping concrete. And carrying stuff around, carrying mortar for guys that were laying bricks, and things like that. Physical labor. I was a laborer. Then the foreman came to me and told me he had an extra job for me, paying me a little extra. I should stay towards the end of the day. It was a three-sided building we were building. They had chutes on one side and they were throwing all the crap off the building—glass, rock, sheetrock, metal, wood. Crap. They would just throw it off the building. It wasn't chutes, even. And there was a big fence around it, and nobody should be in that area, and they would just dump it down there. We were on the fourteenth floor, throwing this stuff down.

Rabkin: Down onto the ground of the site?

Rotkin: On the ground. Yeah, fourteen stories down, just throw crap off the building. [These days] they would make you put it in the chute, into a dumpster. Anyway, so he said, "What you should do is go around that yard after the day has stopped, nobody's throwing stuff off there anymore"—and people had very strict rules about that, so I wouldn't be hurt—"and separate stuff into piles of glass, metal, wood, whatever." So, sure enough, I go do that. I'd do it, and come back the next morning, and the stuff would all be gone. Do it again. So I did that on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. And on Thursday night, I stayed late, and I watched the skip loader come around and pick up all the stuff I'd been sorting, and dump it all back together in a big dumpster.

Rabkin: (gasps)

Rotkin: So the next morning, I tell the foreman. I said, “You know, every day you’ve had me sort this stuff, and I’ve been sorting it. Well, last night I stayed, and I see there’s a guy comes around in a skip loader and dumps it back together again. So what’s the point of sorting the stuff?” The guy says, “Explain this to me again?” I explain it to him again. Then he feeds it back. He says, “So you’re telling me that this happens, like, you sort it, then they...” I said, “Yeah, that’s it.” He says, “Go get your check. You’re outta here.”

“What did I do? What have I done wrong?” To this day—was he giving me busy work to give me some extra money to be generous, and here I was blowing the whistle on him? Was it something else crazier than that? I have no idea, but the idea of meaningless work—I got that down from that experience. (laughs)

Rabkin: Wow. (laughs)

Rotkin: It was totally nuts! Made no sense.

Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA)

Anyway, so that job ended. So then I was home. I’d come home from that construction job exhausted. I couldn’t think, do anything, read. I’d drink a beer, I’d watch some television and go to sleep. Then I’d get up later at night. I’d be watching stuff. Then I lost my job, so I was sitting around, looking for other work, didn’t know exactly what I should do. Late at night on television, I’m watching, I see this add for VISTA [Volunteers In Service To America]—the

domestic Peace Corps—and a quote from John F. Kennedy: “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” It was about Native Americans, I think—that VISTA was going to go help them.

So I saw this and [thought], “I should apply to VISTA. That’s what I should do. I should go into the domestic Peace Corps. Yeah, that’d be cool!” So I signed up, and I said I was interested in any of the—I didn’t care, send me [anywhere]. And the choices were, I think: inner city stuff, migrant workers, Native Americans, I forget what else. I didn’t hear back from them for a while. I went down to the office to see what’s going on with VISTA—why haven’t they got back to me? They tell you they get back in a month, and here it is getting to be September. What happened? So I go to the office, and the place is chaos. There’s bags of mail everywhere, there’s people running around, nobody’s doing anything. I said, “I applied.” They said, “Well, we’re too busy to talk to you now.” I said, “Well, can I help? You guys seem pretty busy.” “Sure.” So I start sorting mail. So I come to my application, process it—

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: —and got myself into VISTA! (laughs) Working with migrant workers in Florida. Because the weather by then was getting cold in D.C., and I thought, “The weather will be nice in Florida. I’ll go down and work with migrant workers.”

Rabkin: So the guy who walks in off the street and offers to help sort the mail gets to make decisions about who gets in?

Rotkin: Well, yeah, because I learned what they were doing there. They were processing these things, and I just processed this one. I was interested in migrants because I saw *Harvest of Shame*, by Edward R. Murrow. And so I knew something about the plight of migrants, and school bus accidents, and where they would get hit by trains on the way to work, and they were being treated badly. So I had a sort of place in my heart for this issue. It mattered to me a little bit. So I went down there.

My VISTA experience was really important for me. As I said, I'd been political as a kid. My parents were political. I had progressive, liberal values. Not necessarily socialist, by any stretch of the imagination. Like I said, my parents never talked about socialism with me. But I thought we should be doing stuff for people.

Oh, I started to explain earlier and never finished: we had a maid who came once a week. They had children, and my mom would have her bring her children to play with me, because she felt it was bad that I never saw any African American kids, or something. My parents were very conscious of stuff like race and poverty and justice in general, civil liberties. I remember my parents went on a camping trip when I was eleven, for four months around the country—to all the national parks. And in the middle of South Dakota, at this lake in the Custer National Forest or something, my father runs into this Presbyterian minister, and they both share their ACLU cards with each other. That impressed me a lot

somehow—that in camping with their families, these guys have the ACLU cards to match. I was eleven. He had a cute daughter, and I remember that, too, at this lake, so I liked her. Nothing happened, though—I was eleven. I was a very late bloomer. Not till after college. Anyway, so there we were.

So the theory of VISTA at the time was, the reason people are poor is because they're not connected with American institutions that are the way you become successful in life. They don't know about savings banks. They don't understand the importance of education. They don't understand how you can use governmental programs to help yourself get a leg up and make your life better. That was the logic of VISTA. And VISTA contracted with agencies around the country to run VISTA programs. So I was contracted with the Community Action Fund of Florida, which is the group that I was working for. I don't know about the rest of VISTA, but that was this group's theory of why people were poor. They were going to focus on organizing people of color, primarily, and migrant workers was my job.

The first place I was sent was to a migrant labor camp in the town of Ona, Florida. It was a population of eighty-five, and a migrant labor camp with three hundred families right outside this little town of eighty-five people. It was Hardee County, and the county seat is Wauchula. And this place was twelve miles from Wauchula. My training was to teach women how to make better use of commodity foods. This was before food stamps. People would get the box of a pound of peanut butter, a pound of flour, a pound of lard, a pound of whatever. And I was supposed to go show them how they could make use of governmental

food. Well, it was a fool's mission, because these women could do more stuff with a box of food than you could imagine. I was taught about five or six recipes I could teach them, and they knew how to do all that and everything else. So it became very clear I was on a fool's errand.

The migrant labor camp I lived in had nobody that spoke English, and I didn't have any training in Spanish whatsoever. And I grew up on the East Coast, so it wasn't even like I could say "*hola*," or— (laughs). *No* familiarity with Spanish. It was not something that existed in the world I lived in.

Rabkin: What countries were these workers coming from?

Rotkin: Mostly they were called Tex-Mex, which means they were Mexicans that had come through Texas and worked their way to Florida. So they were almost all Mexicans. I spent some days and made contact with people from the West Indies, who I could not understand. Even when I learned a little Spanish I couldn't understand them, and I couldn't understand their English, either. They were cutting cane, which was horrible work. I would never do that again.

Anyway, so my experience in VISTA was: I realized pretty quickly, what I've been sent to do here is foolish—a waste of my time. So I started doing tutoring with kids after school, when they'd come home on the bus after school, teaching them reading and math skills. Then in the evening I did some adult ed, with three adults—teaching them English, to read and write. They spoke some English, but really bad, so they were trying to learn to speak it and read it at the

same time, and I was working with that. And there was an Okie there, who called himself "The Okie," and I was teaching him.

Rabkin: Did you have any training in teaching English or math—?

Rotkin: No, no training whatsoever. I went to the library and got a book called *Spanish through Pictures*, in which you'd learn the basic verbs, and naming things, and I went around and learned to call things [by their names]. And I learned to speak Spanish in the present tense, and would clarify what I was talking about by using a word which would say when. So: "I go to the store yesterday"; "I go to the store today"; "I go to the store tomorrow." There's only "go," not "went" or anything else (laughs) in [my] Spanish. I got along, because I was there four and a half months. And eventually, speaking with those folks—you learn to speak a language because you've got no choice if you want to communicate with people. Now, the kids spoke English, but none of the adults did.

I also realized nobody would respect me in this place if I didn't go to work with them and see what they did at work. So I started picking crops. So this was my typical day for these four and a half months: I would get up at about four o'clock or five o'clock in the morning, go pick crops with people. When the women came out with lunch, I would go back to the camp with them and sleep. I would sleep from eleven-thirty, noon, when we'd get back there, till three-thirty, four, when the kids got home from school, and I would tutor kids for two hours. I'd have dinner, and I would tutor one or a couple of adults.

Then I would hitchhike to Wauchula, where I learned about organizing from a big white guy, weighed about 300 pounds. And his idea of organizing—he was antiracist and very much committed to helping people. This was an African American town. About a quarter of the town's population were 200 black families in a ghetto on the Westside of Wauchula, and they lived in one quarter of town. In their part of town they had no sewers, no paved streets, no streetlights. Some didn't even have running water in the house. Hoses outdoors, things like that. It was pretty bad. They were all farm workers—migrant workers, mostly. Most of them traveled up the stream in the summertime to go up to New York and Maine and everywhere else, and Virginia, to pick crops, up the Eastern Seaboard. During the wintertime they'd be in Florida, picking crops down there. So I picked tomatoes in Immokalee, Florida, which is a place that's become more important since. Horrible work. I picked every crop there is in Florida. I picked fruit crops, grapefruits and lemons and oranges, and row crops, and cut celery. Wherever there was a crop, I picked them all. It was hard work. I wasn't very good at it. But I got to know people and they gained trust in me.

So then I'd hitchhike into town. So this guy, named Ray, 300 pounds— Ray's idea was, "People will tell you anything, but you've got to get them to *do* something. When they start *doing* something, Mike, then you *know* that they're gonna be ready to make a change in their lives." And I'd go, "Well, how's that work?" [And he] goes, "Well, come with me. I'll show you." So he'd knock on somebody's door in the black neighborhood—big, imposing white guy—and he'd say, "We all havin' a meetin'. We have a civics group. We're learnin' about American government and civics." Really, it was a disguised voter-reg project, in

which they were learning about American values, and voting, and so forth, and the Constitution, but we were basically preparing for a voter-reg drive. I didn't understand that, exactly. I mean, I understood civil rights and stuff. But it was interesting.

He'd say, "So we're havin' a meeting next Tuesday." The guy at the door would say, "Oh, I think I might come. That sounds interesting." He goes, like, "All raht, well, we'll be bah to pick ye up." The day of the meeting, he'd drive around picking up everybody. He'd knock on the door, and they'd come to the door, and he'd go, "Time for the meetin'!" And they'd go, "Aw, something's come up." And he says, "That's all right. This meetin's really important." He'd open their door, and he'd take them to the car and drag them to a meeting. (laughs) Which is now, you know, totally lacking in respect and manipulative—but at the same time, creates this group of people who start coming regularly. He's not really trying to lead them, or he has no goals of his own, other than to get them to come to a meeting. And once they get there, they'll figure out what they want to do.

Rabkin: Was this guy affiliated with an organization?

Rotkin: He was a VISTA volunteer. He had ignored his VISTA training, and was doing what he thought VISTA should be doing. He was an older guy. He was about, probably, thirty at the time, or thirty-five or maybe forty. And then he would bring other VISTAs, from other places, because there were only two of them assigned to Wauchula, but there were people all over the county, doing different stuff. We created a baseball league, so these separated African

American communities all over the place could connect with each other, and start to realize who was there and what was going on.

I learned some basic organizing stuff for the first time, and I loved it. I went to bars and talked to people. And this was a time when, because the civil rights movement was just in its early stages, in some ways, in this part of the country, they would talk about “the VISTA boy,” and what he was going to do. Well, the first thing I did when I got in Wauchula was— I was, with my middle-class values, middle-income values, it’s like, “There’s no toilets! There’s people going to the bathroom in a bucket and throwing it out in the back yard! That’s disgusting! Aaugh! They need outhouses, at least!” I could build an outhouse. So I found a senior woman, in her eighties, and I built her an outhouse: dug a pit, went to the dump, found some scrap lumber and hinges and shit, and built an outhouse for her. Didn’t cost anything. I went to the hardware store and got them to donate a latch—a white hardware store owner.

Rabkin: You told them what you were doing?

Rotkin: Yeah. He said, “Sure, I’ll give you a *latch*.” You know, it’s like, “Okay, thank you!”

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: So while I’m doing this, all the kids, the high-school-age kids in the neighborhood— There’s nothing to do in the summer there, *nothing* to do. No

programs or anything. They start watching me dig this hole—stand around watching the “VISTA boy” do this digging, you know. And I don’t know what impulse led me to this, but this was the key impulse in my life for thinking about how things should change. They said, “When are you going to build mine?” “When are we getting’ ours,” you know? And I’d say, “Ah, well, I’ll get to it.” Then I thought, “You know what? I’m going to build an outhouse for the first person that digs a hole for me to put it over.” So they all run around, and there’s a contest to see who can build the first hole. So I built two or three more outhouses. Then I said, “I’m going to get the materials for somebody who wants them, and I’ll show you how to build an outhouse.” And *then* I started showing people how to build outhouses, how to dig the pits.

Now, environmentally, looking at it years back—kind of a weird thing, because it’s sand, and [this raw sewage is] destroying the water table. It was going in the ground anyway, so it’s no worse than what was happening before, but it wasn’t a solution that was worth having. They needed a sewer system, and treatment, and they didn’t have it, and they didn’t have paved roads—

Rabkin: Or at least septic systems.

Rotkin: Yeah, something. Some people had a septic system, but most people didn’t. Most people had nothing. And there was no sewer system in that [neighborhood]. The white town had paved streets, sewers, everything else—modern community.

Then we did a garbage cleanup campaign. I was already beginning to understand this lesson, how you mobilize people, and I didn't like Ray's way so much, although I still understood something about that. But I said, "We'll get a truck together—a flatbed truck from the church, and we'll come around and pick up your garbage. But you've got to bring it to the street from your yard. And if you pile it up in front, I'll get some high-school kids, and we'll come pick up your garbage. We'll do it once, and we'll see how it goes." Everybody did it. It was amazing. But that was the beginnings of my trouble in VISTA, because there were black boys and white girls on this truck. Some VISTA girls from other neighboring communities had come and were helping us with the garbage cleanup.

Rabkin: What year was this, Mike?

Rotkin: Sixty-five. The white town freaked out. They sent letters to VISTA-Washington: "What's going on?! This guy's upsettin' the apple cart. Who is this kid? What is he up to, organizing this stuff?" My supervisor at the time was a white woman [with a] problem with alcohol. I thought it was coming from her. I only found out later—because I did some research on this years later—discovered that it went from VISTA Washington. Senator Smathers from Florida—a Democrat, but conservative, racist guy. They told me I either have to go back to teaching cooking skills or get the hell out of the community. I thought it was [just coming from my supervisor]. I didn't think it was anything about this organization, or a structural thing. I just thought, "She's weird. She's got an alcohol problem. She's racist, she's got these problems."

And that's the other thing I discovered when I was there. It was my first experience, really, working with people of color, African Americans. They weren't the noble people I thought they all were—you know, they were suffering and therefore they were wonderful and white people were horrible in the South. My view of racism at the time was, "It's education. It's like, parents teach their kids to think racist thoughts, and so if we can teach them other thoughts—counter-education—then they won't be racist. We'll teach tolerance instead of racism." I had no idea of any structural stuff or anything else that was involved in it. It was an education that year, because I remember [hearing] Julian Bond, who was then a Georgia state senator, or a representative, quoted saying, "Well, civil rights is great, and we have a right to go in a restaurant. But what good does it do to have the right to go in a restaurant if you can't afford to buy a meal?" So he starts to focus on the economic issues. That made sense to me. I began to see that. I began to understand that—"Savings banks?! You don't have any money to *save*! What's the [point of that?!] Food? They can do whatever they want with this stuff [government commodity food]. They're not *paid* anything! Their *houses* are run down. They live in horrible neighborhoods. Their *schools* suck." I saw teachers beating kids in elementary school—I mean, *beatin'* them, thrashing them. That's the way the schools treated kids. Separate black schools, total segregation, still, in '65 in Florida.

But before this happened— A lot of stuff was happening quickly. Four and a half months seems like a long time, but it's a pretty short period when all this

happened. But I was gaining skills, and a sense of what I enjoyed doing. And it wasn't like college. I wasn't lost. I loved doing this stuff; it was fun.

I also was starting to get threatened around the voter-reg stuff that was happening. I would hitchhike to Wauchula, but I'd have to run home, twelve miles, at night, because there was no traffic. It was a rural area. So I would run-and-walk-and-run home twelve miles at the end of the evening working in Wauchula. I'd get back home, like about, oh, one o'clock in the morning. And I'd sleep for three hours. I was twenty years old.

Rabkin: How many times a week were you doing this?

Rotkin: Every day.

Rabkin: Every day!

Rotkin: Five days a week. Not every day, but five out of seven days. And sometimes on the weekends, sometimes not. But I'd say four or five days out of seven, a week. Coming back, I got caught by sheriffs. I got beaten. I got sent to a hospital for this voter-reg stuff that we were doing. And at the time, I would tell them anything they wanted to hear. It's like, you know, "I'm leavin' tomorrow!" I don't take torture well. I don't take beatings well. (laughs) "I'm leaving! I'm leaving! I'll never come back. I'm sorry." Mostly I got light beatings, and then I got beaten badly once. Only one hospitalization, but mostly just harassment and

beatings and stuff. 'Cause [I was] all by myself, running through fields, the short-cut back.

Rabkin: And after the first time this happened, you kept on—?

Rotkin: The next morning, I'd wake up: "Those bastards can't do that to me! It's not *right!* I'm not putting up with this!" Because I was all Mister Courage when I'm nowhere near 'em, you know. (laughs) It was—you know, short-term memory.

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: Then the biggest thing that happened is, I realized that elections for county commissioner in Hardee County—there're three commissioners—they were being won by twenty-five votes, fifty votes. Close elections. And of course no black people were running—but, white people would win. And I started thinking—because I went to the courthouse and studied past elections, and I thought (because we were doing voter reg, and what are you going to do around this?)—I thought, "You know what, we could probably do something here with an election." And this is our civics group, our citizenship group. "Let's go talk to the candidates." "Well, what shall we ask them for?" "I don't know," I said, "How about a sewer system?" They go, "Ah, they'll *kill* us! If you ask for a sewer system, they'll literally kill us! My God!" [So I said,] "Well, what do *you* think we should get?" They said, "We should get a *streetlight*." And I go, "A streetlight?! Why would you want a streetlight?" [And they] say, "Well, because it stops

crime. I saw on TV, it stops crime." I say, "There's no *crime* in this neighborhood]. The only crime in this neighborhood *is* this neighborhood! (laughs) I mean, nobody was *robbed*." They said, "No, we've gotta have a streetlight."

And that was the next lesson for me. It's like, "Okay. It's not what *I* want. I don't give a shit about a streetlight, [but] they want a streetlight. All right. That will be important. So we go to see the first guy. He says, "Get the fuck out of my office. I'll call the sheriff if you don't get out of here in the next three minutes." Go to the second guy (two white guys running), he says, "*What* do you want?" "A streetlight." And there were 200 families, and they're giving their votes away for *beer* the night before the election or something. *Now*, we're *asking* for something. The guy says, "So all you want is a streetlight? And I can count on *how* many votes?" We had, like, seventy-five votes or something—guaranteed, and maybe some more if we keep working, because the election's not for another month or something. "Okay, I'll do it." [So we] say, "All right." And that guy won, and we got our streetlight. They put the streetlight up. Ten minutes after it's up, there's a meeting, spontaneous meeting. Twice as many people as have ever come to a meeting show up: "What shall we do next?!" (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: So that's how I learned organizing skills. Just practically doing it. Not by reading about it, but just seeing how it actually happens, and how people can be

mobilized. And that's when I was then given my choice—"get out"—so I had to leave that community.

Just to end that story: That community now has an African American commissioner. That *county* has an African American commissioner, out of three of them. I didn't do it alone. Other people [besides me] were doing it, and the civil rights movement changed other stuff. But it *led* to something, and it made a difference in that little town, and obviously empowered people. And they have a sewer system and paved roads. I went back to visit it once. It's amazing. You can still tell it's a low-income neighborhood—bad housing and stuff—but a big difference from what it had been back then.

Rabkin: Wow.

Rotkin: So, where was I going to go next? They said, "You can go to Pompano Beach, which is forty miles north of Miami on the coast." Pompano Beach is like every other Florida town. It's got Highway One down the middle of it. There's an Atlantic Boulevard—same name in every one of twelve Florida cities—

Rabkin: Along the water?

Rotkin: —which runs perpendicular to Highway One, hits the water and runs east-west.

Rabkin: I see.

Rotkin: And in every one of those towns, white people live on the ocean side of Highway One. The southern quarter is a dog track, or a ball field, or a something or other. And the northwest corner is where the black people live. In every one of these towns.

Rabkin: The white people live on the ocean side?

Rotkin: Ocean side. And [the black people] live on the non-ocean side. They live next to the canal, on Highway 441, which is where those kids go swimming. So I get there, and they tell me I'm going to live in a house. I'm the only white guy for twenty blocks in every direction, living in a house with some other VISTAs, African American VISTAs.

Rabkin: Does VISTA place you in housing?

Rotkin: They don't *place* me, but they— Again, I'm working now for CAF, the Community Action Fund of Florida. I'm paid by VISTA. I'm paid eighty bucks every two weeks, which is a lot of money in the day, forty bucks a week. Just minimum wage, basically. They give you a stipend of 1,000 dollars if you finish your year in VISTA. But it's enough money to live on. And I live funny. I get my check, and I run out and get a big steak—a round steak, because it's the biggest. (laughs) And some vegetables, and whatever. And I make an amazing meal. And that's, like, a quarter of my check.

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: Then I live on rice and beans for the rest of the month. (laughs) Which is pretty much the way I've lived my life since. (laughs) Anyway, but the first thing I do when I get there, I meet my neighbors, and go talk to them, and they said, "You know, *our* streets aren't paved." Now, they mostly had sewers, but they didn't have paved streets; they had dirt roads in the northwest corner. "Look on the other side. They all have paved roads. We should have paved roads over here."

So we write a letter—very polite letter, not demanding or anything, much more like asking: "We'd be interested in knowing what the Public Works Department's plans are for when our roads will be paved over here," or "when you're going to start the paving of the roads over here in this neighborhood," and, "Thank you so much, Sincerely," and a bunch of people sign it. It goes to, it turns out, the guy who's my supervisor—a black city council member in Pompano Beach, who calls me into his office and says, "What the fuck are you doing? We have ways of doing things in this city, and you're making trouble, and we don't need that kind of trouble." And I said, because I'd already been in trouble in Hardee County, I go, "What is it you want me to do?" He said, "Why don't you go talk to the school principal at the elementary school, and see if there's something you can do for her over there." I go, "Okay."

I go over there. They make me an aide in a fourth-grade classroom. There's thirty-eight kids in this class. They range in ability from kids who can't write

their name up to fifth-grade level. The doctor's kid can write at fifth-grade level, and some other, migrant kid can't write his name in fourth grade. But I'm the aide in the classroom. So that goes on for a couple of weeks, and the teacher, who's pregnant, leaves to give birth, and the principal says, "Would you take over the classroom." I have no teacher training—nothing going on. But it's a black school. They have no standards whatever. They put me in charge of a classroom with thirty-eight kids, no training, nothing going on. I set up, without knowing what it was at the time, a Lancasterian teaching system, in which I have the kids who know how to do stuff teach the other kids those things, because I can't teach thirty-eight kids.

I'm also twenty years old, and I have time. I teach every kid in that class to add, subtract, multiply and divide—you know, long division—by spending weekends with them. Make them come in early before school and meet with me. Meet with them after school, go to their homes; track 'em down. I don't have a family. I don't have a social life. I got nothin'. I got these kids and this classroom. So I took it really seriously. Everybody probably gained at least one grade level in reading. I loved doing it. But it was a challenge, and I didn't have the skills.

Here's one story from that place, just to give you an idea how crazy stuff is. Teacher tells me before she leaves, "*This* kid, don't waste your time with him in math. He's not so stupid. He does okay in reading and stuff, but he *cannot* do two plus two." I say, "Oh, you're kidding." "No, he can *not* do two plus two. He has something wrong with him." Okay. So I don't focus a lot of energy on him. I've got enough stuff to do, and he's "hopeless"—okay, whatever.

Then I realize this kid is collecting the lunch money from thirty-eight kids, going to the store, buying them food and making them change. *This kid*—he's the one that does it. He doesn't understand what these symbols on a piece of paper mean, and he's— Someone's beaten him around it, it's pretty clear, and he's traumatized to the point of, if you show him the numbers on a page, he freaks out. It's emotional. It has nothing to do with intelligence or ability or anything. So I start with blocks, and work him up to, like, "This is what this symbol means." Eventually he's above grade level and does fine with everything. Because he can keep in his head change from dollar bills for people getting candy and crap from the store, which they would do in the school all the time.

Rabkin: So he *was* thinking in numbers.

Rotkin: *Totally* in numbers. He couldn't see the symbol "2" drawn on a piece of paper, "3"—"What does that thing mean? I know what a quarter is, I know what twenty-five cents is, I know how to make change for twenty-five cents. But *that?*"

Rabkin: Fascinating!

Rotkin: It was amazing! So that was an eye-opener and kind of a learning experience. So I taught in that school. That summer I worked in a recreation yard, where I broke up knife fights and stuff. The school was very racist, just like the earlier schools I'd seen in Hardee County. And racist in the following ways: So, all black—I thought, "Well, there won't be racism among black people."

There's a caste system in the South. I didn't know anything about it. Teachers took umbrellas out when they had recess duty, because they didn't want to get darker. 'Cause darker means poorer, and stupider, or whatever. And so kids would line up for fire drill, or to go on a trip or something, by color.

Rabkin: [sharp intake of breath]

Rotkin: Nobody made 'em do it. It just was the way things worked: lightest in front, darkest in the back, and it would be almost perfect shading from one end to the other. Not by height, not by age, not by grades, not by name. By color.

Rabkin: Amazing.

Rotkin: I saw that pattern, and I thought, "What the hell is that?!" And just started to realize racism took a much more complex form than I thought it had before. And the Julian Bond comment I mentioned before: it's got an economic aspect to it, an institutional basis. I still didn't really understand it. But what I began to understand is, I had some good questions: "Why do the people that work the hardest make the least?" Because I knew farm workers worked hard. I couldn't do that work. I was twenty years old and could barely do it for three hours a day, much less seven hours or six hours all day. They work damn hard, and they just don't have any money. They don't pay 'em very well. And the people that do stuff that they *like*, and that's fun, get lots of money. That basic question is what turned me into a socialist. That was fundamentally it.

This story is out of order, but on my way back to Cornell, I read a story in a pamphlet by a guy who said, "Let me describe how capitalism and socialism work." And I'm reading this thing, and I go, "Okay, all right, what?" He says, "Imagine a race." And I still use this in my classes. There's going to be a race. And they say, "We want this to be a fair race. And it's a race between working people and owners of capital. And there are going to be two separate lanes, and you can't mess with each other or I'm going to cut off people. People have to start at the same time. There's going to be a fair referee at the end who's going to determine who gets there first. And the workers start off on foot and the capitalists in a car!"

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: (laughs) And that's how it works. That's capitalism. I said, "I think I'm a socialist!" (laughs) That's how I kinda got it, on some level. And I came out of VISTA an activist, believing in the critical importance of the civil rights movement. I was by then against the war in Vietnam because Julian Bond was against the war in Vietnam, and because Martin Luther King had come out against the war by then, or was at least beginning to talk about it. My high school buddies had gotten killed in Vietnam, and I felt bad that I had gotten this deferment, an occupational deferment for VISTA, which is how I didn't get drafted after I left school. I didn't feel that was good, and I had problems with it. I didn't know why we were fighting in Vietnam. I thought it was a mistake, a tragic mistake. I didn't understand anything about U.S. imperialism. I had no idea. But I would hear—someone like Senator Smathers, or Stennis from

Mississippi or something, they'd talk about the "nigras," and they'd talk about the Vietnamese the same way. It was an analogy, basically, between racism and the way we were fighting this war and how we saw the enemy, that for me became the connection. And I still didn't really fully understand the war.

I should point out: I got arrested. I mentioned that time earlier with my dad, and they dismissed charges in the end, as it turned out, in that one. But at Cornell there'd been a demonstration in the last spring I was there, before I was failed out of school. About eighty people who went to the ROTC, Reserve Officer Training Program, and sat down in the middle of Barton Hall, this big military hall, to stop a march in front of the president—the Presidential Review that happens—and they blocked it by having a line of eighty people on the floor that made it so they couldn't march. I went with everybody else because it was fascinating, the things going on—not to *participate*, God forbid, but to sit in the audience and, "What the hell's going on?" It was more like entertainment. But then I saw these people on the floor. And then the crowd gets ugly. They start throwing things. They start yelling, "We should beat 'em up!" you know, "They're traitors to America, these people on the floor! They don't support America!" Then I identified with [the protestors] completely. This was even before I went into VISTA, because of the civil rights stuff I had done with my dad—civil liberties things, but particularly civil rights.

So I went down and joined them on the floor. What was my point? "These people deserved to be *arrested*, not beaten up! They deserve to be arrested, 'cause they're breaking the law, and they should be arrested—not vigilante bullshit!" So

when I went to see the proctor, who was like the judicial officer for Cornell, he says, "What's your story?" and I said, "Well, I saw this crowd, and they were getting mean. And *those* people [in the sit-in], they deserve to be arrested. And they took our student cards—" He said, "Ah, you were there because you thought the law should be followed, and not because you were trying to stop the—" "No, I just went to watch, but I didn't want to see that kind of vigilante violence. It's *wrong*. It's not American," and stuff like that. And he said, "Aw! Stay out of trouble, would you?!" He hands me my card back, literally pats me on my head (laughs), and sends me away. Nobody got expelled, but they all got [marks] in their [disciplinary records], which with later actions got them dismissed or something, because of that first discipline. But I got no discipline. 'Cause I told the truth. But it was weird. So, that was a little strange.

That guy, Proctor George, later at Cornell at a demonstration—he was conservative, and fought the movement every time we tried to do something—somebody came up with this idea of a button. Big, huge button that said, "I'm not persuaded that Proctor George"—his last name was George—"that Proctor George is a horse's ass!" And they printed about fifty of those buttons, and people walked around campus with them. And they printed *thousands* of buttons that said, "I'm Convinced!"

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: (laughs)

Rabkin: —which by itself couldn't really—

Rotkin: —What are you going to do to somebody? "I'm Convinced"—? So—
(laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: Anyway. I went to see a shrink while I was out. Actually I went *before* I went into VISTA.

Rabkin: Because that was part of the terms of your suspension.

Rotkin: Right. And I saw the guy, and he said, "What's the problem?" And I said, "I'm, ah, bored. I don't want to be in college. I don't know why I'm there. My parents make me go. I'm not that interested. I understand I *should* get a college education, but maybe later. I'm just not that interested." He said, "I don't think you have a mental problem. Goodbye." Writes me a letter: "He's mentally sound." So I got my letter from him. Then I got three letters from VISTA folks. Not my immediate supervisor, but from other people in VISTA who'd by then become aware of some of my organizing work. Very positive letters. And Cornell let me back in.

Rabkin: This was after a year in VISTA?

Rotkin: Just a year. Yeah. And then, when I got back to Cornell, the only major that would take me back was English literature, because I had failed so many classes in everything else. My first two years, I'd tried psychology. I thought, "Well, that will be fun, because I'm interested in why people feel like they do, and how we become who we are, and personalities and stuff." It was experimental psychology at Cornell. They gave me a rat. You'd have to, like, starve it so it will have a faster learning curve, and torture it so it runs through mazes and jumps through things and whatever. And then I took another class, which was even worse, a physiology class: "Memorize the parts of the eye." (snores, rolls his eyes)

So much for psychology.

And then I thought, "Philosophy! 'Why are we here?' 'What's ethical?' 'What matters?'" [At Cornell, the philosophy department's emphasis was on] logical positivism. It's like, "Here's a sentence..." They gave us two sentences, actually, from Freud. One was a sentence that said, in order for analytical theory to be considered correct, it has to be coherent, it has to touch on the various points of the patient's illness, and has to ultimately be accepted by the patient as a correct analysis of their problem. Another quote says more or less the same thing, except it says the patient *doesn't* have to accept it. Teacher writes them on the board—seventeen-week semesters—says, "There's a contradiction here of some kind. How can we understand how these can be reconciled with each other?" And I'm thinking—not having been properly schooled in philosophy—"People write contradictory things. Maybe they think this now, and something later. Maybe

they think two contradictory things at the same point! It could happen." So, what are we doing? Literally, we diagram the sentence, we're working syntax, and it's like, "I don't understand the enterprise!" It made no sense to me. So that was philosophy.

Rabkin: And you were supposed to spend the seventeen-week semester—

Rotkin: We spent seventeen weeks with those two sentences. That's what we did in this class. And I was all excited because I got into an advanced class. It wasn't like the first introductory philosophy class. This was before I failed out. So I failed that class. And that's the kind of stuff I failed. I failed torturing my rat, and whatever.

So the only thing they let me back in was English lit, because in those classes I'd gotten almost all A's. I hadn't taken that many of them, but I'd done well in them, and I liked it. English lit was the residual major at Cornell. Everybody that couldn't figure out what they wanted to do with their life became an English lit major.

Rabkin: So it was kind of a fallback.

Rotkin: A fallback major. It was, I say "residual," in the sense: "You can't pick what you want to do? You're going to be a lit major." And they had big classes, and the people who were lit majors—not in the honors program, but just regular lit majors—you'd be in these huge classes, and you'd be lectured about stuff, and

there'd be exams. You know, "Who were the characters in Shakespeare's play?" or whatever. And that would be your tests. But English lit let me back in.

Antiwar Activism at Cornell

When I got back to campus, I lived a very schizophrenic life, between the antiwar movement—because as soon as I got back to Cornell— Well, first of all, I heard there was draft counseling going on, so I thought I should go to some, because now I was going to be back in school. Then I gave up my 2-S deferment, which I got when I got back in school, because it was wrong. My high school buddies couldn't go to college; they got drafted and killed. I wasn't going to take a student deferment because my parents could afford to send me to school. And when I went back to school, my parents were no longer willing to pay for school. They'd been through that trip. So I got a scholarship, and I got a job working three-quarter time. The job came a little later. But I got some scholarship money, and I think my parents paid my tuition the first semester and no living expenses, and then after that they just stopped paying for stuff, even though I was doing well.

English lit was completely divorced from my political life. When I got back on campus, I was looking for, as I said, draft counseling. I started *doing* draft counseling with high school kids. I joined a draft-counseling group. We stayed up till two in the morning arguing about the war. And my first analysis of the war in Vietnam was it was a stupid mistake. We blundered into it and were Deep

in the Big Muddy,³ or whatever. And, “How did we get here? Nobody was thinking. It was stupid. And we’re on the wrong side, even, kind of, I think! I don’t know. But I didn’t know. And, you know what? Women and children are being napalmed. It’s, like, *wrong*. Wrong, wrong, wrong. You should kill the *soldiers* on the other side, not the women and children!” That was the extent of my politics. It wasn’t like I saw this as American foreign policy was a problem, or we were doing this anywhere else. I didn’t know anything about any of that. Just a mistaken, stupid war, in which I was at threat, and other people were being killed inappropriately, and things weren’t right.

So then, working with this draft group, I began going to the antiwar office and helping fold literature. Then I started reading what I was folding. It was Glad Day Press; it was an antiwar press, because the regular print shops wouldn’t print antiwar material, because it was “traitorous.” And I went to a demonstration in which there were about twenty of us, and they threw eggs at us, and tomatoes and shit. Nobody beat us up, but it’s like, “You’re traitors!” *Pfffshhh!* Literally covered in eggs and shit after the demonstration.

Rabkin: Were these other *students*, throwing eggs and tomatoes?

Rotkin: Downtown Ithaca.

³ This is a reference to “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy,” a song written by Pete Seeger in 1967, whose narrative about a foolish captain ordering his platoon toward certain death during a practice patrol served as a metaphor for President Lyndon Johnson’s policy of escalation in Vietnam—Editor.

Rabkin: Downtown.

Rotkin: A Republican town, conservative place.

So I started to identify with the antiwar movement. It was emotional before it was anything else. I started thinking of myself as a communist, small "c." I didn't know anything about the Communist Party, but the Vietnamese were communists, so, I think, I was a communist. It was more, again, emotional identification rather than any analysis. I had read this little thing about socialism and the race, so I started to think, I'm a socialist, I guess. No analysis of American economics or politics or anything else.

But then you start hanging out with people who've got more analysis than you do. You start reading stuff. There was about a fifty-page booklet on the history of Vietnam, and how it had been a French colony and all. And, "Wow!" I'm learning all this stuff, and how we had picked up afterwards. And then the Dominican Republic got invaded in '65, and that's when I'm still in VISTA. We invaded it, because there was a kind of an anti-militarist, anti-American guy there. And he wasn't even a communist, but he was a democrat, you know, small "d."

So just by hanging out with people, hanging out in that movement, it started moving me to the left. At some point I went to a demonstration and got up on a table and gave a speech, but it was totally nonsensical—emotionally right on point, but no coherence to it, I'm sure. But then I was writing stuff, little leaflets.

Not a lot. Writing a leaflet, two paragraphs. And, again, on an emotional basis: “They’re napalming women and children!” No analysis. “Show up at the demonstration; we’ve got to stop this.” Doing draft counseling with poor kids, African American kids. [There was] a fairly large African American community in Ithaca. Working-class kids. And sort of saw myself as a leftist. Then I joined SDS [Student for a Democratic Society], and I became the treasurer of SDS, so I know that of the 300 members of SDS at Cornell, only five paid dues.

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: (laughs) So we all *belonged*. Everybody felt like a member, but nobody actually sent their dues in to the organization. Because I collected it and I know.

I started getting arrested at sit-ins. I got active in the antiwar movement. I got some more political education, was reading more things. Because it’s not about community studies in a narrow way, I’ll talk just a little bit about stuff: I took an important class with Doug Dowd, who was a Marxist economist, and I read “Monopoly Capital” by Baran and Sweezy, and I read Gabriel Kolko’s “Wealth and Inequality [Power].” So I started learning something about the world (laughs), which I knew nothing about. From all the reading in history I had from my mom, I just didn’t get that really good left-wing stuff. We’d read Henry Steele Commager—sort of progressive, liberal, reform literature. It wasn’t really socialist or communist.

Rabkin: And not Howard Zinn.

Rotkin: Not Howard Zinn, and not anything from [William Appleman Williams], or something like that. My parents were still in favor of the war in Vietnam: “We have to stop communism somewhere.” My uncle—my father’s brother—who was a feminist activist around women’s rights, around reproductive rights, and used to go testify in front of Congress, was the head of army ordnance research, the highest position that a non-Presidential appointment can have. And then he got a Presidential appointment to the next step up. He was managing the operation of designing bombs for the military. So I would come home on Thanksgiving and watch a slide show of how Panama’s a lot like Vietnam, and how, here are some pictures of the planes dropping bombs, because the jungles are similar, and there’s these three-level jungles, and stuff like that. And I’d literally leave the house. I just couldn’t even stay in the house, because I was so against the war by then. I still loved my parents and cared about them, but it was very awkward and strange.

Rabkin: How did your uncle reconcile the work he was doing with his politics?

Rotkin: Because he was doing stuff for feminist politics, but it wasn’t necessarily— They believed in stopping communism. It was that kind of liberal— Hubert Humphrey. You know, in favor of the war in Vietnam, but left of the U.S. Congress. Left on probably every other issue, including probably feminist stuff, I would guess. Before his time—I mean, that came after him.

I organized a big draft-card burning in Central Park with five friends from Ithaca. I got indicted by a federal grand jury, which was, you were facing five years in jail and a 10,000-dollar fine.

Rabkin: For the draft-card burning?

Rotkin: Yeah. Now, we organized that. We were going to have 10,000 people burn their draft cards, and we figured they couldn't arrest 10,000 of us. And we wouldn't burn our cards unless 10,000 people did it. That was our plan. And we started going around the country and trying to send letters around and mobilize people to do this. And so, "That's what we're going to do! And this will be a great idea. And if we can get 10,000 of us, and there's a lot of people burning draft cards, and we do it all together, we'll do it in Central Park in New York, on April 15th." That turned out to be the big march, the first really large march. About a million people marched in New York that year. Fifty thousand in San Francisco. April, '67.

Rabkin: I was in that march in San Francisco.

Rotkin: Yeah. I was in New York. Well, the organizers of that march, mostly labor people, flew us to New York before the march to tell us not to do our draft-card burning, because we were going to get them all in trouble, and they wanted to be a mainstream anti-war movement, but not a bunch of criminals burning their draft cards. They did not persuade us. We flew back on what [was] then Mohawk Airlines, which had a terrible safety record, and these snow-ridden

runways up [in] the north. And as we landed, it ran off the runway and tipped over on one wing— And so we thought, “They’re trying to kill us!” (‘Cause we didn’t say “yes.”)

Anyway, so we went and had our draft-card burning. A hundred and fifty-two people showed up, not ten thousand. We did it anyway: “To hell with it! Let’s burn ‘em anyway!” So we burned our cards. Then I was called in front of a grand jury in New York, which was a terrifying experience. I don’t know why we never came to trial on it. I mean, they had us. They had the right. We did it. And I was willing to admit that I did it, but I was not willing to give them any information about anybody else. I had Gerald Lefcourt as my attorney, from the [National] Lawyers Guild. I never met him. I talked to him over a pay phone on my way to the grand jury hearing.

The grand jury’s all these older men—probably seventy, eighty years old, it seemed to me at the time, maybe younger [from my perspective] now. And they just sit there, ready to rubber-stamp anything the DA tells them. Robert Morgenthau was the DA—a pretty famous guy, afterwards, in New York. And they asked me, “Your name? Your address?” [Lefcourt] told me I should tell them that, so I did. They said, “And who lives with you?” Well, some of the co-conspirators lived with me, and I refused to answer that question. And I found that I could answer it: “I refuse to answer that question under the protection afforded me by the first *and* fifth amendments of the Constitution of the United States.” Because I didn’t want to plead under the fifth, because I always knew those racketeers used to plead the fifth. But he said, “You *have* to plead the fifth.

That's the only real protection you have. You're not protected by the first amendment. You're only protected by the fifth." So, "Could I say both?" "Sure. You can say anything else you like, as long as you say the fifth. And *don't start answering questions*, because if you answer any question, it opens up a line of questioning, and then they can keep going—"

Rabkin: Ah.

Rotkin: "—so don't answer what seems like an innocuous question. Once you give them your name and your address, you don't tell them anything."

So they show me a picture of my seventh-grade class. There's a picture of me and another guy circled, who I don't recognize. And they say, "Did you wear glasses in seventh grade?" the guy asks me, and I refuse to answer that question, under the protection afforded me under the whatever. This guy was probably one of the other draft-card burners, but I didn't know that. From my seventh-grade class? I wasn't wearing glasses in the picture, 'cause that was before I got my glasses. I refused to answer that. "Well, what about (this and that)?"—everything they asked me, I refused to answer the questions. And I started writing fifth-to-the-fifth—you know, like a[n exponential] math notation—fifth-to-the-fifth-to-the-fifth-to-the: "You refuse to answer *why*?" "I refuse to answer *that* question under the grounds—" (laughs) But I don't want to make it sound like I was bold. I was terrorized. I was totally afraid I was going down. Didn't happen.

So to make a long story about the antiwar movement [shorter], I'll just say this. I became a leader in that movement. I gave a lot of speeches. I started writing pamphlets. I learned to run an offset printing press at the Glad Day Press. The way I learned that: the guy who was doing the printing had to leave, for family reasons, to go to Massachusetts. I was the only guy in the place folding literature that day, and he said, "Someone's gotta take over this press. I could teach *you*." I was pretty mechanical, and I said, "Okay." He gave me two hours of lessons, and after that I stumbled through teaching myself what else I needed to learn. I learned to run an offset press. Then I got a three-quarter-time job working in the press, printing both antiwar stuff and other, money-making stuff for the office, so they could keep the thing running. Learned to do that.

I became an activist in SDS. I traveled in upstate New York to campuses and would organize an SDS chapter. I organized one at Elmira, a women's college, [and] at Syracuse University, and then I went out to Ohio and organized one at Canton College I would just show up and I'd put up posters: "Join SDS." Everybody knew about SDS by then, and strangers would show up, and I'd start a chapter. I'd get them going: "Who's going to be the president? When's your next meeting? What's a good night to meet? Here's some materials you can get. So call me"—this was before email or anything like that—"call me or write me and we'll make some connection. I can tell you what SDS is up to. At least one member's got to subscribe to SDS so you get the newsletter and you know what SDS is doing nationally."

So I was doing that kind of work while I was working three-quarter time. I was sleeping four or five hours a night, which I've—pretty much since that time, that's all I've ever slept. That year I failed out of school, that summer just before I joined VISTA, [I was] sleeping like seventeen hours a day. In my last year in college before I failed out, I was sleeping, that spring, seventeen hours a day. I'd just sleep! I'd wake up, have a meal at lunch, play some hands of bridge with somebody in my fraternity house. They'd all go off to the library to study; I'd go to sleep. I finished my sleep in my sophomore year. (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: So I've always gotten along on four or five hours' sleep a night, usually five.

Rabkin: Without feeling exhausted?

Rotkin: At all, no. As long as I get five hours' sleep. If I sleep less than five, I'm like everybody else. I get lost and cranky, and not thoughtful. But five hours is plenty, any given night. As long as it's not five hours twice in a row. Five hours followed by six is fine. I can sleep six hours every night forever; I wouldn't have any problem. But I need five hours. So that's how I get a lot of stuff done. Between eleven o'clock at night and two in the morning, nobody's doing anything, and I'm writing stuff, and getting work done, and preparing lectures, whatever I need to do. You've got time, and it's quiet, and nobody interrupts you. I've also learned—and this happened from that VISTA experience of trying

to get so much packed into a day, of doing all this stuff—I don't waste time. I mean, everybody wastes time; I waste time, too. But you know how people sit around, "I don't want to do this thing," and they procrastinate? I don't *ever* do that. I used to do it. I don't do that at all. I can use fifteen minutes. I can put it to work. I can get something done. I can write an article in a half an hour! I mean, why would you sit around—? I've never been bored. Since VISTA, I've never been bored in my life. Not for a minute. There's always something that you could do. There's a lot of stuff going on. You could *read*, worse came to worst. But you could certainly go *do* something. You could make something happen.

So I became a leader in the antiwar movement. I'll tell you a story about my draft experience. For me, politics has always had to be sort of fun as well as being work—you know, change things. So in the antiwar stuff, we started doing fun stuff. It was fun and edgy at the same time. The draft thing required you to keep the draft board informed of your health status. So I would wake up every morning and write the draft board a letter: "I'm still sick about this war."

Rabkin: (laughs) Every day!

Rotkin: Then I realized there had been a case where somebody had used—they weren't Xeroxes back then, but some kind of facsimile copy of some sort—in a file, and the court had thrown it out: "We need original documents." You know, when the student turned his letter in with his draft card, or something, then: "You can't *use* a copy of the letter. You have to have *the letter* in court." So I started mailing, wrapped around a brick, postage-due, my health status every

morning. Then, you were supposed to keep them informed of changes in your address. I would send them the entire Ithaca telephone book with my address circled in the package, with no postage on it. And they would have to take it. I had several file drawers in Silver Spring, Maryland, in my draft board, of all this stuff.

Eventually, they reclassified me 1-A. I filed an appeal. I went to my draft board in Silver Spring. There were three old guys there, white men. They wanted to question me. There was a line of people going through the draft board. They were given about forty-five seconds each: go in and come back out, bam-bam-bam.

I go in there. They say, "Well what do *you* want," you know. I said, "I don't know. You guys have classified me 1-A. It says, 'available for military service.' And I'm *not*. So it's a misclassification, and I'd like to challenge it." (laughs) And they said, "Well, are you at school or something?" "Yeah, but I won't take a 2-S deferment. It's a class-based thing and it's not right." "Well, how about Conscientious Objector status?" I go, "No. I work in a draft center. Only people with education can get that kind of stuff. It's not right to working-class kids. It's not appropriate; I'm not going to take a CO. And also, I'm not a pacifist. I would have fought in World War II, to be honest with you. I just think the war in Vietnam, we're on the wrong side. I wouldn't fight that war. But, no. I won't do that." One of the guys stands up and says, "Let's call Cornell! If he's in school, let's ram a 2-S down his throat!" (laughs) It was totally weird. I was there for forty-five minutes, not forty-five seconds.

Finally they send me out. I won't take any of the things they offer me. They find against me, and they're not going to accept my appeal. So then I have to write a letter appeal to the state board. You don't get to go there, you just can write a written appeal. And they turn me down. So I'm on my way to a draft physical.

I get to my draft physical. I'm carrying a box full of Wobbly sabotage pamphlets.⁴ I stand up on my desk during the exam, and I'm giving speeches about the war in Vietnam and passing out pamphlets on how to sabotage the military installations. And I'm making trouble. You think everybody thinks you're great for that. No, no: the other kids are going, "Shut the fuck up! We want to be in the infantry! We want to do well on the test," you know. "You're bothering us. Shut up! Communist traitor!" And I don't care. I'm on speed, and I am totally wasted. I've been up for several days. I'm just totally at loose ends here.

I go to see the shrink. Well, first of all, they take me out of the group and they give me a sergeant who takes me around to the stations of the draft physical—by myself, not with the other group, so I'm not bothering anybody anymore. He's carrying me by the arm to these different places. I get to the shrink. The shrink says, "What are you going to do about this draft?" I said, "Well, I really don't know. Sometimes I feel like I should go in the army and organize against the war from inside the military. But I know I'll end up in a brig, and I don't have that

⁴ The Wobblies, or Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)—a wage-workers' union formed in reaction to the relative conservatism of the American Federation of Labor (AFL)—advocated workplace sabotage (including slowdowns, strikes, or deliberate bungling) as a tactic of self-defense in response to unfair working conditions—Editor.

kind of courage, to be honest with you, Sir. And so I think I might just refuse to go, and go to jail—you know, go to a federal prison, I guess. Not go to a brig.” (I’d just seen this play, *The Brig*, which was—*ucchh*, horrible. Devastating experience.) “But I don’t know. I’m going to wait till I get there and see what happens.” So a couple of minutes later, there I am, back with my group.

Rabkin: You’ve been all the way through the stations of the physical.

Rotkin: Yes, all my stations. And they’ve all been through it. It’s in the afternoon now. It’s two o’clock, three o’clock. [The people in charge] say, “We’re going to ask you to step forward. We don’t know which branch of the military you’re going to be in, but those of you who step forward will be in one of the four branches—Army, Navy, Marines, or Air Force—and some of you might end up in the Coast Guard, but probably not. Okay, everybody ready? *Wait*—is there a Michael Eric Rotkin here?” some guy yells. I go, “Yeah.” He goes, “Follow me.” So I follow this guy. They take me to another room. They fingerprint me. They declare me a security risk to the United States and send me home with a 1-Y classification, which is the correct classification for me: I will fight if the United States is invaded, but they will not use me, because I can’t be trusted for anything less than a direct invasion of the U.S. It’s perfect. *Perfect*.

But that gets me out of the draft, because they don’t want security risks in the army. Not going to happen.

Rabkin: It's an Arlo Guthrie moment.⁵

Rotkin: So for months later, I'm visited by people from Army and Navy intelligence who want to interview me. I say, "I'm not going to tell you anything. I can't be helpful to you." They say, "If I don't get something from this interview, they're sending *me* to Vietnam!" "I'm sorry, I'd like to help you, but, you know."

Rabkin: What is it they're supposed to be finding out from you?

Rotkin: What's going on in the movement; who organized this draft card stuff—blah, blah, blah, whatever. I'm just not going to talk to them. So, getting nowhere with it.

Now, I left out some other fun stuff we did. At one point, they come to my house. Two FBI guys come to the door, and they knock on the door, and they look like FBI guys, with the shoes and everything else. And they go, "Can we talk to you?" I go, "Sure. Come on in." They come inside. My housemate—this is before the gay movement; this is in '68, before Stonewall—my roommate's in a dress, running around the room. And we don't even know that he's gay. I mean, he's just *weird*, you know? (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

⁵ Rabkin is referring to Guthrie's famous song "Alice's Restaurant Massacree," released in 1967. The long monologue, sung against a repeating ragtime guitar riff, was based on Guthrie's own experiences during a 1965 draft-board physical—Editor.

Rotkin: He came out later. But I mean, at the time, he's just, you know—Rindos is weird. So they are very uncomfortable. He's dancing around the room, singing, "La-la-la-la," whatever. So they say, "Can we meet you somewhere else?" I go, "Sure." "Where can we meet?" I go, "How about the student union?" "Okay, where's that? We can meet you there tomorrow." I show up the next day with twenty-five people with flash cameras. The FBI guys run away, literally. They won't meet with me. They don't want their picture taken. I don't know why.

Rabkin: Because they want to be able to go under cover?

Rotkin: I guess. Or maybe there're just that many people, when they thought they were going to talk to one guy, and I got this mob. They weren't going to hurt them, just take pictures. But for whatever reason, that scared 'em away.

Rabkin: You scared off the FBI.

Rotkin: So I had these experiences of making trouble, getting arrested. I got arrested for sit-ins at various places—probably thirty arrests in my life, mostly either infractions or misdemeanors. Mostly infractions for trespassing or for blocking a road. I got several at UCSC for blocking the main entrance. Got arrested at a South Africa demonstration when I got here, years later. But at Cornell, small st[uff]—you know, draft board; sit-ins in classrooms, mostly—things like that, after I'd come back to school. And never got in enough trouble to ever be booted out of school.

I took my English classes seriously. I took school seriously. It was very separate from the rest of my life. My first class that I got back in was an honors class, because it only had five people in it [before I signed up] and you needed six to make a class go. It was in eighteenth-century literature: Pope, Swift, Dryden. Didn't like it very much. It wasn't my favorite literature. But I wanted to do well in school, and it was a small little class, and I thought that was exciting. And the teacher needed me to have his class go, so he let me in the honors class. So I did well. I took it seriously. Unlike the other students, I went to the library; I got secondary materials; I read everything; I came to class prepared with things to say. I wrote papers twice as long as they required. I was totally into it. I was not failing out of school again. That was not going to happen. I found a way to make stuff interesting and enjoyable. You can do that, once you make your mind up that's what you want to do. So I got excited about the eighteenth century, and what the hell's going on then—the Industrial Revolution, and things that were beginning to happen, and its relationship to literature.

Every semester for the remainder of the time I was in school, I would be sent to the dean because my GPA was too low. I left school with a 54 out of 100 average.

Rabkin: Oh.

Rotkin: *Fifty-four* out of one hundred. *Sixty's* passing. When I came back, I got straight A's. I got A-pluses. Everything was an A or A-plus. No B's, no B-pluses. A, A-plus [for] everything. But my GPA moved from fifty-four to sixty-one, or

something. (laughs) “You’re not making the grades necessary to stay in the honors program.” So I explained it to the dean: “Look what happened.” “Oh, I see! Oh, you’re right. Look at this last semester. Fine. You can stay in the program. Keep up the good work, son!” Off I go. Next semester, same thing happens again. Finally when I graduated in highest honors— I wrote my honors thesis on Wallace Stevens, an American poet. I studied Romantic poetry primarily; that’s what I really was into. And the last semester that I was there, my GPA finally reached the minimal level necessary to be in the honors program. (laughs) But I got highest honors because of the quality of the thesis itself.

Cornell Migrant Labor Project

So let me finish up the Cornell stuff. When I was at Cornell, after I got back—this was in the second semester I was back—I heard there was a class on migrant workers being taught by this guy Bill Friedland, in the School of Industrial and Labor Relations. (They had separate schools.) So I thought, “Well, I know something about migrant labor, and that sounds fascinating to me. I’d like to know more. In fact, I never really *could* figure out why those people were so poor. How come there’s poor people? Why do they put up with it?” Those were the questions I started to have: “How come the people who work the hardest make the least? How come people will put up with this shit? There’s more of them than there are the farmers. Why do they accept it? I would never accept it. What’s going on?” I wanted to know.

I couldn't take sociology classes. I had failed [out of that department]. Nothing I could take. And they didn't have a politics department at Cornell; it was called government. I went to visit a lecture once, in which a guy explained the three-partite nature of government, and how only Congress can make war—in the middle of the Vietnam War! I raised my hand as a guest—and this was a class with 700 people in it or something—and I said, "Didn't the president just make war in Vietnam without having Congress declare it?" "We're talking about the *theory* of politics here!" It's like—okay, fine, whatever. That was the last time I went back to *that* class. That was a pretty famous guy, Clinton Rossiter—a pretty well known historian in the day. And that was his answer to my question.

Anyway, so my life was split between reading stuff—I'd be at a demonstration, reading to prepare for a class, but I'd *be* there, and I'd give a speech, and be active and do things. Then I heard about this class that Bill Friedland was offering, so I went to the class. Well, it was amazing. It was a small group. It was about nine of us. The first day he says, "Well, everybody in this class is going to get an A, because you're going to earn it." I said—this was sort of a contradiction—"Well, what do you mean? Are we going to get an A, or are we going to earn it—now, which is it?" (laughs) He said, "No. I just know you're all going to get A's, and you can relax. Don't worry about your grade, because we're going to all work hard together. It's going to be a collective project. And everybody's getting an A, and it's going to work fine." I was shocked by that—the idea that somebody would give you a grade and you didn't have to work for it. It shattered my worldview in terms of how school and rewards worked.

Rabkin: Except that he *wasn't* really saying you didn't have to work for it.

Rotkin: He wasn't. As it turned out, everybody got an A, and everybody worked their ass off. It was a way to get a small group of people to get committed to a project. And nobody tested him. I suppose somebody could have tried, but nobody did. That project led to me spending eight weeks— From that class, Bill set up what was known as the Cornell Migrant Labor Project, with Dorothy Nelkin, who has since passed away. She was a research associate and they worked together on this. They were interested in studying migrant labor and what was going on. And part of that project, we ended up sending, I think, eight of us from Cornell and eight students from Tuskegee that Bill had contact with through somebody. Maybe Dorothy had the contact. Anyway, somebody got these students. So the sixteen of us—or, I think it was actually fourteen, so I forget who dropped out or whatever—went to migrant labor camps in upstate New York in the summer, for eight weeks. He had us—the white students who were going into black camps—sent in initially in pairs with a black student, and then after we were situated and located, the black student would drop out and we would be there. So it was a smart kind of way to get started.

Rabkin: So you were getting yourselves hired onto these crews.

Rotkin: Yeah. As workers. Just saying, "I'm looking for a summer job," you know. "Have you ever picked stuff before?" I said, "Yeah, I have, actually," you know, because I'd done this stuff. The kid from Tuskegee never picked anything. (laughs) So, "We have," I said. "It will work out fine." So that was kind of an eye-

opener. I'd work in the camp. They had no idea we were students, or anything about it. This was in a rural, isolated area. Nobody in that camp knew where New York City was, or where they were. They were just on a bus dropped off in Soda Springs, New York, or something, you know, the middle of nowhere.

Rabkin: They had come up from Florida?

Rotkin: Florida.

Rabkin: And these were African Americans?

Rotkin: All African Americans. I was the only white guy in the camp.

Rabkin: They weren't suspicious, the bosses?

Rotkin: I have to say this: it won't be believable to you, but I was very dark. I had curly hair, almost like an afro when it gets longer, and very dark skin from being out in the sun. And because I'd spent a year in VISTA living in black neighborhoods, I talked with a black accent.

Rabkin: So you passed.

Rotkin: I passed. I think. Not always. I think some people knew differently. But a kid would say, "You guys are brothers, right?" to the black guy I came in with. And I tell you, you're passing when a guy says, "You guys are brothers," I

assume. (laughs) Anyway, he left, and then I stayed in the camp. In this camp, I was trying to gather economic data, I was trying to gather social data: how does this place run, what's the political structure, what's the kinship structure, who are these people, how do they make decisions, how does exploitation work, what's going on?

So, since I was [ostensibly] not a student, I had a little notebook for my numbers, because I couldn't remember how many baskets of—we were picking cherries, first, and then apples—and I couldn't remember how many baskets everybody would pick. So I would try to have a little—nobody could understand what I was doing, but a coded system for reporting how much work was being done and how much people were being paid for it. The average pay—I couldn't make this much money, because it was by piece, the buckets you pick—average pay was twenty-five bucks a week, way below minimum wage. And they were charging twelve dollars and fifty cents for the food we had, and then room and board. The house was this shack—you could see through the walls, outdoors. It was cold in the morning, especially towards the end of the summer.

Rabkin: So room and board got taken out of your pay.

Rotkin: You'd get, in cash, twelve dollars and fifty cents—[they would have taken out \$12.50] because you ate the last week—paid after the week of work. And based on how many buckets you'd filled. So I kept track of that stuff. And otherwise I'd just try to remember things. I'd hear stories and jokes. It was a real eye-opener, even though I'd been in VISTA. This was sort of different, because I

was on the inside. I wasn't the VISTA boy. I wasn't an outsider coming to help, or something. I was just working like everybody else. And seen as pathetically incompetent, because I couldn't *make* twenty-[five dollars a week]. I would make *twelve* bu[cks]. They told me at one point, "You've gotta make at least your room and board, or we can't keep you." So I'd work harder. (laughs) And the ladders were rickety old ladders. People would fall off the ladders. They were thirty-six-foot ladders, and you'd fall off them all the time. Usually not straight to the ground, but crashing through the tree. Nobody got seriously hurt, that I saw, but I'm sure you could have been. And cigarettes: I started smoking, which I'd never done before. I smoked two packs a day for that year, that summer. I'd started in VISTA, and I picked it up again when I went back in the migrant labor camp. Because it's the medium of exchange; it's how you make friends; it's how you talk; it's how you take a break; it's a reason for taking a break.

Rabkin: Mmmm. It's like in prison.

Rotkin: It's cigarettes—kind of totally key. Unfiltered Camels, pretty much. Marlboroughs.

Rabkin: So this is the summer after your junior year?

Rotkin: Summer of '68. Because I'd failed so many classes, it took me six and a half years total to get through it all. So I'm not sure what status. But I'm probably, by then, a sophomore, at least. So he sent us out to this camp. And then every three or four days—we'd arrange ahead of time when it was going to be—I

would walk out of camp down a road. (People would leave camp to go look for prostitutes, whatever. People would leave for a variety of reasons. Some would leave because they were fed up, and “I’m going to New York,” and walk west, you know—they didn’t know. Really, we didn’t know where we were. *I* knew where we were, but they had no idea where we were.)

And so I would just walk out and somebody would pick me up in a car, and I would spill my guts into a tape recorder for four hours, and pull out my little notebook and put it back into the numbers. I would record jokes people told, and what people thought was funny, and what we ate. And our food was horrible. Breakfast was always a big plate of grits with a little smattering of yellow—which must have been egg, I think, scrambled egg, but not enough to even notice it. And horrible bread. That would be breakfast. No protein. (Grits, I guess, has *some* protein in it—I guess.) Lunch would be a baloney sandwich, and dinner would be some mystery meat that was *horrible*. Horrible, horrible food. And people got drunk, and I got in a knife fight. I didn’t have a knife; somebody came at me with a knife and I successfully defended myself against it, because he was drunk, and I wasn’t that drunk. It was a difficult and weird place to be, but it was a hell of an eye-opener and an education.

Rabkin: Were the bosses beating people up?

Rotkin: No. There was nobody being beaten. People were just economically dependent. If you wanted to eat, you’d better work, and you didn’t know how to go anywhere else. You couldn’t go to another job. You couldn’t get

unemployment insurance. This was your job. And it was, mainly, it turned out, a kinship structure, was how this crew was organized. Not everybody was related, but most people had some relationship by blood or marriage or something. Some exceptions—friends of friends, in this crew. It was about twenty-five people on the crew.

Rabkin: So you would tell your field notes to whoever picked you up and drove you around?

Rotkin: Other people worked for the project, students, who would show up, and we would talk into the tape recorder, and get a bath, and go back. And people [in the camp] thought I was out getting sex or something, which I was not. I was missing my then-girlfriend, actually, who was back in Ithaca, and so we couldn't see each other or talk to each other. A phone call, when I came out, once in a while. I couldn't even afford it every time I came out.

But it was an eye-opener; I got a lot out of it. That project became the model, in a way, for community studies: the idea that you take a class to prepare; that you go out in the field and do something, and then you kind of unload it. Bill's original idea was that he would do a migrant labor project as community studies. But even from the beginning, I think he [created a broader scope for community studies]. He probably told you more about this. It certainly had a sense that it was mostly focused on migrant work.

Coming to Santa Cruz

I came to California from my summer job with Bill, helping place students in the community studies program in migrant labor camps, because I knew how to recognize them. Most people don't know what a migrant labor camp looks like. They're all over. They're all around us, and you drive by them every day, and you don't notice them. I mean, certainly on Highway One, Davenport, you can see the— Most people in California kind of recognize them, I think. But back East they're hidden; they're not on the main roads. I could find them. So I drove people down to the Central Valley, and into the Salinas Valley, and found migrant labor camps, and trained them how to be a worker and walk in and get a placement in a camp, not being openly a student.

Christine Johnson-Lyons, who's the head of the Community Action Board [of Santa Cruz County], I placed her in a camp—a women's camp of people down in Salinas. And other people out in Dinuba. I drove all over the place in these little wreck cars, and I'd show them how to do it. I'd either go in with them, or I'd get them—once I trained them, just send them off and wait to see that they'd got in, and then disappear. And then we did the same thing.

Rabkin: This was the first year of the community studies [program]—?

Rotkin: The first summer. Before the program. Eight students, or nine students, had taken what became the preparation class, with—not Bill, because he wasn't out here yet. I think Dennis McElrath taught the class, maybe with David Kaun,

even, helping. And then they did the summer, and then the program really started in the fall, when we did the analysis class that people had when they came back.

I had been planning to go back to Ithaca. Wasn't planning to live in California. But I was here about two days in Santa Cruz; I came with my first wife.

Rabkin: You had graduated from Cornell?

Rotkin: I graduated from Cornell in February. And I had a job between February and when I went out for the summer—working for Bill, clipping stuff from the packer newspaper for research on farm labor. So I would read every agricultural newspaper in the country and I would find interesting stories about labor, which was mostly not focused on that, and clip them for Bill's filing system. Then I got a job half time as a traveling organizer for SDS, and they paid me to go to Ohio and upstate New York to organize chapters of SDS. This was now '69, and SDS was already in trouble, and I was still trying to work with it. SDS had gotten taken over by the hard left—the Progressive Labor [Movement, later Party] and then by the RYM-2, which is the Revolutionary Youth Movement, which became the Weathermen. And those groups were fighting over SDS. And I didn't like either of those groups.

I will say that during the period between when I came back to school—actually starting with VISTA—and when I graduated, I got an education. I moved to the left. I began to understand American imperialism, capitalism. Doug Dowd's class

gave me some tools for understanding, analytically, what socialism might look like—a little bit, not much. I still had never read Marx. I'd tried to read *Capital*; I read a paragraph and gave up. I read part of the *Communist Manifesto*; didn't find it very useful, or even that accessible. But I certainly found that paragraph impenetrable—the first chapter, you know: “commodity is the basic form of capital.” I didn't know what he was *talking* about. I couldn't even understand “commodity.” What's a commodity? I didn't even know what it was. I looked it up: “Commodity: something traded in the marketplace.” You know, it doesn't get at it.

Anyway, but by then I was calling myself a Marxist-Leninist, or a socialist, or a communist, or whatever. All small letters. I wasn't affiliated with any particular groups other than SDS. The movement moved to the left with me. This would be an interesting question for someone trying to understand human beings and their personalities and their consciousness and the development of it: I certainly led other people into a left-wing perspective, and was led by others into a left-wing perspective. And it's a mistake to think either I led them or they led me. It's a dialectical relationship in which I was occasionally going beyond myself and dragging others with me, and other times being dragged by others into something.

And I remember, the period was amazing in the sixties, because I would go to a dorm and leaflet people about a rally the next day. And I was printing leaflets. By then, in '67 to '68, I printed a new leaflet at the Glad Day Press almost five days a week, four days a week, we'd have a new leaflet on something happening

about the war. They were good leaflets, because they were just one issue. Two things and a picture. Nothing on the back side. At first we had too much, and people wouldn't read it. Then it was just a simple—you could *read* this. You'd learn about napalm. You'd learn something about the French, what happened in '54 at Dien Bien Phu. Or you'd learn about what happened with the [nationwide elections stipulated by the Geneva Accords]—they didn't hold the election in '56 like they were supposed to. Each leaflet had something. I sometimes wrote 'em, or I would do other stuff and run off. There were 14,000 students at Cornell at that point, and we were running off two or three thousand leaflets a day and distributing them.

Rabkin: Did you happen to keep any of these?

Rotkin: They're all in New York City. There's a labor history library. Bruce Dancis, who was the president of SDS and a friend of mine, and came to Santa Cruz at one point, collected all of that stuff. We had stuff on apartheid back in '68. And Chase Manhattan Bank—they had a demonstration against Chase Manhattan Bank recruiters in 1968 on campus, and blocked them and kicked them off campus. We were militant in SDS. A lot of members, a lot of activism. We had counter-orientations, which I think were very impressive. For two years in a row, when frosh showed up their first day, in the middle of the quad—which is the center of campus life—was a maze, which was higher than a person's head, that covered half the quad. You'd walk through it, and you had lots of choices, and you'd pick this path or that path. And whatever you picked—

you'd keep going through these things—they all ended up as, "You're drafted."
At the end of the— (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: Didn't matter whether you stayed in school, left school. Whatever you did—did well with this, did well with that, got political, didn't get political—every choice led to the draft, and a leaflet at the end: "You ought to get involved, because your ass is on the line." It was sexist, in the sense that it was focused on men and their needs, but women were concerned about their boyfriends and their brothers. Anyway. But it was very effective. We managed to bring people who were brand new to college [into the movement].

We did that kind of stuff at Santa Cruz later, based on that model of counter-orientation movements, where their first two weeks of school would be a political indoctrination, basically. Not to a particular point of view, but critical thinking about the world you live in. It made a huge difference for people, and it set their whole agenda for the next four years. To me, it's *the* key factor for building a student movement. Anybody that doesn't do it is missing something really key in terms of how you bring students into a movement. Not that they have to be told about a particular issue, but something that takes them out of the, "School's about getting good grades. School's about social networks with the right people. School's about"—I don't know, whatever the hell people think it is. No. School's about becoming a human being and having control of your life and understanding the worlds you live in. Anyway, trying to make that stuff happen.

Rabkin: And you think getting students just as they're arriving—

Rotkin: Just as they're arriving. They don't know what college is. It's different. They're away from their parents for the first time. They are now adults for the first time in their mind, kind of. It's a key moment for them to understand, well, what is college like? Well, college is about politics as well as classroom stuff. But it's also about being part of a movement, and taking over your college, and student rights and power. Those are important things to think about: "How do you decide what major you want to be in? Your parents told you what you should study? Is that right?" So, again, critical thinking is really what you're trying to push, not the view on a partic[ular issue]—although some of that goes on. But it really is about, "Have you realized that the history you were taught is all lies?" "Oh! Okay!" And it's an eye-opener in some way.

The History of Consciousness Program

So I came to Santa Cruz. I was here two days, said, "I've got to find a way to stay in this town." I worked on Bill's project, the migrant project, placing people. I was also doing transcribing and helping code the people's notes, so you could go and find the stuff later.

Rabkin: These were undergraduate students doing the community studies program?

Rotkin: Community studies stuff, yeah, for that summer.

Rabkin: And you had come out here *to* work for Bill. He actually hired you.

Rotkin: For Bill. As a job. He hired me. And my wife, both, for a job for the summer.

Then I got out here. I started looking for work—because it was a one-summer job; it was going to be over in the fall. “I could work as a motorcycle mechanic!” (I’d done that before, because I did that— I’ve left out a bunch of little jobs I had earlier.) Couldn’t find work doing that. “I could do construction work! Shit, I’ve done that before.” Couldn’t find work. One day Friedland comes to me and he says, “There’s an opening in the history of consciousness graduate program. It starts next month.” (This was September.) “It starts in October. There’s a guy who was admitted but didn’t come, and they’ve got a space. And you have a four-year Woodrow Wilson fellowship.” When I finished English lit at Cornell, I got a four-year Woodrow Wilson fellowship.

Rabkin: What was that meant to support?

Rotkin: English literature. And I decided not to go to grad school. A teacher had nominated me for [the fellowship], and then I had to apply to grad schools, because once you were nominated, you had to apply to six schools, which I did. I applied to Ivy League schools, and to, I think, Stanford, [and] a couple of Canadian [universities]—McGill or something. I got in everywhere but Harvard.

I got into Yale, Cornell, Stanford, everywhere else. Because I had an honors graduation. I had these glowing letters from people.

Then I said, you know what? I love literature, but I really don't want to tear it apart for the next two or three years. I don't like writing in the style that they make you write. And there's this publishing shit, which—I don't want to get caught up in that. I want to do more political stuff. So that's why I took the SDS job. This all took place during the spring, and then I got admitted, it would have been February or something, and decided not to go.

But I still had the fellowship they'd awarded me. So Bill said, "You know, I betcha they'd be interested in having a student with a full-ride Woodrow Wilson fellowship. So you should do that." I said, "Okay, I'll apply." "And history of consciousness?" I said, "What is it?" He says, "Hell, I don't know."

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: (laughs) "It's some kind of philosophical thing. But I think you can kind of study what you want to study. And you did literature stuff, and I bet you could do something with that that they'd like. Go check it out." So I looked at it, and I wrote an application in which I said I would study William Blake, the Industrial Revolution, and how we went from Neoclassical to Romantic poetry based on changes in the economy of Europe during that period, in the Romantic period. That's what I was going to study in the history of consciousness. And Friedland said it seemed like a waste of time, but go for it, you know, whatever.

Rabkin: Were you proposing to work with a particular faculty member?

Rotkin: No. I didn't even know anybody in the program. I just applied on that basis.

Rabkin: How did this square with your earlier reasoning about not really wanting [to do academic literary work]?

Rotkin: Because here, I thought, I can study whatever I want. I can make it kind of quasi-political. I can stay in Santa Cruz. Maybe I won't graduate from the program, but at least I'll— You know, some way to stay here, and it looks interesting. And, "history of consciousness—it sounds kind of spacey." That probably had something to do with having smoked dope or something. It's kind spacey, California alternative stuff. And it was interdisciplinary. I liked that concept, because Doug Dowd had pressed that [idea]: you can't just study economics. You have to study politics and economics and even art. It all ties together. And I was buying that. That was my understanding of literature as well. Which was not so much at Cornell, where it was more formalism. I studied with Yvor Winters there. He had the: "It doesn't matter who the author is, or what they do with their life; it's all about *the text!* It's either in the text or it's not!" And I took a class, actually, as an undergraduate—a graduate class with Harold Bloom So I got an interesting education in literature. And studied with [M.H. "Mike"] Abrams. All these big names. In the honors program we got access to them, in these little classes with six, eight, twelve people.

But I wasn't going [to grad school] because I really was absolutely engaged with a project in history of consciousness. It was more like: "An interdisciplinary graduate program. You can study what you want to study. And your fellowship pays a fair amount of money, so I can live pretty well." Stuff like that.

Teaching Assistantships

But then, I heard there were TAships available, and you could teach in the community studies program. And that sounded good. And Michael Cowan, who was teaching Community Studies 1, *Introduction to Community Studies*, that fall, said, would I like to be a TA for him? I didn't know him. [He] called me up—because I had been admitted. Friedland probably pulled st[rings]. I don't know the details of this. I think he probably pulled strings for me. But I think I was a good candidate to pull strings for, because they had an empty space and I had money. So for a grad program even then, that'd be kind of cool.

So I got admitted. I started studying, looking at stuff with Blake. I'd studied that as an undergraduate, some classes in Blake's poetry. I was going to read up on the Industrial Revolution, which I didn't know that much about. I had to learn some more about that. And I took a TAship, so I didn't use my fellowship the first quarter of teaching. As it turned out, I TA'd every quarter, and never took a nickel from the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship.

Rabkin: Which was yours nevertheless.

Rotkin: Mine to spend. Yeah. But I never spent it, because I would rather teach than get free money for studying stuff. I TA'd for Cowan first, and then other community studies classes. I sort of became part of the community studies program. Just as a TA. But I was hanging around with people, and I knew Bill. My first wife [Karen Ryan] got admitted to histcon later. She studied feminist issues. She wrote her dissertation on the phallogentricity of our sexual norms. It was a feminist project, in which she studied all kind of aspects of life, from pornography to daily literature, cartoons and comics, about how sexism expresses itself in daily life, and how phallogentricity—the idea that the penis is everything and male sex is what matters, and it begins and ends when the male is ready and done, and that kind of stuff. And shows how the most pernicious forms come in the most innocent—it's in the comics where people really learn this stuff, not from pornography. Although you also get it reinforced there. But the real sources of this stuff are much more daily life, and the things in literature, and the sex manuals, and popular literature, and—you name it. She was bringing that stuff together in her dissertation.

So we had a way to make a living and stay in town. And I started swimming in the ocean—out to the mile buoy, without a wetsuit. I could never do that now, but that was my idea of fun: several days a week I'd swim out to the mile buoy. I lived at the *ocean*, in Santa Cruz!

Rabkin: Breaststroke?

Rotkin: Absolutely. (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: Every so often, just for the hell of it, I'd do something on my back for a while. I can swim the other strokes, just not efficiently.

And decided not to go back to Cornell, obviously, and was going to stay here and be a grad student. In the time left, I'll just make this one last transition towards community studies. So I was a TA most quarters, although I TA'd for Ralph Guzman, who was in community studies and politics. I taught a city politics class with him. I taught an education class. I forget who the teacher was in that class now. I TA'd a so[ciology] class for somebody else. But mostly community studies classes. Mostly the preparation classes, the analysis classes. Bill Friedland was the official teacher of a class on highways and widening [Highway] 17 that I was actually the person who did the direct classroom work in. So I got involved in some local city politics around that. I remember going to the first city council meeting and hearing about the "Utes," before our item came on the agenda: "The Utes are destroying this town!" "The Utes are killing Santa Cruz!" I go, "Do we have an Indian tribe called the Utes here?" No, it's the "Undesirable Transient Element"—you know, about the homeless. It's '69,'70, and they were, like, *on* it.

So I started to get active. And community studies brought me into political stuff. Because I'd never been to a city council meeting except for this highway stuff—

because they were trying to build freeways everywhere in Santa Cruz and we were trying to stop them. So our students did a survey. Bill taught me how to [conduct a survey]—I'd never done that before. I had to do a formal survey. And we went out and surveyed Santa Cruz and found that the majority of people didn't like any of the five freeway choices they were being offered, and they didn't want *any* freeway. And the city council took us out of the freeway system, based on that survey that our students did. That was the beginning of serious environmental stuff in 1970 in Santa Cruz, '71.

At the same time, the school board election—the vot[ing age] for students moved to eighteen from twenty-one, the California Supreme Court decision that you could vote in the town where you went to school and not just your parents' town. The conservative business people that bought a college here had no idea what they were buying, when they got UCSC. It made a huge difference. I don't argue by *itself* the university made the town progressive. It was a necessary but not sufficient condition to make it change from a very right-wing town to a very progressive town. And as we'll talk about when we come back next time, I start to have connections between my political work in town and my work in the community studies program. Not yet the field study coordinator, but just as a TA and hanging out with students. And when we come back next time, I'll get back into community studies and the stuff that happened there.

Rabkin: This is January 10th, 2013. I'm Sarah Rabkin and I'm with Mike Rotkin for our second interview at my home in Soquel, California. And, Mike, last time, toward the end of our interview, you had begun to talk about how your work in

community studies TAing helped to launch your involvement in local politics. I do definitely want to get into to that. But if it's okay with you, I'd like to start by backing up and picking up a few pieces from before?

Rotkin: Sure. Absolutely.

Rabkin: Great. Thanks.

Bill Friedland as Mentor

Rotkin: Well, one piece we want to pick up (I can start it myself) was, I had mentioned last time, briefly, after we were recording: Bill Friedland. Really, I see him as my mentor generally. The key thing that I learned from him—this was at Cornell—was the idea that you can understand things systematically and systemically. I had always sort of thought of problems being like, evil people, or undereducated people, or ignorant people, or racist people, or whatever—individuals with bad ideas and consciousness. Friedland really got me thinking about the *structure* of things, and the way in which, for example, with farm workers, migrant workers, it's not just that they are "undereducated" that's their problem, or somehow that their farmers are evil, and therefore repress them or steal from them or exploit them. It's that there's a structured system, and it's often—the term sociologists would use is "overdetermined." There's more than one cause for a problem. But it's in a structural kind of situation that these problems arise.

For example, take racism. I grew up with a theory of racism, that racism was caused by people's parents miseducating them or teaching them intolerance and prejudiced ideas, and if we could knock those ideas out of their head by giving them the correct ideas and bringing them into (what was then) the 20th century, then we would change their consciousness and we would get rid of racism. As opposed to understanding *institutionalized* racism, or understanding the systemic stuff that Friedland was talking to me about: the way in which the farm worker system was set up.

We have to understand, how does this system work? Why is it that farm workers put up with exploitation? There're many more of them than there are of the bosses or the farmers, and yet they basically get ripped off. They produce huge value and they don't get much back for it. And that that's not just evilness on the part of the farmers. In fact, you can have very generous, warm-hearted farmers, but they're stuck in a structure where they're going to be exploiting farm workers. If they didn't, they would basically go out of business. The whole idea that things are structured in a way that the profit maximization in capitalism, for example, is a structural reality. It's not the greediness of individual people that are causing this problem. That's very much where Marx came from, but I had not ever really read Marx seriously.

That's an idea I got from Bill Friedland, and then developed over the rest of my life, in terms of understanding, "Well, what *are* the structures that are making things happen? Why do students get educated the way they do? Why is UC structured the way that it is?" It's not just evil Regents that are making things

happen. It tends to take politics away from personality and put it much more into changing the structures and the systems that we operate under. And no need to hate the individual people that are in these positions of power. I mean, some of them deserve hatred, because they're evil people, but it's not necessary for that to be the case.

So one of the common things I'll say in a lecture now, which came from this idea of Friedland, would be, "For all I know, David Rockefeller, when he was still with us, was a very warm and fuzzy person. He probably loved his children and his cats, and there's no reason to think that he was a nasty individual. But he held huge power and ownership of property, and was making decisions to maximize his interests in a way that basically [exploited others]." And I'd say to people, "If tomorrow morning the CEO of General Motors woke up and said, 'I want to make cars that are safer, and that are cheaper and that are environmentally safe,' they would not hold their job for another two days, because their shareholders, who are expecting maximization of profit, would find somebody else to do the job that they are required to do." So it's not the consciousness of the president of a company. It's the structure of capitalism, and its rules of how people are trying to operate, that make things happen. It's a really critical idea, something I really try hard to teach my students and try to help them understand. I don't think that I know what those systems and structures all are, but at least I know that's the question I want to try and answer when I look at a social problem.

Rabkin: You had said that when you came out to California from Cornell, and you began working in what was called the California Seasonal Agricultural Workers Project, doing that work for Bill Friedland and community studies, you initially had no notion that you would be staying in California.

Rotkin: Right.

Rabkin: And yet, within a very short amount of time, you had decided that in fact, you'd like to find a way to stay. I'm curious about what captivated you about the area, what made you want to stay here?

Rotkin: Bigger than anything else, it was a seaside town. I always liked to go to Ocean City, Maryland, when I lived on the East Coast—or Delaware, whatever. I spent VISTA in Florida—in the middle of the state for a while, but for the last six months in Pompano Beach, a coastal town. The idea that a person could actually *live* in a town, not just go there for a week in the summer—I was impressed. I thought that was really fantastic.

And I liked the alternative movement that was developing in Santa Cruz. I saw that, even in a couple of days. I never thought of myself as a hippie, but I guess I was on some level, and I liked this idea. Within two days of coming to Santa Cruz, I went to the Nickelodeon Theater and saw a movie, and somebody passed a joint down the aisles, and I thought, "God!" First of all, I was terrified with this paranoia: someone's trying to trap me. Because back East, if you smoked marijuana at all, you would smoke it standing next to a toilet so you could dump

it in there and flush it, in the total paranoia that some law enforcement was about to break into your house and come get you for your marijuana. So the idea of a town that would be loose enough that total strangers would pass joints down rows in movie theaters (laughs), I thought was pretty amazing, to be honest.

The weather was very nice. It was about seventy-five degrees. I could ride my motorcycle in a T-shirt. It wasn't too hot; it wasn't too cold, and people told me it never gets that cold in the wintertime. And I was then thinking, do I want to go back to, like, twenty below zero in upstate New York? Probably not. And so those were all factors that had something to do with it.

It also was the mystique of California. Here I was, seventy miles south of San Francisco, which was, like, "where the action was," for the Summer of Love in '67, or the political stuff that was happening out here. I liked California; I liked Santa Cruz particularly. I liked the weather; I liked being by the ocean. Much more environmental kinds of things, I think, than political. I wasn't thinking of it being a left-wing town or a right-wing town. It was, in fact, a very right-wing town at the time, and I didn't even know that.

Rabkin: Okay. Can we come back to your community studies TAships?

Rotkin: Yes. As I said last time, I had a fellowship. I didn't really need to have TAships, but I was intrigued by the idea of teaching. My first TAship was with Michael Cowan, and we read a bunch of community studies. Literally, that term in sociology means studying things like the Lynds' study of Middletown, which

was done in Indiana or a bunch of little studies of English rural towns. So we read, in that class, four or five studies of communities—“community studies”—that had been written by sociologists. It’s a particular field in sociology. There’s less of it now than there used to be, because as urbanization has taken over, people don’t perceive separate communities as much as an urban national culture—international culture, cosmopolitan culture. But at the time, that seemed like an important idea: what kind of town would you live in. And we read some political books in there.

I really loved teaching. I had a section that I think probably had fifteen or twenty students in it. (I might have had two sections, actually. Yeah, TAs had two sections at that time.) Another TA in that class was Nick Rabkin, who was another history of consciousness grad student—a leftist, political activist—and I really got along with him. The third TA was John McFadden, who was one of the six students in the first year of the history of consciousness program. I came in the second year. I really liked these guys and got along with them as TAs. And I liked Michael Cowan, and I really thought it was an interesting class. We read some literature. It was interdisciplinary right from the beginning. So I decided I really liked teaching.

The next quarter, I TA’d in politics, for Ralph Guzman—*City Politics*. I could go on forever about each of these classes, and they’re all, a lot of them, still vivid in my mind. The thing about the *City Politics* class was, Ralph, then, was very much on demand throughout the state to put out fires. Latino kids at Fresno State—or Fresno City College, I forget which—had taken over the computer room and

were threatening to turn the heat up, which would have destroyed the entire computer of the university. So they wanted Ralph to come down and tell these students that destroying a university computer was not what they should be doing as political activists in the Latino (back then we would have said Chicano) community.

So, many, many days, I would show up for the lecture and Ralph wouldn't be there. And I'd be looking at—we had 120 students in the class, so I had two sections of thirty, and Ralph had two sections of thirty, and what I remember about that class (laughs) was having to like, you know, vamp. I mean, all of a sudden we'd have a topic. I'd read the readings, and I would either have a discussion with 120 students, trying to take the issue up and see what they got out of the readings, or I would come up with a lecture. I didn't know anything about formal city politics. I had no training in the field of politics. I'd studied some political sociology, in effect, with Friedland, and some political economy with Doug Dowd. Other than that, all of my training was really in literature, and it had very little to do with formal training, whatsoever. On the other hand, I had a pretty good developing analysis of capitalism, without maybe even quite understanding what I was thinking about. But an antiwar perspective, a student movement perspective, and a lot of organizing experience. So I could bring those kinds of things into the classroom. I think on one or two days I sent the students home after a brief discussion, when nobody had really done the reading, and I sort of used it as an opportunity to— People are not used to that, saying like, "Well, if you're not ready for a discussion, we're not going to have one. Bye! See

you next week! Take this time to read the thing you should have read for class today!”

So I actually got a chance to do some actual teaching and lecturing. And then, when I was doing the readings, I never knew whether Ralph would be there. Without exaggerating, he must have missed a quarter of the classes. So I started coming to class prepared with a “lecturette,” I would call it—something to say about the readings before starting a discussion, and sort of took the class over. Not really, because he might come back and have a lecture prepared, or something else to do.

Rabkin: So you wouldn’t necessarily know from day to day whether he was going to show up?

Rotkin: I had no idea. Usually what happened is, the secretary (this was before they were called assistants) would run into the room, saying, “Professor Guzman will not be here today!” He called her from Fresno, or from wherever the hell he was—some[times] not even in California. Somewhere in the Midwest students were rebelling, and they needed Ralph to come give a talk, or whatever. So he was not very responsible about this class.

He had also picked a book that he had never read for the class, by a guy named [Edward C.] Banfield, which was a very right wing— It’s called, I don’t even know the name of it any more: *City Politics*, I think. [*City Politics* by Edward Banfield] Anyway, it was a very conservative view. The guy liked Moynihan’s

view of the sort of benevolent, but therefore damaging, policies trying to deal with racism and so forth, and found them ineffective. And basically, the whole idea of transferring income, or trying to help people from the bottom rise up, was sort of a wasted effort and really not going to be effective.

Why Ralph would have picked that as his book—? But I learned there (more than, maybe, anywhere else) how to do a critique of things. Because the point was, you didn't read a book where the book was what you would believe, and just want to parrot back to the teacher. The book was terrible, and you'd want to say what was *wrong* with the argument. I was really pushing hard for these students not just to go, "It's racist"—summarizing it and dismissing it—but "Why is it racist?" or "What does it *mean* that it's racist?" or "What's wrong with the argument?" or "Where is his argument weak?" or "Where are the facts not in touch with facts *you* have?" So it really taught myself and my students, simultaneously, how to think about books in a critical fashion—not to read something to memorize it, but to take it on and challenge it. That was a great early experience.

I TA'd for all different kinds of classes in community studies and, as I said earlier, a number of classes outside of the department. I TA'd at least one class in education, one in economics, one in sociology. Most of the rest were in community studies.

Rabkin: Do any of them stand out in particular in your memory?

Rotkin: No, other than Ralph's class. The other thing I remember (laughs) about Ralph's class—and I don't even know why I'll share this, but I will. This was pre-computers, you understand. We don't have any [personal] computers. Everybody has typewriters. When you got a little Selectric typewriter that could actually erase things, that was very impressive. And we wrote evaluations without grades in those years. So at the end of the quarter, I wrote sixty evaluations for my sixty students—and Ralph lost 'em. And never turned his own in, apparently. So I was outraged. And I didn't keep a copy. I had no idea somebody would lose evaluations! So I had to go back and rewrite sixty evaluations. That time, I kept a copy, and he lost 'em again. So the third time I turned them in to the registrar myself. And for years afterwards I'd have students coming to me from that class, saying, "Well, I was in the class, and I was in Ralph's section, and he never wrote me an evaluation. And I'm going to grad school, and can you write me an evaluation for the class?" So I'd have to say, "Well, if you have your papers and your work from the class, I'll write you an evaluation. Bring it to me. Otherwise I'm afraid I can't." So in most cases they had something that they could bring me, or they would write a new paper. I said, "That's what it's going to take. Write me another paper on the topics of the class." I must have done twenty of those or so, out of his sixty students.

Rabkin: Did you feel at all exploited, as graduate labor?

Rotkin: I was outraged. I wasn't even thinking of it as "exploited as graduate labor," as much just like what a jerk this guy was. I liked Ralph, and I respected a lot of the stuff he was doing. One of the things I particularly respected about

Ralph was he did not give students easy evaluations. He was not willing to let people slide on stuff. And so, not in this class so much, but in classes in later years, he would make students write. He would make them rewrite their papers. And he said, "I'm not doing you any favors if I let you slide. Your writing is not acceptable." So that's one of the places I learned, early on, one of the jobs of teaching is not just teaching subject matter, but you have to teach students writing. As an English lit major, I had reasonably good writing skills, and was able to help students with their papers. Early on in school, I learned good grammar from my mother, who was an English teacher and history teacher. So I was able to do it. That was important.

Other than that, I TA'd a lot of different kinds of classes. When I shift, I'll talk about history of consciousness. Maybe that's the place to go now, I think, unless there's any other questions you have about teaching, TA stuff.

Rabkin: Yeah. Let me ask you about the undergraduate students you worked with in those courses. What were your impressions of them as students?

Rotkin: The community studies major—and to the extent that I taught social sciences classes or other classes—tended to attract fairly progressive, I would say left-wing, often emotionally socialist or left-wing students, who didn't necessarily have a coherent analysis, but emotionally identified with the left, with alternatives, with the Chicano movement or with feminism as it was developing, and so forth. And so [I] tended to have fairly political students. A lot of them had some activist experience. A lot of them didn't, but some of them

did—enough so that in any classroom, you might be challenged on what’s going on in the world, as opposed to just giving a lecture and having students write notes down on what you had to say.

So the students brought something to the class from outside, in addition to the reading you might have assigned, from their actual experience. I’d say a third of the students maybe had done something with some kind of a political action or a movement or something, maybe two thirds hadn’t. And I’d say 95 or 90 percent of the community studies students tended to be progressives—which I’ll define in this case as wanting to make the world a better place, concerned about inequity, concerned about racism, sexism, those kinds of issues, class issues. So it was a sympathetic group for me to teach. I wasn’t having a lot of students who would say my whole worldview was misguided.

But it was a job there, and still to this day, getting people to move from an emotional identification with a worldview or perspective to actually develop analytical skills and critical skills—to be able to articulate, as I said earlier, if something in that argument seems “racist” to you, what do you *mean* by that? It’s not enough to simply say, “It sounds racist and I’m dismissing it.” Well, what’s wrong with the argument? How would you debate that person and beat them in a discussion? That was always a difficult struggle. And that’s true of UCSC students, I think, in general, who often tend to be more progressive than the general population. They’re not all analytically sharp. On the other hand, most of them were very smart students; they weren’t stupid people. And they could learn, and they could read stuff critically if you got them into doing it. I’d say at

UCSC, like everywhere else, 10 percent of the students don't care, don't come to class prepared, show up irregularly, are likely to fail a class because they're just not really engaged.

And that's about the same percentage that I experienced in my classes at Cornell. The difference was, at Santa Cruz, the 10 percent that were not doing well and not performing didn't care, were not trying to hide it, were bold about their sense of, "school sucks, and it's not me, it's the school that's the problem." Whereas at Cornell, I think that people who were failing were defensive and trying to hide it and pretend like things were going great, and keep it to themselves. People were not embarrassed by being bad students at Santa Cruz.

It's not that there weren't as good or better students at Santa Cruz than at Cornell, in the top 20 percent, or equally smart and equally able to write brilliantly and so forth. But I think what changes the tone of a classroom are people that don't feel that they have to defend themselves when they don't perform. They would show up boldly, you know, one out of three classes, and expect that was perfectly fine. Or they would come to you and say, "Well, I've got something really important to do," like "my friend's having an art show, and I can't come to class." And put it on you that somehow, were you going to make them come to class as opposed to their friend's art show? Nobody would ever do that to a professor or a teacher at Cornell. You would *never* do that. (laughs) You would be kicked out of the class and told, "never come back," if you tried it. I think that's the difference between Santa Cruz, and my Cornell experience.

Community Studies – Early Years

Rabkin: During those years that you were TAing in community studies, what were your impressions of the department—of the faculty and the vision of the department and how it was being fulfilled?

Rotkin: Well, the department started small, and I was very much in sympathy with Friedland's idea about how this program should develop as a theory-and-practice program—that students should go into the field with some preparation. I think the idea was not that they should have a theory, initially, or a coherent idea of what's going on in the world. But they have to know at least some good questions to ask. They had to have some observation skills, because people don't always have those. A lot of us sleepwalk through our lives. So a lot of the training in community studies was not indoctrination in a left perspective. It was, "How do you see what's going on around you?" For example, in racism, people say, "Well, that person's racist." You say, "Well, what makes you *say* they're racist? What observations do you actually have? What did they say? What did they do that leads you to that conclusion?" And to begin to focus on what was going on, rather than quickly jumping to conclusions about either people or situations. And the whole idea of a kind of an ethnographical approach, where you see what's really happening, and try and grab that information, *later* to be able to analyze it.

But you had to prepare students for that, because if you sent students out without preparation, they might not see what's going on around them; they

might be more focused on internal issues. The whole idea of field notes became a key factor for us. And the method of community studies right from the beginning was participant observation. Friedland had taught us that at Cornell in the migrant labor project, and in this agricultural project in the community studies major. The whole idea was participant observation. As I've gone on to explain to my students, on the one hand, you're an observer, but you're not a distant or neutral observer. You're an activist. You're out there working with a group, trying to help them effect their outcome as they would see it. But your job is not just to go along with the program and do what you're told to do, but to think critically about what's happening: to observe yourself in action; to see the people around you, and then to have some kind of critical reflection. So you're a participant in the activity, but you're also an observer. And you have to have, as I describe it, a kind of a schizophrenic pullback from what you're doing, and ask yourself, "What's going on in this picture?"

Often you can get *lost* in work. You get totally excited by it. At the end of the day, you say, "That was a *great* meeting!" And this would be a comment I'd make on students' field notes.

"I went to a retreat. It was the most amazing experience of my life," they would write in their field notes. "It was so fantastic, it's changed everything for me, and I no longer look at people the way I did, and I see the world differently, and I see possibilities I never saw before." And then you want to say to them, "Well, what did you *do*? What did somebody *say*? How did you come to this conclusion? What went on?" They've summarized the outcome for them, but there's no

information in the field notes (laughs) about who the speakers were, what they said, what they did. Were there interactions? Were there discussions? What did people do? Let's get to some actual observations before you get to reflections and conclusions or analytical, theoretical perceptions about what it all means. Let's start with some facts—or, maybe not facts, but your direct sensory input on what you took in from the experience.

I remember in the preparation class (which I TA'd several times), Friedland, who taught it the first time I did it with him, would say that your first assignment was, "Do something you've never done before, and take down careful notes about it." The students said, "I don't know what to do. What do you mean?" They had been so schooled for so many years that they couldn't think of anything that they weren't assigned to do: "I should come up with my *own* assignment? How would I *do* that?" And so, again, even these somewhat progressive students, and smart students: so narrowly socialized to doing what you're told to do in school, and basically doing alienated work, to do what the teacher tells you to do, not what you're interested in doing.

Friedland would say, "Okay. You could go up on your roof in a lightning storm! I don't care what you do!" (laughter) So we couldn't get a lightning storm in Santa Cruz, but a bunch of students, amazingly, they couldn't even think past that: they went up on the roof! "Friedland said go up on the roof, I went up on the roof!" It's like, "*He wasn't telling you to go up on the roof, he was telling you to come up with something of your own!*" (laughs)

So that whole experience was important for the students. I liked the students. I wasn't that much older than them. I was still—twenty-three years old, I guess I would have been.

Rabkin: Wow. Even though you had taken extra time.

Rotkin: VISTA at twenty, then two more years of school—so maybe I was twenty-four. In any case, I was twenty-four; some of the students were twenty-one, nineteen, seventeen. So I could have been half a generation older than them or something—not even that, really. So it wasn't like I was from a different world than them, or hadn't experienced stuff that they had experienced.

As I said, TAs were a good job for money, and I made what I thought was a reasonable amount of money at the time. TAs were not paid that well, but I was used to living on nothing in the antiwar movement, from what I could get from the print shop. So it seemed like plenty of money. Also, my first wife, Karen, was hired by the migrant labor project to do transcribing and editing work by the end of the summer, so she was bringing some income in from that project. Then fairly soon after that, I don't know what year it was, she became the first staff person for the women's studies program at UCSC, so she was getting some income from that. So we were doing fine economically. We weren't wealthy, no savings, but we were comfortable compared to anything we'd experienced before.

Rabkin: And you had your fellowship money in the bank?

Rotkin: I still had the fellowship money, and it just sat there, and I never took a nickel of it. But I TA'd because I liked teaching. I was looking forward to each new class. I often had several choices of classes I could TA, and tried to pick ones— I was getting a political education through the readings I was doing for these classes. I also, by that point was in the history of consciousness program, was TAing as a histcon graduate. And if you have other questions about TAing, I should answer those first and then I'll shift over.

Rabkin: Just one other question about those community studies TAship days. I was wondering whether, at that time, there were any other programs like community studies, at other institutions, that you knew of.

Rotkin: No. I think community studies was a fairly unique program, and there [was] not anything really like it. The closest thing that we could think of was Antioch, in Ohio, which had a program where students just left school for six months—no preparation, no training, and no unloading the experience. You could get a job and do whatever you wanted on your job. In fact, I think you could even volunteer, but you had to go do *something* for six months away from campus. So experiential education was the link, and that's as close as we got. Nobody, that we were aware of, had a structured program where you prepared for your field experience and then unpacked the experience when you got back. In graduate programs, like anthropology, people would do that. But the idea of an undergraduate doing that—at the time, I think it's fair to say that very few people in academia believed that undergraduates were capable of doing research, or that they should even be allowed to do it. Anthropology, for

example, at the time, had a strong, strong prohibition against anybody who had not yet had a B.A. going into the field. They should get their theory first. They should study anthropology and understand kinship structures, and all the other stuff they needed to understand.

Rabkin: This was anthropology at UCSC?

Rotkin: Anywhere in the United States. Anthropology *as a field* didn't believe in undergraduates going out and doing [research]. Even though everybody thinks of anthropologists as people who go out and study cultures, undergraduates in anthropology took classroom work. They did not go out and do any, even part-time, field studies. And so, that was very much not accepted by the institution.

This was a very radically alternative program in suggesting that people really could learn from experience. Friedland, in writing the proposal for community studies, focused a lot on John Dewey's philosophical writings—pragmatism, and the idea of learning from experience. There's nothing in there that really focuses on how to develop a program like this, but the idea that people learn from experience and not just from being taught, [not just] from knowledge that's codified and accepted by the status quo as what's real or true, but you actually go out in the world and experience it.

Frankly, this is a very good parallel with my interest in Romantic poetry and what they were into, as opposed to earlier notions of neo-Classical poetry and going back to the past and trying to build on the "truths" of the Greeks and the

Romans and then earlier leaders before it, and that, basically, anybody can learn from nature. If you went out and experienced the world—from Wordsworth or from Keats or Shelley or any of these folks—trust your own experience; trust your own senses; go out there and experience the world. So I was very sympathetic to this, probably somewhat from that training.

Rabkin: Interesting.

Rotkin: Also, I think, sympathetic to it, interestingly enough, from my engineering experience at Cornell. Even though it was only a semester, I went on taking physics for another year past my first semester. I took the engineering physics classes. And at Cornell, the way they taught physics—unlike the way they teach it everywhere else today, and everyplace else that I'm aware of—they didn't teach you a formula to memorize, and then apply it. You did experiments. For example, they had a sparker that would drop from the ceiling, and it would make a mark every tenth of a second or something on a piece of paper as it went down the wall. And then you would measure those marks on the wall, from which you could derive the formula for acceleration— $F=ma$ —which I would never forget to this day. (laughs) Because you didn't read it somewhere. You actually made a graph, and then you learned, in the calculus class and other places, how do you make a formula from a graph. And [it was] something you might have learned a little bit about in high school, but they were teaching that as well. And so the idea that you could learn from an experiment, and that you didn't have to go read Newton or something, you could do what Newton did,

and then discover the process of how science really works on an experimental basis.

Rabkin: It sounds like you're also saying that learning in that experiential mode is more likely to create a deeply embedded sense of knowledge.

Rotkin: And you really hold onto it. I've often thought about this—I mean, my commitment to left politics and progressive ideas—we've been through some pretty dismal stuff since Reagan was elected president, and maybe even before that, since the seventies. How do you hold onto a left-wing view when everything around you suggests that you're crazy, and that nobody else really shares that, or only, maybe, a small town shares it, but in the rest of the country, you're nuts? I lived through the sixties, and nobody can take away from me the idea that you can change people.

I started to tell you this story last time and didn't finish it: You walk out and knock on a door in a dorm, and the person says, "Go away, I'm studying," and you go, "Okay," and you slip a leaflet about a rally the next day under their door, and then you see that person (you know who they are) the next day at the rally, and that leaflet got them to go there. Then they come to the next day's rally, *without* a leaflet. Then they're down at the print shop helping you produce leaflets. And you go, the person who was apathetic, apolitical, and too busy to come to a rally showed up anyway.

Conservatives would come to attack our rally. They'd stand on the periphery of it with a sign saying, you know, "Traitors!" or something. You'd go engage them. Within a couple of weeks, you became their friends, and they joined the movement. They went from right wing, hating the movement, to becoming a member of it. So the idea that people are the way they are, and there's nothing you can do, or you can't change people, or that you can't build a movement, or that institutions can't change, or you can't do something about them—I don't believe that, and I don't [not] believe it because I read it in a book. I don't believe it because I've [seen] in my own life experience that those changes are possible.

So that's another example of experience giving you a belief in something that's much deeper than anything that you heard in a lecture, or that your mom told you when you were growing up.

Rabkin: How interesting that you have pulled that lesson, again and again, from a wide variety of disciplines and experiences—from your political activity, from studying physics, from Romantic poetry, everything you've studied.

Rotkin: You know, I'm really interested in cosmology, actually, and particle physics, and the big bang. I read a lot in that area for fun. And I've always been intrigued by Heisenberg's book [*Physics and Philosophy*]: the whole idea that what quantum mechanics tells us is that, really, there is uncertainty at the most fundamental level. And the idea that a fact is a fact (and this leads to a whole methodology), and that social sciences should try to emulate the misunderstood vision of what the natural sciences do, which is that they have no theory, they

simply start from empirical information alone, with no framework for things—What I learned from reading Heisenberg, and from reading a bunch of theoretical physics directly (actually, reading the physics, but reading also people reflecting on what they were doing): the extent to which things are *not* certain, and that your perspective changes everything, and the idea that you might know the position or the speed of an electron, but you can't know both at the same time, because the way you study it messes up what you're studying. The light particle you would bounce off it to see it would actually deflect or change what you were looking at. And therefore, you can't observe something neutrally. You *cannot* be neutral in your observations.

Which is a metaphor, but also a practical reality, for thinking about social sciences. Our goal is not to be “neutral,” and find the facts, and stay away from theories. It's to find an appropriate theory that makes sense of the facts, rather than not have a theory. And so the whole empirical bent of—and I want to be empirical in my research and my work—but the whole idea that you could be purely empirical, and that, for example, you could simply go out and study stuff and have no framework to put it into—makes no sense.

I started to realize that science's power doesn't come so much from its empiricism, although it's important to be empirical. I was always told in seventh-grade, eighth-grade science, “The reason we have such great power in the modern world is because *we* study the *facts*. Those Egyptians, they just went out there and made stuff up. They had mystical religions, and whatever.” Well, the fact of the matter is, the study of the heavenly bodies by the Egyptians—they did

incredibly detailed empirical observations, and wrote them down, and knew exactly how the planets moved. But then they had to come up with bizarre theories that would explain those retrograde action[s] of planets and other kinds of stuff. But it wasn't that they weren't paying attention to the observations.

What makes Western science powerful is mathematics. You have a *model* that makes some sense. For example, when we shifted from circles to ellipses, we began understanding how planets move. Galileo's work and then Kepler's work and so forth—it's about the mathematical models that make it powerful. Because Newton is no more observant than Ptolemy was about what's happening with the actual movement of the planets. And so it's really kind of critical to understand that you need both theory and practice to make sense of stuff.

My doctoral dissertation, the first hundred-page chapter, is about this question, about understanding how you can be an activist, have a point of view. And I have a hundred-page justification why I can write a dissertation about *my* political work. Because, typically, people would be told, you *can't* write about yourself, because you're too biased to do it. Ralph Guzman was telling me once that he was told he could only do his dissertation, which he did, on African Americans, because he was too close to the Chicano-Latino problem. And the African Americans he worked with were told, "You can study the Latino problem, or the Hispanic or Chicano problem, because you shouldn't be studying your own racial situation, because you're too close to it to look at it objectively." What I learned is there's no such thing as objectivity in the either natural or social sciences. What you have is, you have to understand your point

of view, and what bias and perspective you bring, and you have to bring that into the process to understand and correct for what's going to be a bias you're going to bring to your work. But you cannot get rid of it, and you cannot pretend that somehow, "If I just work hard enough to be neutral, I won't have any bias in my work." What you'll have is the bias of the status quo; you'll be basically accepting the current categories that everybody else thinks are important, and not changing.

Rabkin: It sounds like this goes back to the element of Heisenberg that you were reading—the uncertainty principle, about the fact that you can't act in the world, even do research in the world, without having some kind of an impact on the subject of your research.

Rotkin: Right. And so I was also interested in things like the Copernican revolution, the kind of systemical theory that people were doing; things people had about perspective—again, this is sort of history-of-science and sociology-of-science kinds of stuff that I was reading on my own, and I was getting into through the history of consciousness program.

We did a study group in histcon, which I'll come back to and talk about some more, on positivism, and the whole idea of empiricism—the idea that you can be neutral, that the facts speak for themselves, you don't need categories, or your categories grow out of your facts. As opposed to, there's a much more dialectical relationship between the perspective you bring to your work and what you observe out there, and that you've got to keep changing your categories along

with the work that you observe. The kind of stuff that Sartre talks about in *Search for a Method*. Very much a matter of accepting that there's not a world out there that you're not tied to. You're a part of that world, and you're going to have an impact on it. Even if you think you're just studying it or observing it, you're already affecting it. You walk into a room, you're there; it has some impact. So no anthropologist can be "a fly on the wall," as they sometimes say. You're actually a human being in a society, and your presence is already beginning to make a mess of stuff. (laughs) Not necessarily good or bad, but it's certainly affecting what you're observing.

So that's how my history of consciousness work, and my former work in science and ongoing interest in that, fits together with my social activism and my research and work in the social science fields. And I'm very interested in that kind of connection and how people think about those issues.

Rabkin: For your doctoral dissertation, did you end up pursuing that initial idea you had about the Industrial Revolution and Blake, and the shift from—?

Learning in Graduate Study Groups

Rotkin: No. So now I'll shift and talk about history of consciousness if you like. First of all, I have to say, I think in my mind, history of consciousness and community studies have a huge overlap. In the practical reality of the university, almost none, other than some [histcon grad] TAs, maybe, working for com[munity studies]. Because there was no undergraduate history of

consciousness program at the time, all of the students who had teaching assistantships had to work in some other department. Because community studies didn't have a graduate program, it was a natural match. So there were a fair number of histcon students who were TAs for community studies. That went on for the whole history of the program—even after they developed, not a major, but something of an undergraduate program in history of consciousness.

As I said, I entered the history of consciousness program because it was a way to stay in Santa Cruz; because maybe there was something I would be interested in studying, the connection between literature and the real world; because [of] the idea that it was interdisciplinary, that you could study what you wanted to. Sounded kind of interesting to me. And also, just the idea of “consciousness.” It's probably some relationship, to be honest—I smoked a fair amount of dope, but I was not stoned every day, but in the evenings, I was a recreational dope smoker. And I have to say that has something to do with thinking about “history of consciousness” being a program I would want to be part of. Whereas other people would be going, “That's so strange, I want nothing to do with it,” I was attracted to it for its “what-the-hell-is-it”—the fact that we *don't* know what it is [consciousness], and nobody has a definition—was an attractiveness (laughs) of the program.

The first class that I went to, there were seventeen people in my class. An interesting group of people. Some political activists, but also some religious activists, I would say spiritual activists of one kind or another. People interested in philosophy. An interesting mix of people.

Rabkin: This was the second cohort in histcon?

Rotkin: Yes. Nineteen sixty-nine, fall of 1969, second cohort in the program. The year before us there were six students, and I think there might have been one or two or three, at the most, the year before that, although I don't really know those people, didn't get to know them. But I got to know the six the year before me.

The first thing that we did in the program, we were assigned to a class called, I think, *The History of Consciousness*, or *Theories of Consciousness*, or something like that. It was a collective course taught by the faculty of history of consciousness. The main person, I think, responsible for the credit was Bert Kaplan, who was a psychology professor who wrote a book on self-reporting of schizophrenia by schizophrenics, and was very interested in mental health issues, and philosophy as it related to mental health questions. He had aphasia, which is something that makes a person not able to complete a sentence, and so it was very hard to listen to him as a teacher. He would start a sentence and get lost, and you'd have to sit there and wait till he could find his point again and start. Aphasia's a thing where you're in the middle of a sentence and what you're thinking about—you lose it. And then you may be able to recover it. So you might have a five-second gap in the middle of a sentence, and you have to sit there and wait till he finds himself while he might be—in a way like stuttering, but it's not a verbal problem, it's a mental problem.

Rabkin: Do you know if this was a congenital thing, or from a head injury—?

Rotkin: I don't think it was from a head injury. I have no idea what caused it. He was otherwise healthy. He played tennis regularly, and stuff like that. But he had this issue. And a smart person, but it was just difficult to be in his class. But he was there every day, and he managed the class. But we had visits and talks by Page Smith; Norman O. Brown; Maurice Natanson, a philosophy teacher; Albert Hofstadter, another philosophy teacher, who was a Hegelian. I don't remember others, but I'm sure there were a couple of other people that came in the class. The idea of the class was each person in the class picked a "great Western thinker" (which meant a great white male thinker). I picked Karl Marx, because by then I considered myself a Marxist. Even though I hadn't read Marx and I was not intellectually a Marxist, I was emotionally a Marxist, as I said earlier, because of identification with the North Vietnamese, and socialism, and I was looking for something along those lines.

Rabkin: At this point you had not read much Marx?

Rotkin: I'd read maybe some of *The Communist Manifesto*; I'd made a serious attempt at one paragraph in *Capital* and gave up. I did that when I was in VISTA. I got a copy in the library and tried to read it and it made no sense to me, and I gave it back to the library. But I have to lead a discussion about Karl Marx and I know nothing about Karl Marx except he's a guy I kinda like. (laughs) So I go out and get some Marx. And someone suggested to me, "Maybe you should get some of the early writings. Those might be easier to read than *Capital*." So I got *The German Ideology*, which is fairly accessible, but I still had trouble with it. So I

asked if other people would maybe like to be in a study group with me, because my turn to do this was at the end of the quarter, like the eighth or ninth week. Other people were making presentations, maybe two a day, on the other days.

So I got a study group together, and we started reading Marx: *The German Ideology*, and then we went back and read *The Communist Manifesto*, and then we read some early writings, like the 1844 Manuscripts and things like that. I found in a *group* of people, we could understand these texts. Some people knew something; I didn't know very much. We were serious about it. It was a study group, and we wanted to know this stuff, and we felt it was important. So we struggled with it, and it was not accessible. We were grad students, and none of us stupid, but it was really hard to get into it. This was a way to get into Karl Marx. So by the time it came for my presentation, I was able to give a presentation on *The German Ideology* by Karl Marx, and the basic tenets of Marxism, which he and Engels lay out in that book. They're coauthors of it.

And so, having done that, from that day forward, everybody in the program thought of me as the Marxist in the program. And people would say, "Well, what would Marx say about this?" or "What would Marx say about that?" Well, some of those things I could answer, and other things I'd say, "I have no idea what Marx thinks about that, but I'll go find out!" So I became much more intellectually interested in Marxism and serious about reading Marx.

Around that time, we also, as I mentioned, started a study group—not just the Marx study group, but started a thing in positivism. We created a class. When I

first entered the history of consciousness, they required twelve classes to graduate, which would have been—two classes a quarter plus a TAship would be six a year, so you had two years of work as a grad program, to get your Ph.D. Or maybe a third or a fourth for writing your dissertation. And in the program, they were only offering three courses in the catalog. So this is why this was an amazing experience for me. The way I filled my requirement, because I had to take two classes a quarter and one job as a TA, was we created our own class. We got credit for studying positivism. Again, this was not “getting away with” something. We were deadly serious about it. So I discovered the Frankfurt School through this study group on positivism. We read more traditional philosophy. I had no background in philosophy, almost none, in Western philosophy, or in any other, for that matter. I just read voraciously, and everybody else in this thing did. We took it seriously, and people showed up for class prepared, and there was no teacher; we were the teacher. It was a study group, but it was for credit.

Rabkin: Did you have to petition to the central administration—?

Rotkin: Bill Friedland covered it by giving us credit for me and for three or four others, and then somebody else knew another teacher and they went and got credit from them. We all did it through independent study. So a lot of us took maybe a course, and an independent study and a TAship or a fellowship every quarter.

We also, at one point, went to Albert Hofstadter and said, “We want to know more about Hegel, and you’re an expert in Hegel.” In fact, he was a Hegelian. There were very few of them left on the planet. He’s passed away since, but at the time, he was a serious Hegelian; he took it seriously as a world philosophy. We said, “We’d like you to teach a class, but here’s what we’d like in the class.” We structured this class, but we brought him in and respected him as a person who knew everything about it and we knew nothing. But it wasn’t like he made a class with a syllabus; *we* made a syllabus, and we decided what we wanted to read first and second. And he came, and we said, “We’d like you to teach this class to us.” Which was a great relationship, and maybe the way college should work! (laughs) At least grad school, maybe even undergraduate.

So I learned how to read Hegel, which was totally impenetrable when I started. Hofstadter was amazing. He not only believed in Hegel as an abstract philosophy; he really thought Hegel’s worldview was the way to make sense of the world. So the first day of class, he unrolled—he had a thing that he had done across a whole wall in maybe about six-point type, a scroll of paper, standing it vertically on the wall and rolling it across, so we’re talking about something maybe twenty-five feet long and six feet high, which starts with “Spirit” and ends up with the modern world at the far right end, with everything accounted for someplace in the Hegelian structural system.

Hegel was a system-builder, and what was known as an encyclopedist. So he attempted not only to come up with a worldview and a philosophy, but to account for every phenomenon in the world, and how it all fits into this, and how

it all started in this— I cannot explain Hegelian philosophy [here]. I do it in my Marxism class to students in about an hour, but in the little thirty-second version: The world kind of starts from nothing but possibility, and becomes the practical, physical world that we live in now, which is imbued with Spirit. And it does that through a three-stage process. It starts as an empty, kind of abstract concept of possibility, or Spirit, as he calls it. It goes through a period of “alienated Spirit,” which is a physical world that has no Spirit in it. So you think about rocks, and stars, and cosmic dust. And at some point human beings come along, and embody in them, they once again discover the Spirit that’s been guiding this process all along, from the beginning, kind of behind the scenes.

And it’s a metaphysical system, and it’s a totally *idealist* system—not idealistic, but idealist: depending on *ideas* driving things rather than material development. He shows you how this set of ideas pushes everything in the world. And without giving you my lecture on Hegel, I’ll leave it at that. But we learned about Hegel. So I can pick up anything Hegel’s written. From that I learned to pick up stuff by the Frankfurt School, and to read Sartre, and to read Heidegger and others. We did a study group on Heidegger later, and we had somebody in our class who was interested in Heidegger and helped lead us in that. Then we got into Marx, and the Frankfurt School, which is a combination of Freud, Marx, Hegel. So this study group became everything I was interested in studying.

I also used the opportunity of history of consciousness to follow my other interests and leads. Well, my first interest was to study William Blake, and the relationship of his poetry to the Industrial Revolution in England. I was

interested in that for about a year, not quite a year. Then, because of the feminist movement, which I got active in—the women’s movement—I got interested in the origin of women’s oppression. Because I began to perceive, “Why is it that women, who used to live in matrilineal and matriarchal societies, now live in patriarchal societies, and there are very few examples—there are some, but—very few examples on the planet of truly— There are matrilineal societies, but not matriarchal societies. So descent is through the woman, but the idea that women actually have power and run society—how did it turn out that women were disempowered? Where did that go?” So I got interested in studying that, and was trying to read a bunch of texts.

Some of that came from a class I took with Paul Lee—that’s another faculty member in the program—and he taught a class called *Mythos to Logos*, in which he talked about how we went from a world centered in poetry, music, the Dionysian experience, and the heart; to analysis, the mind, anality, and everything that’s become the modern world of science, losing all the spiritual elements in that process. I liked that class; I found that really interesting. I wasn’t ready to go back to a world of mythos, but I agreed that we had lost something in that process, and that’s, again, for me, the choice between science and literature. I can see how that happened in the pre-Socratic period of Greek development.

Rabkin: This was before Riane Eisler and *The Chalice and the Blade*?⁶

⁶ Cultural historian Riane Tennenhaus Eisler’s 1987 international bestseller *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* documented a historical shift from egalitarian to patriarchal

Rotkin: Yes. And this was the first quarter. I took two classes, the one with Bert Kaplan I talked about, and this class with Paul Lee.

So I started getting interested in philosophical issues that I'd never been interested in before. I also started getting interested in economic issues. Now I got some economic background from the Doug Dowd class, and from Bill Friedland at Cornell. I never took an economics class at Cornell except that one with Doug Dowd, which was, I think, a history class, actually. He was in the economics department, but economic history was what he was teaching.

Rabkin: Did he call himself a political economist?

Rotkin: He did. Doug Dowd called himself a political economist. Or sometimes he called himself an economic historian. But he's written probably 100 books, or scores of books anyway, which are excellent books, and which are accessible to lay people. Very few of them are technical economic books. So I came with some economic background. I'd begun to develop an economic analysis of why we had imperialism, and why we were in the war in Vietnam, and how universities were developed, and so forth. But I didn't have a deep understanding of economic analysis.

I lived for school. I was living an intellectual life, along with, at that point, not a whole lot of politics. I was in a mixed group of men and women who were trying to deal with feminism. There were five couples, all of which ended up breaking up through this process. (laughs)

Rabkin: These were all histcon students?

Rotkin: No. These were my wife and myself, but also— Three of us were histcon students. One was a person that came as a histcon teacher, Bob Werlin, who was a sociologist that was hired half-time sociology, half-time history of consciousness. So he was in this group as well.

Rabkin: So this became your group of friends, peers?

Rotkin: Friends, and we met once and sometimes twice a week, had a dinner and stuff. Often we would talk about our relationships and what we should learn from feminism. And so it was kind of an eye-opener. It was also “the personal is the political,” and we should be doing these kinds of things.

And I was doing antiwar politics on campus. When I first got to Santa Cruz, there may have been a political movement. There had been the year before, an antiwar movement in Santa Cruz, in '68. When I got here in the summer, fall, of '69, I did not connect with that movement, could not find anybody that was active in it. I had heard that Ralph Abraham was a math teacher who had gotten

arrested for wearing an American Flag shirt, so I met him. But I really didn't find a movement here.

I was just kind of on my own. I started publishing almost weekly leaflets, like I had done at Cornell. I found access to a printing press. George Hitchcock, who was teaching in theater arts and poetry (I don't know what department) was the publisher of *Kayak Magazine*, which is a poetry magazine—found poetry, and other kinds of poetry, surrealistic poetry, things like that. He had a printing press at his house up in Bonny Doon, and I heard about that, and I asked, if I helped him print his magazine, could I get access to print some leaflets? He said sure, he'd be excited for that. So I ended up becoming the actual printing press operator for *Kayak*. I'd go up all the time and print various leaflets. I would print mostly economic analysis: how the war in Vietnam is screwing over working people; how it's hurting the economy, not helping the economy.

I began to realize I didn't really know that much about economics. I knew something about political economy, but not about bourgeois economics—you know, about the things people study in an economics class. So between the end of my first year and second year of grad school, I took the entire undergraduate program—required courses—in economics: *Econ 1, Introduction, Macro and Micro Economics*. Audited the classes. David Kaun taught most of those classes that I took, but I took them with other people as well. I took a class on labor and economics.

Rabkin: Who taught that, do you remember?

Rotkin: David Kaun taught *Labor and Economics*. I was respectful and critical in those classes. I didn't disrupt the classes. I didn't make myself a pain in the ass, as much as possible. But I could not avoid, from time to time, raising questions. You know, not interrupting a lecture, but when it came time for questions, I would ask one. It would usually be a fairly critical question about the entire premise of the lecture that I'd just heard. (laughs)

Rabkin: Challenging the models of economics?

Rotkin: So, for example: I'd given an example earlier at Cornell, where I'd gone as a visitor to a lecture by Clinton Rossiter in which he explained that only the Congress could declare war, and we were in the middle of the war in Vietnam that Congress had not declared.

Here's a situation where I found a teacher, and this was David Kaun, explaining Phillips curves, which have to do with inflation and recession and the problem of unemployment and its relationship to inflation. They show you that they never come to the zero point. So you cannot have, simultaneously, inflation and recession. If you bring back unemployment to a low enough level, you'll start to have inflation. Because there are way more jobs than workers, the workers get uppity, and they start demanding more money, and so you have an inflation problem. Or, if you have a huge unemployment problem, you won't have inflation, because people are hungry, and they don't have jobs, and they can't afford to pay more for things, and they won't bid against each other. So it's a

simple economics model of supply and demand, and it has to do with this process.

Well, I'm sitting in a class where we're facing eleven percent inflation and twelve percent unemployment—in 1973, by then, or 1972. And I hold up the front page of the *New York Times*, which has these two percentages on it, after he's just given a lecture from the Phillips curves, how there cannot be simultaneous inflation and recession (which is just a serious form of unemployment). I go, "How does this theory go with what I'm looking at in the *New York Times* today? It's not true. What do you have to say about that?" Those are the kinds of questions I would ask at the end of a lecture. It didn't take a lot of time, didn't waste anybody's whatever. Put the teacher on the spot, big-time.

Rabkin: How did he respond to that particular question?

Rotkin: David Kaun suggested that the assumptions of economics—we had to get these down and understand them, but they were overly simplistic, and when you applied them to the real world, things got more complex. His answer was longer and more obfuscating, but I think that's ultimately a good summary. I've talked with him about this directly. I'm not saying anything behind his back I have not said to his face.

But another thing he'd say: "Oh, well, look at this situation. People here are acting psychologically in strange ways, and that's why the economy's in a mess, because people have different expectations." I said, "Didn't we start this class"

(this was Econ 1) “Didn’t we start this class talking about Economic Man (sic)—you know, that Economic Man, or economic people, maximize their self-interest? That’s the whole basis of the economics profession, and everything that you guys teach. And now you’re telling me they *don’t* act rationally in their own self-interest; they do things that are *against* their own self-interest. So what about the basic premise of the entire field that we’re studying here?” That would be an example of a question that I would ask in a classroom. You know, not taking a lot of time, and not disrupting anybody, but when the time came, asking the question. So I got a heck of an economics education. I don’t remember the timing of all these things, but this is all in the between-1969-and-1973 period.

Now I’m going to go back to what I was doing my thesis on. So I got interested in the origin of the oppression of women. By then I had taken a class with Norman O. Brown, and had done an independent study with him on some of his books—on *Love’s Body* and *Life Against Death*—books that he had written, which were about Freud and Marx. He introduced me to Gramsci. We used to go for walks, the two of us. He did this with lots of people, I guess, but we’d go for a walk in the woods, and it was Socratic method. He would get you talking, and then he’d ask a question that would just *zing* in to the heart of your contradictions and things that you didn’t understand. (laughs) He didn’t talk at you. He’d ask you a question: “Well, what do you think: Marx and Engels are understood to be materialists. But don’t you think that people are driven, to some extent, by consciousness and their understanding of what’s going on? Isn’t there a more dialectical relationship between people’s ideas and the physical reality that they’re in?” “Oh! Well, yeah, I believe that.” “Well, then, how does

that affect the Marxism that you've been spouting?" "Oh!" "Well, I suggest you go read Antonio Gramsci, because it's a more sophisticated Marxism than this stupid, dead stuff you're reading." "Oh." "I mean, Marx is brilliant, but Lenin?! What are you reading there, this Marxism-Leninism? *Stalin*—what are you, crazy? Mao! Get out of that shit! It's useless!" I mean, just in so many words. "You should go read Gramsci." "And you should read Giambattista Vico," who he was reading along with *Finnegan's Wake*, James Joyce. "But if you want to do Marx, okay, Marx has got some great ideas. But to get into Marx and *understand* Marx, read Gramsci." So, he introduced me to Gramsci. I went off to go read Gramsci.

Then he said, "If you want to study the origins of the oppression of women, you really need to understand classical Greek, because that's where the sources are in this stuff. Because it has to do with early societies, and without the Greek, you got nothin' in original sources, and you need to understand classical Greek." I said, "I am *not*—!" It was hard enough for me to learn *French* as an undergraduate. I come to Santa Cruz, and I'm trying to learn Spanish, because my neighbors speak Spanish. "A language I can't even use to speak with anybody? No. I guess I'm not—" I respected Nobby, as we called him—Norman O. Brown. "I guess my topic's the wrong topic for me."

You know what I'm really interested in? I'm interested in the student movement of the sixties. Where did that movement come from? We had this conservative country—the Cold War, and the McCarthy period, and all of a sudden, out of nowhere springs this student movement, this antiwar movement, and eventually

a women's movement and a gay movement. Where did that come from? What caused that? How did that happen? And why the universities were in the center of this. It was students and young people. It's not so clear. I mean, they're affected by it directly, but why isn't the antiwar movement more of a labor movement or something? Anyway, where did this movement come from? What's going on? *That's* what I'm really interested in.

So then I got interested in, "Why are people in college?" There're a lot of reasons people are in college. I understood that. I'd written some stuff about it. I'd done a lot of popular writing by then. I'd worked on a magazine called *Loaded*, in '70-'71—[it] came out every two weeks, then every three weeks. And the pun was intended: "loaded" as in loading your gun, and also "loaded" like stoned.

Rabkin: Was this a campus publication?

Rotkin: Campus publication, primarily. We charged ten cents a copy. The library has a complete set of it, at McHenry. It had cartoons, and we talked political stuff, and mostly undergraduates worked on the program. I was, I think, maybe the only grad student who worked on the thing. I think we were all students otherwise. Later, I worked on another campus magazine. I'd done a lot of popular writing. So I'd write this kind of article—a one-page article, maybe two: The way in which all the students in the class look at the teacher in the classroom and not at each other. So I'd write an article about [that], and I'd have a picture of an eyeball or something at the top of it. It would talk about how students need to look to their peers, and have a discussion that's not simply listening to the

“authority” in the classroom. And how hard it was for me as a TA in a classroom to have everybody look at me. When a student would be speaking, the students would be looking at me to see how *I* was responding to the comments being made by the student, rather than reacting to them directly. Which was: *Why?* What’s going on here? That’d be an example of a kind of an essay.

But [I] also tried to write some stuff about the economics of the war—antiwar stuff. And funny stuff, too. Somebody did a cartoon for us of McHenry, the first chancellor. He made a decision that the Health Center could not distribute condoms at UCSC, which was opposed by Ruth Frary, the first medical director. She wanted to distribute condoms and McHenry said, “Not on our campus. We’re not doing that.” So we made a cartoon of McHenry on a hobby horse, a rocking hobby horse, with a shield that had the Trojan Enz symbol on it, and a spear with a spent condom on the top of it. “Off to the Trojan Wars,” was the cartoon. (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: That kind of stuff. It was funny. It was political. It was stuff like that.

Well, I got interested in the question of, “Why do people go to school? Why has the university expanded? How come there were very few students in college before World War II and after World War II there’re *massive* numbers?” Well, one of the reasons is to simply absorb surplus labor. What are you going to do with all these workers who are coming back from the war? There’s no place for them

in the economy. You can suck them up with the GI Bill. What about all these young people, the Baby Boom and the people that are now going to be going to college? College is a way to get 'em off the street and not cause an unemployment problem. It also is a way to socialize people to behave themselves and to follow the rules. And you need people who are not trained for factory work, like high school trains you, but who can be given a job for a month and produce something at the end without supervising them every day. So those kinds of things I understood.

But does school actually give you technical skills in the modern world? Are people actually sent to college to learn technical things that they need to do in their jobs? It's not so obvious. Most people who hire, say, engineers or chemists, have to re-train them. They might learn some basic stuff in grad school, but there're an awful lot of things you only learn in an actual field when you get out in your work. Nobody in literature learns how to be a publisher of a magazine. You don't necessarily learn how to do real-world jobs with this kind of stuff, or make these things happen. You don't learn as a sociology student how to run studies. You might learn some skills you could use, but it's not really there.

Rabkin: What about the premise of a liberal arts education that was not necessarily supposed to endow you with technical skills, but was supposed to help you learn to think critically?

Rotkin: Think critically. So that might be another function. I saw that as a contradiction as a major reason. I didn't believe that capitalism would produce a

higher education system for that purpose. In fact, that would be a contradiction. I read André Gorz, who talked about this contradiction that exists in capitalism between the need for polyvalent, technically sophisticated people and the need to have people who only look narrowly at their field and don't think about the critical questions that connect you to the bigger world. That's a contradiction he thought was explosive and going to cause revolution. I understood that schools did in fact, to some extent—particularly UCSC and progressive colleges [and] universities—might give you that critical-skill function. But the idea I really was interested [in]: do universities really train people for the workforce, or not?

So I taught myself econometrics, which is the science of studying multiple causes for things. So the question becomes, what do bourgeois economists think about whether schools actually contribute to GNP? Do they or don't they? Because it's not clear. And I read about 150 conference reports, full of econometrics, in which 50 percent of the people there would be professional economists from universities and the other half would be business people, often from personnel departments, asking the question, "Does it make sense to hire somebody with a master's, or a Ph.D.? Or should I be fine with a B.A. for hiring my employees for what I'm doing in this chemical operation I run, or this thing that requires science people to do this work—biologists, or whatever? What do I really need to have people adequate for the job?"

And out of 150 conferences, every conference ends with the practical people from the field, the business people, saying, "We didn't learn anything, and your formulas don't really answer my question," and the economists saying, "Yes,

because they're not sophisticated enough yet. Someday, we'll be able to plug a number in and get the answer to your question, but now we're just developing the theory and so it's still pretty primitive, we admit. And there's not a whole lot of information for you about your question, it's true." Conference after conference after conference.

Which taught me a healthy skepticism about the whole profession of economics and what it actually does or doesn't know. [I] realized more and more the extent to which it's kind of ideological, and the fundamental questions between, say, Keynesians (people today like Krugman); the neoclassicists (the Milton Friedman people); the others, the supply-side economics people—you can't learn anything in the economics profession that answers the question as to which of these people is correct about their theory of how our economy operates. You can have your own theory of it, and you need a political economic model, which does not exist. So you can defend one of these or the other, but there's nothing of a school of training in economics that will definitively, in some scientific way, answer who's right and who's wrong. Which is why it's possible for people to get Nobel prizes on exactly opposite theories of how the world works.

So I have fair contempt for bourgeois economics at this point, and not because I've just dismissed it, because I've studied the hell out of it. I'm prepared for graduate school in economics—and I would never go, because it would be a complete waste of my time. And that's very helpful, when you're out there in the world and people are coming to you as experts, and you know what they're talking about and you can dismiss it on some level. Which has also been helpful

for me when scientists come to me and tell me, in my political life, that something's safe from an earthquake—and I know how to ask the right questions about, “What do you mean by safe? Under what parameters?” When they tell me correlations, I understand how to make them. I've studied statistics. I've got a lot of background in the science side of stuff that makes me kind of a difficult person when it comes to experts. I respect expertise, and there're a lot of fields where you need it, but I don't take it uncritically. It's kind of an important thing in my background.

Rabkin: Was this economics study feeding into your dissertation work?

Rotkin: Yes. Well, I thought it was. As it turned out, two file drawers full of studies and conferences, a year worth of work, the learning of economics and specifically of econometrics, turned out to be a waste of time. Not a waste of time—I'm glad I did it—but for my dissertation, nothing from that. There might be a footnote somewhere, just to try to impress somebody somewhere, but not much useful for the dissertation itself.

So my topic that I came on—and this was what I qualified [on], my qualifying essay and my preparation—I had about a seventy-page essay, which I'll call epistemology: what's real and how do we know it? Which was really becoming a justification for, how can I write about a student movement that I was part of, and do it in a way that's not just my opinion, but that actually has got something of a science base? So I was reading, again, critical theorists, trying to understand. Sartre and other folks, and Colletti (there's a whole bunch of Italian sociologists),

as well as the structuralists, Althusser and other people, trying to figure out, is Marxism a science? Is Marxism an ideology? Even if it's more sophisticated, to what extent can any social scientist say anything coherent that actually is more than just an opinion? As one of our chancellors said about Nancy Stoller (Nancy Shaw at the time), "She's not a sociologist, because I can understand what she's writing. It's just journalism." (laughs)⁷

Rabkin: I remember that.

Rotkin: (As if journalism is not itself scientific on some level.) But, "It's just journalism, because as sociology it should be a field I couldn't understand, because I'm a biologist."

Anyway, I'm trying to get into how I think I'm going to study this question of the student movement, what it's about. I wrote a very rough version about the economy of the United States in the twentieth century. It would be seen by historians as simplistic, probably, and [by] economists. It was a political economic history of the United States, in which I wanted to talk about what had changed in terms of technology and development that required people to have this college education. And came to the conclusion that it wasn't so much the training as it was the idea of having people who could think for themselves to

⁷ Community studies professor and longtime activist (with SNCC, the Boston Women's Health Collective, etc.) Nancy Shaw (Stoller) was denied tenure at UCSC in 1982. She had previously been recommended for promotion by the Community Studies Board, Oakes College, outside reviewers, an ad hoc committee, and the Committee on Academic Personnel (CAP). After a long legal battle, Stoller won tenure in 1987 and returned to teach at UCSC. For a 2002 oral history with Nancy Stoller see http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/oir.exhibit/nancy_stoller

some degree, the critical thinking—but critical thinking taught in a particular way, that limited your ability to take your critical thinking outside of your narrow field. And again, still believing that there was a way to suck up surplus labor and other kinds of things. So I wrote a chapter about that.

I also wrote about a 25-page chapter on the Marxist theory of class, because I wanted to use a class analysis of who was going to school, and how the nature of the working class was changing. That was really the theory I was developing towards. Whereas before, only upper-class or ruling-class, or, let's say, capitalist-class, for the most part, kids, or a small layer of the upper working class, went to college before World War II, now the colleges were opening up to what was in fact the working class. But it was no longer the industrial working class alone. The working class was becoming what we call variegated. It was on different levels. There were technical people in the working class now, people with a lot of education. There were jobs that required education of the working class. There were not just blue-collar jobs; there were white-collar jobs. There were men and women in the working class. The working class was becoming diversified racially, and by region. And this is what became the New American Movement's theory of the working class: sort of a proletarianization of jobs that previously had been outside of working-class reach. And a change of working-class experience to thrust them into areas that required an education. That really was my rough, seat-of-the-pants idea of what college was about, and universities, and why they'd exploded after World War II. That was my qualifying essay, and it got accepted.

That would have been in 1973 when that happened. My committee was Bill Friedland, Bill Domhoff (that's G. William Domhoff, and he goes by Bill Domhoff), and Jack Schaar, who was a politics teacher. I took an undergraduate politics class with Jack Schaar on political theory, which was an eye-opener for me; I learned something from that. I found all three of these guys really brilliant. I learned a lot from them. I audited classes, usually. Although I signed up for a class with Schaar, I think I audited a couple of Bill Domhoff's classes about the ruling class and who they were—which I had studied a little bit with Doug Dowd, but now I was getting further into it.

So I would typically, in any given quarter, have a TAship with one or two sections; be taking one history of consciousness class, one independent study with my fellows in the history of consciousness, and probably auditing two or three classes in some other undergraduate departments, or maybe a grad program somewhere. I was taking some literature classes with Tom Vogler—on literature and landscape painting, which was trying to, again, relate interdisciplinarily what's going on in the world of landscape painting that relates to what's happening in the Romantic movement that was happening at the time

Rabkin: Did you work with him on Blake as well?

Rotkin: I didn't really take any classes with Vogler on Blake, but I went to a number of his classes and so I heard some stuff on Blake.

Harold Bloom came here. I had taken a class with him at Cornell as an undergraduate, and he came to Santa Cruz as a visiting something-or-other, and I was allowed, even though I was not in the lit program, to sit in on that, which was, I think, three meetings. And that started with Blake and then went into other Romantic poets.

So I was a very busy person. I was working like crazy. I also took that study group, and it was such a great experience— That would have been the fall of '69, winter-spring '70. By spring, we realized, "That was such a great experience and such a great way to learn about Karl Marx, we could offer a study group for other students." So a friend of mine, Harry Chotiner, who was a history graduate student, and I created a study group. He had also joined our positivism study group, even though he was not in history; he was from the history department. His specialty was the American Revolution. His dissertation was on the Founding Fathers—a really brilliant piece of work on the complexity of their class interests—that it was not simply narrow, it was quite broad, and they had a sense of *noblesse oblige* that they brought to their work.

Introduction to Marxism Class

Anyway, Harry and I said, "We should organize a study group for some folks, because this went so well. And we'll get [students] credit [for it] as *we* did: we'll find some faculty members who will give credit to these undergraduates that are part of our study group." So our first one had fifteen people or something, with the two of us in it. That went so well that the next quarter, and every quarter

since, till I retired from the university (it was every quarter for a long time, but then it became once a year, but for about ten years, every quarter, three times a year) we offered Marxist study groups.

I used to run around to the different study groups. Harry and I would run around, visiting the sections. Because we started with one section a quarter, then we'd have too many people. Two sections, three sections—we got up to five sections. We would have people that took the earlier study groups be the facilitators of the other study groups, so they would get credit for facilitating. And *we* would run around giving the same little lecturette on Hegel to prepare people for the first readings, because it's difficult to get into Feuerbach and Hegel if you haven't had something of a lecture first. Harry would give them a lecture on the French Revolution, because they had no background in European history, or socialism, which he'd studied. I would give them an introductory lecture on Marxist economics. I did some stuff on the theories of the state, before they read some stuff on that.

So mainly, it was primary material, reading Marx and some secondary sources, with brief—I'd go give a twenty-minute lecture, half-an-hour lecture on Hegel to get people started. Or maybe an hour, sometimes. I'd give the same lecture to three sections. So after I finally got my teaching job (which I'll come back to talk about later), I could actually offer this as a course, not as a study group. I still tried to keep it as a study group, but I could offer the credit for it. Which worked to some extent. It was a different kind of a class. We expected a lot more hours than most classes do at UCSC, and it was a lot more personal, and people got

engaged. I think it had a major transformative impact on students who took it. Most community studies students over the years took this class, this *Introduction to Marxism*. And lots of other students throughout the university took it. So it became kind of an institution at Santa Cruz.

Once I started offering it for credit, I realized, “You know what? Why am I giving the same lecture to three, five little groups? Now that I’m teaching it, I could offer a lecture, and make all the people in the sections come to my lecture.” But still, it was only lecturing maybe five lectures during the quarter, not every time. And we showed some films, which people came to. The more it became a class, the more people expected you to have it be a class, and I started feeling a little defensive about my colleagues thinking I’m offering credit for something that doesn’t look like a traditional class—even though I was always confident the students came out of that class knowing more about Marx than any graduate seminar ever taught anybody about Karl Marx. So I never was worried that they weren’t getting an education. But I started thinking, there should be a lecture every week, and there may be a film along every week, and then the sections, which are the study group, should also happen twice a week, which we were doing. So students come to class for a two-hour lecture, a two-hour film, two, two-hour sections.

Then the facilitators started wanting to have their sections in the evening. Mine always met twice a week for two hours, because I just [think] that’s the level of students’ mental capacity to do critical thinking. The TAs always wanted to have it be in the evening for three or four hours. They’d have a potluck; they’d have a

break in the middle and do two, two-hour sections, and they would meet once a week. But that worked out.

I offered a pedagogy section for the TAs, or the facilitators. I called them TAs, but they really were not. They weren't getting TA money. They were often getting reader money. I scammed for money for them. The first time they did it they got credit, not money. If they came back to do it a second time, I found a way to pay them something. Not much. It was a token amount, maybe a thousand bucks, as a reader—even though they weren't really readers, they really were TAs. And they really were more than TAs; they really were instructors of small sections. So I violated every rule of the university—and I say this as a union activist—with this class. Because nobody else would have been teaching this class if I weren't. I didn't feel like I was taking a job from anybody. And nobody would have been offering graduate students [these positions].

I did not take graduate TAs unless they had been part of a study group, been part of the class, because I did not want someone coming in and lecturing the students in the sections. Those were *study groups*. They *get* a lecture. This is the place for them to talk and break *down* the idea that there's an expert in the class, and have everybody take turns leading the sections, just as I had done it the first time. So that was an important part of my education. And I did a lot of my reading—because of Gramsci and other kinds of stuff, my Marxism became more sophisticated.

Also, parallel to this, at the same time, we became active in the New American Movement, which was an offshoot from SDS, Students for a Democratic Society. I knew people from Cornell who got arrested in the Seattle Seven, or Eight⁸—that Michael Lerner was part of. He had moved to the Bay Area by then, and he started this new group, the New American Movement, in 1972. I was interested. Because I had left Cornell thinking of myself emotionally as a Marxist or a Marxist-Leninist, but did not have much theory, did not have the sophisticated stuff.

By the time I was reading Gramsci, I also had joined a Maoist group for four months—totally crazy group called the RU, Revolutionary Union, that became the Revolutionary Communist Party, one of the more sectarian Maoist groups in this country. I belonged for four months. It was a group-mind-think situation, where they told me I was too intellectual, [that] I had to stop talking, that I should listen to other people. That group was really close. Our whole life was wrapped up in it. I was still going to school, but I was doing this kind of stuff as well. Still sleeping five hours a night to make this all happen. We started a childcare center; we started a bunch of activism. We started a food co-op, where we gleaned fields and provided bags of vegetables for poor people in town. We worked through the Community Action Board to set up a breakfast program for young poor people in the Beach Flats area in Santa Cruz.

Rabkin: All this in the four and a half months you were in this group?

⁸ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seattle_Liberation_Front

Rotkin: Yeah. Four months is a while. Plus, I was still putting out leaflets on antiwar stuff. That's a whole other history I can go into sometime. I've never really written much about that experience. But it was crazy. We belonged to a group that was completely nuts, and had a complete misunderstanding of how ready America was for revolution. Their theory of revolution was: there would have been a revolution if it weren't for other leftists blocking the natural impulses of the working class. A ridiculous theory.

Anyway, Bruce Dancis, who had been active in SDS and had gone to prison in Kentucky for ripping his draft card in four pieces—he was my roommate at the time. And his girlfriend, Lorna Hall, who was a sociology undergrad—they were both sociology and he was also community studies, a double major. We came to the attention of these people in the Bay Area, and I was then invited by the just-then-forming (or, been-around-for-a-little-while) *Socialist Revolution* magazine to become a member of the editorial board. And I started going once a week to meetings on Saturdays.

So what I did with my Saturday mornings: I went to San Francisco or Oakland or Berkeley to a meeting to put out this magazine, which came out initially four times a year, and then more often—six times a year or something. And got a hell of an education there. I was very inexperienced compared to the people on that. And that included people like Eli Zaretsky, who was a theorist of the feminist movement; John Judis, who was a political theorist; Jimmy Weinstein, a famous U.S. historian who had written books on corporate America and the whole progressive movement, from a Marxist point of view. He was from the school

from William Appleman Williams in Wisconsin. So I got a much more sophisticated historical analysis. Some of the stuff I had been learning about economics fit into what they were telling me in, and much more political economy.

I started reading. People would submit ten times as many articles as we published, and they were happy to have somebody who could speed-read, which I could, and would read all these articles people submitted and be willing to write back critiques of what they had written and explain why we were rejecting their article. We thought we not only had a job to publish, but our job was also to educate the people that submitted things about what was wrong with their theory. So it was a chance to, again, much more develop a sophisticated analysis and write to people. So I got an education through that as much as anything I did in histcon. Plus the Marxist study group, plus reading on my own, plus the histcon study groups and classes I was taking.

So I got a kind of graduate education that everybody should have. It was interdisciplinary; self-directed, but making use of experts and respecting them. All over the place—pulling together, following threads wherever they led you. You'd read one thing, and somebody would say, "Well, if you've read somebody like Adorno, from the Frankfurt School, then you definitely have to go read this other guy, because this person's got some really interesting stuff that you would really find challenging." And so, just a drop of a name and I'd be off reading the book. And that's what I did: I read books. I read the *New York Review of Books* every week. I don't know how I ever had time to do this. I was reading literary

criticism and other kinds of stuff as well. And they got into sociological fields and stuff like that.

So it was a lot of philosophy, at the same time as I was beginning to get some practical work in Santa Cruz. I became active in some of the early environmental stuff in this period. A slate of progressive candidates ran for city council in 1973, and I lived a block away from Lighthouse Field. I got active in that struggle. I ended up being the printer for all the literature put out by the slate of these three people. They all got elected.

Rabkin: Just for the record, maybe you could give a quick gloss on the Lighthouse Field issue.

Rotkin: Lighthouse Field is right by the ocean. It's a beautiful, natural field that at the time had a forest on it, a lot of trees. And there was a proposal to build a seven-story convention center that would bring conventions of ten to twelve thousand people to that field. A hotel. The rest of it would be paved over for parking. It was right next to my house. It was a natural thing that I walked through every day to get to the ocean for my morning swim. But I was havin' none of it, and neither were any of my neighbors. Gary Patton, who was then a young attorney who had been a conscientious objector for the draft and worked on draft stuff or something in Palo Alto, and had gone to law school, was hired as the attorney for this group. Had not done much environmental work; he was a kind of a social activist. He became their attorney, and we successfully stopped that convention center, and eventually turned it—through a long thing I won't

go into here—into a state park. A lot of the trees have blown over and fallen since. To this day, conservative and pro-development people will describe it as “messy” and “ugly,” because it’s not a park with trimmed paths and stuff. It’s just natural. You walk through it. They cut the weeds once a year so there’s not a fire. But it’s basically just a wild place, right there in the middle of a neighborhood and right next to the ocean, right next to Lighthouse Point.

So I was getting active in local politics. Not electoral politics, with that one exception, but I wasn’t imagining I’d ever run for this. But these people were environmentalists, and they were social activists, and they believed in social programs. Maybe nonprofit groups, things like that. But mainly focused on environmental issues. Bert Muhly was one of those three candidates. The other was Sally Di Girolamo, and a woman named Virginia Sharp, whose husband was a professor at the university. She got elected, and she, for personal reasons that I don’t know, dropped off the council six months after being elected, and they appointed a more conservative person back in her place, Charlotte Melville.

The three of them were doing environmental politics, and so I got more interested in environmental kinds of stuff. I had, probably when I just got to Santa Cruz, read Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*—like everybody else in California, beginning to understand more about the environment. I had not been much of an environmentalist, honestly, before that. Some awareness of it, but not much. When I got to Santa Cruz, everybody was getting moved by environmental kinds of issues, and protection of the natural environment. Way before global warming, we were much more interested in development: “paving Santa Cruz

over”; “becoming a suburb of San Jose”; “urban sprawl.” That’s really what people didn’t like.

And I mentioned earlier, I worked on a freeway class. That would be another example: I would help Bill teach that class, and I don’t think I was paid for that. I just helped, and co-taught it, really, with Bill Friedland, teaching students how to do survey work, which ended up with five choices of freeway through Santa Cruz. And the public, through our survey, demonstrated they didn’t want any of them, and we killed the freeway through Santa Cruz. During the “freeway mania” period of the early seventies we didn’t have a freeway through town. Otherwise we might have had a double-decked Mission Street, or a freeway through what’s now the Pogonip and University Terrace, and down through what’s now Wilder Ranch, if we hadn’t stopped it. Because that was the main choice. And the options were double-decking Mission Street, or making King Street and California into one-way loops of the freeway. This was all part of the 1964 General Plan for Santa Cruz, which would have made Ocean Street, which was mostly a three or four lane road, into an eight-lane freeway into the beach area and Chestnut [Street], which was a two-lane neighborhood street, into a six-lane loop back out. Plus a nuclear power plant at Davenport; ten thousand homes for the wealthy on the North Coast, and two twelve-story towers on Frederick Street—all of which got killed.

Rabkin: Were you involved at all in that booklet that got put together by a bunch of students who were working with, among other people, Gary Griggs in earth sciences? This would have been early seventies—

Rotkin: Mapping the earthquakes around Davenport?

Rabkin: No, it was a more general publication about environmental issues in the Santa Cruz area.

Rotkin: No. I knew Gary Griggs⁹ because he had gone, as a grad student, and mapped the earthquake faults around that potential site for the [proposed nuclear power plant]. And that was probably the major thing that gave us enough time to kill that. If it weren't for Gary Griggs and his earthquake mapping, we'd probably have a nuclear power plant at Davenport.

Rabkin: That was actually [one of] Gary's first graduate student[s], who was Jerry Weber, who did that graduate work. Gary had done his graduate work up in Oregon.

Rotkin: And Jerry Weber did the grad stuff. Right, and they both worked on that project. I knew Jerry Weber because we played basketball together. That's another thing. Before I got elected to public office, when I got to Santa Cruz, I had never played basketball before. I'd been an athlete in high school and played various sports; never basketball, I don't know why. Maybe because I grew up in a house that was on a hill, and the ball rolled away when you missed the basket. (laughs) For whatever reason, I never played basketball. But I got interested in

⁹ See Sarah Rabkin, Interviewer and Editor, *From the Ground Up: UCSC Professor Gary Griggs as Researcher, Teacher, and Institution Builder* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2012). Available in full text at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/griggs>

basketball; it seemed like a great sport. So I was playing—I used to work in, between three to four days a week, a couple of hours of pick-up basketball games up at the university, in the gym in the afternoon. That's what I gave up when I got elected to the city council. I no longer had two hours a day to play basketball, so I stopped playing basketball.

When I look back on that period between '69 and '73, '74, I don't know how I did all the things that I did. Again, it helps to only sleep five hours a night.

Rabkin: You didn't have kids?

Rotkin: No children, and a wife who was interested in the stuff that I was interested in. She had her own interests as well, but it was not like any of this was taking away from our discussions. We still had a life together, because she would be interested in some of these philosophical questions. She was a philosophy and a French major as an undergraduate. So she would talk about things with me when I'd come home, and she'd be interested in reading some of them. So our life was around this kind of thing that had happened.

History of consciousness was an open-ended education for me. I finished my qualification essay in '73.

Consensus Decision-making in Community Studies

During this whole period, when I was working as a TA for community studies, the community studies program (and I'll start talking a little bit about that) was run on a pretty much consensus basis. We would have meetings. The students were welcome; the TAs were welcome.

Rabkin: Staff?

Rotkin: Staff certainly came to the meetings and were regularly participating. We had several people that were active, but eventually Sherry Phillips was hired, and she would come to the meetings, and people kind of valued her— Actually, she wasn't hired till '74, but other people were there earlier. Cheryl [was] one woman's name, and other people. There was a field study staff person, who was just a staff person, whose job was to develop field placements for students. Didn't supervise them at all, but found listings that students could look into. Al Espinoza was the first person hired in this job. Rudy Hernandez was then hired after him.

Rabkin: This was a staff position—

Rotkin: A full-time staff position to help develop [student field placement opportunities]. They hired people initially who knew something about migrant labor, because that, again, was still kind of the focus of the program. But by the second year, already—in fact even in the first year, [one student] worked with

the Zen Center in San Francisco, no relationship to agricultural stuff. Somebody else worked with Glide [Memorial] Church in San Francisco—not really about agricultural stuff. Most of the students [were] doing agriculture, but increasingly [there was a] shift away from that. Some students always did that, but others did other things.

But we were all welcome in the department meetings. We would discuss hiring new faculty—who should be hired, who the choices were. We would discuss curriculum—what classes should be offered. We had some money for lecturers, [so we talked about] which lecturers should be hired. (I was not then a lecturer.) This was before the union. And we would have a discussion in which the senate faculty would be present.

Now, I think the senate faculty had more input than the students. There were more students in the room than faculty, but people would defer to the faculty. That's different than, "they voted and ignored us," or that we had input and then they kicked us out of the room and made a decision. We're sitting right there, while they—they don't vote, they talk about what's the best decision; they talk it through till they get consensus. And students can speak up throughout that process.

So it would be misleading to say that the students "hired the faculty," because I think that the faculty had more input. They knew more about who might be tenurable, or who had what would be seen as a respectable background. But, for example, should we rehire this person who lectured for us for a quarter? Should

we rehire her or him? Students had more to say about it, probably, than the faculty. They were in the class: "He's gotta be rehired; he's the best guy ever!" Faculty didn't care that much. If the students all loved them, and they seemed to be doing a good job, and they had a good syllabus and met the minimal requirements for education, they got hired.

I don't think people thought of this so much as a conspiracy as it just developed the way that it did, and it was part of Friedland's philosophy and consciousness, and it went over to the other faculty. And you have to remember, '69, everybody in my class in 1969 in histcon—we didn't share a worldview; we had different people we thought were important. But everybody thought, "There's a revolution coming. The world's changing. The old rules are going to change. Everything's going to be different. Education's going to be different. Jobs are going to be different. The whole idea of how we run our foreign policy—this war in Vietnam is going to end. They're going to legalize marijuana. The world's going to be a different place."

And everybody was feeling like you can take risks and do stuff differently. I remember Norman O. Brown telling a student, "I'm so sick of reading expository writing from students. Do something creative! Write me a poem! Do something—whatever"—and then punishing the students because their work was not sufficiently intellectual or academic! I mean, kind of schizophrenic attitudes. (laughs) But that stuff was in the air. Page Smith was talking about how the whole university needed to be revamped and done differently—and then somewhere, not that far in the process, quit. When Paul Lee didn't get

tenure, [Smith] quits his tenured position because he's outraged that they haven't hired somebody he thinks is a really good person that should get tenure. And as a protest, quits his job at the university (and apparently has enough money from some other source to live).

So it was a very radical period. And the faculty they were hiring—they weren't leftists, or all communists or anything, but if they were on the social science side, they certainly were familiar with Marxism even if they weren't a Marxist. And the people on the more philosophical side—interested in, not mainstream logical positivism and analytic philosophy; much more interested in ethical philosophy or alternative philosophy. And in psychology, they didn't want to torture rats; they wanted to talk about the philosophical underpinnings of psychology and Freud. It was a very radical period.

The tendency was, as throughout UCSC, to hire people who had been undergraduates in the antiwar period. So the choices included people who were fairly progressive, radical faculty, with a more radical pedagogy: people who respected their students; people who wanted discussions rather than lecturing at people. And they tended to be much more progressive in their politics and their teaching methods and approaches. So there was no conflict between what the students wanted to hire, or keep in curriculum or as personnel, and what the faculty wanted.

So at the end of one of these discussions, the faculty who were able to vote and had legal votes to hire people, would then report to the secretary of the

department, “I vote yes; I vote yes...,” and it was unanimous. Every decision was unanimous because it reflected a consensus that already had been come to by the entire group. So, with no exceptions in the very early years, everybody was hired unanimously; every curricular decision was a unanimous decision. The people who formally voted and sent the message up the chain to the deans who had to actually hire these people—they had no idea how that decision got made; all they knew was it was a unanimous decision by the eligible, voting senate faculty on who was going to be hired, and by the department chair, who was going to be the new lecturer that they were hiring, or who should be hired as a TA.

Rabkin: Are you implying that you think that, had those deans had an inkling of how the decisions got made, they would have had some objection to that consensus process?

Rotkin: They would have absolutely opposed it. It would have been contrary to the university provisions—

Rabkin: The idea of students having input into the decisions?

Rotkin: Not input. There were many departments on campus in the early seventies—physics, math, sociology, literature—that had student members of their board, sometimes one or two or three elected representatives. Nobody else had more students in the room than faculty than community studies, as far as I’m aware, but the idea that you could have input, sure. But when it came time for the discussion and the vote on a tenure case—who’s going to get tenure—*out*

of the room except for the people who have a right to be there. *We're* all sitting in the room, discussing whether a person's going to get tenure. And, you won't be surprised to hear, the students thought how they taught was much more important than what they published, or whether they did community service. You know, the three-part thing about the university. And, of course, the faculty we were hiring were not unsympathetic to that approach.

Friedland was dogged from the beginning: "You've got to have people who meet the expectations of the academy. You've got to have people that can publish respectable materials, and we're not going to hire people that don't have that." So he basically educated students about what's acceptable: "No, you can't hire this person that's never published anything, or that's got no hope of publishing something, or a teacher that is all about sitting in the hot tub and spinning visions of the future or something. You've got to have people that are respectable, because this department has to be respectable." But it was done by education, by example, by authority that comes from respect rather than by "I can vote and you can't." It wasn't structure; it was more respect and mutual decision-making.

And that went on, informally like that, pretty much until the middle-to-late eighties, as a model for the department and how it actually functioned. In the late eighties, that got broken when one faculty member insisted upon her rights—she was then an associate [professor]—her right to not have junior faculty voting on her case. Because the senate rules are, if you want, a department can have everybody vote on stuff, or you can simply have the people at your rank and

above voting and nobody below. So a decision about whether to make a person full professor—only full professors get to vote on that decision, not assistant professors. Until about '85 or something, we were ignoring that; there was no rank distinctions. And again, at the university, some departments would have that distinction, and we made the decision that our department only had to vote by rank; [in] other boards of study the whole faculty would vote. Nobody had a situation where any undergraduates could vote, or TAs, or grad students.

Rabkin: Did you have an inkling of what the reasoning was behind this faculty member's decision [to invoke her right to exclude lower-rank department members from her tenure decision]? Was it that she knew that the particular personnel who were lower-ranked faculty members might not have been partial to her? Or was it just on principle?

Rotkin: Without mentioning her name, I'll say she was a person who was mercurial in her emotional response to stuff. And she sometimes really got along well with students, and loved them and respected them and would give them total power to rule the world, and fifteen minutes later would be totally paranoid that they didn't like her and that they were going to punish her for not being the best teacher ever. Even though she was a really good teacher, and I don't think she would have had that problem, I think she misperceived that the students were going to, like, ding her when they weren't.

Rabkin: I see.

Rotkin: That would be my sense. I could be wrong. She never said it but I think that was her motivation.

Rabkin: Okay. But this consensus system lasted into the eighties.

Rotkin: Yes. After which it went it away forever, and never was able to come back. For another five years, students kept coming to meetings, could still participate, and were only sent out of the room when the final vote took place. They could take part in the full discussion, even. I'm sure some other discussion went on afterwards, but there was a full discussion of the person's teaching, a full review of that.

I think from maybe my second year in the program, I was the person that read the student evaluations of the teachers and produced a statistical report on how the students evaluated the teaching ability of the person under review. They trusted a grad student to gather those things and do it. So it wasn't that I was just in the room, or they took input; we were full participants in the process about everything going on—again, particularly curriculum and hiring.

After '85, till maybe '95, students were still active in curricular decisions—what courses should we offer. Not that the faculty weren't engaged in it. And, again, I think faculty had, probably, a bigger individual impact on the decision. But students were not excluded, and they weren't just having input; they were part of the decision-making process. But no longer around personnel matters. Those became more regularized, because that's a right faculty have, and once they

insisted on it, there was no way around it. I'm sure that if the people higher up had known that if there was anything like students in the room when decisions were being made about tenure, there would have been hell to pay. I don't know. They might have just disestablished us right there. (laughs) Something really bad would have happened, I think.

I would say this: nobody was sneaking around about it. It wasn't like we were hiding it from anybody, as much as it just was the way things were working. I think the secretary, or maybe Friedland, said, "We've gotta have a vote, because that's what they want up there. So even though we've had a consensus, here's a piece of paper for all the people that get to vote. Give us your votes." They'd collect the votes. They'd report the vote. But it was never done like, "It's a secret," or "Don't tell anybody we're doing this," or something. It was just accepted as the way it was. And then nobody ever bothered to tell anybody higher up. And for the most part, I'd say students had no contact with deans. I had no contact with deans in that early period. Probably most of the faculty had very little contact. Friedland went and talked to the dean, or maybe McElrath when he was still active in the program, or David Kaun, when he was still doing things.

Faculty Dual Affiliations

Community studies, early on, had a model—Friedland thought this was really important—that people be in two departments; they should be anchored in an existing department [in addition to their community studies appointment].

Because this is a new, untested program, and he was thinking, if they're only in this program, and they don't have roots in sociology or in something else—they should do this.

The first time that didn't work was when Carter Wilson was hired. He was hired in literature and in community studies. He was a novelist, and he wrote novels and had training in anthropology, and could teach our students about field notes and ethnography and stuff, but also how to write. We were interested in an interdisciplinary approach, so not just how to think as a sociologist, but how does a *novelist* look at what's going on in the world? And how do you produce a novel that's about social issues? (which is the kind of novels he would write). He wrote a book called *Crazy February*, which was about an area in Mexico, and the popular experience of people in village life. He'd made a movie called [*Appeals to Santiago*], which was about Mayan cultural rituals. Carter Wilson's FTE was eventually shifted from half-time in literature and half time in community studies to full time in community studies with tenure.

And after that there was more sloppiness about whether people were in two departments. Friedland was always in sociology, until near the end—sociology and community studies. And several other people were hired in history and community studies. Jim Borchert was a historian who studied back alleys in Washington, D.C. There used to be communities where people lived in these alleys in between the buildings in Washington—black people in southwest Washington, D.C. Fascinating book—

Rabkin: Oh, interesting!

Rotkin: Fascinating book called [*Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850-1970*].

A lot of people didn't get tenure in the early years. They hired a geographer who didn't get tenure, never published anything and that's why.

Anyway, the program fairly quickly started gathering students, but it was pretty small for a long time. I think we had, typically, fifty majors for our first ten years, which meant we had twenty-five people going on field study. People could go on field study any two quarters in a row. Mostly in a row: there was always exceptions being made for a person doing it in fall and spring, and not in the winter for some reason, [for example] because there was a class they had to take. We didn't like that idea, but we let people do it. But the basic model was we offered *Introduction to Community Studies* in the fall and the spring; we offered *Preparation for Field Study* twice a year. So two cohorts could go through the major every year. With fifty majors—and maybe we'd get up to even seventy-five, but I think we were still closer to fifty—so our classes often would be twenty students (maybe sixty students in the major). And two groups going through. Maybe one group starts in the fall and does their field study in winter-spring, and another group starts in the spring and does it summer-fall.

Rabkin: Was *Introduction to Community Studies* different from the *Introduction to Field Study*?

Rotkin: Yes.

Rabkin: Okay. And you had to have both before you went off on your field study?

Rotkin: No. *Introduction to Community Studies* initially was not required. It was just a service course, often large. Often, Carter Wilson and I taught it together as kind of a combination literature and sociology type class. It was to introduce students to the idea of communities. As I said before, Michael Cowan started with actual community studies. But Carter and I would have people read literature. It only had to be something dealing with social change. We really were a social change major, somewhat misnamed. It wasn't so much "community studies" as it was really social change. And with experiential education.

Rabkin: Not "community studies" in the old-fashioned, sociological, Michael Cowan sense.

Rotkin: Right. It was much more—people would be in communities of some kind doing their research or their field study. But it was not necessarily in a traditional community. It could be in an institution or something else.

The only rules for students on their field study, initially, were: you can't do it on a college campus, because the whole idea was to get off a college campus. You can't do it with an illegal group like the Mafia. It didn't have to be a nonprofit

with a 501(c)(3), but it had to be some organization. You couldn't do it alone. You couldn't go to Tucson and save the town or something; you had to be part of a group. Because the idea was, we had no way to supervise you out in the field. You had to have a group that you worked with to look after what you were doing. And we also didn't like the idea of university people entering a community and deciding what should happen there. It was more, we're going to find a group that's indigenous to the community, and rooted there, that we would help work, and we would learn stuff. And we might have some impact on what the community group did in the community. But you'd at least have some area. And Friedland often articulated a more pragmatic reason for it: "If shit happens and things blow up, it's not like community studies sent somebody down there to make that trouble. Look to the community group that's doing it, and our student's just working with them." And so, trying to keep a barrier between the university department or board and the actual problem that might happen out there in the community.

We had some conflicts around this. One of the early ones— Some of these I'm repeating stuff I'm sure Bill Friedland told you about, but—

Rabkin: It's fine.

Rotkin: We had students who were working with the United Farm Workers, and they were working on the grape boycott that was happening at Safeway. And all of a sudden, Charles E. Merrill, who's—there's a lounge named after him in Merrill College, and the *college* is named after him, and he's from Merrill Lynch

Pierce Fenner and Smith, the Wall Street firm—they find out that community studies students are helping boycott Safeway, and Safeway is a subsidiary of Merrill Lynch Pierce Fenner and Smith, at the time.

So: “What’s going on? Are you sending students out there to organize boycotts against our business?” And to give total respect to Charles Merrill, we explained, “We did not send them there. Students choose their field studies. They choose all kinds of interesting places, and they picked the UFW and the UFW is involved in this struggle about grapes. And that’s how they got there. We never made anybody go do it. We didn’t even send them there. They pick their own placements, and we never assign anybody to a placement. And we try and get them to look critically at what’s going on, so I’m sure they’re helping with that effort, but they’re also trying to think, ‘Is it effective?’ and ‘Is it the right thing to do?’ And that’s what’s going on. And that’s why those two or three students are working with the farm workers on this project.” He said, “Oh. Well, thank you for explaining that to me.” That was the end of it. I was very impressed with that. And that’s what happened with that situation.

From Boards to Departments, and the Colleges’ Shifting Role

When UCSC started, Clark Kerr, who’d been the roommate of our first chancellor, Dean McHenry—they came up with an idea of a university that was based on broken-down [as in separate] little colleges that would focus on themes and be interdisciplinary, and not focus on traditional disciplines, which they thought were wrong for universities. They imagined something on the Oxford

model, that these little colleges were where people would study, and you didn't really need departments. So everybody who was hired initially, in the first year of UCSC, was hired by a college—by Cowell College. And then they started realizing, well, you know, some people want to go to grad school from this undergraduate program (because UCSC was focused on undergraduates), so we better figure out how to offer enough courses, for example, in math or sociology, so a student would have the basic requisites for being admitting to a graduate program in those fields.

Rabkin: Were there not majors, in the beginning?

Rotkin: No majors at UCSC. So, who's going to determine what courses [are required within a given field]? Again, I wasn't here in the first three years, but I was here in '69. The program starts in '65-'66. But in that four-or-five-year period, they started realizing, "Somebody has to decide what kind of curriculum to offer so that there's enough courses in math so you're ready for a math grad program. Who's going to do that?" "Well, let's collect the faculty" (by then in three colleges) "who are in math, and have them make a math curriculum that students have to take if they want to get a degree in math, a major in math.

"But we don't want departments. People are still going to be in Merrill College, studying the Third World. Or they're going to be in Cowell College, studying the humanities and the Western Civilization traditions. Or Stevenson: the modern social sciences." Those were the three examples. Or science, and science & technology: Crown College. Those were the first four colleges here. And then the

fifth college was the arts—[at College Five] they were interested in the arts. But there might be a math person that's interested in using (they would have been too early, because they weren't invented, but) fractals—you know, something in art that involves math.

So there were boards. Everybody initially taught five courses for Merrill College, if you were hired by Merrill College. Then, in order to fill the curriculum for the math board, you'd be told, you'd teach four for the college and one for your board. And then I watched, as I got here in '69 (because when I got here it was four-and-one, four college courses and one board course): it very quickly went to three-two, then became two-three, reversing the order of it. And then, it was four courses for your board and one for your college. And then, eventually, at UCSC, it became five [board courses]. And then they said at some point, "Why are we calling these 'boards'? They're departments!" Which they were. So they changed the name to department.

Rabkin: This is the most lucid gloss I've heard on the history of, and the rationale behind, calling them boards. It's like boards of certification in professional fields.

Rotkin: Yes, that's a good analysis of what was happening. And there were big fights about these things, because there were people still always trying to hold onto the college model, and not liking the idea that we were going back in the direction of the cosmopolitan pressure of the university system and higher education in general, to look like what every other college looks like.

So this very radical idea that McHenry and the president of the university had gets subverted fairly quickly. Not initially, in one year. But by the second year it's already sliding back towards what everybody else does. Because we have to send our students back into graduate programs that are in the rest of the cosmopolitan world of higher ed. And you'd better be preparing them for what they need to do there.

Rabkin: And faculty, also, as I understand it, had professional reasons to resist the pressures of being responsible to both a college and a board.

Rotkin: Well, what happens is, and it's as simple as this: how many meetings you have to go to. Just to be clear, it wasn't like you were just in a college or in a board. In order to get tenured at UCSC, you had to be approved by both your college and your board. When community studies had people in two boards and a college— You want to be a team player? You want to be perceived by your colleagues as somebody who's ready for tenure, because you've been around, and you're one of the team? You go to every meeting of the college, every meeting of two departments. You're spending your time in meetings. It's, like, nuts. And you volunteer—to be a good team player—to be on a committee of for three different things.

And, you're not just giving people a grade—which my mom, as a middle- and high-school teacher described jokingly: "Sometimes I don't know what's going on. I feel like I should throw them down the stairs, and the papers that are heavy

enough to make it to the bottom get an A, and the ones at the top don't!" And so, however you grade, whatever it is, it's a lot faster than trying to write a half-a-page- or a page-long evaluation (which is not what everybody did, but a lot of people wrote long evaluations). They didn't just say, "wrote papers," [but] "His first paper looked like this, the second paper looked like that, the third paper got better," or "it had some new problems," or whatever. And then, "The exams looked like this," and not that many exams were being given. And, "In class, this is what this person's good at," and blah, blah, blah, and "they come to lecture and they ask good questions. And they seem to know a lot about this area, and they need more some work in this other area." That takes a bunch of time.

So you're not only going to meetings like crazy, you're giving people narrative evaluations. And the meetings are taking forever, because even if you've got three students [involved in decision-making] in sociology, I bet it takes longer to make a decision about anything with three students, with their point of view in the room, than if you just had them excluded and made your own decisions on your own. Or the math department, with its student. And physics had a student member of their board (who was elected, in those two cases). So there's a lot of work going on.

And people take teaching very seriously. And the expectations are that you're going to party with your students, in the early years of UCSC, as well as teach them. Not everybody gets into that ethic, but it's around, and at its extreme it gets ridiculous, in which, you know, the provost of Kresge College is having hot tubs with his students in the nude. That's an outlier, probably, but, more

commonly, people are going to dinner with their students, and they are friends with their students, and they're not just distant teachers. That whole notion of rank and privilege is a lot weaker than it is today, or before [UCSC was founded]. It was a very interesting period.

So the pressures of the university system as a whole, and academia and education, pressures this experimental university back in the direction of what everybody else is doing. It didn't happen quickly. Eventually they get back to grades, and now there're no narrative evaluations for most people. (Some weirdos like myself occasionally still were writing them in the last year that most people were [saying,] "They're no longer required; I'm not writing them.") And, of course, then eventually they said, "Colleges will not offer courses at all." Now they've found their way back to, some colleges can offer a couple of limited courses.

Rabkin: And there are still freshman core courses in the colleges.

Rotkin: Yes. But for the most part, most of the college courses went away. There're a few of them left. And they also started cross-listing courses, so you didn't have to offer a course listed in the catalog. For example, Santa Cruz had an interesting early course on wine, which included the history and culture of wine, anthropology, the chemistry of wine, the biology of wine—the, I don't know what, the social mores of what happens to people when they drink too much of it. (laughs) It was the whole thing. It was wine, everything about it. And that class, it would be listed as a course, by the two teachers or sometimes three

teachers teaching that course. It was listed as a course from biology, as a course from biology, and a course from chemistry, and a course from sociology, and the literature of wine. It was taught by different people in different years. The students in the class who were biology students would take the biology course, and the others would take the literature class, and whatever. They would eventually end up all getting credit, but they would not all be in the same course, even though they were in the same room having the same experience.

Rabkin: So that they could get credit toward whatever their major was.

Rotkin: In their major, or their department. That started to slide eventually, and they went to cross-listing. And then, cross-listing got messy, and we decided, "There's no cross-listing. You want to take a course somewhere else? Get your department to accept the course from the other department as acceptable for your major."

Rabkin: The student would have to petition their department—

Rotkin: Community studies would say, like, "This sociology course will count for my community studies elective."

Rabkin: But it wasn't listed under both departments.

Rotkin: I ended up offering a lot of independent studies for students who then got them counting for anthropology, sociology, politics, over the years. Or my

Marxism course would be accepted, even though it was a community studies course, and I would have the department assistant or the chair send me something: "What topics are appropriate, in Marxism, for this student to write [about] to get politics credit for this?" And because Marxism is interdisciplinary, I made sure that they wouldn't be writing a paper on literature if they were trying to get credit from the so[ciology] department, or vice versa.

It's hard to talk about this stuff because it's so overlapped and interpenetrating in terms of what's going on.

Rabkin: This is really helpful.

Rotkin: Community studies, as I say, was kind of a collective on some level, almost. We went to dinner; we had retreats. We'd rent a house in Aptos, at the beach, and the whole department would go there. No students would be at that, but the staff and the faculty and so forth.

Rabkin: Grad students?

Rotkin: Grad students would be welcome. Usually. I think all were welcome, but not everybody wants to go spend their weekend with a bunch of faculty members at the beach. (laughs) I would go to all these things, because I was coming regularly. I wasn't alone. There were almost always one or two other TAs or lecturers who wanted to be in the board, or active in this community of people, and so they would show up and be active in it. Others, maybe not so

much. We hired people like Gus Newport—I think of him because he was a socialist mayor of Berkeley—to teach a class on electoral politics for community studies. He lived in Berkeley; he wasn't coming to a retreat. He was only teaching one class, one quarter.

Rabkin: He was literally a visiting lecturer.

Rotkin: A visiting lecturer, yeah. We had a number of semi-famous people. We had a class at one point taught by Marshall Ganz --he's at Harvard now; he was an organizer for the UFW. People who would come from outside, sort of famous people, would come and offer us a class.

Evolution of the Community Studies Program

Our program was slowly growing, not really rapidly. I think from the very beginning, community studies was perceived by many of the other faculty and by the administration—*perceived*—as a somewhat flaky program, based on absolutely no factual information. Not based on how serious our students were, what we made them do. Friedland made an early decision that the way to protect ourselves was to have every student in the major do a thesis. A lot of departments had theses in the early years, including math departments, and science, where people wrote a thesis about something. But we required one from *every* major. Which is a lot of—it's "craftwork," as Friedland described it, not industrial production. You had to work individually with students; you didn't

produce a mass class of sixty students or a hundred students. You had to work with each one on their individual work.

Every student had a faculty advisor that worked with them on their senior thesis. The senior thesis was the student's synthesis, in effect. They're collecting what they had done on their field study, with all the classes they had taken, all the things they had studied in community studies and other kinds of classes. It was some original research based on their own experience and their field notes. That was the primary focus. And they had to develop something of a theory. First, the only required courses were *Preparation for Field Study*; one quarter of credit, but six months or two quarters or actual field study, one of which you didn't have to pay for, you could just go on your field study and save the tuition if you want to. If you were on financial aid, you'd want to take them both for credit, because then you could keep your financial aid. But if you weren't getting financial aid, why should you pay for so little service from the university for three courses? You could just do one.

Rabkin: I see. So for the field study [requirement], they would have to do six months of field study, but they only had to enroll in one quarter's worth of coursework.

Rotkin: And most did. Most of them did it over the summer for one of their quarters, and typically didn't take it for credit in the summer. Then when they discovered that summer was cheaper than the other quarters, a lot of students

started [enrolling] in the summer for credit and not in the fall, because it was a cheaper way to do it. Just pure economic reasoning for how to pay for this.

Later—and I don't remember exactly when—the department realized, we can't really justify our number of faculty for the number of students we have. And there was always pressure on us—that we had so few students compared to, say, psychology, in the social sciences division. And back then, they cared about how many students you were teaching. It was a big issue. More than how many majors you had. It was just, literally, were you doing your fair share of the teaching?

Rabkin: Student-faculty ratio in the classes.

Rotkin: Student-faculty ratio, exactly. So we realized we needed to get credit for field studies, and so we changed our requirement, that you had to take both quarters for credit, because we needed the idea of getting each student in our major to take three more courses was getting our [student-faculty] ratio up.

Rabkin: Interesting.

Rotkin: I don't remember what year that was, but it was, after a while, discovering the economics of credit at the university.

Rabkin: So the students ended up having to pay more money to do their field studies?

Rotkin: Yes. And it was not that much more money, back in the day, but it was still more money, for sure.

Rabkin: So I just want to take you back to where this started, which was that you mentioned that there was an unfounded perception, outside of community studies, of a kind of flakiness in the department.

Rotkin: Yes. So our students really were doing intellectual work that was pretty much superior to what most other students were doing, in the following way: They were being forced to actually develop a coherent point of view, write it down, explain how all the stuff that they had been studying in the university fit together (or, not *everything* in the university, because they often could take an elective that was unrelated—but how their *major* work tied together), and often interdisciplinary approaches, which I think made it better work academically than if you were just taking— I don't mean to attack sociology, because I think we always have had a good sociology program at Santa Cruz, but in sociology at Santa Cruz, you'd take one [course] from column A, and one from column B, and one from column C—or three from column whatever—and then when you finish those courses, you had an exit requirement, which would be: get a GRE score, [or] take a senior seminar (not actually write anything in particular)—[or] you could write a thesis, and a fair number of people wrote theses back in the day.

But our department required everybody to write a thesis. We collected our theses and put them in the library, and every external review we had looked at these

things and said, “The vast majority of these are master’s level theses. You wouldn’t get this except in a master’s program. We don’t see undergraduates producing this intellectual level of work.” That saved our butt, over and over again, when people would say, (adopts a disparaging tone) “Experiential education!”

What it really came down to: people did not believe that you could really learn from experiential education. And to this day, and all along, at the same time that the academic world has moved more towards acceptance of at least some experiential education, in its heart, particularly the natural scientists and lots of others at the university, have this sense that, “Six courses of field study are worthless! You don’t learn anything unless you’re in my classroom, listening to my lecture and writing notes. I’m sorry.” They’ll say it in so many words. And so, “It’s illegitimate that this is going on, and you’re giving people credit for crap, and it’s not serious.”

They don’t know anything about this participant observation method, and how much work students put into writing one hundred pages of single-spaced field notes a quarter. On average, I’d say, one hundred during the field study, maybe fifty a quarter, pages of serious writing. And then, in addition, writing each quarter, papers—like a seven-page paper, single-spaced, summarizing, intellectually, what’s going on—take your field notes and pick some themes from it and develop some ideas. And then when you’re all done, this is still not the end, because this class is not—unlike sociology—untied to where you’re going;

this field study is tied into what you're going to do in your senior thesis, your capstone experience. We required that of everybody.

These external review people that came in said, "This is the most amazing" (you can go back and read those) "the most amazing program in the country in the social sciences." I mean, they'd say that: "This is the best program in the social sciences." These are people from Ivy League colleges, and other UC campuses, coming to review our program. That was true of every external review we ever had, almost to the very last one that we did—which itself was still very positive, but had a couple of critical comments. Most of the others couldn't think of anything critical to say. Their criticism would be, "You need to pay that field study coordinator more," or, "You need to get some more faculty in relationship to your undergraduates," or, "You need to find a better way to tie your" (once we got one) "graduate program to the undergraduate program," or something. But it was *never* "Your program's weak."

Rabkin: I have a two-pronged question about this. The first part is, I'm curious about how this feedback from other faculty [and] administrators found its way back to you, how you heard it. And then, whether you had the sense that the external reviews had a big impact and actually changed some people's minds about the department.

Rotkin: External reviews changed deans' minds, who would [otherwise] basically have not given any new lines for hiring senate faculty, FTE. Most other people never saw [the reviews]. Maybe if they served on some ad hoc committee

or something, they would have seen them. But most people never saw those. And remember, in the university, I'd say, the majority of people that teach in, let's say, the economics department don't believe that anything anybody does in *sociology* is worth doing. I'm not exaggerating. I think it's a fair statement: "That's a waste of time. It's not science. It's journalism," or "It's touchy-feely qualitative kind of stuff. What's that worth? That's not science, and the university's about science."

So, what did they think about a program that's not even sociology (which has at least got something like a body of knowledge that people are supposed to learn and respond to)? It's not yet established enough to have a tradition or a body of knowledge. All it has is a methodology—which is coherent and makes a lot of sense, and I think it's a good pedagogy, this whole idea of practice and theory. So they've got contempt, is the best word I can use, for a program they know nothing about, other than that half the credit is experiential, initially.

Meanwhile, the students and the faculty in the program, and some of the pressure from other faculty in the university outside of our program, and from some deans and a little bit from external reviews, suggest our students need a little bit better preparation in theory. And some, maybe, before they go out in the field. So at one point we developed this [policy that] you have to take a theory course before you graduate. Some kind of theory course. Could be from any department on campus, any board on campus, but you had to take something. Over time that became "it's recommended you take it before you go on your field

study.” At least one, so you have something to give you a framework for thinking about what’s out there.

And now we’re back to thinking maybe a little bit about someone like [Charles Sanders Peirce], who has a theory of knowledge that suggests that it’s neither inductive nor deductive, but some weird thing he calls “abduction”—he makes up his own word for it. Which is, you start with some premises, and then you go out and get some information, and then that changes your premises, and then you go back and get some more information. And there’s a constant feedback loop between studying things and the categories and framework that you use to go out there. Which is exactly Sartre’s argument in “Search for a Method,” and what I argued in my dissertation. He argues that that’s true for the natural sciences as well as the social sciences—that you’ve always got some framework or a paradigm that you’re working out of, and sometimes the facts don’t fit and you have to change your paradigm. That’s the whole, Kuhn’s—

Rabkin: *Structure of Scientific Revolutions?*¹⁰

Rotkin—which is a book that was very influential on me, and I think on a lot of people at the time—this was early 70s, probably in ‘70 or ‘71. So: the idea that you should have a little theoretical sophistication before you go out in the field. So then we began eventually requiring the theory course.

¹⁰ Thomas Kuhn’s landmark 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* challenged the then-prevailing view of cumulative scientific progress, positing instead an episodic model of scientific knowledge development in which periods of conceptual continuity are periodically disrupted by paradigm shifts that result from encounters with anomalous phenomena that contradict prevailing assumptions—Editor.

I designed the first theory course for the department, and it was kind of modernized, Gramsci-influenced Marxism. We didn't necessarily read Marx in that at all. You could get that from my Marx class if you wanted. But we read contemporary Marxists on political economy. Our textbook might be something like *The Capital System*, by Weisskopf, Reich, and [Thomas E. Edward], which is a big book that's got a chapter on housing, a chapter on healthcare, a chapter on whatever—in which you'd have a Marxist perspective on work. There was some feminist theory introduced in this, and some theory about race that we would introduce into the class. So there was at least some intellectual or theoretical perspectives to hang your stuff on.

Rabkin: When you designed this course, had you already become a lecturer in the department?

Rotkin: Yes. I was a lecturer by then. I'm going to drop back to how I got that job, and how that happened.

Rabkin: So you had designed this theory course. You were beginning to talk about changes in the department over time.

Rotkin: David Wellman was then hired from the University of Oregon—a sociologist who was brought here. By then we were hiring people just directly in the department. That would have been in the middle eighties, I think.

Rabkin: So Wellman was hired directly and completely into community studies?

Rotkin: Community studies. And by then you were no longer, I think, even required to have a college [affiliation]. I mean, everybody belonged to a college, but there was no meeting in the college to decide whether to [hire you]. Maybe to give you college affiliation, but the college didn't vote on your tenure case. It was totally in the department, through your division, which is the way it is now and in most universities around the world.

Rabkin: Do you remember when it was, by the way, that boards evolved into departments?¹¹

Rotkin: Well, they *became* departments, I think, effectively when you were teaching all courses in the department and the colleges no longer controlled curriculum. And that happened by 1980, late 70s, or something like that. Could have been '78, '79.¹²

¹¹ As of July 1, 1997, boards were renamed departments at UC Santa Cruz.

¹² In a chapter "UC Santa Cruz: The Anomalous Campus" of his autobiography *Strands of a Life: The Science of DNA and the Art of Education*, Berkeley: (University of California Press, 1994), Robert Sinsheimer described his justification and plan for reorganizing the Santa Cruz campus.

"... The budgetary, crisis of 1978–79 and the demoralizing decline in enrollment in the fall of 1978 forced me to propose in that fall the "campus reorganization" that I had conceived the previous spring. Academic standards are the sine qua non of a major university. To maintain and improve the standards of in the recovery of the image of Santa Cruz. To accomplish this, the diversion of resources into second-rate college courses had to be stopped. The influence of the colleges had to be removed from personnel decisions so that the faculty had a clear set of academic goals. The vitiation of the intellectual life of the disciplines caused by the dispersion of faculty among all eight colleges had to be ended by establishing intellectually coherent groups of faculty in each discipline in at most two or three colleges. At the same time, I wished to maintain the colleges as intellectual and cultural centers in the liberal arts tradition, as well as residence facilities. There would be several diverse groups of faculty in each college and a mix of students with varied interests. Each college would be required to provide a freshman "core" course on some broad topic of interest to its faculty—funds would be provided for this purpose. As

Rabkin: The name change happened a little later?

Rotkin: That didn't happen till the middle or late eighties, where they started calling them departments. But they were departments in everything but name earlier, for at least five or six, seven years.

Rabkin: Okay. Thanks.

Rotkin: And that also coincided with a change where Dean [Richard] Moll, who was brought in as the admissions director, decided that there must be a problem with our students getting into graduate programs because they didn't have grades—when in fact, empirical research would demonstrate that our students were getting placed in the most elite grad programs around the world—at a much higher rate than UCLA or Berkeley, for that matter—and that the training they were getting here, in small classes, in critical thinking, was making them very attractive. And the fact that they had—ironically—these narrative evaluations were *very* useful to graduate programs in knowing who they were getting, and whether they wanted them or not. And the fact that the faculty had

available, funds might also be provided for other college-based endeavors that fell outside the scope of any discipline. While I knew that this drastic proposal would provoke diehard resistance from those who would regard it as a betrayal of the Santa Cruz vision, the "dream," I believed that the majority of the faculty would welcome it. The proposal would provide a clear sense of direction and, finally, an end to the college-board wrangle. I hoped it would "jump start" the campus and release the energies of the faculty from its sterile internal strife. I checked that this would meet with the approval of the systemwide administration and then presented the proposal at a senate meeting just prior to my official inauguration in October 1978. I had to have the senate's agreement. The debate continued through much of the academic year. . . In the end, when the academic senate voted in the spring, over 80 percent were in favor."

written narrative evaluations meant that they could write good letters of recommendation, because they knew who the student was two years later, which you wouldn't necessarily know [just] because you gave them a grade, even an A.

Rabkin: I know, having now bridged that historical moment, because I'm now at the point where I have students asking me for letters of recommendation who did not get narrative evaluations from me.

Rotkin: And you actually start to ask them, "Can you remind me a little something?" (laughs) Which is a little awkward.

Rabkin: Fortunately, because I started using online paper-reading systems, I have papers that they wrote. But it is different. Anyway, go on.

Rotkin: So one of the threads through the history of community studies is the development of a little more structure and rigor in the program. Now, initially, the field study coordinator was a staff person who developed field placements, and would meet with students who wanted to know, "Where can I go to work with a union?" "Where can I go to work with a women's group"? Or whatever. That's what they did.

Rabkin: So that coordinator had, probably, increasing numbers of files about possible field placements?

Rotkin: And when both Rudy Hernandez and Al (Alfonso) Espinoza had the job, initially, as staff people, they had a good budget for travel. Most everybody did their placements in California. They drove around the state developing placements, and they had a good budget for driving and for calling people and stuff like that.

Rabkin: So that was part of their job.

Rotkin: Right. And the faculty each had responsibility for teaching three courses. Now, the faculty load officially at Santa Cruz was initially five courses. Then it became, through some slippage that I don't know how happened exactly, four courses. And as a practical reality, the average teaching load for senate faculty, pretty consistently for the last twenty-five years, has been about 2.33 courses per senate faculty member per year. Two-point-three-three. Because they get course relief: when you're junior faculty, for research purposes; when you're board chair, you get one or two course releases; if you serve on a senate committee, you get a course relief—whatever it is.

In community studies, officially, your maximum course load was three courses. And this was even when everybody else was teaching four. But in lieu of your fourth class, senate faculty in community studies were expected to oversee a minimum of twenty-one independent studies—roughly. Some people did eighteen, but some people did thirty. And that is how the department covered sponsoring the students on the full-time field study: senate members in the department were the faculty instructors for the three independent study courses

that each students enrolled in during one of the two quarters of their field study. Later the department required the full-time field study students to officially enroll in three courses during each of their two quarters of full-time field study. When they were only teaching three classroom courses, unlike the four being taught by most UCSC senate faculty, community studies faculty also tended to sponsor more independent studies and part-time field studies in addition to the full-time field study and those were also counted as part of the in-lieu work for the fourth class the senate faculty were not teaching in community studies.

But also for the senior thesis work you did with them—they took a course in senior thesis writing, so that was independent study. Or you offered independent study to a bunch of students in your area. Friedland would offer independent studies in farm labor or something. So aside from your full-time field study, you could do some additional field study. Or a reading study: You want to study the history of the United Farm Workers, or the history of labor unions in America? Bill Friedland would offer you a class, or David Brundage, when he was brought here, would offer you a class. In addition to his lower-division course on civil rights, you could take a course with David Brundage, a historian, on the Irish in America if you wanted to.

There would be occasional workload pushing and shoving. Somebody would go, “Hey, I’m teaching twenty-five independent studies and you only taught fifteen! What the hell’s going on here?” And one of the jobs of the department assistant—it was a secretary who became the department assistant and eventually the department manager—was to send out a memo. Never saying,

“You’re not teaching enough.” It was like, “Here’s how many everybody taught last quarter.” (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: And all of a sudden—I shall not name the names, but somebody who only taught seven, which could happen, would be like, “What the hell are you up to?!” There’d be pressure. Then it would come out in a meeting: “Ah, excuse me, what are we going to do to get [more independent studies taught]?” So the number of students you would attract, that you would sponsor on a field study—Carter Wilson would tend to sponsor the students who were interested in the arts and creative writing and narrative stuff, or who happened to be interested in Mexico or Central America or maybe needed a Spanish placement, because he was bilingual in Spanish. And then eventually people interested in gay studies or GLBT issues, because he was himself gay and out. And similar for Nancy Stoller. (She changed her name. She was hired as Nancy Shaw, and eventually changed back to her maiden name, Nancy Stoller.)

And so people would offer independent studies in their area of expertise. But the number of students you would sponsor on full-time field study, and on senior thesis—and typically you’d sponsor the student for their field study *and* their senior thesis, because it would be the area they’d worked with you on—some faculty would attract fifteen students, and some faculty would attract three, or one. Typically, for many years, it worked out fine; it wasn’t so extreme. Many people worked outside of their narrow interests. That was, I think, a positive

thing for the faculty in the program, that you were kind of dragged into areas that were not necessarily what you had researched in the past, but you're an academic in the social science field, or in the humanities, and you would bring yourself up to speed. You'd recommend a book and read it yourself, with your student. So that worked pretty well for a while.

At some point, [in response to] the theory class, David Wellman brought this critique: "It's too leftist. It's too speciali[zed]. It's too alternative. Our theory needs to take into account a broader range of theories for people." So he designed a course that I worked with him on, in which we read [Oswald] Spengler, and we read, oh my God, Parsons, a sociologist who's *unreadable*.

Rabkin: Talcott Parsons?

Rotkin: Yes. An *unreadable* sociologist. Along with some stuff from Marx, and some other stuff. And maybe, at that point, it became somewhat slanted towards the left, feminist, antiracist perspectives. But we read Milton Friedman. So it passed the straight-face test for a kind of smorgasbord of theory. And the students hated it. It was not a popular class, because they didn't like reading this crap. The theory class was popular when it related to things they cared about, but the idea that you're going to read Spengler on the history of civilizations— Not all these students gave much care for the Roman Empire and what went wrong.

Rabkin: This is interesting, because sometimes students don't like studying some subjects or some theorists because they don't intuitively *agree* with those theorists. And sometimes it's because the reading is arcane, or not really that relevant—

Rotkin: —or specialized, or something. I think most of the students *wanted* some theory. We often had demands from students. Now here's one of the ironies—students coming back from field study: “Why didn't you give me more theory before I went on field study? Why can't the field study last longer? Why can't the preparation class last for two quarters? There's too much stuff to prepare, and I'm not well prepared. I want more theory stuff”—when they're coming back. Students going out: “How come I have to take this damn theory class, and prepare? Whatever you're giving me is too much, and I'm not interested in it.” (Now, we're making generalizations here, because there were always some students who loved the theory classes, who wanted more earlier on, and thought it was important to get it.)

And so then we went to a different model of how we should offer theory classes, and this happened in the late eighties. We decided that each faculty member in the program should offer a gateway class into the major. We still would offer *Community Studies 1* as a generic community studies/social change kind of class, as a service course for everybody else in the university, and not necessarily even for our majors, although many of them took it. (That's also how we recruited people into the major. They discovered this major through it.) But each senate

faculty member in the program, and only the senate members initially, would offer some class that was in their field.

So Carter Wilson offered *The Arts in Social Change*. Bill Friedland offered a class on—it was not what you might think, but I think it was focused, actually, on music and social change. Because he was interested in folk music and its relationship to social change—Nathan Glazer stuff. Mary Beth Pudup offered something on political economy. David Brundage tried first to offer a Northern Ireland kind of thing. It was very hot at the time politically, but not enough students really wanted to study Northern Ireland for their major. So then he offered a labor-and-change course, which became very popular; people were interested in that. David Wellman offered something on race and social change. Nancy Stoller offered something on women and social change. Fairly broad, not in a narrow way, but again, introducing people to some theory in that field, and how to prepare—feminist theory, or anti-racist theory, or political economy or whatever.

Well, in order to do that, and still offer enough courses for the curriculum to be filled, faculty had to teach a fourth class instead of just three. And in a moment of weakness in a department meeting, I said, “Well, I guess I could sponsor these field studies that students are on.”

The Extended University

Now, let me go back a step to my history, to bring you up to speed on this. After [I'd] been a TA for four years through the middle of '74, Friedland and the department decided to offer a new program called the Extended University, which was an experiential education program—it was just an experiment, initially—to twenty Model Cities employees in Fresno, California¹³. All people of color, except one white woman; everybody else was either African American, Latino, or Asian.

These people worked for the Model Cities Program, which was a poverty program. OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] programs established under President Johnson had evolved to Model Cities under Nixon and moved to that direction, eventually, in '74.

So these people were working for the city of Fresno in the Model Cities Program, and economic development and community change in the poor, low-income and people-of-color neighborhoods of West Fresno. Community studies wanted to offer a pilot course to see if it would work with these students. Now, who were these students? They were age between about thirty and sixty. Most had had at least a course of college, but many had dropped out. Many women dropped out because they got pregnant and they had families. The men had to get jobs and couldn't stay in school. So they didn't get a college degree. And we thought this

¹³ Model Cities, an element of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and War on Poverty campaigns that lasted from 1966 to 1974, was an ambitious urban aid program that legislated support for antipoverty programs and experiments in alternative forms of urban government, fostering a generation of new urban leaders most of whom came from racial minorities—Editor.

would be an interesting group, to see if we could get them a UCSC degree in community studies. But to test this out, let's try an Extension class in the summer.

So I was hired to offer an Extension class in Fresno. We very much wanted to document this to see how it went. So this was also the beginnings of social documentation, and the only place in the whole university where anybody was doing anything with media, because we didn't have a communications major at UCSC, or journalism. We had a minor, that Roz Spafford and Conn Hallinan and a couple of other folks, but mainly they, operated. But there was no media stuff. They had originally set up UCSC with a Communications Building. They bought these very expensive studio cameras that couldn't leave the room but could be rolled around like, basically, what NBC had in a sit-com or something. Big, huge, massive cameras, very expensive. And mixers, and things that would be used to make a television program. And never had a program at the school that would actually use that equipment. So it was put in mothballs and never used.

Rabkin: I always wondered about that.

Rotkin: Yeah. They just never had anybody to use it.

Rabkin: And then it was outdated.

Rotkin: And Tom Karwin was hired to be the staff person for all that stuff, and then he became more a technical consultant to the university. Not a consultant,

because he's an employee, but the expert at the university on how the university should deal with its wiring of Internet and stuff. Which was not what he was hired for initially. He was hired to be a kind of staff person in a media program, which never got created. I don't know how that happened.

Rabkin: So this was a pilot program to begin with, this Extended University. And what summer was this?

Rotkin: Yes, just a pilot program. Summer of '74. And they bought Portapaks, which were a form of camera that you could carry on your back. But they were still huge, and they still had to be plugged up to something the size of a very, very big reel-to-reel tape recorder to record the tape of what you were getting. There were no little cassettes. This was all before cassette tapes.

Rabkin: Right! 1974!

Rotkin: Still reel-to-reel tapes for audio as well. There had been eight-tracks, but there were not yet, by that year, I don't think, even cassette players. Maybe there were eight-tracks, which I bought one of. They stopped making eight-tracks about six months after I bought it. (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: Anyway. So they hired some people for this pilot to come down and film my class. We did a lot of fishbowl exercises, which are where one group sits in

the center of a group, and another group sits around and observes what they're talking about. So this class that I taught was basically a preparation-for-field-study type class. I was teaching people in this class research methodology. And we thought, "This will be different than on campus. Because here, we don't need to place these students in a placement. They're *in* a placement. They have a job, working in the community. What we need to do with these people is get them to become more critical about the jobs they do, that they're being paid to do for the city of Fresno."

Rabkin: It's sort of the complementary reverse of community studies—where they're out there in the field, and they're going to do a temporary "field placement" at the university.

Rotkin: Exactly. So I was made an instructor through [UC] Extension. Jim Williams, who worked for Extension, was the guy, I think, who came down with the cameras. He had nothing to do with the university. He worked with Agricultural Extension, but was part of the Extension program, so he's going to come document this thing. So we filmed some of the classes. We had a photographer [who] came and took [photographs of the] classes. I've got these great pictures on the wall of my students, my first class.

I'm still pretty young. And I'm explaining to my students, who are all much older than me, "This is going to be different than your earlier educational experience, because I don't believe in punishing people for disagreeing with me. I think that you need to develop your own analysis of what's going on. My job is

to teach you to be critical about what's going on, but not to agree with *me* about stuff. So, basically, I'm going to be rewarding people for speaking up and sharing your views about things. I want you to attack my ideas—not me personally, and I'm not going to attack you—but my ideas. I want to see discussion, and I want to see radical stuff." And I've got this picture of twenty cynical-looking faces, going, like, "*Sure*, man, I'm going to tell you what *I* think, as opposed to do whatever you tell me to do! 'Cause *I* know how school works." It's an amazing set of pictures of the group. They're looking like—and your tape will not capture this in an oral history, but I'm going to give you the look. It was kind of like—(inhales a long, slow breath before delivering the word in a low growl with eyebrows arched): *Sure*.

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: (laughs) Just disbelieving, cynical, skeptical looks on the face of everybody in the room. Nobody's looking eager.

They've all got a high school degree, and all have had at least a college course or two; nobody has a college degree. And so the issue's going to be, can we create a program in which they will get a B.A. in community studies at UCSC, even though they'll never come to U[CSC]. We thought they might visit, but they'll never be a regular attendee, matriculating on the campus. They're going to study in Fresno, and we're going to take the faculty to them.

Rabkin: I see.

Rotkin: But “let’s try this model and see how it works.” So it was very successful. The students loved the program. All twenty of them wanted to be in the program, and sign up and become students, and were willing to pay tuition—initially through Extension, was the way we funded it, but then eventually we got it approved at the university systemwide level. There was an initiative then to create a couple of Extended University programs.

I think the university was trying to fight for turf in the Central Valley. They wanted to have a campus out there, but they weren’t ready to really take on Fresno State and CSU and other community colleges they would have been battling with, and the political fight over whether UC could have a campus out there. This was putting their feet in the water. I think that’s why *they* were interested.

Rabkin: Hm!

Rotkin: *We* were interested because we thought we could go reach students of color in a much higher percentage than we had on campus, older people and people from low-income communities who were not your typical college-bound folks.

Rabkin: Did those students, by the end of your course, actually come to believe that they were really there to question what the teacher said?

Rotkin: Oh, our students were amazing. The one white woman in the program became a federal judge. One became the assistant city manager of Fresno, from this class. A bunch of them became leaders of various sorts of political groups in the community. And one guy went off to become the finance director of Turlock, or some other city in the Central Valley. I mean, they got an education in this thing.

Being Hired as a Lecturer

After that summer was so successful, they hired two faculty members to run this program: myself and Nancy Shaw (at the time), who became Nancy S[toller]. I'll use Nancy Stoller from now on. She had come from Brandeis, where she had been teaching as an assistant professor, briefly. She had a Ph.D. from—might have been from Brandeis, too, I don't know. We were both hired as assistant professors, verbally: "We've got a job for you. That was a great job, Mike, and now you're going to be an assistant professor."

And then I got a call at home from Dean McHenry, the first chancellor, saying, "You know, Mike" (my first name. We were all first-name on the campus, back in the day. "Mike, um—" I'd met him. I'd actually been in a demonstration and stood on his desk once. It was a strange relationship. (laughs) Ruth Needleman, who was a lit professor, didn't get tenure, and there was a feminist movement on campus, had a big fight in which we won, eventually, to get her tenure. And so we had a sit-in in the chancellor's office that I was active in. We didn't get busted for that one, even. We just went and did it.)

Anyway, the chancellor knew me by name: “Mike, it’s not right for us to hire people who are getting graduate degrees from our own campus. So how would you feel about being a lecturer?” I said, “What’s a lecturer?” He said, “Well, you start off at about the same pay as a first-step assistant professor, a little lower. But they will make a lot more than you over their career. They’ll make maybe almost twice as much as you. You will teach eight classes a year instead of five” (or whatever the number was at the time) “and you have no publishing requirements. We don’t expect you to publish. We want you to be a teacher.”

Took me about twenty seconds to say, “Thank you. I’ll take that job. I’ll be very happy.” Because I was getting very paranoid about a career in academia. I thought the idea of writing stuff for refereed publications in sociology was the last thing I was interested in. I, by then, was doing a lot of popular writing. By then, I had a column in the *People’s Press*—a weekly column, for a year and a half, which was published up in the San Lorenzo Valley, on politics. There was a weekly paper in Santa Cruz the name of which is now escaping me. Started as *Sundaze*, but became a weekly, I think.

Rabkin: *The Express?*

Rotkin: *The Express*—maybe that was it. I had a political column in that every week.

Rabkin: *The Phoenix?*

Rotkin: *The Phoenix!* That was it. I had a weekly column in *The Phoenix*. Thank you. And I had a radio program on KSCO Radio—which was a right-wing radio station, but I had a left-wing radio program, which I was able to run both on [campus radio station] KZSC and KSCO, with a weekly commentary on politics in the community. So I was doing a lot of popular writing. (I wrote my scripts out.)

So I was used to doing popular writing. I liked speaking to an audience, having politically relevant stuff. And the idea that I was going to publish something that *Sociology Today* would think was in their style—not very interested in that. And I was sort of thinking, I was not really planning a career in academia, but I got this job. Well, far out! I can be a lecturer. I can teach, which I love doing. I was required to teach eight classes for the first couple of years I taught. I taught nine classes; I taught extras because I wanted to teach more stuff. That's how I started. As I mentioned, my Marxism class was done through that.

Now, because Nancy and I were hired to teach in this program, and she was an assistant professor and I was a lecturer then—

Rabkin: —because she had not got her graduate degree at UCSC, so it was fine for them to make her a professor—

Rotkin: She had got her graduate degree from somewhere back East, so she was a regular assistant professor. And she had already written a book, called *Forced*

Labor, which was about how women were abused by hospitals in the birth process, and about medicalization of normal human processes like birth, and so forth. Great book. So she was hired as an assistant [professor]. And I would drive to Fresno twice a week to teach classes. And Nancy would drive. We'd sometimes drive together, different days of the week for our students, when they could come [to class].

Then I discovered that you could take a light plane, a Cessna four-seater or two-seater, out of Watsonville. So I started taking pilot's lessons. I never got a license, but I took ground-school stuff, and learned everything I needed. I can land a light plane. Once a week I was flying, for ninety bucks. The pilot would fly down and stay in Fresno for four hours—while I taught a class for three hours and got back on the plane—and fly back. And that would be ninety bucks, including the gas and his money.

Rabkin: Amazing.

Rotkin: Driving down, which took three hours each way, plus the class and everything else, cost sixty bucks, or sixty-five. So because they couldn't afford to fly me down twice, I'd drive one day a week and fly one day a week for my classes in Fresno. And Nancy started doing the same thing.

Then we started thinking about this: Well, you know, you don't want to have a person with a B.A. who's only studied Mike Rotkin and Nancy Stoller. That's not an education. So we started trading out classes with people on campus, at UCSC.

So I taught a class in the sociology of education, and we got somebody from the education department to come and teach an education class. We got somebody to teach a history class, so I taught something in the history department. So I was, two classes a year, [teaching for] some other department: sociology, education, an anthro course. I don't remember what all the different classes were. Then we would get an anthro teacher or a history teacher, or a whatever. And sometimes we had some money, a little bit, so we hired a physicist, because our students all needed a breadth requirement, for the GE in science. So we hired a physicist, as a lecturer, to come and teach Physics for Poets, or whatever—you know, something that had science in it but was not too difficult for people who were math-challenged to take a class.

So I was now teaching, again, on campus and in the community. I also started getting involved—and you asked this question—in teaching classes at the women's prison, Frontera¹⁴—California Institution for Women—which was then the only women's prison in the state. And the warden was very progressive, a woman who wanted to have college classes. This was organized by Karlene Faith and (now) Catherine Cusack who at the time was Catherine Angell who was a histcon student who got interested in prison stuff. They organized it and I got active in it, and then we brought some other people into it.

A bunch of histcon students started coming down and offering a class now and then. And I offered a regular class, one weekend a month. They were all-day class[es], on and off for about four, five hours, six hours, in a two-day period.

¹⁴ See http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Facilities_Locator/CIW-Special_Notes.html

Then I'd come back the next month and teach again. And they were classes like Introduction to Marxism, but called *Community Institutions*. In the prison, they didn't care what you brought into the prison in the way of reading, as long as there were no graphic pictures that were disturbing. So you could have people read Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, but you'd have to tear the cover off the book, because they weren't having pictures of a guy holding a gun, or whatever the hell was on the cover of that book. And you couldn't have a cover on a thing that said MARXISM, in big, bright letters, because everybody would freak out. But no guard ever looked at any of the books we ever brought in, as long as the covers were torn off. So we had fairly radical teaching, from feminist literature, antiracist stuff, Marxist literature, whatever. And we also taught some more traditional kind of college classes. I taught an *Introduction to Sociology* class, on economic analysis. Nancy was teaching classes in feminist theory. Somebody else would come in and teach a music theory class. University-related stuff in fields having nothing to do with social change, necessarily.

Rabkin: Was this all under the aegis of the Extended University, or was this something separate?

Rotkin: No, this had nothing to do with the Extended University, but it had a lot to do with community studies, because that's how we arranged the credit mechanism. So when people would come and teach—say, histcon grad students or something, we would find a way, working through me or through Bill Friedland or through Nancy or somebody else, Carter Wilson, to arrange the credit mechanism by which a person in a prison could get a college course

through Extension. And they were enrolled through what's called concurrent enrollment, in which you pay a fee to Extension to be allowed—if the professor let you—to take a regular class at the university. So we'd go through the curricular approval to have it become a community studies course—go through CEP (the Committee on Educational Policy) and approve a course in *Community Institutions*. It would have a community studies number. And then once that course was on the books, then a person in prison could take this course because it was a regular university course that the professor, or the lecturer—myself, or Bill Friedland, or somebody—would give you credit for.

Ralph Guzman organized a course that I taught (he never showed up) in Soledad Prison, on utopias, in which I had a racially mixed group, in which all the white people thought utopia was as much drugs as you could ever have, and all the African American and Latino people all thought it was about political revolution and giving power to the people. It was a very interesting class, and I managed to create a space where those people could talk to each other. It was much more threatening than the women's prison, because [at Soledad] you were locked down. They would have prison problems, and when that happened, all the gates closed. I found myself in a sally port between two gates, locked in, not able to leave or go into the prison, because the prison's locked down; you're not moving anywhere. So I'd get some guard to pass me a newspaper or something I could read, and I'm sitting there with no chair, no nothin', in a gateway in which they're supposed to close one gate before they open the next. That happened to me five, six times in ten weeks of teaching.

Rabkin: This was at Soledad?

Rotkin: Soledad Prison, in the Salinas Valley.

So that was going on at the same time [as the Extended University project]. And, if students were interested in a class on campus, I might do independent studies for it. But I also—people would tell me, “we’d like a class in electoral politics,” or something. So I would organize a class in electoral politics for community studies. It was totally unalienated labor to me. I loved teaching; I saw it as political work and teaching work. And I wasn’t indoctrinating people; I was trying to get people to look critically at these different kinds of fields. Somebody from outside might think of it as indoctrinating. David Horowitz or somebody would say, “Oh, it’s all left-wing craziness.” But the fact is that these were really solid college classes, getting people to think critically.

I taught some literature classes, because we needed literature classes for our students, because they had a humanities requirement. I taught a class in the black novel; I taught a class in Chicano poetry. Then I taught a class a couple of times on ethnic literature in general, in which we read stuff from various ethnic groups—in which my students were all students of color. Here’s a student in my class who was interned during World War II because he’s Japanese, who had never in his life talked about the experience with anybody in his family or anywhere else, who completely breaks down in tears as we read *Farewell to Manzanar* in this class. He’s never (chokes up)—I’m crying too, at the time, and I

started to do it now, again. For the first time in his life, here's a place to have a discussion about this incredible experience he went through during the war.

Rabkin: Had he been a child during the war?

Rotkin: He was young. He wasn't a young child, but not an adult. His parents were there. I think his father, actually, was part of the 442[nd Infantry Regiment], the Japanese [American] unit that went to Europe. But he was a kid; he didn't go. I think he was a teenager. I got him to begin writing about that. He couldn't write very well in English. A lot of these students had horrible writing skills, and so a lot of my work was teaching these students to write. And I taught classes in writing, actually focused-on-writing classes.

Rabkin: In community studies.

Rotkin: In community studies. Because it's interdisciplinary, you could teach whatever you liked.

That program was very successful. And then after a year of doing that program, we opened up another front (I'll use that term)—

Rabkin: —after a year of doing the Extended University program?

Rotkin: The Extended University.

Rabkin: And did those people go through a four-year college education and graduate?

Rotkin: Sixteen of the twenty got B.A.'s. There's actually one left who still, every year, contacts me and says, "Mike I'm interested again!"—and then never follows through. He gets inspired. He's had a serious drug problem and issues in his life, and he's been to jail a couple of times. But every year I get, now, an email (I used to get a call) saying, "I'm thinking about finishing up, Mike! What do I have to do?" I used to have to keep going back to the department, say[ing] "What's he need?" Or his college, because our department used to be in Merrill College. But then I kept it, so by the time we had computers, it's like, "Uh, just a second..." I looked it up. I'd go, "Okay, you still have to do the second half of your field study, and the analysis class, and you still have never got that science class done," or whatever the hell it was.

Rabkin: This is like, almost thirty-five years after the fact.

Rotkin: Yeah. Way after the fact. As recently as two years ago. I haven't heard from him for about two years now. I hear back from others of them when they become the assistant city manager of a city or something. So that's kind of interesting stuff.

Rabkin: So you opened up a new front.

Rotkin: In San Jose. And this was for people who had been going to the D–Q University, D–Q U, which stands for I know not what, but it’s an Indian word or something.¹⁵ These were people who were trying to do an alternative educational model for Chicanos in Northern California. They all lived in Santa Clara County somewhere, mostly in San Jose. They were also mostly older students, students of color. They had a little more college background than some others. We met at Evergreen College and then at West Valley College, was where we held our cla[sses]. At Fresno, we met, usually in city buildings, or in rented space in city buildings. My summer course was in the UC Extension office in Fresno, which is an Agricultural Extension office, but then we started meeting in a City College of Fresno classroom, or something. But this was just renting a room, basically. Then we started meeting in the Redevelopment Agency area in West Fresno. I used to land the plane right next to where my class was, and walk to my classroom from the airport. There’s a big airport in Fresno where big jets land, and then there’s a west little thing where little planes land. I landed once at the big airport, but it was less terrifying to land at a small airport where only small planes came in.

Rabkin: So you were actually flying and landing this plane. You didn’t have a license yet, so you had to have a pilot with you, but you did the flying.

Rotkin: I had a pilot with me, an instructor with me, all the time. I, [on] several flights, totally flew the plane, with him sometimes talking. It’s been a long time,

¹⁵ From Wikipedia: “The full name of the school is Deganawidah-Quetzalcoatl University. According to Iroquois leaders, use of the spelled-out name of the university can be offensive because the first part of the name should be used only in an appropriate spiritual context. Therefore, it is usually referred to as D–Q University to avoid offense. Iroquois tribal members, in certain circumstances, may use the full name.”

and I'd have to get some refresher, but light planes are not that hard to fly. They're no harder to learn than driving a car, really. I mean, there're things you need to know, more importantly than driving a car, but as far as the actual act, it's as hard as it is when you drive a car at sixteen, if it's a stick shift. Because there's no stick shift on a plane. But you have to learn a chart. You do what the chart tells you: set your flaps; do this, do that, do whatever. And then you have to learn certain procedures. You have to learn how to talk on the radio. That's the hardest thing: how do you talk on that radio, in that "*Niner-niner!*" talk. (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: Anyway. So we'll wrap this up by saying: So you've got this Extended University. I'm teaching in the Extended University and at the prison. So the connection is, I drive to Fresno—because when I flew down, they almost always flew me back, because we couldn't afford to keep a plane there. It was out of United Flights in Watsonville, so the pilot would have to come back home. And I had two pilot instructors. One was a World War II bomber pilot who was Mr. Conservative: "You will keep those wings level, and you will follow the procedures. You will make right-angle turns when you come to the landing." And the other guy was a Vietnam-era pilot whose idea of—this is a Cessna: "I wonder if we could make this thing do a loop!" (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: And his idea of landing— Where Paul, the World War II pilot, would have me line up two-and-a-half miles out from the West Fresno airport and come in slowly, and learn how to land that plane, the other guy's model was, "Hey, there's mortar fire! You drop the plane from 2,000 feet straight down, because you don't want to come in from a distance; they'll know you're coming and they'll kill you." So his idea of landing a plane was, you just drop like a rock from straight on top of the airport. You know, *Pfoom!* And then, as you get down to the right level, level it out.

Rabkin: This is like a flight instructor with PTSD.

Rotkin: (laughs) I loved both of them. It was great, but it was a very different instruction. One guy was always, "You will do it by the book! You will never take a chance. You will not deviate from the flight plan." The other guy was, "File a flight plan?! Why? Nobody cares."

Rabkin: What an education. Wow.

Rotkin: I had some experiences flying, too. I had wings ice up going over the mountains and the plane going down, with a guy from the history department, Jim Borchert, who'd never been in a light plane, freaking out. And *I* was freaking out, and I was flying the plane, because the other guy was on the radio, trying to get the Oakland radar to triangulate where the hell we were. Because you start dropping. Your plane's pointed up at forty-five degrees, and instead of going up, the altimeter shows you're going down, because your wings are so heavy.

Rabkin: It's at an angle, with the nose pointing up.

Rotkin: And you're still going down, with the nose pointing up at full power. And so you're going to hit the mountains that are at about 2,000 feet, and you're at 4,000 and you're starting to drop because your wings are icing up. This is a light plane; there are no de-icers. Modern jets don't do this because they have de-icers on their wings, so they never ice up. But this plane's icin' up like crazy. And "we don't know where you are, exactly, 'cause you're in a light plane." But there's a radar out of Oakland that gets the whole Central Valley. And so you're calling. You say, "Can we come down yet? Are we down at the Central Valley level, or are we still short of the peak of the mountains, and if we go down to 3,000 feet we're gonna hit something?" You can't see. You're in the fog; you see nothing. And you don't even know if you're upside down, if you're not looking at the instruments. Because flying is very strange. Literally, you don't know if the plane's accelerating. You can't tell if you're on your side, or whatever, if you don't look at the instruments. That's why people often crash and make stupid mistakes. They drink a little bit, or they're tired, and they're not paying attention to the instruments. You can feel like you're doing just great when your plane is on its side, flying sideways.

Rabkin: (gasps)

Rotkin: So (laughs)—

Rabkin: So in this particular case, you did okay?

Rotkin: He said, "You're clear. You can come down." And we just dropped really quickly. And as soon as you get to 2,000 feet, the ice melts, and you can land your plane. But up there, it's still free[zing]; it's gathering more ice as you fly through the weather. Why am I off on this tangent? I have no idea. This is fun stuff.

Rabkin: It's too interesting to stop. Anyway, we're going to wrap up with—?

Rotkin: So. We should stop in 1978. I'm a lecturer; I'm teaching more classes than I'm being paid for, and I don't care. I love what I'm doin'. I've got interesting students on campus; I've got students in two different cities—students of color, older students. I'm involved in political work—not yet ever thinking about electoral politics, but I'm doing political work in the community. I've gotten out of this crazy group. I've joined the New American Movement; we're building a New American Movement chapter from about '72 on. Mostly it's on campus. It's student activism through the New American Movement, which changes in '75 to become more community oriented, which leads to a whole different path for me. Most of our members are students, from '72 to '75. But I'm doing political work on campus—antiwar stuff, and anti-apartheid, and I don't remember all the other things we're engaged in. It was early on anti-apartheid work, because I had gotten involved in that at Cornell back in '68.

So I'll end this with [the establishment of] my lecturer position. And I'll just say that in '78, community studies is still being run collectively. The students are involved. The field study coordinators are all staff people. The senate faculty are all sponsoring the full-time field studies. It's a very alternative, radical kind of faculty. Everybody on the program goes to lunches and dinners together, and knows each other, and we go to retreats a couple times a year and figure out what we should do in the way of pedagogy. And we have serious intellectual and political discussions about what the curricular requirements should be, to be the most effective both intellectually and academically, *and* politically. So it's a very interesting kind of political *place* to be active.

And: we have allies in other departments on other campuses, but we're also deeply disrespected by the general senate faculty, because we're involved in experiential education. They know nothing about our senior theses or our external reviews, or that we have a coherent curriculum that requires students to actually learn something and come out of this prepared to do work of a certain kind that's very rare at the undergraduate level. They don't know that. So we're having constant running battles about resources. And as we get different deans, in this period, some of them are very generous and love community studies, and some of them are going, "What is this thing in my division? I'm going to put resources into traditional programs." But none of them are trying to get rid of the program; they're just either generous and supportive, or somewhat undermining and less than forthcoming with resources. But nobody's trying to kill this program or end it. (I shouldn't say *nobody*. There are some people on the campus that think it's not the right way to go.)

One last thing, because I don't want to forget this: When we start the community studies program, the field study—and the program—is organized in the academic side of the campus. Friedland believes that if you put this under “external education,” or the thing that Education Abroad's under, or some other kind of thing that's not academic, you're not going to last. You can be around a while, but you're going to be closed the first time there's a budget crisis. Of course, he was right. So we need to be academic. The field study needs to give credit and be academic. And the field coordinator, who's developing the placements, should not be in the Career Office, where there are job placement-type people, because they're not going to be academic, and the placements are not going to be seen as an academic requirement. They're going to be seen as job training, and narrow kinds of stuff which will never be given any respect by the university. So that's an important part of what made community studies an *academic* program, and gave us—whether people gave it to us or not—academic respectability from the external reviewers: “Hey, this program's coherent! It's got a curriculum that students will come out of; they'll know something when they're done. There's a logic to what courses are being required, and the electives have to be in certain areas. And there are different electives for different students, depending on what their intellectual interests are.”

So we don't have one from Column A and one from Column B. We have: each student will put together a curriculum that makes sense for him or her in terms of what they're interested in studying. There will be some common courses they'll all take together—methodology courses, mainly, and analysis classes. And

even there, the analysis class was always kind of a smorgasbord of, “I’ve got to help these different students, with very different interests, figure out”—and when I taught those classes, which I did a lot, and all the senate faculty taught those classes—“You’ve got to figure out, what [is] the appropriate body of literature for this student.” It may not be sociology. It might be anthropology. It might be literature. It might be something in history or philosophy. It depends on what they’re doing, and what they are interested in. Or it might be politics—more traditional political theory, or social theory.

Rabkin: So you’re helping each individual student develop a coherent course of study.

Rotkin: A coherent course of study, with theory and practice, that ties it all together in some way. It’s a very logical, rational program. And it’s labor intensive, but it’s not alienating, because the faculty feel like we’re in a group with colleagues. You work together; you like what you’re doing; you have control over who your next colleagues are going to be. You like the students and they like you, and there’s not this tension that exists in the university between the students as “other”/faculty as “other.” We’re all in a kind of community. Literally, there’s a community in community studies. Most classes have potlucks in addition to the work they’re doing. But, again, that’s double-edged. A class with a potluck? That makes a wonderful space for people to learn and connect with each other—and it creates an image, for the outsiders, of this foolishness that has nothing to do with academia. (adopts a derisive, sarcastic tone) “Oh, a potluck—yeah, that must be fun,” is the attitude of the people from the outside.

So we're always marginal in some way, in the perception of many of the mainstream people on campus, including the administration. But never enough of them with positions of power to do us in. And our courses were always rigorous courses, so we never had problems getting our courses approved by CEP. Sometimes they'd send it back for [revision], like they always do. But our problem was not the Committee on Educational Policy, the group that approves courses and curriculum, because we thought about our curriculum much more deeply and much more systematically than any other department on campus. I mean, even in physics—physics people are not thinking, "this is what everybody in physics needs to have, and yet it will be separate for each person." They put together a curriculum, and everybody can pick from the choices of what's in that field of physics, which is too big for any one student to cover. We actually had a thing where each student would have a coherent curriculum, and you look at it and see why they took those courses, and why they were recommended.

So it really came down to advising. Every student in community studies had an advisor, who was not "other." It was their field study supervisor, their thesis advisor, probably taught one or two or three of the other classes they took in the major. Then they took classes from other people in other departments or boards. So you ended up with a quite coherent curriculum, which was deeply appreciated by the external reviewers, but invisible to the campus as a whole, I think.

I'll stop there. So we'll come back and we'll talk about '79, how I became a field study coordinator; how the theory requirement became restructured. I started to talk about how the faculty were going to teach these gateway courses, and how that changed. So that's where we'll start, is the shift to the gateway courses, the new field coordinator, and the supervision of field study, and other additional course requirements that we started to develop in the major, beyond one theory course.

Rabkin: Perfect. Thank you, Mike.

Becoming Field Study Coordinator

Rabkin: It's January 15th, 2013. This is Sarah Rabkin, with Mike Rotkin, at my home in Soquel, California, and this is for our third interview. Mike, when we left off last time, you had taken us up to about 1978, and you were aiming us toward talking about how you came to be hired into a faculty field coordinator position for community studies. So why don't we pick up there?

Rotkin: Okay. I'm going to begin by talking about the end of the Extended University. That program had been set up, as I said earlier, I think—I don't know this for a fact, but it's appeared to me to be because the [University of California] was having a territorial battle with CSU [California State University] and community colleges over whether they could get into the Central Valley. And this was, I think, a strategy for them to get a UC campus (this was before [UC] Merced was created) in Fresno. That didn't happen, obviously. More

importantly, the whole idea of reaching out to a different kind of constituency—to older students, people who had been to college when they were younger but maybe [were now] already in the work world.

The Extended University students ranged in age from about thirty to seventy, forty to sixty. After four years in the program—it was a very successful program, in the sense of getting people their B.A.s. Almost everybody in the program, I think with now one or maybe two exceptions, in Fresno, from the initial twenty. We added one person to that group, but a pretty stable group—they all graduated from the program, and I think there's two people still that never got a degree, one of whom contacts me about every other year—

Rabkin: —you mentioned him, yes.

Rotkin: (laughs)—to see if he might be interested in it again. He's had troubles in his life, with drugs and jail sentences, I think, over minor drug offenses.

Rabkin: Can I interrupt just for a second, to clarify—was there just one cohort, one group of these students?

Rotkin: There was one cohort in Fresno, the first group that started—I think we started with nineteen and we ended up with twenty. And in San Jose, we had people enter the program for about two years, so there were two cohorts, I believe, in that program. Because people were working part-time—they almost all had jobs—and they were going to school part time, it took them two or three

years to finish up. Some of the ones from Fresno took the full four years to finish, and some even maybe another additional year.

In any case, the university decided, based on a comment made in a report by Jerry Brown—who was then governor—that the appropriate mission for the University of California, in terms of teaching, was primarily the education of the cream of the crop, or the “best and brightest,” I think was the phrase he used, of seventeen-year-olds and eighteen-year-olds coming out of high schools in California. And the idea that we would be teaching, or invite as our students, people who were thirty to sixty years old, people of color, people with mixed track records in the past academically, was not really appropriate for a UC program. So they ended the Extended University on that basis. Very little notice. It just was ended. The people in the program had a right to finish up, but no new students were admitted after 1978.

So both Nancy Stoller and I returned to UCSC. She returned as an assistant professor, which she was, in community studies, and I came back to campus and was teaching classes—primarily in community studies, but I think I had one or two classes each quarter in other departments in the social science division at UCSC.

Rabkin: While you were working for the Extended University, were you *not* doing any on-campus teaching?

Rotkin: No, while I was working for the Extended University, as I explained earlier, we sometimes traded out, in order to get someone to come teach a class. So that they wouldn't have only classes with Nancy and myself, we would trade with the economics department and Jack Michelson came and taught a class in San Jose, for example.

Rabkin: In exchange for which—

Rotkin: In exchange for me teaching a class in the economics of education, I think it was called. Which actually, I think, was what he was teaching. But mine was an economics course for students at UCSC, and his was a course for people over the hill. I don't really remember what that course was—something for the economics department. It was something of a political economy class.

Rabkin: I see.

Rotkin: I taught a sociology of education class. I taught a class in the education department focusing on inner-city schools and their problems, or something like that.

In any case, my teaching load shifted to campus. About that time, the prison system kicked out the college courses that we were doing at the California Institution for Women.

Rabkin: Why was that?

Rotkin: I don't remember the particular incident that sparked that program ending in the prison, but it was about the time that the California prison system was tightening up in all kinds of ways. Initiatives on crime. It wasn't yet "Three Strikes" time, but they were beginning to move in the direction of less amenities for prisoners, and there was a kind of law-and-order, anti-crime movement going on in California that I think was beginning to shut down those kinds of innovative programs in the prison system. I don't think there were any college classes offered at Soledad after that ever again, either—at least not that I'm aware of.

So on campus, I'm back all the time, and no longer driving or flying to Fresno, or going down to San Bernardino County to the women's prison. I was much more focused on stuff in Santa Cruz in '78. But I also began realizing that there might not be a lot of job security in a lectureship position—which, to be full time, required (at least in community studies) six courses, plus what would be considered two equivalencies (which is basically being given credit for doing independent studies and working with students, some advising, that kind of thing).

The field studies coordinator at the time left the position, and they were interviewing people for a new field coordinator, and I decided to apply for that job—and in the interview, made them an offer that they couldn't refuse, basically. I don't mean a kind of Mafia threat (laughs), but it was just too good an offer to turn down, which is: I believe I could do the field study job—which was

a staff-type job, finding interesting internships for students, and at the time, particularly in California—and I offered to help them find placements around the world, which I had already been doing informally as just a lecturer. And that I would do that work, and I could do it basically half time, and then I would also work also half time as a lecturer, teaching three courses a year for the department. So a split appointment, basically: half academic and half staff.

Based on that interview, they decided to create a new, full-time academic coordinator position, in Unit 18, which is the same unit as lecturers are organized under in the university labor relations system.

Rabkin: In 1979, the [Unit 18/lecturers'] union contract was not yet in place, though.

Rotkin: No, but we had “units.” The university still had defined various kinds of units for [classifying groups of employees]. Because I think they were looking at, eventually there might be representation someday. At least [they had to establish] who in Labor Relations was responsible for handling those units. I don't know how the unit designations were created.

Rabkin: I see. So that was a pre-union University administrative designation.

Rotkin: Right, and it had nothing to do with the union at that point.

So right there in the interview, they said, “That sounds great. We’ll see if we can make that happen.” And as it turned out, they basically made me a field study coordinator, which was a title that existed in this Unit 18, and there were six of them around the state. Or I was the sixth one hired, I guess. So they decided they could use that title for my position. And they would give me that title and they would give me a “Lecturer Zero Time” title that would allow me to have the academic credential necessary to teach in the classroom, which the field study coordinator title doesn’t necessarily do, even though it’s in that academic unit. But it was a full-time academic appointment, on the academic side of UC, which is divided into academic and staff sides, in terms of how employees are handled.

Rabkin: Of those six field-study coordinators around the UC system, were any at that time at UC Santa Cruz?

Rotkin: Yes. Jenny Anderson in the environmental studies department had one of those academic appointments. The other coordinators at UCSC were staff appointments. They were usually three-quarter time or half time. They were finding placements for students, and had no academic oversight in the sense of looking at students’ academic work. They were helping them find placements and dealing with the logistics of field placements. And, again, the job I sort of created for myself was a combination of that logistical work with the academic work, able to sponsor courses and things like that.

Rabkin: Did you have any communication with Jenny Anderson at that time?

Rotkin: I knew Jenny Anderson pretty well because we were trying to coordinate some internship possibilities. At that time, I don't think I knew any of the other field coordinators on campus. There was one in psychology and one in—I'm trying to remember the other department that had one—economics had a part-time field study coordinator as well. It was a staff position. I'm not of sure the years those programs were started.

Rabkin: Was your appointment at all similar to the one that environmental studies had created for Jenny, or do you know?

Rotkin: I know Jenny Anderson mainly focused on developing placements for students, and was very active in the—which I got active in as well, once I took that job—the National Society for Experiential Education, which had a longer title that got shortened to that one. That was a national organization that basically tried to hold conferences, and link information, and produce publications to help people create experiential education opportunities, both in high schools and in colleges and universities, and had several hundreds of members, and there were big conferences that we went to. They were fairly well funded. And the university paid to send the field coordinators. Not all of us every year, but maybe half of us every year, to one of these internship conferences—that took place, one in Florida; one in Wisconsin I think; several in California. I don't remember the other places we met, but all over the country. Chicago, I think, for another one as well.

Rabkin: How about the Merrill Field Program? Was that operating at the time?

Rotkin: The Merrill Field Program was created right at the beginning of Merrill College, and that was in place when I first arrived, I think, at UCSC in '69 or '70. Certainly by '70 or '71. I knew Nick Royal, who was the coordinator of that program, and also Jody Bruce, who was a community studies graduate who was hired as the assistant in that program, and worked there for almost a decade, I think, before she eventually became an elementary school teacher in Boulder Creek or somewhere in Santa Cruz County. Nick's position was also a staff position, not an academic position. He wasn't able to offer credit. So their job was to coordinate or facilitate students connecting with community organizations for internships, and with a faculty member who would arrange the credit and supervise the academic aspect of the work. The Merrill Field Program was placing most of its students internationally—small numbers of them, but they would go to places like Senegal to learn African drumming. I remember I had a student who worked on that, and then later did that for his community studies major as well, when he got there. But those kinds of placements. Another student in that program went to Peru, where he learned to play the harp. He came back, and eventually became a professional harp player, playing a special kind of Andean harp—I don't remember what its exact name is.

Rabkin: So Merrill's program was not connected with an academic major.

Rotkin: No. And, again, it was founded when the colleges really were the academic center of things, and the idea was that most if not all Merrill students would want to do some kind of practical experiential education in the Third

World, or related to the Third World. And as it was being defined back in the seventies, the Third World included places outside the United States, in the undeveloped world, particularly in the [global] South as we now call it—but also, I think, in inner cities in the United States, in places where there were large numbers of people of color—Latinos or African Americans, primarily. Some Asians, at that time. Native Americans as well, I guess.

Curriculum and Pedagogy in Community Studies: Developing Critical Thinkers, Participant Observers, and Agents of Social Change

So. Once I had this new job as the field coordinator, which started pretty soon thereafter, the senate faculty in the program were still sponsoring the students on field study, so my job was to help them find these internships. Then I taught a Marxism class. [At that point] I was teaching it every year. Earlier I had been doing it almost every quarter, when I was doing it on independent study credit, but now I was going to actually offer it as a formal course. And it was offered usually once a year, sometimes twice a year.

But I also taught all the other courses in the community studies major. With Jim Mulherin, we taught a version of the *Preparation for Field Study* class, which was like a three-ring circus. In a ten-unit course that students took, they got five units for a part-time field study to prepare for the full-time field study. It was to be in a related area, somewhere in the local community, so they could still come to school at Santa Cruz and take the course, but it would help give them practical experience to get ready for their full-time field study. And also it was kind of the

laboratory—and this was Friedland’s idea—the laboratory where students would learn about the issues they needed to know for their full-time field study. So they’d practice taking field notes on this part-time placement. They would also confront the ethical dilemmas of being a student working in the community; the entry issues of how do you work with people; the question of how challenging to be about the placement and the organization and its strategy and so forth, whether they should simply accept what the organization was up to or be more critical, and in a short period of time, begin to suggest new directions for the organization.

In the field study in community studies, we always encouraged our students not just to be passive folks filling up an existing slot in the organization as an intern, but to actually look at the overall picture and figure out what would make this organization more effective in its work, and to try and contribute to that process—but at the same time to not do that in a way that was arrogant, or that assumed that they knew the answer to every problem these people had been wrestling with while they were in school reading about it in a book somewhere.

Rabkin: Did the ten units of preparatory fieldwork and classroom work for this course take place concurrently, within the same quarter?

Rotkin: Yes. And we offered this preparation class twice a year. We had two cohorts every year going through the major. So one, I believe, would be offered (the preparation class) in the spring; students would then do a full-time field study in the summer and fall, and take the analysis class when they’d come back

to campus in the winter quarter. And another cycle we'd go through where they'd take the preparation class, I believe, in the winter quarter, do their field study in the spring and summer, and then take their analysis class in the fall when they came back. This allowed students to take one of their two quarters over the summertime, when the fees were cheaper. And then sometimes, as I said before, they wouldn't even take the other quarter for credit; they simply had to be on that internship—in this case it would either be in their spring or their fall quarter, half of their internship.

I found the field study work fascinating. As I think I've said elsewhere, it was kind of, for me, a virtual field study of its own. I would read these students' field notes—and they would produce massive amounts of notes. In a typical full-time field study, the students' notes would range from about fifty to one hundred and fifty pages over the six months—which is a lot, from each student. When I started as a field coordinator, we had roughly twenty-five students going on each of these cohorts. So there would be twenty-five students launching a field study in the beginning of spring quarter, and another twenty-five would launch at the beginning of summer. And they'd continue for six months, for each of them.

Rabkin: Now, they had faculty advisers—?

Rotkin: Yes. Their faculty adviser was, in theory, responsible for supervising their work. And they submitted their field notes to their faculty members initially. But my job was to collect the field notes and to forward them to the faculty member. Looking back on it, I'm not sure exactly why that was a rational

way of handling this—although you have to remember, this was pre-computer days, and our students tended to mail their notes in, or fax their notes in, which was a pretty elaborate process. And, in some cases, we were just beginning to get email capacity. I think that didn't start at the university officially until the [late 1980s]. So in the first couple years of doing this program, I was basically handling a lot of materials that students were shipping to me. The logistical problems of just getting the notes from the students in a timely fashion to the faculty member, and making sure that the right faculty member got the right notes (because students sometimes would change their advisor during the process) took quite a bit of time, and it was a logistical issue to keep track of it all and make sure it was happening.

Everybody knew that I would be reading these notes, but I had no obligation to necessarily comment on them. Except I sort of couldn't help myself—when I'd read these notes, and I'd see political issues they were confronting, and they seemed not to know what to do—to gratuitously share my advice (laughs) with them about ways they might handle a conflict with their supervisor or something. But most of the academic feedback was supposed to be coming from their faculty advisers. Most faculty advisers had about ten students a quarter on a field study. So they had enough time to read their ten students' notes. Some faculty members were more careful and attentive to the notes and wrote longer comments; others said, "Doing fine job," and sort of moved on. But I think most faculty members tried to engage the students on important issues that they saw in the field notes and the papers.

I never read the papers from students at that point. Every student had to write a paper at the end of each quarter, the first of which was typically an organizational analysis: What group are you working for? Who are they, what kind of people are they working with; who are they trying to organize or educate or target for one reason or another? What are you trying to accomplish? What's the goal of this organization? And then, whether people felt that the organizational mission clearly reflected what they saw in practice as the organization's work. Their second paper, at the end of the second quarter, would be a broader paper about whether the organization was being successful in terms of social change. And so, it often would take some of the work from the first-quarter paper and integrate it into the second, but now asking a much more difficult and bigger question: Is this group effective? And, more importantly, how would you make them more effective if you think they're not? Or, if they really are effective, why are they effective, and what can be learned from this group that you could take— If you were going to form a similar group in another community, what was making this group so effective in the work that they were doing to educate teenagers or to help pregnant teenage moms, or to work with autistic school kids? Or, if the program was organizing farm workers, or whatever it was.

The goal was to have our students come out of this field study experience with at least the beginnings of some serious questions about what leads to effective social change work—which they then would consolidate in the class when they came back to campus, the analysis class. And eventually, in their senior thesis, they would pull together these ideas from the papers from the field study, and

the field notes, and the courses they'd been taking—including courses they might take from our department or other departments that would give them background to understand what possibilities existed in the area where they were working.

So we really developed students who had a kind of coherent change theory, which most students don't leave undergraduate life with. I think we were fairly effective at that. I don't think every student necessarily had a totally polished final version of it, but I think they could certainly answer the question, "What do you think social change is? What's the best way to handle problems in the area that you're working in, whether that's trying to make schools take the arts more seriously, or trying to make sure that (again, there's millions of examples of these kinds of things) domestic violence be ended, or at least begin to address that issue seriously?" So the student would leave having to have, in order to graduate from our program, a theory of what caused domestic violence, some basic idea of where to go find the appropriate statistics. Their final papers would usually include a mix of their personal experience, statistical analysis of how bad the problem was, how it differed in various class and ethnic groups, the forms that it took, and what kind of general education might address this issue in society as a whole—but also, what kind of resources did the survivors of domestic violence need from organizations, and how that might work.

Our students were, I think, fairly well poised to become directors of programs running in their area of work—if not immediately, at least as they left school to become an outreach coordinator in one of those programs. We had a very high

success rate in placing our students in nonprofit organizations related to what they had studied as an undergraduate—including, oftentimes, the very organization they had done their field study with, who were desperate to hire them, having known who they were and seen their work for six months. I don't know what the percentages are now, although we have some stats on that that we could probably get, on how many of our students got placements with their field study organization as an employee after they left the university and got their degree.

Rabkin: I'd like to go back to those papers that students wrote at the end of their field study quarters, for a moment. I'm curious about whether they were explicitly required, or asked, to incorporate some of their theoretical education into those papers, or if it was primarily experientially based.

Rotkin: The papers they wrote for the field study were primarily experientially based. We did not require [students] to footnote them. The assumption was that the source of most of the information was their field notes, and they didn't need to tell us what page of their field notes it came from. Some students had already taken preparation classes, or theory classes, or substantive courses in the area—like, for example, they might take a feminist studies course (I think it would have been a “women's studies” course in those years) about domestic violence. And so they would have sources, and they would then talk about their experience against some book they had read in the earlier class. And we always said if you're using somebody else's ideas or work, of course you should footnote it and give the person whose work you're using credit for it. So some final papers were

footnoted into literature, but most were not. Most were really, “I had these experiences... .”

In teaching people to write field notes, I was always focused on two areas. We’d try to teach this in the preparation class, and it’s why we would give them feedback on their notes, and the faculty members would give them feedback on the notes when faculty were reading them. (I’m somewhat conflating [this with the time] when I began to do the reading myself, which I’ll come to in a moment here.) They would be reading these notes, and you’d want the students to have direct observations. Often students would quickly jump to conclusions: “This organization is, despite their best intentions, very racist.” And you’d say, “Well, but what observations did you have that led you to that conclusion? It’s not very useful or interesting if it’s just abstract. What did you see? What did somebody say? What are people doing that leads you to this conclusion about the racist nature of the organization?” Or any other matter: that somebody was “ineffective in their work.” “Well, what did you *see* that was ineffective? Let’s get that actual, direct, what-did-you-see-or-hear observations in there.” And that it’s important that they protect the anonymity of the people they’re talking about, so that we taught our students how to code for the names, particularly if they were young people who were minors, to not reveal the names of kids in the classroom where they were working, or people who were in the situation.

But then, once they got those observations down, we also wanted to see field notes that had critical reflections: What do these observations mean to you? You saw this behavior happening. You saw two kids on a playground interacting

with each other, and you thought that it was sexist, what was happening. So we want to know what they did, and what is it you see as sexism. But then, also give us your reflection and your conclusion as well.

So it's this difficulty of trying to get the two things going—both direct observations and reflections—and not to conflate the two, which is the biggest problem students have with field notes and ethnographic work in general. The tendency is to go in there, you already have your mind made up, and you see what you were looking for whether it's there or not. So you really need to teach people to step away from their own preconceptions and see what's really going on. But you don't want to stop them from putting things back together and being analytical, and understanding what those things mean once they see them.

We got our students to actually, often, code, and some students followed the process of having separate places in their field notes to record observations from where they recorded their reflections or conclusions. Other students would mix those together, but if they did a good job, you could see they were both writing down very direct observations, irrespective of what they thought it all meant, and then also trying to come to their conclusions about them.

Rabkin: That's an education in itself, to learn how to *recognize* your own interpretive reactions and distinguish them from "pure observation."

Rotkin: What you just described is the most fundamental aspect of participant observation: how do you get somebody to participate with an organization, be an

active member, do positive things for the group's goals, but at the same time be able to step back and see how the organization is actually doing it, and are they being effective at it. Because the tendency is, I think—when you do work with social change groups and you support their general goals—to be supportive, to work hard, and at the end of the day to feel like you did some good work, but not know what exactly it is you did, or what happened, or what went on. We want students to be critical about that process, and actually change it, rather than just doing what they're told or following their instincts, and not understanding what the actual things they did were that were effective and what was not effective, and what they should do differently.

It's not easy to teach people, ever, to be critical of what they're up to and what they're doing, and it's particularly difficult if they're emotionally engaged in the work and they enjoy it and think it's important work—to still be able to step back and say, "Is it effective? Could I make it more effective?" Because, ultimately, there's no work that anybody's doing that couldn't be made somewhat more effective if they stepped back and look at it and asked themselves some hard questions about it. Or if somebody else starts to help them ask hard questions about it, which is the job of faculty, I think, in a program.

Rabkin: I wonder if the faculty gave students access to former students' papers and theses, and/or if students were encouraged to read each other's work, in order to get a better sense of the ways this could be done.

Rotkin: The whole *Preparation for Field Study* class is really about letting students understand this enterprise they were entering into, which is nothing like they'd ever done before, for most of them. And so we certainly gave students access to other students' theses in their area—because, a lot of times, before you're writing your field notes, you want to know, "Well, what am I going to *use* these for? What do you do with these notes when you're done?"

Rabkin: Exactly.

Rotkin: So, in a typical preparation class, students might get an example of field notes that Carter Wilson (one of our faculty members) took that eventually became the book *Crazy February*, this novel that he wrote. You could see his notes about some incident that he actually experienced while in the Yucatan, and then you'd see the book he wrote about that experience—not nonfiction, but an actual novel he produced. You could see how a creative writer might use notes from an experience to create a creative piece of work. Or we would ask our other faculty members in the program, "Can you share field notes with us, and then the final paper that you wrote, or the book that you published, or something that came out of those notes?" So, typically, students would get two or three examples of field notes becoming something else. And we'd say, "Of course, you're going to do something different with your notes, but you'll have to also produce a final thesis using these notes."

We gave students the theses that other students [wrote]. We did not share anybody's field notes with each other from among our students, but they could

certainly see the theses that were produced, and see what a senior thesis was, that they were going to be asked to eventually produce as the final product of their undergraduate experience. Friedland used to always emphasize that this final thesis was, in fact, a *tangible product*, he would describe it as—something you could hold in your hand. It might be (eventually, as we got video stuff) a video, or a slide show, or something, but it had to be something physical: “Here’s my slides. Here’s my written paper.”

We required every student, no matter what they did for their final project, to also do some writing. So if they produced, for example, a slide show of Chicano art in Los Angeles and San Francisco ([which] a student that I supervised later did), he would also be expected to write a paper about, well, what’s this slide show for? Who would you expect to show it to? How do you think this slide show will be helpful to the social change process? So all of our students left the major doing some serious academic writing, but also encouraged to produce more innovative, interesting projects, maybe, than just a typical “what I did with my summer vacation”-type senior thesis.

Rabkin: Did you provide formalized opportunities for them to work with their peers in the process of producing their theses?

Rotkin: Community studies also was a program that very much focused on peer learning, and people working with each other. So I would say in the preparation class, typically—almost without exception, no matter who taught it—the class would (in addition to the general meetings of the course, with, again, twenty-five

students are already a pretty small class) break into subgroups of three or four students who might be interested in feminist issues of one kind or another; another group might be working with youth. Another group might be working more on going internationally, and they had that in common, and therefore preparation for going to another country was important for their work. Each quarter, it was not that there were set categories; the job of the teacher was to figure out what are the rational groups.

I played a role in that as a field coordinator, because in order to get into the preparation class, students were already supposed to begin thinking about where they were going to go for their full-time field study. And so I would have some idea about the issues the students were working on on their field study, and [I] created lists, or even suggestions, for the faculty in the preparation class if I wasn't teaching it: who would be doing what. Maybe, "Here's five groups that would make sense out of your class of twenty-five students"—or six groups. The faculty would take my advice or not, but it usually was helpful to them, I think, to know who were these students and what were their areas of interest. It also allowed them to prepare materials for the class, to help prepare them for field studies in these areas that the students were going into.

Teaching in the community studies major always required the ability to be a generalist. Even if your field was [for example] feminist studies. Take Nancy Stoller's stuff: [she was] working primarily on medical sociology and feminist issues, but she might have students in the preparation class who could be

studying any possible social change issue, and she'd have to be prepared to help get them ready for field study.

So some of the teaching was generic or general, and other stuff would be actually getting students to develop a bibliography of appropriate readings in their area. Even if they didn't read them all, it was supposed to be an annotated bibliography of what they had read and what they still had not yet read, to know: what are the kinds of things that are written about in this field? So, either on their field study or when they came back, or maybe before they left, they'd begin getting some theoretical background for that area, to know what were the cutting-edge materials. Partly that job would be: we took every 102 class, or preparation class (102 was the course number for that class in community studies, all through the whole period)—students would take a visit to the library and be expected to begin the process. They'd meet with a librarian [who] would tell them what's available. The librarian would be given a list of the five or six areas these students were interested in, and present them with some at least beginning leads for how to develop a bibliography of interest in their area.

So students went off on field study with an idea of—before they even entered the preparation class—what kind of issues they might be dealing with on their field study. They might change their mind, but at least most of them had picked an area. They would, in that course, have developed some readings appropriate to those issues, would get general ability to learn how to take field notes, would be working at a part-time field study to get some practical experience at least somewhat related to what they'd be doing full time. And beginning to take field

notes, and learn how field notes work, and getting feedback on their field notes from their faculty advisers in 102. Then eventually when they went on the field study, they'd get that feedback more directly from the person they were going to work with on a senior thesis, that was looking at their field-study work.

Rabkin: Was that usually the same person as they worked with in preparation?

Rotkin: Usually the prep teacher would be one or two—usually co-taught. *Preparation for Field Study* had two faculty members.

Rabkin: I see. So it was whoever was teaching that preparatory course they took.

Rotkin: There was a tendency for students to choose as their adviser the people teaching 102. [Teaching] 102 was a sort of guaranteed way to get more students to supervise on field study, because the students knew you and had a direct connection. But it wasn't 100 percent. Certainly well over half the students would be working with some other teacher than the people teaching the preparation class.

Rabkin: Did the preparation class also provide introductions to who in the faculty specialized in what areas?

Rotkin: Usually in the *Introduction to Community Studies*, which most community studies students took before the preparation class, they would be introduced to every faculty member in the department, who would come and give a brief

presentation on their research. Usually we tried to do that, and also in the preparation class it took the form of having a faculty member come in and share an example of some of their field notes and some of their published work—pick something that they were working on and talk about it to the students. So that would typically be five or six different faculty members, maybe seven faculty members who visited the introductory course during a ten-week quarter. And you would do some other stuff in the introductory course. And then, when students got to the preparation class, they would already have some idea of who the faculty were and would have, in theory at least, picked a faculty adviser.

In order to get into the preparation class, you had to be a major in community studies. That didn't happen initially, but eventually we started to realize we were going to have lots of students and fill the class up, and maybe they wouldn't end up being in the major, and that was a waste of a pretty scarce resource. So we required students to get into the major. And the way you did that, from about the middle eighties on, was to write an essay about why you wanted to be a community studies major, a proposal for who should be your faculty adviser given what their interests were (and you could get lists of what the faculty interests were; we passed those out). You would suggest who your adviser was going to be, and an example of the kind of field study that might interest you, although it might not be the one you actually chose eventually. Do you like more doing policy-level work, or would you rather do hands-on work in a neighborhood, or with a think tank in Washington, DC, or would you rather go abroad or stay in this country?

So we'd ask students in that essay to explain what their interests were, why they decided they were interested in social change, what they thought social change was. This was supposed to be a one-to-three-page essay on why they should be a community studies major. That meant they entered the preparation class with a person that was appropriate to be their faculty adviser. Once they got admitted to the major, they were assigned an adviser, and it was usually the person they had said they wanted to work with; if not, we would figure out a reason that somebody else was better for that student that they didn't understand.

Rabkin:—based on what they had said in their application.

Rotkin: Right.

[As for] the limits on what people could do for field study: there weren't many limits, but there were some. You had to work for a legal organization: you couldn't work for the Mafia, for example. You could not be in a regular public-school classroom, like a third-grade classroom, because we didn't want to have a fight over turf with the education department. They were preparing students for that kind of work. But you could work in an alternative school. Or you could do something unique and different in a school, let's say in the inner city, that was not necessarily classroom-aide work, but something else for that school: [for example,] a special program that was preparing kids for college, or working with pregnant teenage mothers. Santa Cruz had TAM—Teen-aged Mothers something

program.¹⁶ You could do that kind of work, but you shouldn't just be in a regular classroom helping the third-grade teacher out with the students in the classroom.

You also could never do a placement on a college campus. Again, over all the years we existed, for forty years, we might have had two or three exceptions to that, where a project was sponsored by a campus organization but really was in the community. We wanted to get our students away from hanging out with their peers on campus and going to the library, and get them actually out into the real world—not that the university is not part of the real world, but away from the academic environment and working someplace else. I can think of an example that was an exception. Duke University was running an agricultural type program with migrant workers and Native Americans in North Carolina somewhere, and even though it was a Duke University program, the students working in it were stuck on a Cherokee reservation in North Carolina, and were not really going to the Duke campus, ever. So that was fine with us.

Those were really the limits of a placement. We also wanted to make sure that the students were not involved in something that was completely introspective, and about changes in their own head and consciousness rather than working with people of some kind. So when students wanted to go to an ashram in India and—if you'll forgive me, I'll use a Friedland-type phrase—"contemplate their navel" (laughs), that was not an appropriate placement. We weren't saying they

¹⁶ The Teenage Mothers Writing Project was a cooperative effort between UC Santa Cruz Feminist Studies Research FRA and Watsonville High School from 1986-1990. The focus was on literacy education for teenage high school students. The project was directed by Professor Helene Moglen of UC Santa Cruz.

couldn't work with a religious group. They could work with a Catholic workers' group that was out in the community providing support for low-income people. Or you could go to India and work with a group that was sponsored by a religious or spiritual organization. But they had to be doing *outreach* work in the community, and working with people on a project of some kind that affected life in a village or something, rather than simply sitting with other believers, talking about your common beliefs.

Rabkin: So something like a hospice program run by the San Francisco Zen Center, or by the Tibetan Buddhist Land of Medicine Buddha—that would work?

Rotkin: That would be perfectly fine. And we had students [who], for example, went to India to work with Tibetan groups. But they weren't focused on Tibetan Buddhism, although that might be a big piece of what they were interested in studying. Their work was really dealing with the refugees who were coming from Tibet into Dharamsala], India. It had to be some sort of community work, or at least outreach work with people.

"Community" was defined very loosely in the program, so the community might be a community of interest rather than a geographical community. So people could work with a think tank, for example—which is not really a community institution. An example of that would be the Institute for Policy Studies, in Washington, D.C. It's not a community group; it's a research group for congressional members, to help them develop policy with a left-wing

perspective. And that might be an interesting placement for a student, even though they were not necessarily focused on any neighborhood in Washington D.C., in that placement; their work really was about looking at national or international issues through that organization.

So “community” was fairly loosely defined, but we really wanted to avoid it becoming a kind of internal investigation of consciousness and thoughts, and not have interaction with at least some group of people that you might have some interest in.

That was a struggle for us, because we often had students who came to us who would have liked to do a field study somewhere with a religious group. They thought of that as social change: “I’m going to make the world a better place, because I’m going to get everybody closer to Jesus,” or “I’m going to make sure that everybody discovers their inner light,” or something. And, again, we wouldn’t tell people you couldn’t *do* a religious placement, but this has to be an outreach project of *some* kind into a broader community.

I remember writing many guidelines to pass out to students, as a way of trying to distinguish between the students who had appropriate-type religious placements from ones who really were looking at a religious study group—[for example], studying the Bible. A Bible study group would not be an appropriate placement by itself. Now, you might belong to an organization that spent some time in Bible study, or, for that matter, Marxist text study—they’re not that different on some

level—but ultimately, the group had to be doing some work in the community, taking those ideas or those concepts to try them out in practice in some way.

Rabkin: Did proselytizing count as community outreach?

Rotkin: Again, proselytizing *by itself* wouldn't be community outreach work, unless you had some social goal in that work. So you could be working with a Christian soup kitchen that was trying to help homeless people on some level, and as long as you were making sure that you were producing soup, and trying to do outreach work, and trying to raise the question of what's an ethically appropriate way to bring religion into a soup delivery program, that would be fine with us. But what you couldn't do is have a group that just met every evening to talk about the Bible, and talk to themselves in a group of six people, would not be an appropriate placement.

Rabkin: Or trying to convert all the members of a neighborhood by going door to door.

Rotkin: Right. So, again, conversion to a religious [belief system]. Or, for that matter, to a political goal—to get everybody to join a political party. You could not be simply a Democratic Party activist, in the sense that your only job was to try and see if you could convert more people to Democratic registration. Or to join the Socialist Party or something like that.

Rabkin: The distinction there was what, exactly?

Rotkin: There was a very careful distinction, because we didn't want to find ourselves in a place where people would see us as either proselytizing, or, for that matter, propagandizing folks, but actually to get our students to be critical about what was going on in the world. So you want to do that in a way that's respectful of that fact that maybe our students don't share the worldview of some faculty member, or the vague, general shared view of all of our faculty in the program, but that they have some kind of an attempt to make some difference in actual institutional arrangements in society, or neighborhood connections.

So we had, for example, a student in our program who was "pro-life"—defined herself as pro-life, and was trying to fight abortion. She was the *only* student, as far as I know, in forty years of community studies, who had that position (at least that I'm aware of; maybe others did, but they never raised it, and certainly nobody focused their field study on that work). But she belonged to a Catholic religious group that was pro-life. The fact that it was Catholic was fine with us, and the fact that they spent some time talking about what we might believe about abortion from the Bible—fine, so long as they were out trying to organize demonstrations and education about pro-life activities. Of course, you know, it's an ethical problem for me, teaching someone who's going to be out there doing work that I don't agree with and think is not ultimately appropriate, from my narrow political perspective. But that's not our job as teachers, to make people all agree with our worldviews. My analysis of how to handle something like this is:

out of 3500 students we graduated from this major, so one of them was a right-wing, pro-life person—I think that’s a ratio that I have to live with on some level.

Rabkin: And there’s another ethical question that that one may have been at odds with, which had to do with intellectual and academic freedom.

Rotkin: Certainly. Students have their right to follow their own path, and they don’t have to necessarily follow mine.

Another example: I helped train, through classes I taught (he took the preparation class and a field study), the most active anti-tax activist in Santa Cruz County. [He] graduated in community studies. Basically he learned what he knows [in our department]. And he now files regular petitions *in pro per* [*in propria persona*—acting on one’s own behalf in a court of law]. He’s never been to law school, but actually files legal cases based on his experience. He knows enough about the legal system, from what he learned from us and from his (now) practical experience in the world, so every time the City of Santa Cruz tries to pass some new tax that maybe is close to the edge of whether it’s a legal tax—maybe we try and get it through as a majority tax under California tax law, [and] he believes it should require a two-thirds vote because he sees it as a special tax—he will take us to court. And he’s won a couple of battles. He lives in Watsonville, so he more often takes Watsonville and the county to court—and defeats taxes that I think are very appropriate taxes and deeply upsetting. But not every student I produced shares my worldview. That’s life. (laughs)

But, again, I think the ratio is probably something like 3,000:2, or probably a total of, over the years, maybe five or six students with a very different, much more conservative worldview. And we didn't screen for students' politics. We screened for appropriate field placements, where they were working with groups of people. There's a tendency over time for us to *attract*, I think, generally more progressive and left-wing students rather than more conservative. The faculty had that bent in their worldview. Our materials, examples we gave to people, typically would be issues that the more progressive people would be interested in than more conservative folks. Generally, I think, activism tends to attract more progressive folks than conservatives. I think it's fair to say that most conservative campaigns depend more on money and less on activists than progressive campaigns do. But that's not absolute. That's just a generalization.

So we would have occasional students that came and were interested in something that we thought, "Well, I'm not sure that's going to be very helpful." But as long as they understood the rubric under which we were organizing things, and had an appropriate type of field study, and were willing to sit through classes where they often would be in the minority—. And that would then become of question of how they would work with the other students in the program, and part of the job of the faculty was to make sure these students were not run out of the program by their fellow students. That took some work.

Sometimes there would be tensions. Imagine a class full of, let's say, twenty-four pro-choice students, and one student in the class who's pro-life. And since it's a class where lots of students share responsibility for leading discussions, and

share their field notes from their part-time placement, and talk with each other about what they're up to and what they're going to do for their full-time study—you can imagine there were some fairly tense, and I think difficult, discussions that took place in the classroom between that pro-life student and the more pro-choice students that made up the vast majority of our students in the program.

Rabkin: She must have had to develop quite a thick skin.

Rotkin: I think she'd have to have a thick skin. Our faculty, I think, realized their obligation to not exclude people who didn't share their worldview. I'm sure there were students [who] maybe, at times, felt that it was not carried out fully, as well as it might have been.

Rabkin: Was the department ever the object of criticisms levied by other people on the campus, or by parents, or by people in the community, that the program was overly "leftist" or progressive?

Rotkin: The department *regularly* got criticisms from the community and from the campus for exactly the problem of being perceived as being too left-wing, too ideological, too focused on a narrow set of ideas. I described last time how we had changed the theory course from one that had been pretty explicitly kind of leftist/feminist/anti-racist into a much broader set of possible issues, including reading Milton Friedman. And then we went to a textbook that had liberal and conservative views of a variety of topics—housing, health—and how liberals and conservatives would approach the so-called problems of affordable housing,

healthcare, the economy, poverty, and so forth. Of course, very different theories, depending on your politics, of how you see those things.

I'm going to explain in a moment about how we came to another way of resolving that tension, because the students in the program hated the readings they were assigned from the more conservative theorists. My way of handling that, when we did it, was to get the students to learn to be critical of those ideas. It's not a waste of time to read Milton Friedman. You read Milton Friedman and figure out, if you don't agree with him, what's wrong with his arguments—which is a very useful thing to have in life. There's nothing wrong with making somebody read through that and learn how to take it critically, rather than just dismiss it as conservative, or racist, or whatever your views might be about the book, before you start.

On the other hand, it's hard to run a class where you've got the majority of your students asking why we have to read something they really hate, and it's like pulling teeth to get them to take it seriously. If you had one thing like that, one book that was more conservative, that might be acceptable, because they could see the job was learning to write a critique. When something like half of the readings in the class were much more conservative and from a variety of different perspectives, I think the students started to feel like we were making them read things that they didn't like, and that were not that helpful to them. By the time they had done their second or third critique of a conservative book or series of articles, they might feel like they *got* that, and "Why are you making me read more of this stuff? I hate it."

Anyway, so that was a problem we had when we were trying to do a broader theoretical introduction. Also, it wasn't so much that it was left or right. A lot of the stuff was overly academic, and they really liked to have theorists who at least were accessible from a political perspective. I gave the example last time of Talcott Parsons, who's very hard to read, and [it's] not clear what the applications of his ideas are to any practical problem you might actually want to deal with. And so, "Why are you making us read this stuff?" For the brief period of two or three years when we were reading that kind of material, we had a lot of resistance from students. A lot of the work was trying to teach them even how to read something that's as dense and difficult as a classical sociological text like some of Parsons' work.

Rabkin: Do you want to talk about those changes in the curriculum?

Rotkin: Yeah. So we were very self-critical, in terms of pedagogy, as a program. Because we had students active in the curricular planning process; because the staff were active in those meetings; because I was in those meetings, initially as a graduate student and then as a lecturer—people didn't just accept the curriculum the way it was and just keep teaching it. It never ossified. Almost every year, there'd be something that wasn't working as well as it might be. Since we were teaching our students to be critical and think about how to make things more effective, we started asking those questions about ourselves and the way we were teaching the program. And we got a lot of feedback from students. If people didn't like the preparation class, or the analysis class, or the readings

being assigned in some course, they'd come to the department meeting—not just to the teacher—and complain. They'd come to the department meeting and go, “How come this class is so badly organized?” or, “Why are you making us read this crap?” At times faculty would defend the readings and explain why they were necessary. At other times, we'd realize maybe the students had a point, and we should think about stuff differently.

Rabkin: Could any student attend any faculty meeting, or was there a designated group of representatives—?

Rotkin: Any student in the major, any *major*—once you'd been admitted, had a faculty advisor, had a field study area you were working in, and had been admitted to the preparation class—you could come to a department meeting. If you came to three department meetings, you became a *member* of the board, and that meant that you could, in effect, vote on things. But since we always decided things by consensus, you really weren't voting anyway. But I think as a practical matter, students spoke up more when they had been to two or three meetings. And certainly anybody who came to their *first* meeting—they were perceived as giving input to the process and not really taken as seriously as somebody that was going to make the decision about what we should do. But let's say students would come to the department—a bunch of them, half the class would come. We'd hired a lecturer to teach a class and students didn't like him. Or students didn't like the preparation class and the way it was organized this year, and the readings were not appropriate. So they'd all show up with a petition signed by everybody. You know, we're teaching organizers here—

Rabkin: Exactly! (laughs)

Rotkin: —and they'd show up to complain about stuff. And so then the department would have to wrestle with, well, what should be changed? And often we'd have meetings—and this was a very common discussion, repeated over and over—where the students finishing their field study, in the analysis class, and busy working on their senior thesis, would come to a department meeting (or a board meeting, at the time) and ask us for more theory: “We came out of the field study, and we think we need more theory classes. We think students shouldn't go off into the field when they're not prepared to do so.” And so they would insist we develop a theory course for the other students. Well, the other students didn't want that. They were in the preparation class. And so, basically, students would disagree about what should happen, and so it would be up to the faculty working with the students to resolve the tension about how much theory: should we require the theory course *before* going on the field study, or only *recommend* it strongly? And so we went from no theory class, to recommending a theory class, to requiring a theory class, to recommending the theory class before your field study, to requiring a theory class before your field study. And most of that was driven by student pressure.

Rabkin: So students tended to come out of the field study experience wishing they had had a more theoretical preparation for field study.

Rotkin: Right. But not appreciating, before they went, why they might need such preparation.

Rabkin: Interesting. So it was the actual on-the-ground experience that made them appreciate the value of theory.

Grounded Theory

Rotkin: There is an essay that we read for a long time called “Grounded Theory.” I think David Wellman, one of the senate faculty members, produced it. Grounded theory is theory that develops out of an empirical experience, and, at least at its most extreme, suggests you don’t really need clear theoretical guidelines to get started, and that your theory should develop from what you’ve experienced yourself. I think most of our faculty believe (as I talked about to some extent last time, in talking about Dewey and some of these other issues) that you kind of have some implicit theory anyway. You always do.

Rabkin: —whether or not you’ve articulated it—

Rotkin: And so it became much clearer that the goal of grounded theory was to become more *aware* of what your assumptions were when you went off on a field study. Not that you wouldn’t have some. And to have some explicit ideas about what your assumptions were, and to try and make those assumptions more appropriate by some reading and some preparation before you went. But we didn’t want people to have full-blown, completely decided final theories before

you go out and experience something, because you want to be able to modify your theory based on your experience.

So, again, a lot of the teaching we were doing in the program was teaching people to be kind of flexible and fluid, and have some understanding of what you were bringing to a situation, but also be able to change your mind. If the theory you had was not a paradigm that made sense of your experience, you wouldn't want to deny the experience; you'd want to try and change your theory to make it more appropriately match. And it wouldn't be that you'd want to reject the theory you started with as much as modify it, and figure out what kind of paradigm shift you needed to have it be a more appropriate or effective theory to explain the experience.

And again, on a high level, this is the kind of stuff that I wrote about in my history of consciousness dissertation, and what I was studying in the various histcon study groups, and looking at the Frankfurt School: to what extent is social science actually a science? To what extent is it possible to be "objective" in doing social science research? I think not at all, but you can certainly have some fidelity to empirical reality, and not simply impose your preconceived ideas on the experience that you have in life. And how to get students to be more effective about that, and approach it, as Sartre would suggest, with a kind of a dialectical approach. I don't usually use the word "dialectical," because most people don't know what it means. I try to come up (laughs) with some easier word that's not so fancy to make the point. But as Sartre described it, you start with some assumptions, go out and experience [something], and come back and look

critically at your assumptions and see which of them need to be transformed based on that experience. That's the kind of model, ultimately, that I think most faculty in community studies had, that we'd try to inculcate in most of our students as a way of approaching social change work.

Rabkin: So that you're constantly refining your theoretical understanding based on your actual experience, and figuring out how your theoretical framework can inform your experience.

Rotkin: Right. And, of course, theory exists at many different levels. You can have very abstract theory: you read something like Marxism, or Marxists, and you start to get to a level of very general [theory] about the whole world and how it works under four hundred years of capitalism. And even Marx—this is what Sartre was writing about—needs major modification. We're no longer primarily involved in industrial production in the capitalist system, and Marx's ideas were based on an industrial proletariat of people working in large factories and de-skilled in their operations. We live in a world where people are being reskilled, and differentially skilled, and have much more complex jobs than they did before. And education does play a role in the workplace in a way that it didn't in a nineteenth factory. So any theory, whatever it is, is going to need to be transformed, and people shouldn't see themselves as accepting any theory as unchangeable—whether we're thinking here of spiritual types of views of the world or a more coherent theory like Marxism, or just some mixture of bourgeois concepts about how you approach the world. Whatever it is you take out there

with you, you need to go back and look at those categories and assumptions about what you're doing.

And usually we'd try and offer students some readings about these—call it sociology of science, or sociology of knowledge—kinds of ideas, so that they understood critically this whole process of becoming theoretical and practical in their work. So I think our students were much more sophisticated than most undergraduates going off to do practical work. Think about the distance we had moved from, say, Antioch's experiential education program—which I think is a good thing, but where students are simply told, "Go get some experience outside the campus for six months and come back," with no real preparation for the particular thing you were going to do, and no unpacking of the experience when you got back. I think students probably benefited from that experiential education, but not to the degree they did from a structured experiential education project like community studies.

And the fact that the thing was six months made it also much more coherent and much more intellectually solid than the kind of internships people were doing for one quarter in environmental studies, or education, or economics. So they had a pretty decent theoretical preparation for the field study and a couple of actual courses to unpack the experience with faculty guidance. And it was focused in some particular *area*, so it wasn't *abstract* learning; it was really about an issue you had some passion about—but trying to be not just passionate but effective in trying to think about what could be done to change it.

So you want to take somebody who emotionally wants to deal with domestic violence, and get them to understand it's not just evil men that are making this happen, but what are the institutional structures that reinforce this? Why do women stay with these "evil" men, if they are evil? And not to blame the victims—like, "They're stupid, they stay with these men. My goal is to get out and tell them they're stupid so they'll leave these men." Not a very effective strategy for getting a woman out of a bad relationship—make her feel even stupider and more dependent on whomever she's getting some support from, even if it's support mixed with beatings. And how do you get somebody out of that kind of a situation? It requires a very different theory than just, you know, it's inherent in male nature to beat people, and women ought to leave them alone. It's not an effective strategy for getting women to deal with the problem of domestic violence in their lives. So that'd be an example of a concrete case.

And you'd try and do something parallel in all the other areas that our students were working in. Antiwar work: it's one thing to say, "war is bad and we want to stop it," but just going out and saying "war is bad" over and over again, and writing that down and publishing leaflets that say it and giving speeches on soap boxes that say it—not a particularly effective antiwar strategy. How do you actually take on the institutions that get us into wars, and how do you change popular consciousness in a way that's actually effective in turning it into electoral power, or whatever power is necessary to change the decision-making process that gets this country into wars? So that's a very different process than simply working hard and passionately to go out and say what you think about war and what ought to be done about it.

So it was trying to create effective organizers. As we described it often in the preparation class: we're not short of people out there trying to make the world better. There's probably too many of them on some level. But they're often like chickens running around with their head cut off, because they don't have a coherent theory of what they're trying to do, and they're involved in work that may or may not be effective. They're often just spinning their wheels, working very hard, and burning themselves out, and feeling after a year or two of doing that work that nothing can change, because it didn't seem to be successful. And in fact you end up with someone who started off as a passionate social change activist becoming much more cynical, and feeling like you can't change anything, and "I'm never going to do this kind of work again," and trying to find some way to make themselves happy in a horrible job doing something evil, and making money, and going off into their private life to watch TV.

Community Studies' Academic Mission

So how do you actually do effective social change work? That was really our goal. And it fits really well with an academic mission to try and get people to think critically about things. So it's not, really, that there was some tension between the academic mission and our political mission, because of the particular way we conceived of our political mission. It was not to gather adherents, or supporters of various views that the faculty held. It was to get students to understand an issue and think about how to address it in a critical way. Whether they did that by teaching other people through the academy,

eventually, or as an activist, as a neighborhood organizer, or as a policy analyst inside of a governmental institution—that would be up to the students to figure out their pathway. But to get them to be more critical about that process.

That's why I think the department always felt that we were never at odds with the university's mission of an educational process. But often, going back to this question you asked me some time ago here, others from the outside, in the academy or in the community, felt that we were a left-wing machine that was simply propagandizing our students and creating little Mike Rotkins, or little community studies faculty sycophants who were simply repeating whatever we told them, like sheep. Which I think is a completely unfair criticism of the major—but from the outside, without looking at it, you might come to that kind of a conclusion.

Rabkin: In that sense, this guy who was so interested in preventing taxation must have been very useful to you over the years, as an example of somebody who you trained up—to be your political adversary.

Rotkin: Yeah. And I think an example of how we were honest about how we approached that work.

I will tell you a story that I think is useful. You have to get course approval from the Committee on Educational Policy. I offered an electoral politics class a couple of times, because I had by then been elected to the city council a number of times, and had managed other campaigns, both for candidates and for issues. So I

thought I'd teach a class to our students on electoral politics. I wanted my class to be something about, well, how do electoral politics work? What's the structure of democracy or representative government in the United States, at the local, state, and national level? But also, how do you run a campaign? What does it take to be effective in doing that? I made all the students in the class—a fairly large class, I think I probably had about sixty students in there—pick a campaign. They could pick anybody they liked. I'd say, probably, the vast majority picked more progressive campaigns or candidates. I would not let anybody work on *my* campaign, because it would be perceived as a direct conflict of interest, so you couldn't work for me. But you could pick whatever you liked. I'd say probably two thirds, three quarters of the students picked progressive campaigns, but a smaller number picked other, much more conservative candidates that I didn't necessarily support—in fact, people I might have opposed actively. That was their choice; students could pick who they liked. Then I'd teach people, how do you produce electoral material? How do you do brochures? How do you analyze a precinct? How do you figure out where your voters are? How do you tailor a message? And those kinds of things.

Well, when I proposed the class, one of my colleagues (and he should go unnamed, but from the economics department) challenged the course—unfortunately for him, never looking at the actual syllabus. [He] just assumed that if I were teaching a class on electoral politics, obviously it would be a biased class in which I would try to get students to share my progressive views or leftist views about things.

Rabkin: Was this colleague a member of CEP?

Rotkin: No, this was a faculty member who wrote a complaint to CEP on why they should not accept this course and then went to testify about how this course should be rejected because I was an inappropriate teacher for the course, and because clearly my syllabus would be a biased syllabus. His problem was that he didn't look at my syllabus. That year I had three books, and two were written by conservative Republicans, and one of them was a more mainstream progressive, maybe a liberal, textbook on practical politics.

So we had Joe McGinnis talk[ing] about the election of the president, back in—I think it was written in 1968, about Nixon's election. And then there was a book by William Safire, and I'm trying to remember who the other person was. Escapes memory now. But when the CEP looked at my syllabus [and considered the complaint], it was like (laughs), "What are you talking about?!" Because I thought that students should read what conservatives thought about the practical issues of elections, and understand the conservative worldview. Because about the period I was teaching this class, the conservatives were doing quite well electorally across the country, and I thought we should try and understand what was their strategy and how they were approaching their work. Again, approaching it critically and looking at it in that way. So both a lot of the essays that students were reading in the class and two out of the three full books that I assigned to the course were from conservatives.

So CEP approved the class quickly and without any problems. I suppose people are not supposed to tell you what goes on in these closed little hearings in these committees, but somebody (who shall also go unnamed) basically told me this whole story about how this all happened. Because none of this was ever [officially] reported to me. I was never told that my course was under investigation, or that there was a problem or anything else, but I heard later that someone had challenged it and the person told me who it had been. When the course got approved, that was my last concern about it.

Of course, if you teach a Marxism class, you're going to tend to read Marxist texts—although I do have students read Milton Friedman in that class as well, because I think if they've understood Marx they should be able to critique Milton Friedman. So even in a class like Marxism I have students reading some conservative texts, because I think that's good educational pedagogy.

Okay. So let's now shift a little bit.

Rabkin: Okay.

Rotkin: As I said, almost every year we would have retreats for our faculty. We would go and talk about the curriculum and how we should make it more effective. We'd have department meetings, or board meetings, where the students would show up and say we need a new theory class. At one point we had a lot of students show up—and this is a little later in the program, probably in the nineties—upset that we were sending students out in the field who had

not really come to terms with racism or sexism. And although I think our students were probably better prepared to deal with those issues than the average UCSC student, certainly it was an accurate criticism. It's not like all of our students had thoroughly worked through, more than any of us have, how to deal with these complex issues of relationships between genders or among races in this country. But they definitely wanted students to take a class about racism before they were allowed to go out there and interfere with the people in the community—you know, and visit their racism on the community people they were working with. This would be a perception in their preparation class. They had discussions, and they perceived that some of their fellow students were not as sensitive to racial issues or gender issues as they were.

So we would debate and discuss: should we create a special course that sort of focuses on the issue of racism or sexism or other kinds of issues before students go out in the field? Or class issues, for that matter. And again, we'd always, in our classes, tried to do some preparation to sensitize our students to: how do you deal with people who come from different backgrounds than your own? You're dealing with people that are not college students, that don't have much education. People who have, again, different racial or ethnic backgrounds, different cultural experiences. So we always did some cross-cultural work, and often had workshops. Maybe the course itself wouldn't have anything, but we'd bring a trainer in, often, to the preparation classes, and invite students to participate in a training on dealing with race.

Rabkin: Somebody like Lillian Roybal Rose, doing Unlearning Racism workshops—that kind of thing?¹⁷

Rotkin: Literally. She came once. We had her, and then people that she had trained came to our program. Other students who had had preparation of one kind or another in unlearning racism would show up, and we would organize that as either one of the class [sessions], in the course, or as a workshop attached to the course on the weekend that students should participate in. But, you know, there were certainly some students who continued to feel we hadn't done enough, or that students were not adequately prepared.

And, frankly, we had faculty members we hired from time to time in the department who expected our students, as *undergraduates*, to already have a full theory and know what they were doing before we'd ever let them loose in the community. That's a problem with the university. Your job is to *teach* people to be critical and understand the world that they live in. They don't come to you with all that done. Why would they go to college if they already knew all that? And so you say [to these faculty members], "Your expectations are too high. You've done too much work, obviously, with graduate students or with your colleagues. Somebody who's eighteen years old and entering our major—the fact that they *want* to deal with racism, or that they're willing to try and struggle with it, should be enough. That's all you can expect at the start. And then you want to,

¹⁷ Lillian Roybal Rose, an educator and cross-cultural communication consultant, leads workshops and seminars designed to improve leadership and long-term cooperation, including programs that emphasize the recognition, understanding and "un-learning" of racism and other forms of oppression—Editor.

of course, before you graduate them, hope that they've at least begun to get something of a sophisticated analysis of these issues. But you can't expect them to come to you with that already as part of what they have in their toolkit."

But it's a constant tension. I will quickly describe an experience I had in the classroom, in a community studies class. I don't remember now what the class was, but I was in the section. There were fifteen or sixteen students in the class. This couldn't have been one of the core courses; it had to be some other elective that I was teaching in community studies. This class had seniors and frosh in the same class, and one of the frosh in the class—without saying their exact quote, you'll understand the point they were making. They said it was about racism, and they said, "Gosh"—I don't think they knew they were quoting Rodney King, but they said, "Can't we all just get along? Isn't it enough just to be kinda color blind, and treat everybody the same? Wouldn't that solve the problem of racism if we just treated everybody equal, and the same, and nice?" That was a male making that comment, and it was about sexism and racism both, I think: "Can't we just get along, and learn to like each other, and work hard?" And a senior in the class—again, I don't know if she was a major or not, I don't remember—but whatever it was, turned her seat over. We were sitting in separate seats in a circle in the classroom—jumped out of her seat, turned her seat over, and said, "I don't have to put up with this shit anymore!" and walked out of the classroom.

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: And the rest of the class sat there stunned. Particularly the young man who had made the comment, who was innocent enough in his ignorance, you know. (laughs) And I then had to go— because this was an ongoing class, and it was early in the quarter—had to go find the senior female student and talk to her about her job to help educate this frosh student about these issues. It's not acceptable to just dismiss him for being ignorant, because that's a process. If you want to be a social change activist, you don't write people off that are racist or sexist. Even if you think that's the problem, you find a way to educate them, and explain—give him an answer to his question! It's not an unreasonable question for someone to start with. Now, you would hope that you don't *graduate* people that would say something like that, but they're in your classes, or you're going to send them maybe even on a field study. I would hope maybe before going on a field study they wouldn't say something quite that naïve, but you can't control for that—who's going to be in your department and what kind of ideas they're going to have.

Rabkin: Right. But what a—to use the cliché—“teachable moment.”

Rotkin: Yeah. So I found myself in that class trying to explain that I thought that the woman who had left—I tried to explain why she might be upset, and why she had maybe *had* enough of this, as she put it, shit, that she would feel uncomfortable sitting there listening to it again. But I also explained that there was nothing wrong, in a classroom, with asking that question, and that she was the one in this particular case that should have stayed in the room and helped try and answer the question. And that if I was going to blame somebody for this

blowup, it would not be the young male who made the question, but the woman who responded to it. But nonetheless, let's understand why she might be upset, and we have to respect that as well. So it's a lot of work to try and get this stuff to happen—

Rabkin: Absolutely.

Rotkin: —and that's part of what teaching's all about. And particularly if you deal with students who are activists, and who are passionate about learning and what they want to do in the world, who are not going to sit there quietly and just ignore whatever their emotions and feelings are, and suck it up no matter what they're being taught, but can actually take what they're taught seriously and react to it. So that comes with the territory, I think, of teaching in that kind of a style and a classroom.

Rabkin: Do you want to say anything more, Mike, about the evolution of the curriculum in community studies, before we dive further into the field study coordinator position?

Rotkin: Yeah. So I'll just say that we, over time, created a number of other sorts of requirements in the major. Some of them were electives. [We] recommended more things. For many years the department requirements were—I'll quickly summarize them again. First it was: take a preparation class, do a field study, take an analysis class, and produce a senior thesis. Then it was: take a theory class—recommended before your placement, but some time before you graduate.

(A lot of times students took it when they realized they needed it, when they came back from the field study, and didn't take our advice to take it before they went. But then eventually, under pressure from students, we started requiring some kind of a theory course before you went. I don't remember exactly the year that happened, but maybe by the late eighties.)

Rabkin: And this was separate from, and in addition to, the field study preparation class.

Rotkin: Yes. But then, from about the second or third year, we started requiring that every student take three electives as part of the community studies major. And they worked with their faculty advisor, who was a senate faculty member, on what would be the appropriate three courses for that student. Everybody had three different classes, and they might be one from community studies and two from some other department, or all three from other departments. I know that shifted over the years. For a while we required at least one from the department and two from somewhere else if you liked. I don't think we ever required they all be from the department, and even when we wanted more from the department, we still would accept other courses. If your advisor said this course [from another department] will meet this requirement, you could take it from somewhere else.

And so students might be taking an area studies class: if they're going to be going on their field study to work in Costa Rica, maybe they should take a class from Latino and Latin American studies in Central American politics, with

Susanne Jonas, who used to teach in that department. So that's geographical knowledge before you go on your field study, so you're not completely ignorant of the history of the place you're going. But you also might want to take a course in literacy. If you're going to be doing literacy work in Costa Rica, then it might be appropriate for you to take some class, if they're teaching one, on how to teach English as a second language, or something that's being offered through the education department, or by some writing program on campus or something. Or you might want to take a substantive course in some particular area—say, domestic violence. I gave that example earlier. If that's what you were going to work on, then you'd take a class from women's studies in domestic violence, or on the oppression of women in general. You might take a political economy class from Alan Richards in the econ department, or from Wally Goldfrank in the sociology department.

We always avoided making a list of who the appropriate [instructors] were in the other departments, because we figured the people that we didn't choose might feel slighted, and it would, again, reinforce this idea that we were trying to create a leftist alternative major. Let the students pick the appropriate courses, and as long as they seemed to prepare them for the right area, [we'd allow them]. So they would have to pass what I called the straight-face test. You'd go to your faculty advisor: "No, I'm sorry, the literature class that's looking at the music of Bob Dylan, being taught by some music teacher, is not really an appropriate course for somebody that's going off to work in Tanzania with agricultural workers." Everything's related to everything, so there's nothing you could take that wouldn't help you in some way—but, no, show us how this is related to

what you're going to do on your field study." Whether you took these electives before or after your field study, they were meant to help you get a more academic approach to the senior thesis you were going to write. And so you'd have some mix of those things.

Rabkin: Did you sometimes get students making off-the-wall decisions?

Rotkin: *Often* had students proposing very strange electives, and you'd have to reject them and say, no, I'm sorry, that's not really acceptable.

One thing you could not take for your elective would be another field study. Students often wanted to do an internship, and say, "I want to do some more internships within the same area. I'm working on affordable housing, and I did an internship with the housing group in Santa Cruz full time, and I did my [preparatory part-time field study] with them—same group—and now I'd like to get five more units working with that group, after I've come back from the field study." [We'd] say, "How is that helping you develop a theoretical perspective about this work? It's just more field study. So, no, field study is not an elective to prepare for more theoretical work in your area. Not appropriate."

And then, over time, we began trying to—as some other departments have done—suggest that (and this was right towards the end of the program, after the 2000s, I'd say—I don't remember what year) you'd need to have at least one political economy-type course; one course dealing with racism, sexism, and/or gender oppression—gay issues or something dealing with those kinds of issues.

Or you'd have to take one course that prepared you for the place you were going—maybe a course on city politics, or a course on rural life in America, or a course on a country that you were going to go study in. We'd say you have to have one of each of these areas covered.

So, over time—and, again, often from pressure from the students, but often from the faculty as well, thinking this would be better preparation before people went, or additional information to write a better, more sophisticated senior thesis—we did develop a more specific set of requirements related to this major than “find three courses related to your field study, and that decision will be made by your faculty advisor, [concerning] whether they are or are not appropriate.” We would give people more guidelines for what would be the appropriate stuff to *bring* to your faculty advisor, and suggest what could be met. And sometimes we'd even, towards the very end, actually identify the actual list of courses [for which] you wouldn't even have to get approval from your faculty advisor: these courses would be acceptable to meet your political economy requirement, whether they're offered through our department or offered through some other [department], make that happen.

Rabkin: But you weren't *limited* to that list.

Rotkin: You weren't limited to those, but these you'd know ahead of time: take this course; it's going to count. If you want to do something else, go get approval from your advisor.

You could do independent tutorials, which were research projects, as electives—if approved by your faculty advisor.

Rabkin: And supervised by a faculty member?

Rotkin: Supervised by a faculty member—not necessarily in our department. But it would have to be accepted by your advisor as theoretical work. Again, not slipping in more internship. And we had that same issue—again, not with most of our students, but a significant number, 10 or 20 percent, asked to do a senior thesis, would ask, “Couldn’t I do a field study with this group for my senior thesis?” [We’d] say, “No. That’s just another field study.” Back to Friedland’s comment: “We want something we can *hold in our hands* that shows us what you got out of this experience. And you going off in the field and doing some more field notes is not a culmination or a capstone of your undergraduate experience; it’s more field work. You’ve got to integrate your field work with your academic learning. And that’s what we expect out of this senior thesis.”

We would explain over and over, “you can’t do another internship for your senior thesis.” It didn’t matter. They’d come and they’d say, “Well, I was thinking I’d work with this group, and this group is producing some videos.” And we’d say, “Yep. Well, are *you* going to be making the videos?” “Oh no, the group does that, but I’m going to work with them on certain kinds of stuff.” And we’d say, “Are you going to have something that you did yourself, that you can bring to us, that will show that you’ve learned something from this internship, and from the classes you’ve had, and that summarizes your educational

experience?" "Not really." "Then no. That's not a senior thesis. That's another internship and we're not going to accept it."

So again, trying to look after the respectability of the major as well as our own sense of what we wanted our students to have when they left. We did not want them to be one of these people running around with their head cut off, passionately involved in making the world a better place, and no idea of a theory of what they were trying to accomplish or how it might work. So for both political and academic integrity reasons, we resisted the attempts of some students to avoid writing, to avoid doing analytical work.

Which frankly made it very easy for me to write letters for students looking for graduate school—from all the students I've ever supervised or had something to do with in this major. Because they've all had some theoretical background. They all have a perspective. They've all done writing that's academic and that's grounded. So you really feel like you know something about their practical ability to do a job, their ability to write decently, if they're going to be doing some kind of an assignment—and that is very, very helpful, because that's what graduate schools are looking for, and why we've had such a tremendous success rate at placing our students in elite graduate schools when that's where they wanted to go, or in practical placements in organizations, where they're effective at doing social change work.

Rabkin: You mentioned students' writing ability. In your major, you had students doing a great deal of writing—and I know, as a university writing

teacher, that students come into their upper-division work with quite a range of abilities. I wonder how you, as a department, dealt over the years with that range, and with getting students up to speed who had writing deficiencies.

Rotkin: First of all, when the major started, until about 1995—twenty-five years into the program—in order to graduate from community studies, you had to present your thesis, very much like the defense of a Ph.D. thesis or a master's thesis in some programs. You would present your thesis to your advisor and to two other people, one of whom would be another faculty member from the campus—usually a community studies faculty member, but it didn't have to be. The other would be a community member who knew something about the issue that you did your field study on and that you were writing your senior thesis about.

Rabkin: So it was analogous to a dissertation committee.

Rotkin: Exactly like a dissertation committee, but this was a thesis committee. About 40 percent of our students received honors in the major, which is a high number, based on the fact that they really did honors-type work. So you presented this thesis to people who read it. If the three of them didn't find your thesis acceptable, then you didn't finish. You had to go back and redo your thesis, or do something different. Most people got through this successfully, but I'd say perhaps 5 or 10 percent were not successful in defending their thesis initially, and had to go back and make changes. And often it would be the community person who would be the one who would say, "I don't think this is

very good writing.” The faculty member that worked with them felt like it was their student, and it was a huge improvement over where they started (laughs), and the person from the community went, like, “This is a graduate from college? I don’t like their writing.” Or maybe the other faculty member would think, “This work is not really coherent to me,” or “I don’t understand it.”

Rabkin: So were the standards for acceptability understood to relate not only to the content, but also—to the extent you can separate these things—to the writing ability?

Rotkin: Right. The person would have to be able to write adequately to produce a piece of work that would be credible. And I, during all these years, did some senior theses—not many, but a few people who really wanted to work with me on something I was focused on. And part of your job was to, I felt, prepare your students for this thing, so the other two people would like their work. You don’t want, any more than you would with a Ph.D. student, to send somebody into this exam who was not prepared for it. So I never had a student fail that, because I would tell somebody, “I’ll be embarrassed if I present this to my colleague on campus and somebody from the community, so you’d better do another draft, and here’s the problems with it.”

Frankly, the faculty varied in the attention they paid to writing style. Some of them very carefully went over people’s writing, basically taught people writing in a serious way; others would send them off to writing tutors, of which there were many in the early years of this campus. (Not so many toward the end.) You

know, “Your writing’s not working. Go see a writing tutor. And here’s your problems, and take this paper to somebody and let them look at it.” Or, “You need to go take a writing course. Your writing’s bad enough that you might have passed Subject A, but you don’t know how to write.”

Early on, Ralph Guzman—I mentioned this earlier—and some of the [other] faculty [would say], “We’re not doing our students any favors to let ‘em slide by with bad writing. It’s the most important skill they’re going to get out of the university, if they don’t have it.” So we would often really get people to improve their writing who started off very bad in terms of their skills. They actually would have to learn how to write before they left. I won’t represent that our students ever were all great writers, but you very rarely—if you go through the senior thesis collection, which is a lot of students—(at the end we no longer required a thesis, and I’ll come back and talk about that)—but when everybody was doing a thesis, I don’t think you’ll find very many of those that are not pretty well-written pieces of work. Because, again, the faculty advisor wouldn’t accept it until it was. You had to send it back for redrawing until it was done right.

Rabkin: Did you have students have to delay their graduation because they hadn’t produced a successful thesis?

Rotkin: Occasionally students would delay their graduation. Mostly we didn’t require them to enroll in school again. But it meant basically that you were all-but-your-thesis, just like many [graduate students] are all-but-dissertation.

They'd finished all the coursework but not the actual thesis. We had students in that place. And you'd have faculty members working with a student in the fall quarter after they'd "walked" in their graduation that summer, or that spring, they're still not done with the thesis to actually graduate.

Rabkin: They were no longer enrolled.

Rotkin: And occasionally there were faculty members who wouldn't do it without getting credit for it, so they'd expect the students to spend the money or to do what it took to enroll in school and take a thesis-writing course with them. Or they would not let them graduate. But most faculty pretty much just worked with them independently, and didn't require them to spend money to re-enroll in school once they'd done everything but this thesis. Probably 90 percent of our students finished the thesis on time.

We were very careful about deadlines. Because this major was not like so many others, where you're told, "Take this class, this class, and this class, and now you're done." Every student had to put together their own individual major, in effect, through community studies. Even though you had some common courses, you had to pick your own electives; you were writing about a different issue for your thesis; you did a different kind of a field study. So your major was a little different than everybody else's in community studies. So we had a lot of attention to deadlines: by when you had to have your advisor; by what time you had to know what field study you were going to go on. We were very good about getting our students to appreciate the importance of deadlines, and

literally tell[ing] people: “If we don’t have this form signed by your advisor by such-and-such a date—” You had to know before the end of winter quarter what field study you were going to go on, and have it approved, before you even got into the preparation class. The actual organization had to sign off on a form: “Yes, this student’s got a six-month placement with us.” The faculty member had to sign: “Yes, I will supervise this field study, and be this student’s senior thesis advisor.” And if you missed the deadline for that by one day, there was no exceptions made. You would wait another year for your chance to take that preparation class and do your field study.

We had people in tears; we had people freaking out, threats of [legal] suits by parents that never materialized. No, we were very clear about this, and we could demonstrate that we had given plenty of notice. Nobody was unaware of those deadlines, or never told. And it turned out to be a good way to teach people to get responsible about deadlines. If you’re going to write grants someday, and get a job or even be an intern with an organization that expects people to show up on time and meet deadlines, produce stuff that’s necessary for a deadline— Election day is election day; you can’t come the next day with some work. I think we felt quite good about being very hard-assed about the actual requirements. It doesn’t mean that community studies was full of unsympathetic people, or people that wouldn’t make general exceptions about things, but the collective deadlines to get the stuff to be a member of our student class—we didn’t want people who were in the preparation class, still not knowing where they were going on a field study.

I'd have students, before we made this requirement, [who] would say, "I *can't* do that assignment this afternoon, because I don't know where I'm going on my field study yet!" Well, I'm sorry. You're in a preparation class to go on a field study." I would say things, like, "Well, the least you could do is pretend like you know where you're going, and do the assignment!" So after a while it became clear: no, we ought to have students that know where they're going. How do you prepare for a six-month field study when you don't know where you're going? So you can't even get into this course until you've already got an assignment. You can change your mind about where you're going, and replace your initial forms with a new organization, or change your faculty advisor. But you can't get in this program unless you have an organization you're going to work with and a faculty advisor to supervise the field study, and ultimately your senior thesis when you do it.

Rabkin: You've got me thinking about all of the paperwork and logistics involved in tracking all your majors.

Field Study Coordinator in Community Studies

Rotkin: A *major* part of the field study [coordinator] job, and the student advisor job, was tracking the students in this major—all of whom were working at a different pace, going on field studies in different years. Let's say a student was going on an Education Abroad Program in their junior year to France, to study at the Sorbonne.

Rabkin: This is separate from their field placement for the major?

Rotkin: Having nothing to do with the community studies major. Just, they want to go to France to study at the Sorbonne through Education Abroad. Well, since Education Abroad typically, is a year-long program (fall, winter, spring of your junior year) and since your field study typically would be, take the preparation class in the spring—when you're in France, you can't take the preparation class. So you'd have to work out with those students how they could take the preparation class in the spring of their sophomore year, wait a whole *year* till they went on their field study the following summer, and not miss their education abroad project. And you'd have to know that that student was coming back from an education abroad project and was going to be one of the field study students, and they'd been gone for a year, and you'd had no contact with them in the major.

Rabkin: So was the department assistant or manager involved in tracking some of this, or was it up to the field studies coordinator and the faculty?

Rotkin: It was primarily focused on the faculty advisor and the field study coordinator, who of course had to communicate with the student advisor in the major. It wasn't the department manager. It was the student advisor.

Rabkin: Ah. The undergraduate advisor.

Rotkin: And initially the department manager and the student advisor was just one position, but when we moved from twenty-five majors to, eventually, two hundred and eighty majors or something—

Rabkin: Whoo!

Rotkin: —then we were given a student advisor who focused more on tracking these students and their files and so forth. And the student files were kept in the student advisor's office. But when they were going on field study, and who was going to go where, and what they were going to do, was something the field study coordinator had to track, and basically inform the faculty members about. Because even the faculty advisors didn't necessarily track this student they had agreed to be an advisor for, as they went away for a year to France and then came back, and now all of a sudden, your student is now going on field study this summer, and you're responsible for reading their field notes.

Rabkin: You had to have an elaborate record system.

Rotkin: The field coordinator had to have a relational database system, and careful tracking, and forms that made it easy to send all the faculty members information about who their students were in the field, who they should be looking for field notes from, and when they were going to get them, and all that detailed stuff. And to get the students to fill out forms in which they had to sign on the dotted line that they knew when everything was due on the field study.

Students were leaving the campus for six months. They might be going, literally, to Kenya. And they've got to know (they're not coming to class) when to turn in the field notes three times during the field study; when their final papers are due; when to make their organizations send us a letter of evaluation. Because you don't have control of that, the student needs to get it—*extract* it, is the word I'll use—from the organization in a timely fashion, because *grades are due*, and if you don't have a letter of evaluation from somebody that says, "We're busy. We'll get it to you next week"— Well, not, next week won't do it; I'll have to give the student an Incomplete. Now the student has an Incomplete in three courses, because that's what they're doing on a full-time field study. And you have to track those Incompletes, help the student remove them. They have to pay thirty bucks, ten bucks each, to remove each Incomplete and get a new grade. And make sure you track down the faculty member that's going to give them this grade, and get them this letter. And back then, people had to write evaluations *and* give grades, after a while, so the field study coordinator is responsible for all that work. I'd say the tracking work was as much time as the actual intellectual work, directly working with students. A *big* part of the job was tracking that.

Rabkin: So you had this logistical tracking, which was a huge job. And then, related to that, you had not only the intellectual relationship (which we'll talk about more, of course), but also just the students' subjective or unique problems in their particular placement. I'm thinking about the flash drive you gave me, before we started meeting together, on which you have literally thousands upon thousands of documents and files having to do with your work in community studies. I have not finished going through the relevant files (laughs) in that flash

drive, but one of the things I noticed in it was that there are a number of chains of correspondence with students labeled stuff like, “So-and-So’s Sad Story”—

Rotkin: (laughs) Yes.

Rabkin: —where students run into all kinds of unbelievable difficulties having to do with immigrant status, and their visas, and their relationship with their sponsoring organization. So I wonder if some of your job involved engaging with those kinds of problems?

Rotkin: I developed a relationship with the State Department, with our Congress members—often you needed their help to deal with a situation in another country. I knew how to get visas to every country that students might be likely to go to, and where the consulate offices were that would do it the most quickly. I had to teach students those kinds of things. I got daily reports from the State Department on where it was dangerous to send people, so I wouldn’t send a student to some places. Certain places were obvious, like right now you wouldn’t want to send a student to Afghanistan, let’s say. That would be a no-brainer. But you might not know what’s happening in Senegal—you know, this year it’s safe, and next year it’s not. That becomes important. I didn’t want to send some student off into a war zone without realizing what was happening. So I was on the State Department’s emergency alert list. Any time they had some situation where they’d be warning consulate employees or Americans abroad traveling, I would get a flash warning on my email, and I would immediately

cancel a student's field placement in that country so they couldn't go there, if that was the appropriate response, which it sometimes was.

There's a *lot* of work involved in those kinds of issues. Students who ended up with personal conflicts with their supervisors. Sometimes it was the supervisor's fault because they had the supervisor from hell. That happened sometimes. And sometimes it was the student's fault. The supervisor ended up with a student who was not really prepared to be away from Mom and Dad, or away from the campus and some of the, at least, "parenting" that you get from dorm supervisors or something. And sometimes just homesick, and never been out of California, or never been out of campus and their home community.

And so problems arose, logistical issues of various kinds. Somebody gets in a car crash in Mexico, in which it was the other person's fault. But our students, just being so generous as they are, feel bad for the other person that's involved in this. Well, it turns out in Mexico in most places, if you feel bad for the other person, the legal authorities believe you're responsible for what happened: you wouldn't feel bad if it wasn't your fault! So you train students before they go off in the field to *never* say, "I feel bad about the other person that caused an accident." You know, you have to be heartless about it, and say, "No! They caused it; it was their fault; I had nothing to do with it." Because even an expression of sympathy might be enough to have you in jail for having caused an accident.

Rabkin: Oh, my goodness.

Rotkin: That happened to me in one case: I had to get a student out of jail in Mexico City because they had had absolutely no responsibility for a minor fender-bender, but they expressed sympathy for the fact that, how was the other person going to pay for the damage to their car (even though the other person had caused it). The expression of sympathy was enough to have them arrested and jailed. I got him out in two days. But all kinds of examples of things like that.

Most of our students didn't have these problems—serious ones, life-threatening problems, or your safety and your freedom being challenged. But one student got dengue fever. She had to come back immediately and was deathly ill, could never return to the tropics. Her whole plan was to become a kind of tropical forest manager. She now has a job managing the Clayoquot Forest in the temperate forest zone. She can do that. If she ever goes back to the tropics and gets dengue fever again, she'll probably die. It's one of those diseases that, the second time you get it, it's more dangerous. So it's life-threatening when you get it, but it's a death sentence if you get it subsequently, apparently. Dealing with her mother was an experience, because she was unhappy that her daughter got dengue fever and wanted to blame it on me, even though we had certainly warned her about tropical diseases. Our students signed waivers, but that didn't necessarily protect you against lawsuits. I was able to talk this mom down, and she eventually decided it wasn't my fault that her daughter got dengue fever. But that was a struggle.

Insurance issues: organizations would say, “Do your students come with insurance?” And the answer was no, because it’s very expensive to develop an insurance program for your students. So they could go get private insurance if they wanted to, but I had to basically persuade people that our students could be covered under their own insurance plans for their employees, and if they were going to be there for six months, they should provide them with insurance protection. And that’s a negotiation with an organization that has no money, or an organization that doesn’t have that kind of provision. Or persuade them to take the risk that maybe it was worth it to get the student and take whatever risk their was—that our students were generally well trained and they were not going to cause them legal problems or financial problems or—

Rabkin: Liability problems?

Rotkin: —liability issues. But that was a whole process. A big part of my job was keeping the question of whether our field program—and, for that matter, the other field programs on campus—had adequate liability protection. Because the answer is they did not. And some lawyer in the Office of the President would have ended every one of these programs had they ever discovered that they didn’t have liability coverage over them. And so, when, periodically, somebody would ask, “Do these programs have liability coverage?” I spent a fair amount of time on the telephone, or going to UCOP, the Office of the President, to talk with them about how our program didn’t need liability coverage and why that might be the case. And successfully managed to stave those people off—starting with almost the first year of the program for forty years, and defending the other

programs, not just my own, but some of the other campus programs without liability coverage.

Rabkin: Like the Environmental Studies Internship Program...?

Rotkin: The Environmental Studies Internship Program, or the economics program—

Rabkin: The Merrill Field Program—

Rotkin: The Merrill Field Program, exactly. And if you went all the way through that flash drive of all those memos, you'll see a bunch of memos about liability. In fact, there's a whole category of stuff called Liability Letters, that I fired off to organizations and off to officials of the University of California, trying to make sure that we didn't get our program shut down for lack of liability coverage. And to some extent, we were taking a certain risk there. It's conceivable we *might* have been sued. We might have been sued personally, and we might have been sued corporately. So that was a decision to make about keeping this program going, because we never could have afforded adequate liability coverage, and had we been required to get it, we would have been forced to end the program.

A lot of little things like that, just constantly going on. Dealing with the field notes. Students are taking field notes every day. They're private field notes: they're nobody's business but the student taking them and their faculty adviser. Some students had ethical issues about that: "I'm writing field notes about other

people, and I'm not letting them know that I'm doing that?" Well, ethically, if you're going to publish something about people, you probably should let them know, and not sneakily record information about them. Your own field notes? Everybody writes informal field notes in their head all the time. You have views on what you're experiencing; you come to conclusions and judgments about what's happening around you. What's the ethical problem with writing that down? Well, the ethical issue is, you'd better *protect* your field notes. If you're writing this stuff down, they'd better not fall into the hands of somebody else. We had a couple of examples of field notes falling into the hands of supervisors out in the field—and, in one case, letting the intern go because the field notes were so critical of the organization. In another case, the field notes talk about one of the other employees with her hand in the till, taking money from the organization. Resulted in the employee being fired by the organization. And, of course, they had real evidence that it had happened, so it wasn't simply based on the field notes that it had happened, but [the notes] alerted them to the problem.

So we spent a lot of time in the preparation class talking about how to protect your field notes: Don't *talk* about your field notes. You know, it's very tempting at the end of the day to say to somebody, "Oh, you get to go home! I have to go home and write field notes for two hours every day! I'm so unhappy and I'm busy..." Well, then the person's going to ask you, "What are field notes?" And you're going to say, "That's where I write down everything *you do* every day!"

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: (laughs) And the person's going to freak out! So you have to train people how to not make a fetish out of your field notes for other people. Keep them to yourself. And, if you're going to write field notes about young people, where there are, in fact, liability issues of naming school kids or underaged children that you're working with, you'd better come up with a coding system to protect the anonymity of the people that are in your notes, so even if somebody found your notes, they wouldn't know who you're talking about. So we trained people in coding systems, and where to keep the code somewhere separate that would never [be found] in the same place as your field notes. Back in the day, we would always suggest people never take their field notes (which used to be handwritten, not even typed, because people often would be in places with no typewriters)— Because you might lose your field notes, you'd better keep a carbon copy. But then how are you going to protect your carbon copy? These days, when you say "carbon copy," students look at you like, "What the hell are you talking about?!" So now people just keep a [digital] copy somewhere. But how do you keep a safe copy of your field notes someplace where they won't be discovered? Well, you'd better not keep them on the computer that you use at work in your field study. You'd better not carry them around on flash drives that you leave on your desk when you leave work. You'd better not keep hard copies of your notes, if you're keeping them in that form, where people can find them. And so that's part of the training of your students, so that, as any other responsible researcher knows, you don't leave your field notes lying around. You don't talk about them with other people.

Rabkin: And there was no "cloud" they could send them to for safe storage!

Rotkin: No. And even now, if you're going to keep them on some other [storage site], better make sure that stuff— Here's an example: Students used to *fax* their field notes. I had a student working with an aboriginal tribe in Australia, who faxed her field notes to me and thought she'd sent them off and everything was fine—but the fax machine keeps a shadow copy of everything it faxes. Somebody came to work the next day and printed a copy of the student's complete field notes off the fax machine and distributed them to everybody inside the organization!

Rabkin: Oh, no.

Rotkin: This didn't happen often. I probably had five or six cases of this, totally, out of 3500 students. But, yeah, these things happen. And you try and educate people so they don't happen, or at least minimize the occasion of them.

And then, of course, when you have the crisis, then you've got to deal with the student who has a messed-up field study. What are you going to do now? Well, what about a student who has the supervisor from hell, and is in the middle of a six-month placement and needs to find another placement *now*, immediately? Doesn't have three months to find a placement. And my job is to help this student, who's not here in Santa Cruz, but is off in another country or another state or another city in California—or maybe even in Santa Cruz—find another placement, and find it within a week. Because you don't want a student spending two weeks at loose ends in the middle of their placement. All of a

sudden they haven't had a six-month placement; they've had six months less two weeks. So we want to try and really find another appropriate placement, a better placement.

Or, how do you make a decision for a student who really is not ready for field study, that they really should think about another major—and then be responsible about that, so you just haven't let them fail at school, but get them into another major that's more appropriate for them, that does not include a field study for six months, leaving home?

Rabkin: You really had to be able to think on your feet.

Rotkin: You end up being a registrar, responding immediately to people. And you get calls for these problems 24/7. They don't happen during work hours; they happen at three o'clock in the morning. I gave you the earlier story, I think, about Togo, West Africa? If not, I'll give it to you now, again. Three o'clock in the morning (I think I did tell you this, but if not) I get a call, and my wife hands me the phone, says "It's for you." It's three- o'clock in the morning, and I can hear machine gun fire and mortars in the background, literally. I'm not going to make good sound effects, but I hear, *eh-eh-eh-eh-eh, POOM! POOM!* (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: And the student said, "Hey, they're having a civil war in Togo, West Africa. If I come home now, will I lose the credit?"

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: (laughs) And I said (pardon my French), “Get on the fucking plane immediately, and we’ll work it out!” So, you know, there’s a lot of that in a placement.

Also, my job involved, from time to time, speaking to people in Spanish and French—languages I speak or spoke (not so much now, because I haven’t had as much practice in French for a while, but I certainly can write it). You have to write sometimes to organizations to persuade an organization to take your student, particularly if they’re selective in the—. Sometimes you have internships that are competitive. At the Institute for Policy Studies they have applicants from a thousand people that want to be interns, and they’re going to take ten, and you want your student to be one of them, so you need to write them a letter. Well, that would be in English, to the Institute for Policy Studies.

But sometimes you’re writing to the mayor of a town who’s running a little organization in San Salvador, and you’ll write it in Spanish. And the students have to be able to write at least well enough to be able to work in a Spanish-speaking environment where nobody speaks English. So you expect them to write their own introductory letter. But I would write a cover letter for them, explaining what community studies was and what we expected of the organization in terms of writing letters of evaluation. Then they would send them to me in Spanish, and I would have to translate the letter evaluating the

student's work back into English. I would translate letters in French and Spanish, and I would try and get somebody else occasionally if I didn't know [the language being used]. I had a couple of Italian letters, but I don't speak Italian, so I'd find a faculty member—get Giulia Centineo to translate a letter for me in Italian. Or sometimes I'd have the students do it and then just check it with somebody that spoke German or something. I had a student work with the Green Party in Germany, and the student's work was all in English, but the letter that came was in German, and I don't speak a word of German, so I had to go find a German teacher to help me translate the letter or the evaluation.

So this was an interesting job with a lot of aspects to it that were not what you typically would think a faculty job might involve.

In about the middle nineties (and I think I did start to tell you this story, but I'll now make it explicit), a decision was made that a better way to approach one of the theory requirements in the major was to have the faculty teach what was called a "gateway course." Did I talk about this?

Rabkin: Not much.

Rotkin: So each of the faculty members—not necessarily every quarter, but most quarters—most faculty members in the community studies department—would teach a gateway course into the major, which would be a course about an area of their expertise. It would be kind of a theory course, which would prepare the students. Typical courses—and you can get that from the list of stuff I sent you—

it would be between five and seven different courses every year, and they'd all be offered in the fall and winter quarters. So students could take one of these courses and be prepared for the preparation class, and join this major as a junior. That was important because we wanted to allow junior transfers, which are half of the students at UCSC—

Rabkin: Half!

Rotkin: *Half* of the students at UCSC are junior transfers, not admitted as frosh. And you don't want to discriminate against (probably) economically disadvantaged students who tend to go to community college and not straight to the university. So if you want to be a program that accepts all students and has some class fairness to it, you don't want to have a major that requires you to start in the sophomore year, because these students are not here in the sophomore year. Because the students are doing so many different kinds of things in the major, you can't necessarily accept any course they had as a lower-division student at a community college as a theory course. Because they don't take many theory courses in the first two years at a community college.

So we would offer, fall and winter quarter, our gateway courses, and students would have to take one of those. That's usually how they would meet their advisor. In order to get into one of those courses, they'd have to write a little essay explaining why they wanted to be in that class. Typically most of those courses had fifty students applying, but we would never take more than twenty-five, the absolute maximum of twenty-five students in one of these gateway

courses. But if you think about this, we had six courses being offered with twenty-five students each, that's one hundred fifty students. And that became the number of students that we're sending off on field study each year. No longer twenty-five or fifty-students a year, but like one hundred twenty-five. I think the most we ever sent out was one hundred thirty students on a full-time field study beginning in the summer. That was towards the end of the program. But we began building that over time. So we went from twenty-five, thirty majors, forty, fifty, sixty, eighty, nine[ty]—you know, kept going up and up and up.

The faculty would teach this class in their area. They would tend to attract students interested in what they were interested in, so it was a sort of organic connection between a faculty member and a student. They'd have to be pretty open-minded about defining what the field was. So, you know, you couldn't really teach a class in domestic violence as your gateway course. It was too narrow.

Rabkin: That would be too narrowly defined.

Rotkin: You might only have three students interested in that; you want to get twenty-five students into your course. So it would have to be "feminist issues," one of which might be domestic violence. But you'd also have to deal with discrimination in employment for women, or any number of other feminist issues people might be concerned about, in addition to domestic violence, or rape, or medical treatment of women, or a whole range of—whatever it might be.

A labor course couldn't narrowly focus on labor organizing; it might be about labor organizing, but it might also look at job markets, or job training programs, or something related to work and labor. So you had to be a little flexible, a little broad in your definition, in order to fill your class up with enough students to take it.

That was a problem sometimes. We had faculty members who were not good at creating a course that was broad enough to interest students. I'll give you an example, without getting into the particular faculty member that was involved. Somebody would want to teach a class on race, and want to focus pretty narrowly on the issue of "whiteness"—which is a field in critical race studies that's important, but doesn't draw enough students that want to get into that abstract theoretical debate about whiteness and what it means. They want to deal with racism, and what they really want to do is help Latino kids get out of the barrio and have a future in mainstream America, or something. You certainly would like them to know about whiteness and critical race theory, but it's not the major focus of their work, and they're much more interested in why are students oppressed in the classroom in elementary and middle and high schools in California if they're Latino? That's related to whiteness, but your class has to be more about race theory in general, and racism as a problem, if you want to get twenty-five students and fill your class up.

So that was an educational process with the faculty, getting them to offer [the appropriate gateway courses]. And many of them tried a couple different courses till they hit on the one that was going to be effective for them. David Brundage,

for example (he wouldn't be embarrassed by this): the first class he wanted to teach was a class on Northern Ireland.

Rabkin: Oh, you mentioned that last time.

Rotkin: Just not enough people interested. You couldn't get twenty-five students who wanted to go to Northern Ireland for their field study and write a senior thesis about Northern Ireland. We had six students interested, but not quite enough to really make it go.

For a while in the major, we'd try to work on (and this is a little tangent) what Bill Friedland defined as "the second curriculum" in community studies. That would be something where a faculty member decided they wanted to do a research project, like Bill had done at Cornell with the agriculture research project, and basically instead of having the students take the standard preparation class and the analysis class and electives in different places, you wanted them to work with you on your research project. *You* would offer them the preparation necessary to go in the field. It would have to still have a six-month internship involved, still have to do a senior thesis. But they would work with you, and you would define the classes appropriate that you taught, or that you would have them take with others. And basically what it would mean is, you would have to attract enough students to this curriculum to get out of teaching the other stuff you might be doing. Like, you wouldn't have to do your share of *Preparation for Community Studies* teaching, or teach these other analysis classes for students. You would be offering your four or three courses a year in

your area of expertise, but attracting enough students to carry your student load in that area.

Rabkin: So would that mean you would have to have a cohort of, like, twenty-five students?

Rotkin: Well, you would have to have a cohort of—since you were doing a lot of work with them—at least twelve students or ten students, or something more than two or three. And as it turned out, the only successful second curriculum was done by Friedland, in an agricultural area. He did it one time and never tried that again. It was hard to find fifteen, twelve, ten students who really wanted to work together in a particular area and make it happen. It could be done, and still is conceptually possible, but nobody was able to pull it together. It always was in the catalog, but something that faculty members stopped even trying to make happen. Several tried it and then discovered they couldn't attract enough students to make it go, and that other faculty were not going to release you from your teaching obligations to do something with three students. Wasn't going to work.

Taking On the Supervision of All Full-time Field Studies

Once these gateways were established, that required faculty to teach an additional course. Instead of the three they had been teaching (plus a bunch of individual studies), now they're teaching four courses, which was the standard load at UCSC at the time. This was about 1995 or so. In a moment of weakness, I

said, "I can supervise those students when they're on full-time field study. I'll make that work. And then maybe I'll teach fewer courses." Because remember, I was teaching three courses a year and doing the field study job. So I ended up going back to teaching, typically, one course a year (the Marxism class) and sponsoring, supervising, all of the students on full-time field study. That worked when I had seventy students. As we began getting more students, I eventually was able, through an external review, to get them to take the position and persuade the dean that we needed to have an assistant field coordinator to help me read some of these students' field notes and so forth.

We also tried a model, one year, of having some faculty members be paid to supervise some students in the summertime. As it turned out, tracking those students, and the logistical issues, and getting their papers to the—the correct students to the correct faculty members who were supervising them—ended up being more of a pain, and taking more work, than actually reading their field notes yourself. Literally, the students' notes would be late, and they'd get lost in translation, or the faculty member would have questions, or they wouldn't follow it. So that model was not a successful one, of having a field study coordinator who farmed out some of the field studies to another person. So we developed the idea of an assistant field coordinator, who really was another coordinator, and had full responsibility for her share (they were both women that we hired in these jobs) for their fair share of the students that they were doing. Because they were only, often, a half-time employee or a three-quarter-time employee, we worked out a ratio, where I did maybe two thirds of the full

time field studies and they did a third of them. And that was the right ratio, given the time we were being paid to do the work.

Rabkin: Were these two women hired simultaneously or consecutively?

Rotkin: No, consecutively.

Rabkin: So there was always just one assistant field coordinator.

Rotkin: Right. First Lisa Mastramico was hired as the first assistant field coordinator. And we did a division of labor to try and figure out how— I didn't want to be her boss; she's doing the same thing I am. Although in a way I was. She'd come check with me about stuff. I'd want to make sure that we would tend to have assigned to her the students that were interested in media, because she was a video producer as well as other kinds of work. So it didn't make sense for me to supervise the students working with Community Television of Santa Cruz County, or some other county where they were doing that kind of work. Or some student who was making a video for their senior thesis—they knew before they went that's what they were going to do.

So we would try to divide the students up. And then, eventually, we started realizing that got confusing—because why have different faculty advisors, and both of us were sending stuff to the same [faculty advisers] who were still [supervising students]. Even when we supervised the full-time field study, eventually these students were still going to come back to campus and have a

senior thesis advisor who was a senate faculty member. So you'd want to communicate with them about the student's work. Some students would never want to talk to their faculty advisor, and [preferred to] be left alone and simply turn in their assignments when due, and communicate with a field coordinator. But some of them wanted to have feedback from their eventual thesis advisor, and wanted to talk to them. And they had taken the gateway class with them. So they wanted to share some of their notes with them, or ask a hard question about, "Gosh, Nancy Stoller, you're an expert in feminist theory. What do you think I should do? Not just have Mike Rotkin tell me what to do; what do *you* think?"

So you wanted to create lines of communication that are easy, and that make sense. So eventually we realized the best way (with some exceptions) to handle this was to divide up the faculty and their students between the two field coordinators. I would take two thirds of the faculty and their students, and Lisa would take a third of them. I don't remember the ratios, but it was something like that. It was actually a decimal-point ratio that we worked out to be fair about the hours we were working. And also I was teaching another class, and if Lisa taught another class she'd be *paid* to teach another class, whereas [it] was part of my full-time job to teach another class.

Rabkin: Was the assistant position created as a staff or a faculty position?

Rotkin: It was academic, with the same title—Academic Field Coordinator—as my own—

Rabkin: Okay.

Rotkin: —although I was given the title by the department of Director of Field Studies, which was only a departmental title; it wasn't really a university job title. The job title was Academic Field Study Coordinator. That was the title we both held.

Rabkin: And did your assistant, like you, have a zero-percent-time lecturer appointment, so that if she wanted to, she could teach a class?

Rotkin: Yes. Initially, I was the only one with the academic title, so [the assistant] did all the work, but they were my students officially, and so I would turn their grades in. But then I would just teach [the assistant] to do the work to turn [the grades] in—to actually go on the appropriate computer program and enter the evaluations—and [I] didn't have to actually do it. Then we realized at some point, once they had done it and could demonstrate their ability to teach and do the work, then we made an argument and applied for them to get a lecturer-zero-time title, which Lisa did. She was then replaced by Florencia Marchetti. Lisa went to a graduate program at UCSC, so we hired a replacement assistant field coordinator.

But by then we were up to 100 field-study students, 110, 111, 130, different years. So I was looking at, maybe seventy or eighty students' field notes, and they were looking at fifty. We were pretty much equal in handling that stuff, although it

was partly a training job, showing them how to read field notes critically and give people feedback. There would be issues of expertise. [An assistant] would come to me and say, "Mike, you've worked with a nonprofit doing this kind of work before. Look, this student's in trouble, and they need some help on how to put together a—the organization wants our student to do a survey for them. You've done survey research, Mike. Would you help this student with it, or teach me how to teach the student how to do that?" Or, "Have you ever had a problem before— They want to know what to do about insurance." I'd dealt with that problem, so I'd—you know, it was training a person to do the job, and it was ongoing, on-the-job training while they were doing it.

I was fortunate in having two assistants who were very quick studies, and quickly came up to speed—both of whom had done practical political work of one kind or another, so they got the idea of what field study might be about on the practical side. And they also had been, by the end, both of them, graduate students who had taken community studies upper-division, or graduate courses with community studies faculty. So I think they had an intuitive sense of what this undergraduate program was about, and how to work with our students. But partly it was a training job.

As the program was winding down—I'm leaping ahead here, and I'll come back to that—eventually they first laid off the assistant before I got laid off. That's a union right: I had the right to bump people with less [accumulated service] time, and so I got to bump, in effect, my assistants—keep my job full time and get them laid off. And they both had other things to do, so it turned out they both

went to graduate programs and were not harmed by having been laid off. In fact, one left *because* she decided to go to grad school. The other got laid off because of lack of work, and then was fortunate enough to want to go to a graduate program and got accepted.

Rabkin: She got laid off because the number of students in the program was dwindling, or because the administration wasn't funding the—?

Rotkin: Because the number was about to dwindle as they realized they were going to try and shut the program down.

Rabkin: I see.

Rotkin: Our program had a very steep decline. The last four years of the program had [first, respectively,] 130, 111, and 109 students, and the last year was eighty students. So we took a number of decades to rise from twenty-five students up to the large numbers. We were gaining students every year until they told us they were about to start eliminating this program, at which point the number of students allowed to be admitted in the program was limited. As they declared it to be a program in suspension, they limited our ability to admit new students to the major to those who had already declared it, either as they came here from a community college or as they entered the UCSC program. And so the number of students on field study declined at the end. And so they realized I could probably handle eighty students; I'd been handling eighty students, so I didn't really need an assistant any more to go back to that number.

Rabkin: Yeah. So I'm hoping—just logistically, looking ahead at the rest of this interview—I'm hoping that next time we meet, we can focus on that whole process of dismantling and suspending the major.

Rotkin: We can probably do that in an hour or two.

Students Serving the Community

Rabkin: But before we stop today, I'd love to hear some more about the students you worked with. There are a number of directions we could go in, but I'm thinking about—among other things—how the community agencies that students were placed in tended to respond to having field study students placed. And also, some of your recollections of various students in the major, and what they went on to do afterwards.

Rotkin: Sure. So I can talk about some of those issues now, students and some of their placements. First of all, most placement organizations were thrilled to have a student volunteer full time for six months. Often organizations get interns who come for four hours a week for ten weeks and then never show up again. They spend more time training them to understand what the organization does, and to do some narrow job that they want them to help with, and it's not very effective. Some organizations can use four hours a week from somebody. If they're running a childcare program and somebody comes in and helps deal with the kids in the childcare program—assuming that they're not axe murderers—they

quickly learn how to help with the pre-school program and make it happen. But a lot of organizations, four hours a week is not useful to them at all. And even ten hours a week, on a part-time placement just for ten weeks—not enough to be helpful. But if you have somebody full time for six months, you can make use of them. You can train them to do the things you need done.

Now, we were always pressing that they not only send the students to do (and I'll use this term we used with our students) "shitwork"—you know, rote work, repetitive, routine. Database entry was our example of the worst thing you could do. That's not acceptable. These students are supposed to be learning something that they can use when they graduate from college, and either go to grad school or get a job in the community. So whereas every job has got some shitwork in it—*my* job always involved Xeroxing, and making lists, and sending stuff off, and whatever—you don't want an internship to be 100 percent or even 50 percent entering numbers into a database. It's just boring. Yeah, for about a day you'd learn something about how to do database entry, but then you've learned it and it's not a learning experience anymore.

Rabkin: Did you have some kind of standard introductory document that you would send to agencies and organizations that were taking your students in, to explain the nature of what you were doing?

Rotkin: Yes. There was a standard letter, and I had it in six languages.

Rabkin: Wow.

Rotkin: I had other people help me write the ones in languages I didn't speak. I wrote the ones in Spanish and French, and got some help from teachers to make sure they were really high-level letters—appropriate, professional-sounding letters. We would send those off as we were trying to arrange the internship: here is this program; this is what we do. The students would explain what *they* were looking for. We would explain what we expected of the organization—exactly what I was just describing. How the students would work under *their* direction. We weren't sending them out with a mission from the university. It was really working with *their* organization, and *their* mission that they were trying to accomplish. But that the students would try to understand, by learning from them, what they did, and to look critically at what they did. We were clear about that from the beginning. But that we were not sending them there to get something done from our point of view.

Rabkin: And were these all-volunteer placements, or were students sometimes being paid?

Rotkin: About 10 percent of our students got paid for their internships. We would always warn students: if you were being paid for an internship, you were facing a potential risk that they would have you do a higher ratio of rote, uninteresting work. Since they're paying for you, they want a product, and so they might expect more database work if they're paying you than if they know you're a volunteer.

But a big part of my job was both teaching students how to negotiate a meaningful field study that had some things they wanted to do and to learn about, that would be fun for them and a good learning experience, along with helping the organization with stuff they just needed done. Or to do that myself with an organization in some cases. And so it would be up to the student whether they were capable of handling that all on their own, with advice from me, or whether their job was to tell me what they were looking for and have me call the organization up and negotiate an interesting kind of placement with the group.

Often we had organizations that became dependent on our students, expected to have an intern or two interns every year. Some of them in Santa Cruz. We had nonprofits in this town that would have collapsed without community studies interns.

Rabkin: For example?

Rotkin: The Survivors Healing Center is a group that does counseling with women that experienced domestic violence or sexual abuse as a child. That's the clients that they're working with. And they have a therapist who does recovery work about sexual violence or inappropriate sexual behavior that people have as youth. That program would not have run without a graduate from community studies who started the program, and [the people] who did all of their staff work were community studies interns working with their program. They had a trained therapist who did some direct counseling with people, but they did counseling

groups with students from the community studies major who were trained to run groups that would be helpful.

There were a bunch of different ones. The Santa Cruz AIDS Project probably would never have had a needle exchange program without our students, probably wouldn't have had a lot of their outreach programs in the early years without community studies making it happen. A community studies student, as her internship, started the hospice program in Santa Cruz County. It's now an ongoing, running program, but it was started as a six-month internship by a community studies student. Christine Longacre was the student, and she started the hospice program in Santa Cruz County as her internship, and then went on to start the hospice program in Paris, France, as a job, for ten-fifteen years after she left the hospice program in Santa Cruz. Where she retired, where she now lives—in Paris, France.

Rabkin: Is this hospice program the one that's based in Scotts Valley?

Rotkin: Yes, currently based in Scotts Valley. That program started as a community studies internship.

Surveying Community Studies Graduates

We did a study in 1985, when the program was about fifteen years old, of all of our graduates. I did the research on finding these students. UCSC did not keep records of who they admitted as students in the first twenty years of their

existence, and as a result, that will explain why Irvine—founded the same year as UC Santa Cruz—had donations from 25 percent of their alumni and Santa Cruz had donations from .02 percent of their alumni in 1985.

Rabkin: That sounds like a serious omission.

Rotkin: An *irresponsible* alumni office and university advancement program that was not being well run. So how could I find these students? The university didn't know where they had gone after they left UCSC. In some cases I went to their college, and was able to easily find where they went to high school. In some cases I could only find that because—remember, there were no computers when UCSC started—I'd have to go to the basement in Merrill and find a box full of the admissions to Merrill College back in the day, back in 1966, '67, '68, '69, 1970, whatever, up to '85, and contact the high school alumni office that had better records than UCSC, to go find these students.

We got about a 65 percent return rate (which is amazing on a survey, especially for people gone a long time from an institution), in which we asked students questions like “How valuable was this major for you?” “Did it help you find your career?” “Did you learn stuff here that was useful to you in your career?” “What are you doing today?” “How do you rate your activism compared to other people you know, in terms of social change work in your job; outside of your job?” “To what extent is your job still related to social change?” That study is available. Very, very useful for knowing what happened to our students.

A similar study was completed about three or five years ago now. That study didn't reach as high a percentage, but it had more detailed questions and more information than the initial one that we had done. I actually did that survey, with advice from other people, but I learned how to use a [Microsoft] Access database, a PC database, for analysis of it—that was the relational database that I learned how to use at the time. I didn't have a PC so I had to go learn how to learn PCs—which are not *that* much different than Macs, but at least in terms of how you use them they're very different, and how they're organized, and their graphics systems. But a study done on a Filemaker Pro database on a Mac is not that different than an Access database once you learn how to use it.

Rabkin: Can you characterize the responses on those surveys?

Rotkin: I would say that 85 percent of our students that were in this major became more progressive or more leftist in their orientation; about 10 percent about the same, and about 5 percent became more conservative from their experience. When they actually went out in the world and looked out at what people were like, they decided that social change isn't possible and that they should do something with their life, or something—about 5 percent. But the ratio, again, of 85 percent being pushed further to the left, more coherent in their analysis. I don't remember the numbers exactly, but a ballpark 85 or 90 percent felt they were more engaged in making their communities better places than their neighbors or acquaintances. The vast majority of them felt that their careers had been deeply influenced by their field study. Ninety-five percent of them said that the field study was the best college experience they had—[of] any of their

college, either undergraduate or graduate if they went to grad school. And not just the major, but the field study, specifically, had changed their life in dramatic kinds of ways. Some of them had other things that they felt were important—particular classes or teachers—but the field study was overwhelmingly this life-changing experience for the students, the experiential education piece of it. Others thought that writing the senior thesis combined with the field study had done it.

We also, in the study, had asked them some more objective type questions, to measure, not just their opinion of how active they were, but “Tell us what you do in your free time.” I worked with a coding system to try and rate people’s activism based on how they answered those questions. It’s not 100 percent accurate, and some people might be exaggerating or underestimating how much they do. But it gave you a pretty good impression that this major has been very effective at creating activists for life, and very effective at making them tend to be more on the progressive side of things—although their particular issues or approach was completely up to them—that we didn’t tend to produce a whole lot of conservative activists. We had some, but mostly not.

Rabkin: Do community studies graduates tend not only to be activists in their spare time, but also to enter into professional careers that involve social change?

Rotkin: Yeah. About 50 percent of our students eventually went to graduate or professional school from our major, which is a very high percentage compared to the rest of the university. And the other half—up until very recent years, I don’t

know what's gone on, but up until, let's say, three years ago, the vast majority of our students either went to graduate school, professional school (including law schools), medical schools, all kinds of placements like that, *or* got a job in the nonprofit sector right out of school. Not flipping burgers at McDonald's, but actually doing something socially useful with an organization in the community. So I would say that study demonstrated, again, to our external reviewers (which is why we had done it), and just for our own interest, how successful we were at really preparing students for a life after undergraduate work.

We also asked them where you went to school after they left here, and the vast majority of our students were being placed at Ivy League schools, Stanford, UC-system schools. Elite schools in the system. A few going to grad schools at CSUs or something, but we had an incredible record of placing students in elite graduate programs.

It's overdetermined: many different causes of why these students would be successful at this. But if you think about it: say you were on an admissions committee—and again, I'll pick on my colleagues in sociology, a program where I respect my colleagues. But here's a student that says—you want to go to graduate school in sociology. Let's assume that our student also wants to go to graduate school in sociology, from community studies. And you ask the sociology student, "What is it you're going to study in graduate school, in our sociology Ph.D. program?" And they say, "Sociology! I *like* sociology! I have straight A's in sociology" (when you had grades), or "I had wonderful

evaluations in sociology. And I'm kind of interested in stuff dealing with feminist issues, and I want to do something in that field."

And our student says, "I've taken the following classes related to—" (let's say feminism is the same area of interest) "—feminist theory classes. I spent six months working with a domestic violence program. I wrote a senior thesis on the causes of domestic violence among African American women in inner cities, and solutions to the problem thereof. I'd like to go to graduate school and work on how to develop a much better governmental program to address the needs of African American women in the inner city, to deal with domestic violence issues."

And the admissions committee is looking at these two applications. Who are they going to pick for their grad program? One of them's got their topic; they know what they want to write on; they've got a very clear constellation of courses—more than the sociology major has, maybe even in sociology courses, around their focus. And they've written, and they can submit with their application, their master's-level (even though it's an undergraduate) honors thesis that they've written on this topic, with a bibliography of fifty works, and letters of recommendation from a faculty advisor that worked with them on this thesis and knows exactly what they were doing. A recommendation from me as their field study coordinator, knowing what they did in the field study. And then they get a letter from the community, from a director of an African American program for dealing with domestic violence in downtown L.A. or New York City or

something, recommending them to the grad program. It's a no-brainer. Our student's going to get admitted.

Now, it's still an average. It's not that the sociology student might not be admitted, because they're not going to find everybody as prepared as our student. But our students get admitted. We had very few people who didn't get one of their top three choices. And we encouraged our students to apply to good programs, and not settle for something. There's exceptions: we'd have students that couldn't get into a graduate program.

We'd have students who kept changing their mind about graduate programs. They'd have a lot of interests, and they seemed focused at first. Let me give you an example of one. They want to work on an international program dealing with international health problems—but they're *really* much more interested in the oppression of women, and not really about health issues, so they really want to go to a feminist studies graduate [program], now that these programs are developing. So I write them a letter of recommendation for a grad program in international health studies at Berkeley, in the Master's in Public Health program. They're not so interested in health. There's other stuff they're more interested in now. I write them another letter, taking the first one, but now they're trying to write about political economy and the oppression of women in the job market in Outer Mongolia, or whatever the heck it is. You know, they jump around in different things. But they're still a good student. And they did stuff in both of those areas, and I could honestly write good letters for them.

It was very easy to write recommendation letters for our students, because they had such a good preparation in some focused area. In that sense, our program was more like a graduate program at the undergraduate level, because people had a focus that you don't typically have as an undergraduate, even when you have a major. I used sociology as that example; the same thing could happen in anthropology or politics or someplace else.

The survey reflected our anecdotal experience, and collections of people writing us back, telling us what they were s[eeing]. You know, "Thank you for your letter of recommendation. I got admitted to this program." Or, "thank you for this major—" They would come with a bottle of wine or something. (laughs) "—because I got a job working with, not the group I worked with, but another group in another city that's very related to that, and without the stuff you did on that field study, I wouldn't have gotten that job!" So we had appreciative graduates from the program [who] got into good graduate programs.

And UCSC had (which we'll come back and talk about some more later, too) a very high success rate in placing students overall—our graduates in lead graduate programs compared to other UC's. But the community studies program had an even higher rate than the UC Santa Cruz campus did in terms of our success in our placements. And that's probably the best way to measure an undergraduate program. It's not like, how does it look to you as a review committee, or a faculty reviewer. And you had external reviews from people in the field tell you how they think the program looks, and whether it's good or

bad. But actually, look at the senior theses these people produced; look at where they go when they'd leave here, look at what they do with their futures.

I think we were always confident that we were doing a very good job—at least relatively speaking. We were always hypercritical, and always constantly “not doing the best job we could be doing,” and trying to figure out how we could make it better, and change things. But I think we always had a fair amount of confidence that this was a darn good program and doing a good job of preparing our students.

I did write, with Bill Friedland, an essay that appeared in, *Academic Activists*¹⁸ a book by Torry Dickinson, about the community studies major. And Mary Beth Pudup has written another one about the major, an essay that just came out. She's a faculty member, and now the chair of what's left of the program.

Rabkin: I did read the one that you and Friedland wrote; I haven't seen hers.

Rotkin: I'll get you hers, too. I don't know if it's been published yet. I have a manuscript, anyway. Those have very useful, much more statistical, detailed information than me just remembering what the numbers are—and examples, really extensive appendices. In the data that I gave you on that flash drive are external reviews. And our self-studies for the reviews (which is what the department says about itself and gives to the three people coming from outside

¹⁸ “Academic Activists: Community Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz,” by William H. Friedland and Michael Rotkin, in Torry Dickinson, ed., *Community and the World: Participating in Social Change*, (Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2003).

to review us) have in them appendices with huge examples of what all of our students this year are doing for their placement. Or where our students go to graduate programs. Those appendices are very concrete and full of useful information, if anybody wants to get a better idea than my off-the-top-of-my-head memory of the students that stick in my mind about what people did.

We had students that went off to become medical doctors—went to medical school at University of Chicago and became oncologists studying cancer and working as medical doctors—and their placement had been working in a rural clinic in Nicaragua or something. It wasn't medical school. We actually had a student who went to Ecuador, who worked part-time in a rural clinic where she actually gave injections, and was trained to do that by the doctors she worked with, and medical advice, and she was bilingual in Spanish and English, and helped really deal with the patients directly. But [she] also went out into very rural villages where she had to have Quechua translators, because they didn't speak Spanish, much less English, and she didn't speak Quechua (although she could get along kind of direction-wise, but not to give a talk). But she would give a talk about the female reproductive system. And I have a slide show she produced which includes an avocado and—I forget the other two fruit[s], little apples or something—as a uterus and (laughs)—

Rabkin: (laughs) —ovaries—

Rotkin: —the female reproductive system that she was using to demonstrate how babies are made, to women in this rural village. She's giving a talk on

reproduction and why they need birth control if they don't want to have more kids. She's out there traveling by herself out to the middle of nowhere and giving a talk in a rural village, then coming back to a—it's not even urban, but a slightly larger village where they actually have a clinic that people come in and she's actually treating. Pediatric work with inoculations and things like that going on. Well, she decides to go to medical school, which she got into, and she went to UC San Diego medical school, and she's a doctor today.

And we have somebody who's a dentist in Oakland, serving low-income African Americans, who for her placement worked in a dental program that was going to—I think she went to Haiti. She spoke French or learned French or had studied French. So she worked in a dental program where her work was helping out in the program, with the logistical stuff. She wasn't doing dental work while she was there, but she was interested in it. And so, not surprisingly, a dental school was happy to have somebody that had been working in Haiti with low-income people doing dental stuff. She's a dentist today and works in Oakland. I went to her office and visited her there. She's African American.

So people really figured out what they wanted to do with their life, and had the stuff on their résumé that made them attractive to either their employers or the grad schools that might want to see them. You can get some examples from those materials better than me just going on about it, I think, with examples.

Rabkin: Great. We need to wind this session down. Is there anything else you'd like to cover before we quit today?

Rotkin: Let me name these topics for next time. Bring them up with me, since you've been willing to do that; that would be helpful. I think we want to talk a little bit about, just briefly, how my work in the community as a city councilmember and mayor and activist on a number of issues related to my work as a field coordinator on campus. I think we want to talk about some stuff I did on campus—because I was there, and an activist—with my union work and other kind of stuff—that I would never have been in a position to do if I hadn't been working for community studies as a field coordinator. So at least touch on those briefly. They're not big topics. I want to talk about some of the politics of how chancellors dealt with me, because I was involved with movements attacking the campus. Ironically. I mean, I was on the city council that sued the university and got sued by the university over university growth, and yet I was a university employee. And so, how did chancellors deal with me as their employee who was busy suing them as the mayor of Santa Cruz?

Rabkin: And how did *you* deal with that?

Rotkin: And how I dealt with it. So that's a topic.

I think we want to at least talk a little bit about how they closed down community studies and how that went, and why I think this program—given what a wonderful program it is—what went wrong? Why did it get ended? How did that happen? Which means I have to talk a little bit about the graduate program in community studies, and start with that topic as a way to lead into the

collapse of the major, because we created a graduate program in social documentation. I can talk about a failed attempt to do that in the nineties, and then the successful attempt to do that in 2000 or whenever it was. And then how that played a role in what happened to community studies and the undergraduate program. You won't understand the collapse of the program without understanding the graduate program—why we wanted one, what it looked like, and how that played a role, sort of leading into that. I think that will give you pretty much what we need to wrap this up. Maybe some final comments about the major and department and what happened with it, and my hopes for where it might go from here.

Rabkin: Sounds great. Thank you, Mike.

Rotkin: Sure. Thank you.

Community Studies Senior Capstone Options

Rabkin: It's Tuesday, January 22nd, 2013, and this is Sarah Rabkin, in my home in Soquel, California, with Mike Rotkin, for our fourth interview. And, Mike, before we get into the main material of today's interview, I'd like to pick up a couple of loose threads and see if we can tie up those loose ends. One of them has to do with the community studies senior exit requirement, which—as you've talked about—started out being a requirement that every graduating major write, and have approved, a senior thesis. And you've mentioned that eventually, that

requirement shifted so that students had other options besides the thesis. I wonder if you could talk about that briefly.

Rotkin: Sure. There was always the possibility of doing a senior thesis that didn't take primarily a written form: a slide show, a video movie—although less of that in the early years, but as people began to get access to technology to make a videodocumentary. Or, a handbook on how to create a food co-op, would be an example from the early years. It's not really an academic paper. We usually expected the students to attach some kind of a more academic paper to it, if it was not an academic paper, to situate it: who's this for; why are you doing it this way; what made you decide on this kind of a project; why do you think this way you've done this will be successful as a social change strategy? So that always had existed. But I think we began to realize that our students realized that we had very high expectations for the senior thesis, and some of them were intimidated by that. And you want to give people a sense of high standards and expectations, but on the other hand, you don't want to scare them to death and have them unable to get started because they feel they're not capable of ever being done.

So at a certain point—I would guess about halfway through the major, so about twenty years ago (I don't know the exact year that it took place)—we decided that we would be more concrete about what we expected in the way of a capstone project for people. And we actually produced different names for these things, which everybody had called by different names all throughout. Every one of these kinds of examples people had done before, under the name of thesis, but

now we were calling them different things. And there were also different ways to get them approved. So, as I said earlier, typically the thesis had a committee of three people [that] included your faculty advisor, somebody else from the department or some other campus department, and somebody from the community that was working on the issue that you had done your thesis about, or your field study about. That had always been a possibility, doing those various options.

So what we decided was that we would give students a choice, fairly early on in the analysis class, when they came back from field study, about halfway through: Students would either come with a note from a faculty advisor that they were approving working with this student on a senior thesis—so they had met, they knew what they were doing, the student was on the right track. And the analysis class was always a class to prepare people for writing these senior theses. So people typically would develop an outline in the analysis class, and perhaps one chapter or two chapters of what was going to be their senior thesis. But other students really were not organized enough, or not really prepared to do a senior thesis. And we were starting to have a problem, especially as the major got larger and there was less close connection between a student and a faculty member (although everybody had an advisor). The numbers got too large to track, and when faculty advisors stopped supervising the field study after a while— A combination of all these different things had led people to the point of thinking, well, let's describe another way to get out of here with a capstone. And this was to be the "synthesis," was the term for this.

A synthesis—again, people had done this before—basically was telling people, it's okay to do less than the absolute master's level writing thing to get out of here: "You can make a decision; it's up to you." And if you decided you'd rather do a synthesis, all that would be was taking papers you had already written—the two papers you wrote on your field study about your organizational analysis; perhaps your "is my organization doing social change" paper, the second-quarter paper; plus maybe a paper you'd written in the preparation-for-field-study class. Or any of your other courses, even. Maybe one of your electives. Take those existing papers; put them together to make a point. You'd have to write a new introduction and a new conclusion to this. So it was kind of a thesis made up of existing work.

And you would, of course, want to revise your papers—both just grammatically and stylistically, but also because perhaps when you put them together with the other papers, you realized there were formulations you'd want to clarify or make more sophisticated. So there was work on the synthesis, but the synthesis was to be approved by the teacher of the analysis class, the Community Studies 194, not by your thesis advisor. So you would, in this last 194 class, be done at the end of that course if you finished this final synthesis paper, which would be the final product.

Rabkin: This is if you were choosing the synthesis route as opposed to the formal thesis.

Rotkin: Which about half of our students ended up doing, pretty consistently every quarter. It's not exactly half, but pretty close to that. And what that meant— The people who didn't choose the synthesis had a note from a faculty advisor that they were going to be working with the student on a thesis, and those students had a different final requirement for the analysis class: they had to produce an outline, a chapter of their thesis, and a work plan for how they were going to get the thesis done. So from that point on, the students split into those two groups.

I could show you a synthesis and a thesis, and you would tell me, "Example A is the thesis and Example B is the synthesis," and you'd be 180 degrees wrong, because we often had a synthesis that was a much better piece of work than a final thesis had been.

Rabkin: And more coherent, even though it was made out of individual essays.

Rotkin: More coherent, and the student put more work into it, and it was longer, and better, and more researched, and more footnotes and everything else. But at least in concept, one person has decided, "I'm going to get this done in a quarter and be out of here." It also became more and more a money issue, as the fees started to go up, and students who came back from field study, always at the end of fall quarter now—

And I should say that. Whereas earlier we had had courses where you could take the preparation and the analysis class two different times during the year, so we

had two cohorts going through the major every year, that got reduced to one, because we no longer could afford enough faculty to offer a *Preparation for Field Study* twice. Also, the experiment, which had gone on for almost twenty years, of co-teaching every preparation class, disappeared; we no longer could afford to do that. And the *Introduction to Community Studies* was no longer co-taught, because it was simply a question of resources: the number of faculty, number of courses needed to be offered, and the number of students we had to cover.

Rabkin: So everybody was on the same timetable now.

Rotkin: So everybody was now having to take *Preparation for Field Study* in the spring; field study summer and fall; analysis in the winter quarter. Many students would come back with more than enough units to graduate, want to finish in the winter quarter, not stay around for spring to continue work on a senior thesis, taking these optional courses for credit to work on a senior thesis—and chose the synthesis path simply because it could be done by the end of winter quarter, and [they] would be forced to get it done by the end of winter quarter.

And as I said, sometimes the quality was quite good on those syntheses, but generally the synthesis tended to be less work, could be finished in a quarter, [was] less elaborate. It involved less additional library research when you came back to campus. Maybe the student doing the synthesis would simply finish reading out the bibliography they had created in the preparation class, turn in two papers, do some basic revisions and then write a new three-page, five-page

introduction to that, explaining why these papers hung together around a common theme.

We also always had students who did what we then formally defined as *projects*: a video documentary; a slideshow; an elaborately developed website that had information about some subject. A funding proposal that they were going to submit to get ten thousand or fifteen thousand dollars for an organization they worked with. Again, if they did one of these projects, they still had to write a paper, do some writing to show why were you doing this project; who was the audience for this project; how did you see it as part of a political or social change process? I would say about 10 percent of our students did projects rather than a paper or synthesis. And the remaining group split about fifty-fifty in those two choices.

Rabkin: Did you also do student-directed seminars?

Rotkin: The final thing you could do, a fourth choice, was to teach a student-directed seminar. No one had a *right* to teach a student-directed seminar. You had to have a faculty advisor; it had to be approved by the Committee on Educational Policy as well as by the department chair. I'd say most people who submitted them tended to get them approved. Their advisors worked with them. Some perhaps were discouraged from doing it when they expressed interest and people felt they were not really ready to do something like a student-directed seminar. And we would always have, almost every quarter, ranging between

two and eight student-directed seminars in the major—typically more like four, five, or six any given quarter.

Rabkin: Were these full-credit courses?

Rotkin: These were five-unit courses, lower division. Students could not take more than twenty-five students in their class. We usually encouraged them to take fewer than that—maybe fifteen to twenty would be a better size—but they could take up to twenty-five. And they typically related to a student's field study. There were some amazing classes—if you look at the student evaluations and reviews, some of the most popular classes ever offered at UCSC.

Rabkin: Do you remember any examples?

Rotkin: Gosh, there's just massive numbers. I made posters for all these classes so students could advertise them, because they would be in the catalog, but often late, and it would say "Staff" next to them. You wouldn't really realize, unless you understood the numbering system, that this was led by a student. Typically they'd be listed under the faculty mem[ber]. It might be under my name as the faculty sponsor, or some [other] faculty's name. But it really was being taught by a student.

Rabkin: Because you had to have a faculty of record.

Rotkin: You had to have a faculty of record. And beyond that, I always felt (I don't know how many people follow this elsewhere, but) that for ours, we almost always had the faculty member come to the first class, certainly to the last class, at least one or two other classes during the quarter—to see how it went, to make an evaluation of the student's work, give them feedback. Every time I organized a student-directed seminar, I usually gave the student independent study credit the quarter before to really complete a good syllabus. And then we met a half an hour each week when they were teaching the class, to deal with pedagogy issues when they were having problems. What do you do when a student comes to class on meth and wrecks everything? You know, things that happen, typically—not every class, but now and then in a class—and have to be dealt with. Or when the students don't come to class pre[pared]. The reading: how can you get students to do reading? There are little tricks and things that you learn after you teach (laughs) for a number of years. So it's fairly labor intensive to supervise one of these. And we had a fair number of them.

Some of the examples would be a class on teaching sexuality to secondary school students, from a student who worked with Planned Parenthood for her field placement and was going to do a senior thesis [that] was going to be producing materials for Planned Parenthood. A class on class and caste in southern India, by a student who had done her field study working with a feminist organization in India, trying to wrestle with these issues of how the structure of society was organized there. They might be fairly technical classes. Students might offer a course on Chicano literature as it relates to farmworker issues. Almost anything you could imagine, students have done. A class on organizing. A class about a

particular social issue. Several classes on the prison system, or the prison-industrial complex, as students often referred to it, following from the work of Angela Davis.

And, again, we would have students very well prepared for these classes. We realized we were kind of under close inspection around these courses, and they would be the evidence used against us if people wanted to argue we were not intellectually serious. So I would say these classes were as tight as any course ever offered at UCSC (laughs), in terms of passing the straight-face test for requiring serious reading, intellectual discussion—and not just go-out-in-the-woods-and-contemplate-your-navel kinds of courses.

Rabkin: And the syllabi had to be approved by CEP?

Rotkin: CEP had to approve each syllabus, and it had to be approved far ahead of teaching the class. Typically, in order to get a student-directed seminar approved, you'd have to submit it the spring before you left on your field study, and it wouldn't get approved until the fall quarter when you were still on your field study, and you'd be able to teach it either in the winter or spring when you came back. So to teach a student-directed-seminar, students had to plan way ahead of time, and be known to their faculty advisors as somebody probably able to do that work.

There were some exceptions, where we discovered people later on who were capable of this, and some of them who stayed for the fifth year or did their field

study in their sophomore year were able to do it with more rapid approval. But typically it was a long process to get them approved—and screened, first, by a faculty advisor saying, “No, this will never do. You’d have to do this to make it work,” or, “I don’t think you’re really ready for this; how about doing this instead.”

But then sometimes I had courses challenged (that I had approved) by the department chair, saying, “This bibliography depends too much on ‘zines and popular literature and ephemera, rather than actual serious academic sources.” So I’d get the student to beef up the academic sources in their course. Or I would show that they were using the ephemera, and examples of pamphlets and things like that, but if you looked at the questions that they had prepared for each discussion, for an entire ten-week quarter twice a week, you’d realize that the student was not taking this material lightly, or that they took quite a serious intellectual approach to it. Often the academic materials had been prepared earlier in courses they had taken, and they didn’t want people to be reading so much dense academic material, as bringing what all the students had read together in the preparation class into this student-directed seminar to address a particular issue or phenomenon.

So that’s how the senior thesis evolved. The senior theses continued to be excellent pieces of work and things we were very proud of, and happy to show any external reviewer. The syntheses were not embarrassing; they usually were competent work, better than a typical term paper for a course, but in most cases not quite up to the standards of the thesis. But still quite a demonstration that the

student had an intellectual focus and perspective, more than most students leave a university undergraduate education with.

Completing the Ph.D. in History of Consciousness

Rabkin: Great, thank you. The other thread I wanted to pick up has to do with your Ph.D., which you completed, I think, in 1991?

Rotkin: Ninety-one, right. I believe I hold the record at UCSC of twenty-two years to get that done, from the time of admission to the program. (laughs)

Rabkin: Congratulations—I think! (laughs) So, obviously, by that time, you were already quite professionally established, both in your position in community studies and also elsewhere. What motivated you to complete the degree at that late date?

Rotkin: Well, there are personal reasons, and— I really didn't have a financial reason, or an economic or professional [reason] in the narrow sense of the term, because my job did not depend on me finishing that dissertation. But the following factors weighed in. Number one: my mother. I had had a fight with my mom, and we had not talked for about a year and a half. A very vicious battle. I don't remember what it was, even, the details, but we weren't talking. My mom can be stubborn and so can I, and we just weren't talking to each other.

Rabkin: Case in point: the Eagle Scout standoff.

Rotkin: Yes, yes—although we generally loved each other and had much better, closer relations than that. But at this particular time—this would have been in December 1981, when I was elected mayor of Santa Cruz. I called my mom, and I [said]: “Mom, I’m just elected mayor of Santa Cruz!” And she said, with an icily cold voice, “That’s nice, Dear. How’s your dissertation coming?” Because I had sort of spent every summer, from the time I finished my qualifying exam and was advance to candidacy, not *working* on my thesis, but *thinking* about the fact that I *ought* to be working on my thesis. It wrecked a number of possible summer vacations that I might have enjoyed. I also went and did things, and sometimes ignored it, and I went on with my life and got a teaching job, and a job elected to city council, and all of these other things. But I kept thinking, “I ought to get this done, because my mom ‘wants me to be a docta.’” (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: So, like a good Jewish mom and boy, you know, I was poised to have this done. So there was just kind of a pressure that it ought to be done. And I also remembered the trauma when my father’s brother, my uncle, who was the head of Army ordnance research, and very high up in the federal government, had applied (he’d finished all of his coursework earlier, but decades later) to get a Ph.D. in mathematics for the work he was doing. He’d had an engineering degree earlier and was not successful, did not pass his exam on it, which was traumatic in our family. And I just thought, “This is a mark that the family takes seriously, and I ought to get it done.” So there was that pressure. But I kept

pushing it off, and never really had time to get on it. I had other things to do in my life, and it was not a high priority. So after '73 I don't think I did any writing at all on that dissertation, or any direct, deliberate research on it.

Gary Lease had become the head of the history of consciousness program that I was in, and he began contacting me and asking me when I was going to get my dissertation done: I was ruining the time-to-graduation statistic for the program, and what was I going to do about that? I knew Gary, and we were friends, and so I took that as a little bit of pressure. And then (I think not by any design, but by accident), I had three members of my committee—Bill Friedland, Jack Schaar (from politics) and Bill Domhoff (from sociology)—all announce their retirement in the same year, 1990, that they were going to be retiring at the end of 1991.

So I thought, "I'm either going to get this dissertation done now, or I'm never going to get it done." Because twenty years later, if I have to pick a new committee and start from scratch— And I don't even now what my topic is anymore. Because after going through a number of possible topics, I had left my dissertation with the subject of [the] student movement in the sixties. And David N. Smith wrote a book called *Who Rules the University*, which was basically the dissertation I wanted to write. So I felt that was gone; there was no point in me doing that dissertation. But I had a first chapter that was about epistemology that would pretty much apply to a number of different issues. I had a chapter on Marxist theory of class that would apply to a number of social phenomena that would be of interest. I had started writing a chapter on the political economy of

the United States in the twentieth century. Although it was not yet done, I was about twenty, thirty pages into that.

Rabkin: Modest chapter subject!

Rotkin: Yes, I was very ambitious, and maybe arrogant in my ideas of what I could write about. In any case, I thought, "I've got to get it done now. What can I possibly write about? I'm not going to do it on the student movement. What should I be writing about? What would be appropriate?" I realized the topic that I was ready to produce a dissertation on, without a lot of additional research (although it would take some) was the history of the progressive movement in Santa Cruz, and how we went from being a right-wing town in Santa Cruz to a progressive community—one of the most progressive, probably, in the country. And what I had were massive resources. Following my teaching of my students about field notes, I had taken field notes on all my political work in Santa Cruz. I had copies of the agendas of massive numbers of political organizations in town, neighborhood groups, the New American Movement (that had done political work here); from the beginnings of the electoral campaigns that actually had allowed us to win a majority of the Santa Cruz City Council. So I had a lot of primary source materials ready to go. I had stored them and actually pretty much well organized them.

Rabkin: You must have had a lot of filing cabinets!

Rotkin: I had an office at school that you could barely squeeze into, and half my house was filled with boxes. And I had a shed out back with, probably, fifteen boxes of field notes, and all kinds of stuff that I'd been collecting all this time. So I made a decision to get it done. I wrote about 300-some-plus pages that summer, on top of the 150 I already had, and finished my dissertation—the basic research and writing—in a summer, ten weeks, eleven weeks. That would have been the summer of '91 that I finished that. Then I spent the fall quarter finding the sources for my bibliography (laughs)—all those cards and notes I had not written carefully enough to track them. So I spent a lot of time, fell in love with librarians at UCSC who could help me find this stuff. (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: And did a lot of work sort of filling in, “Where did that quote come from?” Or looking through the thing and realizing, “That needs a footnote to support a statement I was making about the economy in the twentieth century; what would be the appropriate source for that?” Most of which I had, and I'd done a lot of that, but it was in my head or notes. I poured a lot of work [into it]. I was working very, very hard on that, and I got it done, in time to graduate in 1991—December, the end of the year.

And I went through graduation ceremony, which for graduate students then, at least, was at the Civic Auditorium. Probably a quarter of that audience were people who knew me from my political life and had no idea about my campus life. It was embarrassing. People had air horns, and were doing all the kinds of

things that don't take place in a graduate graduation, but only at the undergraduate graduation. (laughs) It was not disrupted, but it was certainly more raucous than your typical graduation. People just went nuts. And it was like rock-star time, or something, which was ridiculous and embarrassing, frankly, in terms of how it went down. But I was very happy to have my Ph.D. in the history of consciousness. And I think, frankly, having that Ph.D. has made a difference, because it's allowed an awful lot of faculty colleagues in the senate to believe I'm a senate member. I've been treated often as a senate member when it came to respect around political actions on campus, and decision-making. Administrators often treated me as if I— I remember people being shocked: "You're *not* a professor? You're not a senate member?" No, I'm a lecturer. I'm a temporary worker (before we managed to get the benefits of a better contract).

Rabkin: And you did not have security of employment?

Rotkin: I had no more security than any other lecturer would have. I was the first person in the UC system, actually, when we got the new [union] contract for Unit 18, the lecturer contract—the first one to actually go through a post-six[-year] review to get one of these continuing appointments. They were not called "continuing" at that time; they were called "post-six" appointments, and they were three-year contracts, after which you'd have a brand-new review, just as serious as the six-year review, in your ninth year, your twelfth year, your fifteenth and every three years thereafter.

So I had that status, which gave me some protection during the three-year period, but no guarantee of a job after three years. And had trouble when I refinanced my home, because the university was still listing me as a casual employee when I went for a bank loan—even though I wasn't thinking of myself as "casual" after having worked for the university for several decades. When we finally got the continuing appointment approved through the union struggle, then they changed all the continuing appointees to—they were called, I think, "permanent," or, I forget the term for it, but not longer "casual" employees of the university.

But the Ph.D. was helpful to me also, I think, in a number of situations where being a "doctor" makes a difference to people. In general, to my students, to others, it never mattered. And, frankly, most students at UCSC and I think throughout the UC system don't understand the difference between lecturers and professors, and often called me Professor Rotkin. I made a point of correcting them every time it happened, because to me, there's a political issue going on, about the fact that we have a group of second-class faculty, who are not senate members and don't have the protections of tenure.

The Graduate Program in Social Documentation

Rabkin: Good. Thank you very much. So let's move back to community studies. In our interview sessions to date, you have already provided a rich and detailed picture of the major—its origins, its evolution, governance, curriculum, and also your role as both teacher and field studies coordinator. Today I'd like to ask you

to talk first about how the community studies department came to develop a graduate program in social documentation—and then, how the undergraduate major came to be suspended. And that, as I understand it, is the condition in which it remains at this juncture.

Rotkin: Yes. Community studies—the department, the program (it was called a board before it was a department)—had always thought about developing a graduate program. There's intense pressure in the UC system—probably in all higher educational institutions, but certainly universities that have the right to offer Ph.D.s and masters programs—to have such programs. They're valued much more highly by the outside world [and] by the funders within the university structure. Programs that don't have graduate programs are always looked at with suspicion, as being not serious academically.

Rabkin: Why is that?

Rotkin: I think that's a fallout from the focus on research in research universities like the University of California, and the fact that research is valued much more highly than instruction and teaching, or public service. The university has a three-part goal, or mission—has always since it was founded 100+ years ago—which is research, teaching, and public service.

Rabkin: Are those supposed to be equal arms of the—?

Rotkin: They're never exactly equal, but they're certainly meant to be all serious, and none of them ignored. I think it's fair to say that 95 percent of the focus of the university is on research, and the other two fall somewhere in the remaining 5 percent. And you measure that by [the fact that] people who can't teach their way out of a paper bag, but do great research, are destined to get tenure; people who are the best teachers you've ever had but don't necessarily have a stellar research record tend not to get tenured. It's publish or perish—that phrase meaning you do research and get it properly published in the proper kinds of refereed journals, in things that [people in] whatever discipline you're in believe are important. Some disciplines require books; others require articles. Economists, for example, are not typically expected to do books for their tenure and for their advancement; they're expected to do articles in appropriate journals. Sociologists are more expected to do books, but articles are also okay. It depends on the discipline you're in. People in literature are expected to do books, and they don't get as many points for articles. It really varies from discipline to discipline. But if you don't have research going on, and your faculty are not productive in terms of producing articles in appropriate journals and/or books that have been reviewed by the appropriate kinds of people, you are not taken seriously.

Rabkin: I see.

Rotkin: *And*, concomitant with that, you need graduate students to help the faculty with their research. Having graduate students [work] as research assistants and work on faculty research projects, particularly in the natural

sciences, where you can't run labs without post-docs and graduate students working for you. The education piece, or the instruction piece, is really subservient to the research model. And for the most part (and I'm being harsh, but I'm not pulling back from this one iota), there are exceptions, but they're few and far between. When people fight for resources for programs, they're typically fighting for more research fellowships for their graduate students. They would much rather have fellowships for research than teaching assistantships, but they want to find *something* to allow them to support their graduate students, because having a graduate program, having the graduate students, having graduate students that are working directly with faculty members successfully, is the key evidence that you've got an academically sound program. And without a graduate program, you're always under suspicion that you're really frivolous and not a serious university institution. It's nothing less than that. So we had pressure, from the founding of community studies: what was our graduate program going to be?

We had something like a graduate model for our undergraduate program, and it met some of the needs of faculty members for their research. They had undergraduates helping them with their research projects, which is not typical in the university. So some of the pressure *internally* was off of the department for creating a graduate program.

I think from early on we thought about having something like a social policy graduate program in community studies. Sociology also talked about such a program. It would be kind of theory-and-practice-oriented—something modeled

on the undergraduate program, but maybe more focus on social policy—where the students would go work with various institutions and they would do research there using participant observation methodology, and be expected to produce social policy documents for their masters thesis or their Ph.D. thesis.

Rabkin: Was there a notion that this might actually be a joint venture between community studies and sociology?

Rotkin: There were both ideas of doing this inside of community studies alone and in conjunction with American studies; with sociology; with the history department. There were a variety of different proposals at different times that looked like they might be promising, none of which came to fruition.

Finally—I think with a lot of leadership from David Wellman and Carter Wilson, who was a novelist and a screenwriter—[we arrived at] the idea that we would do something in the area of social documentation. And the concept here, just to be clear, was we would take traditional social science research, which we were doing (not necessarily quantitative; more focused on qualitative research, the participant observation method that I described earlier), and find a way to express, let's call them the “discoveries” of the research, in a means that made them more accessible to the general public. In other words, not writing for an academic audience, as most academic publications are, but, in fact, thinking about producing video documentaries. But we were never [only] going to be about video documentaries. We also would want to do sound documentaries, for radio production. Right from the beginning, I think, museum installations, which

was a way that people learn about the truths of science. (I'm thinking about the Seymour labs, stuff that they've done in terms of biology and marine biology focus.) But also the possibility of people doing extensive website development, would be a way of communicating what you had discovered in your research.

Rabkin: Mm-hmm.

Rotkin: So our idea was, we would take people who had been trained in social science methodology, which we were doing, and have them also be trained in and learn how to work various kinds of media, or other kinds of communication means of expressing what it was that was being learned in this research.

And we were told that the university was very, very interested in master's programs. There weren't enough of them, and Ph.D. programs were too expensive, and you didn't get enough bang for the buck, and all the money you put into them, and very few students produced in the end. And by the way, there were not a lot of jobs in the academy, given the falling off of the economy, and other kinds of things happening. So all kinds of students were getting Ph.D.s and not being able to find work. And therefore, maybe it wasn't that productive to offer another Ph.D. program. So we got directed by a number of deans, starting with Gene Cota-Robles and some other folks, into producing a master's program of some kind. And this idea of a social documentation master's program—people were very excited by that.

Right from the beginning, the department realized that we had to be careful not to produce a graduate program that would simply suck all of the resources out of the undergraduate program and leave that program wanting, in terms of its resources and structure and ability to produce quality. We had these huge discussions, because there were some people in favor of the graduate program in the faculty, and some that [were] not so excited by it. Of course, the people interested in social documentation, like Carter and even David Wellman—*very* interested in that program, and other people wondering how they would fit into that graduate program, since they were not video producers, or didn't know how to do screenwriting, or fiction writing, or other kinds of things like that.

But people eventually decided this would be a good program, and we would get teaching assistants out of this. We often had to struggle for teaching assistants in our program. Because we didn't have a graduate program, we'd have to fight to get the teaching assistants from anthropology and sociology to come to our department. Sometimes the [graduate] students were desperate for a place to teach, and we did fine; other times, there were more courses being offered, in good years, than there were [graduate] students available to teach them. We were last on the list, because we didn't have our own graduate students that we could require to teach in our program. So that was another benefit from having a graduate program, was you would have access to teaching assistants, and ones who had been properly trained in community studies methodology and participant-observation approaches, and so forth.

We went to the, it was then centralized, not so much in the social science division but in what was called University Advancement, which eventually became University Relations, to help us figure out how we could get resources to go find where the money was hidden for a startup for a new graduate program. It was a horrible experience. It made us very uninterested in going back to those people.

I'll just give you one example. I knew Jane Fonda personally, from my connections with Tom Hayden, and I thought I could go to Jane Fonda and see whether she wouldn't be interested in creating the Henry Fonda School of Social Documentation, which I thought would be a great way to honor her father, Henry Fonda. I casually dropped that as an example of something that we might want to do—and I was trying to get an idea of how much money would have to be put into a fund to endow something that would make the university sit up and take us seriously, in terms of starting a graduate program (because having resources was one of the things the university looked for before approving a new graduate program).

I could see the eyes lighting up on the part of these people, going, "You know Jane Fonda! We can think of much better things to have Jane Fonda spend money on. She's got lots of money and we have a lot of initiatives we'd like to talk with her about. And you *cannot* speak to Jane Fonda about getting money from her for this program!" So not only did they not help us; they took away the leads we had. And there were several others of that kind of an example. David Wellman and Carter Wilson brought them other kinds of examples that they shot down in a similar way. Or the process that they wanted us to go through before we could

contact people to do it in the right way was so byzantine and so labor intensive, and took so long, that it was counter-productive and not useful. And at the same time, by the time we finally got around to the point of being serious about organizing this, not being in a period of expansion like when we started—the university was going through a period of contraction, and that graduate program possibility disappeared, and we dropped it. So it didn't happen.

Ten years later—and this would have been in the nineties—we decided it was time to look again at a possible graduate program, and we decided that social documentation still made sense, and we started up again. And this time, we got further. Now, as I've explained earlier, many of the faculty were very concerned that we not start up a graduate program on a promise and a shoestring, in the hopes that it would eventually get funded, because we could imagine them approving the program, giving us one or two faculty positions, and then all of the faculty energy being drawn—as it would naturally be by the reward system of the university—into the graduate program, and we would abandon the undergraduate program, which we were all very committed to.

So we insisted that we would not start this program until the university committed to four FTE for a graduate program, and additional soft-money resources for some lecturers and visitors, because if we were going to run a social documentation program, you'd want to bring some well-known social documentarians to the campus. We also had brought some people who were famous social documentarians, in order to set this up, for guest talks, and asked

them the question: what should we do to make a good social documentation program?

We set up a lecture series with, I think, eight or ten guest visitors who came. Fairly well-known people. Todd Gitlin was invited to come talk about what he thought was appropriate for working with the media. But we also brought TV producers and people who had done all kinds of work in social documentary production; people who were doing museum installations. It also became a list that we began to pick from about who we might want to hire for our faculty members, and who did they know—young faculty that we could afford, that would be good to start up in this program but were doing quality work. So we got quite serious about developing this graduate program, and excited by it, and we began to see the way it might help our undergraduate program, and so forth.

Well, of course almost immediately, the university was asking us: how about if they committed to two FTE, and in the long run they would give us the third and the fourth in later years. We said, we want it in writing; we're not taking verbal promises. So they put it in writing that we would have four FTE, and the soft money would be forthcoming, and they were excited by it. And we got some exterior grants that helped us—not as much as we would have gotten from Jane Fonda, but some money that would get us started, and the university was excited by it. And we had a number of deans who thought this was a great program, and they would want to support the creation of this graduate master's program in social documentation.

There were arguments and fights. Some people felt till we get the four FTE position[s] in blood, we shouldn't say yes, because they're going to screw us like they screw everybody (pardon my French). That's just the way the university works: they make promises and then the resources are then not forthcoming. In the next contraction, this thing that they think is wonderful and they love they're going to not like so much.

But we went ahead. We created the program, did a lot of work in designing it. We made connections with other film schools, and we carved out our particular turf that made us different than a City College of New York film school, or the New York University film school, or what was happening at [the University of] Southern California, or the UCLA film school, or whatever. We were going to do something different. We were not producing the next Steven Spielberg; we were working on somebody who was going to be doing documentaries, and not just all in video, and so forth.

We created a small graduate program. We had, I think great success in those people being our teaching assistants. As I mentioned earlier, my assistant, Lisa Mastramico, was admitted to that graduate program, so she left her job as assistant; we got somebody else. We hired somebody else who'd graduated from that program as my next assistant—Florencia Marchetti. Most of the faculty had those students from the grad program as their TAs in their undergraduate courses. It worked out very, very well, and was going nicely.

Rabkin: When did the grad program open?

Rotkin: I believe it opened in the mid-nineties. I forget the exact time, but later 1990s. Might have been as late as 2000. I should check this out; my memory's now faulty on this.

But almost immediately [we] started having struggles about how much soft money we were going to get or not get. They did fund some things. There were promises of other positions coming. And then the university, in about 2005, began to go through a contraction. It was not yet the crash of 2007, but we were already starting to think there were some problems here. We only had accepted three positions, not yet four, [who] were brought primarily to be in the graduate program.

But there was always a model that the graduate faculty would also teach in the undergraduate program. Maybe they would focus a bit more in the graduate program. We brought Ruby Rich in as the chair of the new graduate program. Renee Tajima-Peña, a pretty well-known filmmaker, as a faculty member, teaching practical video skills along with the theory of video production and so forth. And we then hired another young Chicano man, John Jota Leños. He was brought in and he did a lot of cutting-edge work—some video work, but a lot of his work was with websites and new media kinds of activities that he was involved in, museum installations, things like that. So we had three senate faculty in the program, and they were supposed to teach some in the undergraduate courses, one or two, but also do two or three graduate courses, in their four courses they were teaching. And then the rest of the faculty would

teach one or two courses in the graduate program. So we would integrate them. It was very important to us to not have these two separate programs, to try and integrate them.

The Collapse of the Undergraduate Program in Community Studies

We had serious problems, and they began to create the problems that led to the demise of the community studies department. First of all (I've used this term many times here already, and I'll define it again), the collapse of community studies was "overdetermined" (more than one cause). And I would be dishonest if I could tell you I knew exactly why. But I can tell you the factors very clearly, and I'll give you my impression of them. I could go on for hours about this, but I'm going to cut to the chase and tell you what I think are the essential factors.

It didn't help that Ruby Rich (and I'll name the names here), the person who was brought in as the new faculty chair for the graduate program, never really understood the undergraduate program. Late in the process, she said in a department meeting (and the way she said it was very revealing), she said, "You know, the undergraduate program is not legible to me." This is a postmodern term. She's saying life is a text. It's not about *doing* things in the world; it's about *interpreting* things in the world. And the whole postmodern approach to literature, which is to see everything as a text, and to look at semiotics, and the notion that somehow you're going to examine the way in which things ultimately become *seen* and *read* and *interpreted*—it's not really about what's going *on* out there; it's about how we understand and interpret what's going on

out there. And she's saying, "I don't understand" (in common English)—"I don't understand this undergraduate program and how it works." But she's saying, "It's not *legible* to me. It's a text I'm looking at; I don't understand how to read it." Well, the fact that she then became chair of the entire community studies program, and she didn't understand the undergraduate program—a little problematic.

The dean was facing serious budget cuts in his division; he wasn't making that up. A very quick analysis: the state has generally been underfunding UC over the years. It went from 100 percent funding of UC to, currently, about 16 percent funding of UC's budget comes from the state funds. That's been a slow process, more rapid in recent years, which, of course, has led to tuitions going up to cover some of the missing money—and other kinds of scams, and focusing much more on patents and investments and other ways. In a way, it's more like a private university than a public university. But one of the consequences of that is that the university simply gets less money.

And when there's an economic crisis in the state, which we've had in California for some time up until recently for sure, the university faces budget cuts. And those budget cuts take place first systemwide, and a smaller amount of money comes to the Office of the President. And at least up into the period we're talking about, the Office of the President received all tuition and all state funding, and then decided how to distribute it, by a secret formula, to the campuses—in which the vast majority of the resources go to the two flagship campuses, Berkeley and UCLA; much lesser amounts to smaller campuses. And Santa Cruz and Riverside

get screwed completely, particularly because they have fewer graduate programs, which are the coin of the realm, as I just explained. They don't get the kind of resources that the other institutions get.

So it's bad enough that, right off the bat, the state funding's cut, and UC Santa Cruz gets a smaller share of that. And the Office of the President takes an increasing share out of what they get from the state, and uses it for bloated administrative costs, which have been shown to go up much more rapidly—in fact, exponentially—compared against the number of new students or the number of faculty being hired.

Rabkin: Is that also true of the ratio of administrative costs to instructional costs on the separate campuses?

Rotkin: Yes. There's no question that administrative costs both centrally, at the Office of the President, and within each of the campuses—that if you draw simple little graphs, and just talk total costs for administration versus instruction, versus research, other kinds of things, that administrative costs [are] going up faster than any other cost factor. And it's something that Jerry Brown (the governor), this year, is very upset about, and trying to get UC to— He's trying to see if he can get away with not giving UC more money by getting UC to be “more efficient,” by dealing with what he calls their administrative bloat. And I think he's correct in that analysis to some extent, although they should both give UC more money, *and* UC should spend the money better.

I'm getting ahead of myself to say that UC is now working to change that. They made a decision this past year that the campuses will keep their tuition money, and they can spend it on their campus—which has led campuses into a bunch of very strange experiments to find ways to get students from out of state, who give 10,000 dollars more [apiece] at the undergraduate level to come to UC. So they're trying to recruit students from New York, because they'll get not only the tuition from them, but 10,000 dollars on top of it, and they get to keep all of that money on the campus.

Rabkin: Are campuses obligated, though, to give spaces to a certain minimum number of in-state students?

Rotkin: No. What's happened now is that there's no statewide regulations for how many UC students they have to take. In theory, they still have to take a certain percentage. They're supposed to take a certain number of students that they've taken before, but they can take on top of that as many additional students as they'd like to take. And if they perceive that the students they're bringing in from outside make money for them rather than lose money, it would be in their advantage to invite more students from other places, bringing more money with them.

So, for example, at Berkeley this past semester, almost a third of their incoming class came from outside of the state of California, to raise a lot of money. Where did most of those students come from? Mostly from China, paid for by the Chinese government. And the vast majority of those students at UC Berkeley this

past fall semester didn't speak English well enough to pass classes at UC Berkeley. So huge numbers of them failed. It worked for them, because they got the cachet of "I attended school at UC Berkeley" when they go back to China. The Chinese government gets the sense that somehow they're bringing back students that have some training from the United States, which is probably not the case. UC Berkeley got additional money from the Chinese government for bloating a bunch of their classes with a third of non-functioning students in their classrooms. So it's crazy, and completely strange, but it's the incentive being given to campuses—to raise more money, to bring people in from outside, that makes that attractive.

Rabkin: I don't want to dwell on this too long, but I just want to get this clear in my mind: As a state institution, is UC not constitutionally obligated to provide spaces to a certain number of graduating seniors?

Rotkin: Yes, UC has to accept, in theory, the top 12 percent of graduating high-school students in the state. And they pretty much do that—it fluctuates a bit, but they do make some attempt to do that. And then it's very complicated how the students have to go to second choices when a campus is "full." But the definition of when a campus is full is flexible enough to allow [campuses] to declare themselves "full" of UC students and still take, on top of that, additional outside students from other places, in order to make more money.

Rabkin: When you say full of UC students, you mean full of students from the state of California—?

Rotkin: They've met their 12 percent obligation by admitting a certain number of students. Then, if a certain number of students from that 12 percent they admit don't choose their campus, they're not blamed for that. So let's say you admit just the right number (which they don't usually do; they usually admit a larger number than their 12 percent, in the expectation, they're trying to hit a target that will be that top 12 percent of [California high school graduates]). So they might accept—I'm making a number up, but let's say 15 percent, in the hopes that 12 percent will say yes to their campus acceptance. And then, if more than the 12 percent end up saying yes, they often get diverted to another campus. And typically, let's say, Berkeley and UCLA always fill at least their 12 percent and divert students to elsewhere. Most years, UCSC meets its 12 percent quota and diverts students to elsewhere. [UC] Merced is way below its 12 percent and takes a bunch of transfer students from other places. [UC] Riverside tends to take transfer students from other places. It varies from quarter to quarter, year to year, which places get second-choice students or third-choice students diverted to them.

But what's changed is that now the campuses have a direct economic benefit from taking outside students, who bring more money with them. It's a benefit before that they didn't have, because UC Central took the money and distributed it all to UCLA and UC Berkeley. That no longer happens with the tuition money. The Office of the President still distributes the state money according to a secret formula. They are currently trying to make that formula more transparent, and not have it be a secret formula, because we have embarrassed them with it in

front of the legislature and other places. (The “we” here is the University Council of the American Federation of Teachers union that I work with, and we have brought this into the legislature and the governor, and they’re quite aware of this disproportionate treatment. The thing that wakes the legislature up about it is that UC Riverside, which has by far the highest percentage of students of color, receives the smallest amount per student of funding from the UC system. So that’s embarrassing to UC in front of the state legislature that cares about things like that.

Rabkin: Okay. So let’s bring this back to community studies.

Rotkin: So all of this is by way of saying [that] the dean of social sciences, Sheldon Kamieniecki, at UC Santa Cruz, had a very real budget cut facing him—because not only was money reduced from the state, then cut somewhat as it passed through the Office of the President, cut again as it passed through the executive vice chancellor’s budget at UC Santa Cruz, so [the cut then] comes to the division [of social sciences]. Then the division has to make decisions about what they’re going to cut. Those are very real decisions. The dean was not making it up; he was not lying about it, as some people accused him of. He had several hundreds of thousands of dollars he had to cut out of his budget.

He had various choices in front of him. He might have done a 10 percent across-the-board cut to the entire division, which was being contemplated. He had an advisory body of one representative from each of the eight departments in the social science division who had *recommended* across-the-board cuts to everybody.

He had already made earlier cuts to his own staff within the divisional office, and was not willing to make any more cuts there. He had already cut field programs, he felt, pretty much to the bone, in terms of, what had been three-quarter-time field coordinators had all been cut to half time in most of the field study programs on campus (unless they had outside funding for those positions)—including getting rid of, by that time, my assistant in community studies, so we were back to one full-time [coordinator] there rather than one-and-three-quarter time, which he had had for a while.

He made the decision to basically terminate the community studies program. He came to a community studies department meeting and announced it boldly: that was what he was going to do. He didn't hide the ball; he was very direct. We were shocked. We had no warning that that was what was about to happen. He was coming to, you know, "talk" with us about things in the division—budget issues in the division. And he said, "I'm going to cut community studies. I have some other cuts to make, but that's where I'm going to save most of my money." And he said, "I can imagine a social science division without a community studies department. I can't imagine one without an economics or a psychology department." So he had traditional programs that had been in academia since the fifties or earlier, and we were kind of a unique program.

Didn't explain why he might cut us and not, say, environmental studies, which hadn't been around in the fifties. Perhaps that's his field; maybe that's something he didn't want to cut. Or Latino and Latin American Studies, another example of

a non-traditional or interdisciplinary department that he decided not to make major cuts in.

Now, in fact, he had made major cuts already in LALS (Latino and Latin American Studies), where he had laid off the two lecturers who were teaching, together, by the end, sixteen courses—half of the undergraduate program. He laid them off, and the number of courses offered to undergraduates in LALS was cut in half, because he had no way to replace them. He hired one new senate member who offered four courses in the program, so they lost twelve courses in that undergraduate program. And because he laid off people that taught some of the major required courses in the department, and union rules meant that they couldn't lay those people off and hire new people to teach the *same* courses, he basically was prohibited from teaching courses in immigration (which was covered by Susanne Jonas, who got laid off) or any courses dealing with the Andes, which were taught by the other lecturer he laid off, Guillermo Delgado. Or courses in Central America, being taught by Susanne. So it made quite a mess of the LALS undergraduate program for a number of years, until the rehire rights for those two lecturers are over this coming year, when I think they'll begin to fill back in some of those courses they had.

Meanwhile, community studies was clearly the dean's target. It was going to get cut. He announced it to us. We began doing organizing work, and we went to the other departments and said, "They've picked us out. Is this fair? Do you think this is right? We're a really unique and important program, and we've worked with you over the years. We know that you appreciate our program." We were

able to get a letter, signed by seven of the eight departments (excluding the education department), that they agreed with us and that the dean should not cut our program, that the cuts should be more fairly distributed among the various departments.

Rabkin: Can I stop you for just a second and ask about that? Since there had been this recommendation from this joint talk force or committee, that the dean cut equally across all departments—

Rotkin: —which he ignored. It was an advisory committee, which he didn't have to pay attention to—

Rabkin: —so did he articulate a reason why he would choose not to do that, and instead concentrate all the cuts within community studies?

Rotkin: I think the dean gave us a speech about how, in difficult times, you destroy an institution by just indiscriminately cutting across the board—which I don't disagree with in principle—and that therefore he would be better off to concentrate on what we do well and what's important. And community studies was neither done well nor important, in his point of view. He was very blunt—insulting, I would say, almost, although I don't believe he was trying to be insulting. But his bluntness was both welcome and insulting at the same time, if you can imagine: being told what he really had in mind, and that's nice, to not be lied to or have him sneak around. But his description of our enterprise as not of

much value in difficult times, a likely place to make cuts—not very well received, as you might imagine, by the people he’s talking to about the program.

Rabkin: Did he cite or provide support for that claim about the level of worthiness of the department?

Rotkin: No. So, Cause Number One: The dean didn’t like the community studies program. He’d expressed doubts about it right from the time he was hired. We had lots of deans who were hired and didn’t understand what we were about. We’d meet with them and show them past external reviews, bring them up to speed, educate them. Most eventually decided this was an *amazing* program, that it was a feather in their cap to have it in their division—kind of a cutting-edge program in the social science field, and something that they should be proud of and should see as something important to what made Santa Cruz unique as a campus. [This] dean didn’t buy that, didn’t share that view, thought it was wrong.

We were going through an external review that same year.

Rabkin: This was the ‘06 review?

Rotkin: Yes, the ‘06 review. I believe the department made a mistake, in that always in the past when it came to external reviews, we always put forward a review of ourselves as doing wonderful work, cutting edge. Of course [we would] always try to be self-critical, which we had done, and change our

curriculum, and respond to changes in the world and our students' needs and so forth. But there was a sort of growing sense among the faculty—and this included, now, some of the new graduate-program faculty—that our undergraduate program needed reorganization, tightening up, changes, and so forth. So for the first time ever in an external review, we entered the review with the sense that we needed a major overhaul of our undergraduate curriculum—even though most people still believe that it was a wonderful program and we were simply making it stronger, not that it was weak and desperately in need of overhaul because it was not a good program. But it just could be made much better.

But as people began to interview with the external reviewers (they'd talk individually with faculty members), it became an opportunity for each faculty member who believed in some new piece of the new curriculum we were in the process of developing to focus on how bad the program was without that new additional piece that they were in favor of. [For example,] why we needed to have a course that dealt with ethnic, racial, and gender issues that our students didn't fully understand.

Particularly in the graduate program—people felt, ironically, about community studies, that we didn't put enough emphasis on GLBT issues, although we were probably the program on campus that put the most effort in that, maybe along with feminist studies. We had, certainly, more than our [share] of gay and lesbian teachers in our program. It was a ridiculous claim that somehow we were insensitive to those issues, given the history of our program, hiring some of the

first openly gay and lesbian teachers at UCSC and continuing to do so over the years—including the new chair of the program, two out of the three people hired for the graduate program, who were out, and a significant number of our undergraduate faculty. So it just was a ridiculous claim. But, so we had to reexamine whether we were sufficiently covering the issues of GLBT concerns, *and* racial concerns, and everything else.

And, again, the number of our students who were students of color was higher, it had always been higher, than the average on campus. The number of courses we offered that directly addressed those kinds of issues on ethnic-studies type things, because we didn't have an ethnic studies major, kind of important. And the number of students who chose us because they were interested in getting into political work around ethnic issues or racial issues—much higher than typically on campus. So it's sort of ironic that that would be a claim—that we were having problems with that.

In any case, the external review that year was, once again, extremely positive. It still described us (and I have to just use short form, but) described us as a cutting-edge, model program that should be emulated across higher education: for its interdisciplinary[ity]; the linking of theory and practice; the attention given to students; the ability to create a model that didn't treat students as a mass in the Scantron tests, but provided something like an intimate educational experience for students, with close contact with faculty; that it was very much focused on student needs rather than being oriented towards faculty research, so the students really got the kind of education they needed. And our success, once

again, just statistically, in placing students in elite graduate programs, and in meaningful jobs related to what they had studied, as they left UC, rather than flipping burgers at McDonald's, which was the unfortunate possibility for a lot of UC graduates during economic downturns.

So it was a wonderful external review, but it did say that there were curricular changes underway, and that those were important, and that we needed to look closely at those, and they would make the program a much stronger program. The dean chose to interpret that one negative paragraph in a very long external review as evidence that we were in serious trouble, and called it a "negative external review." No basis for doing so, by any reasonable person looking at it. So the external was ammunition, from the dean's point of view, even though we didn't believe that was anything but a major distortion.

We have no idea how our chair, Ruby Rich, interacted with the dean. She was the only person going to talk to the dean, for the most part, during this period. Trying to figure out what he wanted us to do, or what we might do to save the program, or what he was looking for, how we could make ourselves more attractive to him. We don't know (there's no way of knowing) whether she defended the program as best she could, and strongly and effectively, but he was simply hell-bent on where he was going (at one end of the spectrum); whether (in the middle of the spectrum) she was not that interested in defending the undergraduate program, made a kind of half-hearted attempt to do so, through which the dean could see that he was not going to get in a bunch of trouble with her if he continued to cut the program—or whether she simply gave the program

up to the dean, and said, "As long as you support the graduate program, I don't care what you do to the undergraduate program." And it would be dishonest to say that I know what took place in those private conversations. All we know is the result: the dean never, for a moment, hesitated in his hell-bent desire to end this program and disestablish it, as he had said he was intending to do.

Simultaneously with this, our students, who were very well trained in organizing, got up on their hind legs, and very well organized when they found out that the program was at risk and that it was being challenged by the dean. We had 3000 or 2800 members of Facebook join a Friends of Community Studies within *a week* after the dean's announcement, which is an amazing number of people. We had, before we were finished, about 200 letters from famous people, including—Marshall Ganz was the name I was trying to think of earlier, who had been the director of organizing for the United Farm Workers and became, now, a professor of organizing at Harvard University. Letters from congressmembers; letters from the governor; letters from all over the place about how this was a model program that needed to be defended and supported. Letters from all of the nonprofit executive directors in Santa Cruz and elsewhere around the state of California and the country. Strong, supportive letters. Letters from parents of students who had graduated. Letters from people we'd sent graduate students to. The students themselves had demonstrations—organized, written things.

There was a perception by the senate faculty in the community studies program that the extent to which students got organized and mobilized, it would not be seen as a strength of the program, but would reinforce the perception that we

were a popular program with undergraduate students because we were not academically serious, and the students were defending a kind of a free-ride undergraduate program. So at the time that the faculty should have been working closely with the students to organize what Mao Tse-tung would have called (and I'll use it here advisedly) "walking on two legs"—an inside strategy for how you work inside of the senate, and inside of the administration, to defend your program (which, by the way, was a program that was supported and appreciated by the executive vice-chancellor by that time, the current executive vice-chancellor, who was a former professor from anthropology; unlike some other EVCs that did not much like our program because it wasn't a science program, she was a supporter of the program—and the chancellor, George Blumenthal, who was a strong supporter of community studies, and frankly mentioned it in every speech he ever gave in the city of Santa Cruz, something I know from wearing my mayor's hat, as something wonderful the university was doing for the local community)—

So we had passive support, but nonetheless support, from the chancellor, the executive vice-chancellor (who constantly told us, "Let's find some way to save this program; we think it's a great program," but [they were] not willing, for whatever reason, to instruct the dean that he must save this program. Both of them had the ability to do so; neither of them ever did that. So we have a letter saying, "This is a wonderful program; I hope there's a way to save it," etcetera, but never a direct letter to a dean saying, "Do not cut this program," which they might have exercised but decided not to.

And the other leg of the strategy was working with the students on getting popular and public support – from alumni, other students, potential future students, parents, and UCSC donors. But, as I mentioned earlier, the chair and some of the other faculty came to believe that they should not encourage student activism around saving the program – because of how it would be interpreted by the administration and senate leaders. We could have and should have worked both inside of the administration and senate and outside with popular forces, but there was absolutely no coordination between the efforts. The students felt abandoned by the faculty and written out of the struggle by them. Lecturers like myself and Andrea Steiner and one senate member—David Brundage—met with the students, but were often discouraged from doing so by our faculty colleagues.

Rabkin: Are there precedents for exercising that kind of power on the part of the—

Rotkin: Executive vice chancellors often tell deans, “Don’t do this,” “Don’t do that”; “I’ll give you an FTE if you keep this part of a program going,” or “I won’t give it to you if you do.” Typically, chancellors don’t reach into programs that way, but executive vice chancellors do. And if chancellors want to have that kind of an impact on a program, they do it through the executive vice chancellor. That’s been my experience on most campuses. There’s exceptions.

Rabkin: How about your alumni? Were they also organizing?

Rotkin: We organized our alumni, and had them, in major terms, writing in, threatening to quit the alumni association. Alumni who had given donations to the university—we found out who those people were and had letters from them that their donations depended upon keeping community studies going. We also started a fundraising campaign, which raised, fairly quickly, about 4000 dollars from alumni, just to show that we could raise money and our alumni cared about us. And we actually organized—at one point Mary Beth Pudup did major work on this, along with Andrea Steiner—a major fundraising campaign. I can't remember the details, but we were going to try to raise, I believe, a half million dollars—maybe half of it from two or three large donors, and then a middle group of people who would give some significant money, and then a bunch of small donations from a huge number, 3000 alumni, who we had the names and contact information for.

So we had a strategy we were working on that would have students doing organizing work in contact with the faculty, and have it coordinated. From the moment that the dean had come to that meeting—and Bill Friedland was invited to that meeting as an emeritus faculty in the program—Friedland called for what he called a “war room.” And this was not so much a war metaphor as a political metaphor from the Democratic Party, from James Carville: that we needed to have a regular meeting, a strategy meeting, at least once a week: where are things at. And actually organize a campaign to defend the community studies department. We had no meetings of the department. For the first time in history, I was disinvited, and all the lecturers were disinvited, from the faculty department meetings.

Rabkin: By whom?

Rotkin: By the chair, Ruby Rich—and the senate faculty must have concurred with her. They no longer invited students to the meeting, who had been always invited to come (sometimes asked to leave the room when there was a tenure case, now, as I explained earlier). They were simply not even invited. The meetings were now not described as department meetings, but department *faculty* meetings, to which only senate faculty members were invited, along with the student advisor and the department manager (sometimes not even both of them). And sometimes meetings were held among the senior faculty, without the junior faculty being invited. There w[as a] complete splitting up of the program. Never called a war-room meeting, never had regular strategic discussions of what we ought to be doing.

So the students went their merry way, on their own—I think doing fairly impressive kinds of work, but never having the latest information about what exactly, where they should be applying pressure, what should be their talking points that might *not* sound like they were anti-intellectual or anti-academic. So that link was broken.

David Brundage kept meeting with students and trying to be helpful with them, but the department chair would not meet with students. Mary Beth Pudup, the chair of the undergraduate program (because we had a department chair, a graduate [program] chair, and an undergraduate [program] chair)—none of

those three people would meet with students about this issue of what was happening to our department. I met with students fairly regularly, but I had no authority and nothing to tell them. And I was often being kept in the dark, by then, about what was really going on in these meetings.

So we would get emails, information: here's a new statement from the dean reinforcing that we're gone, or disappearing. At some point, the dean had managed to move us from a department of thirteen senate faculty members to seven senate faculty members—by denying a tenure case and by not replacing Carter Wilson and Nancy Stoller when [they] retired. That's three positions gone there. (I can't remember the names of all the people who were beginning to reach retirement age or disappearing.)

So we were left in a situation where there were seven faculty members, three of whom were committed to the graduate program. And when we looked at the resources that year—this was two years ago now, 2010—somebody was on sabbatical; there were six faculty able to teach, three of them fully committed to the graduate program and only three left in the undergraduate program. Only six students in the graduate program that year. And they were unwilling, the graduate faculty, to shift their focus a little bit over into the undergraduate program and teach some extra courses. We got—I think because it was required to get the students through the major—a little bit of soft money for one course, from the dean. So we managed to mount the undergraduate program. But electives were disappearing. Advising work was forcing more and more students to take their electives in other departments, because we weren't offering as

many. And we couldn't use the student-directed seminars, [which] were all lower-division courses, and not acceptable for electives in the major.

So the undergraduate program was basically understaffed to be able to provide an effective undergraduate program. At that point, the Committee on Educational Policy, a senate committee which is in charge of curriculum, made a decision that we no longer had sufficient faculty to bring new students into this program and commit to them that they would have a full undergraduate program. They put the program in suspension. I believe that was a correct decision, because the program simply didn't have the resources it needed to run.

The dean then attempted to get the department disestablished, and put a formal request in to CEP and the senate. The senate has to approve disestablishment of programs, because departments are actually creatures of the senate. They are divisions of the academic senate at UC. And so the administration cannot start or end an academic program. They can fund it or not fund it, but they can't actually give an academic approval to a program. So whereas the senate committee could *suspend community studies admissions*, which they did— And they had to admit people who had (informally called) "catalog rights": if you had come to UCSC as a junior transfer, listing community studies as your major, you had a right to graduate in community studies. Or if you had come as a frosh and announced that, and you were already here, and had taken at least one course in community studies, you had a right to finish. But let's say you were a junior who had never declared the major: you were not allowed now to declare community studies; you had to pick some other major. So we still had a small number of students

able to get into the pipeline of community studies, but the number dropped from something like 120 or 130 admissions a year to about thirty or something students who had a right to finish up this major in the last year.

When the dean asked to *disestablish* the community studies major, the academic senate said no. They did not agree that this program was weak, or needed to end. It simply was in trouble, temporarily, needed to get more resources. They actually sent a letter to the dean saying, “fund the program.” (Said nicely and politely.) “We’re not willing to disestablish it. You should fund the program. Why did you disfund this program anyway?” Because they thought it was a good program, the academic senate.

The dean refused to do so, and so for a period there was not adequate funding. The dean, however, decided that he was going to split the graduate program off from the undergraduate program and create a separate program for the social documentation program. That program tried to find a home, first in the film & digital media program, which did not want them, and they were not accepted as part of that program. They are now kind of at loose ends. I once asked Ruby Rich, “Are you guys going to get some great new offices over there in the new Digital Media building?” And she laughed—like, “They’re not giving us anything. They don’t give us any resources. We’re totally an orphan over there; we have no connection.” So I’m not sure where they’re currently housed, or what’s going on with them. But they are a separate graduate program, not tied to the community studies undergraduate program. The dean likes *that* graduate program. I don’t know anything more about it. I’m in the dark, as anybody else

might be, about what kind of funding they're getting, how many students they're admitting, or what's happened to that program. It's now a separate program not tied to the undergraduate community studies program.

Rabkin: Have all the undergraduate students who were in the pipeline now finished the major?

Rotkin: There are now roughly thirty students enrolled this quarter in *Analysis of Field Materials*. They just finished their field study this past summer and fall. Mary Beth Pudup was the faculty advisor for that summer and fall field study, and there are, I believe, two sections of fifteen students each in the *Analysis of Field Study*. Julie Guthman's teaching one, and I think Mary Beth Pudup's teaching the other, but I'm not sure; it may be Andrea Steiner. Anyway, there are two courses of 194 this quarter, to let these students graduate. And as far as I know, no new students have been admitted to community studies.

Now, once they separated the undergraduate program from the graduate program, the faculty who were left in community studies—David Brundage joined the history department, where he had been teaching one course a year most years. He then became a full member of the history department, and now will teach, for a while, one course in community studies, to allow us to finish out the program, or perhaps be willing to continue offering (if the program continues in some smaller form, as a program, not a department, inside of a college)—he might be offering maybe one course. But he will not be a core faculty member.

Rabkin: So history had an FTE that they could give to him?

Rotkin: Yes, history offered him an FTE, and he was able to transfer. Actually, he had an FTE: he's a senate faculty member who was tenured—

Rabkin: Oh. I see.

Rotkin: —so, with the approval of two deans and the executive vice chancellor, he took his FTE and moved to history with it.

Mary Beth Pudup became a social science division professor—which has happened when they can't find a place for somebody to be moved. We tried to put community studies as a sub-program into sociology, where it was not successful. The faculty there—somebody made the decision that it would have to be unanimously accepted, and I understand by rumor (I don't have any factual stuff on this) the vote was whatever the number of faculty [in the department] to one in favor of admitting us. For whatever reason, what is clear is that sociology did not accept community studies.

They attempted a new program combining American studies and community studies. Came to nothing. But in informal discussions with the executive vice-chancellor and Herbie Lee, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, they continue to try and find some soft money to let community studies limp on in some way.

And the provost of Oakes College has now accepted community studies as a college program. Mary Beth will be teaching through that program; that will be her teaching, primarily. And they've not got approved—it's in the process of approval—a small core faculty: of Mary Beth; Julie Guthman has become a social science division faculty member *not* tied to community studies, and teaching more in the area of environmental studies and so forth, but not in the environmental studies department. It did not offer to take her FTE. She is also tenured, but not accepted by [any department]. So both Mary Beth and Julie—although both have good publication records, particularly Julie—never were accepted by another department. David Brundage was. Marcia Ochoa was not accepted in anthropology, which was her disciplinary field, but I believe was accepted by feminist studies. They had a line they had available, because she didn't have tenure, but she did have an FTE on the way to tenure, and they accepted her as a junior faculty member. I don't know what rules they've worked out for how she'll get reviewed by a department where she will have only done half of her work as a junior faculty member in their department, and the other half was in community studies. I'm sure there was a protocol worked out for what her review might look like. So that's where she went.

So community studies is now what we would have called a “rump program”—thinking back, here, to the rump legislature that met in the Glorious Revolution of 1688 (laughs) in Britain. The idea that it's not a complete legislature. It's not a complete program. It's a shadow of its former self. But there'll be some kind of a field study program. It will be a major, I believe, for a very small number of people, but primarily kind of an enrichment program in the college, for Oakes

College. And this is consistent with what's going on in the college system at UCSC, where every college now seems to be working on something of a field study program. I've been talked to about starting one up at Merrill, by the provost there, Elizabeth Abrams. There's a program like this in Kresge that I'm aware of. There's a small one in Crown; there's one in Cowell. Oakes is now going to look at this as their possible field study program. Nine and Ten has had an internship program for some time. I think each college is facing a little bit of pressure to start something like a field study program.

Rabkin: Pressure from where?

Rotkin: The Academic Senate had decided that every student should have field study experience at Santa Cruz—and then, ironically, they defunded community studies, and some of the actual time that people had in the other field study programs in the social science division. But the idea [was that] somehow they would squeeze some field-study work out of the colleges without much academic resource support for it. So it's not yet formalized. It's still under discussion.

Elizabeth Abrams and I have been talking about me making 6000 dollars to organize the beginning of an internship program for Merrill College in the fall quarter. I would offer, perhaps, the courses in the fall, and figure out how, over a year, that would be picked up by other faculty who are college fellows. I might play some role in that. We don't have a final contract; it's not yet absolutely

decided, but we're having discussions about this new program. And she's been given instructions that she should be trying to create this kind of a program.

Rabkin: Instructions from—?

Rotkin: Instructions from the executive vice chancellor and the colleges, from the provosts' committee. I don't think it's so much a mandate as, "This would be a good thing to do, given the importance of experiential education." And again, ironically, at the same time they're defunding these programs, trying to create a field-study-type, internship-type program thing. The Academic Senate at Santa Cruz actually has a resolution that calls for a requirement for some kind of internship experience—experiential education—for every undergraduate, with no mechanism to fund how that actually would be operated. And, again, ironically, at the same time they're cutting back on the actual experiential education offerings.

Rabkin: Wow. Okay. So I have two or three questions coming out of what you've just said—one of them to do with Merrill—which, as we've mentioned before, had a longstanding field program run by Nick Royal. Nick retired, and I'm curious about what happened to that after Nick retired. Did it simply disappear for a while?

Rotkin: The Merrill Field Program disappeared. It's simply no longer in place. It was run by— Nick was full time and Jody Bruce, who was a community studies graduate, worked as his assistant for a number of years. Jody was replaced by

Monica Larenas. I believe Monica was first then laid off, and then Nick Royal was laid off. And this was back in an earlier period when they were cutting back, and that was the first field study program to face an axe. That was a long time ago, back in the nineties, I believe. Elizabeth Abrams talked to Nick Royal, and he's very interested in participating if Merrill creates something. Nick Royal is not, apparently (this is what I hear, both from him and from Elizabeth) not really interested in work—employment—related to this, but is interested in participating in the program. I was interested in participating, and *I* am interested in possible work related to it, if there's money to be had—although I'm not so much interested in the money as making it happen. I enjoy the work, but I certainly am not turning down money if they have it. Because the first thing I suggested was, you should talk to Nick Royal first. If there's a Merrill Field Program, I think you should hire him before you hire me, and he didn't express any interest in the money piece of this, just a willingness to participate in discussions and planning for what might happen.

So there's been no Merrill Field Program for some time. Some students I know have taken some individual credit with faculty who were in Merrill College, and that's happened in every college—but it's very small-scale and not well organized or highly structured.

Oakes College had, for a while, hired Franklin Williams, a former community studies—actually, he graduated in sociology—student, who came in '73 or '4 to Santa Cruz and has been around Santa Cruz a long time doing community work. [They] hired him as a facilitator, not a lecturer, but he would have to find other

faculty to offer the credit. And then they actually got him teaching permission, so he has a zero-time lecturership-type thing. But he has a staff position to organize field study programs. And he's done these in Porter, Kresge, and Oakes over time—currently not in Oakes; I think he's primarily in Kresge. Juan Poblete and Micah Perks helped hire him for that. This community studies thing moving back into Oakes is, I think, what's happening there. Elizabeth Abrams talking to me about restarting what's going on in Merrill. And Nine and Ten has had Abbey Asher as a field study coordinator, along with other work she does for the college creating internship possibilities through the core course—and then, during following quarters, for the last, maybe ten years or something.

At this point I would say Nine and Ten has the most organized internship program on campus (of a non-departmental nature). And, as you know, there are still programs in environmental studies, psychology, and economics, but they're scaled-back programs, only for their majors, and a small number of students. You can only take a maximum of one internship program while you're a student, as an undergraduate, and you have to be a major in that department, and there's a very limited number that are actually able to successfully get them there.¹⁹ Community studies used to take a bunch of spillover from those programs—people who couldn't get an internship in economics or environmental studies

¹⁹Christopher Krohn, internship coordinator for the environmental studies department, noted in a telephone conversation with Sarah Rabkin on September 10, 2013, that students may enroll in as many environmental studies internships as their academic schedules and study plans permit. Some students enroll in multiple internships within the same academic quarter. Twenty percent of students who enroll in internships sponsored by the department come from other majors, or else have not yet declared a major. In 2012-2013, the department sponsored almost 700 internships for a total of about 300 students, some of them community studies majors.

and came to us instead. And community studies was always the kind of residual department for sociology students, anthropology students, politics students, and others who were looking for internships.

Legal studies now also has an internship program that Ryan Coonerty, as a lecturer in that program, has helped to organize. And students in the politics department, and legal studies, which is affiliated with politics, have a way to get some internship credit through the faculty there. But as far as I know, there's nobody who's paid to actually organize an internship program. Coonerty does that as something that comes along with the classes that he teaches for the program, so it's not a separately funded field study program, at least as far as I'm aware of it.

Rabkin: Looking at what remains of the community studies undergraduate major: you have not been there for a while. So this vital element of the department, as you described it earlier in our last interview, hasn't been there for students—that is, the field coordinator position. Could you talk about the end of *your* time in community studies, and how the students who are still trying to finish that major are coping with not having a field studies coordinator?

Rotkin: I'll start with the second question first: what's happened to the students who needed to have a field coordinator. I've done some informal advising. I've given Joanie Peterson all of my resources, and she's played something of the role of field coordinator, as far as helping students find appropriate placements.

Rabkin: And her position in the department is—?

Rotkin: She's the student advisor in the community studies department.

Rabkin: And her position is still in existence?

Rotkin: She's three-quarter time, and she's still with the department. And how long her job will remain, and whether it will be folded into Oakes or simply disappear— I believe the university wants to hire her somewhere, because she has skills they would be stupid to let go of, in terms of advising students in the social science division. She knows where everything's hidden and how to find it. But whether she'll continue as a community studies advisor, three-quarter time, remains uncertain. I believe *she* doesn't know the answer to that any more than I do. I see her once a week, at least, and there's nothing new on that field. She's currently planning to go to Oakes with Mary Beth Pudup to do something with the community studies program, but whether her position will continue to be funded, and by whom and in what way, is not clear.

Oakes College is tied to the social science division, so that will be divisional funding from the dean. And the dean did not object—which he could have—to having an Oakes College *program* of community studies. I think I missed this point earlier: finally, the Committee on Educational Policy, the CEP, accepted that the program was so far gone, and had so few faculty left, and looked so unlikely, they agreed to disestablish it as a department—but were willing to still have it continue as a program, which is what it became in Oakes College. And

the hope of those who still support the program is that either we'll get some kind of a big grant in the future that might be federal funding; maybe the university funding picture will right itself, finally, and we'll have more money around; maybe a different dean. The dean still has four and a half years left: he got rehired for a second five-year term. I don't believe there will be a community studies department as long as this dean is in place, for whatever reason. But eventually, we might once again have a community studies program. Whether that's a pie-in-the-sky hope or realistic, it's very hard to judge at this point.

Rabkin: You mean an actual department?

Rotkin: An actual department. But the fact that it's still something left that you could hang it onto is helpful, because if you go for a grant—say, a federal grant, or a grant from a nonprofit foundation that might fund something like this—it'd be easier to get the funding if there's some existing institution that you can be applying for it in the name of, rather than, "We'd like to start a new program called community studies, and there used to be one like it, and it got closed, and now we're going to reopen it." It's more like, "This program still exists, and it got unfortunately defunded for lack of money" (which would be the argument you would make), and then, "Here's how we want to refund it," and so forth.

So I think people see this little rump program left in the college as more hopeful than not, but we shouldn't overstate the likelihood that it's going to either expand into a full-sized department again, or how many years or decades it

might take to make that happen, given, particularly, the university funding problems that exist today.

Rabkin: Having been part of that decades-long process of gradually building and carefully thinking through a governance structure, a curriculum, a faculty, a way of doing business as a department—how do you feel about seeing this disestablished department, and imagining that it might someday be reconstituted? Do you have optimism about it?

Rotkin: I'm an optimistic person by bent. So I keep thinking, at some point, everything awful is going to get fixed and made better. So why not this? Because it was a wonderful program, and we had every reason to think that it should be recognized as such by others, and properly fed and supported. At the same time, I have enough of an analytical understanding of what's going on to think it was a terribly wrong decision; it's not that easy to rebuild something like this. The fact that it existed and then got crushed makes one more argument against its reestablishment. Somebody, at least, will see it in that way: if it was such a good program, why did it get defunded?

And so, frankly, I kind of despair about it. Because it's so difficult to transcribe sobbing on the interview, I won't cry in front of you in this talk—but it was a tragedy, and I mean that quite seriously. It was an incredibly important program. I feel particularly bad for Bill Friedland, who put his life into this program. I think it really was his legacy on some level, and an important one. And he was, I think, deeply hurt by this change—to the point that he, as an emeritus faculty

member, now lists himself as sociology and not community studies, and did that while there still was a possibility of being a community studies faculty member. He moved his office from Oakes to get away from the people that he feels, I think—I shouldn't speak for him, but feels that, I believe, wrecked this program and didn't defend it the way that we could have, successfully, if we'd got organized the way both of us understood that we could have done, with our student and alumni help. And so he, at some point, was very angry with not only the people like Ruby Rich, who he sort of sees as having really messed this up, but even the supportive faculty who didn't play a strong enough role in defending it. So even David Brundage, who nobody ever perceived as trying to kill this program—but why didn't David play a more key role in trying to defend it, after all the years of being in it? Or, how come Mary Beth wasn't willing to talk to students, and sort of wrote off the students as people we shouldn't talk to, because it would look like we were supporting the nonacademic aspect of the program?

So all of these arguments made Friedland very angry, and he moved his office from Oakes to College Eight (where he had had an office before), just to make clear that he wanted nothing more to do with this. When he was gone, is when Mary Beth had managed to negotiate this new program through Oakes; she played that key role. By that time, even Julie Guthman wanted nothing to do with the community studies program, perceived it as difficult for her future, and so she wanted to become a social science faculty member rather than a community studies faculty member—although she's still, at least this quarter, teaching a class, I think, in the department.

So, just to quickly say something about the program at Oakes: I think the vision of it, for at least the temporary, transitional period, is that it will have a core faculty of a very small number—maybe Mary Beth, maybe one lecturer, soft-funded, maybe if it's Andrea Steiner, or someone like her. There will be a secondary rank of faculty who are willing to teach regularly in the program. And the names I've heard dropped (but I don't know what commitments have been made) are people like Dana Frank; David Brundage might teach a course; Julie Guthman might teach a course, although there was argument that maybe she wouldn't even want to be in this middle, second group. But then other faculty around the campus: some sociology faculty and some people in other places—Craig Reinerman, and other people who've supported the program over the years. And then a third group, which would be much larger, and would be all the faculty who were doing nothing except offering a course where they would be willing to agree to admit community studies majors to their course and not exclude them because they weren't, say, an anthropology student or a sociology student or an economics student. So that they would be willing to be listed, as we describe it, "under the line," or under the three diamonds in the catalog—that they would not send community studies students away, but that they wouldn't be making any commitment other than to allow students into their courses in their department. And on that basis, Oakes would run a very small little program, where a small number of students could run through a curriculum that would have enough electives, enough courses, enough core courses, and enough supervision of a field study—and we're thinking here, maybe about, I think, five

or ten students, fifteen students, twenty students. Maybe even thirty, I don't know. But not 130 students like we had at our height.

Rabkin: Would these students be called "majors"?

Rotkin: They would get a major in community studies, I think, is the idea. Much as we have a number of programs on campus you can get a major from, but they're not departments. As exists, for example, in creative writing: for a long time you could get a degree in creative writing, though there was no creative writing department; it was part of literature. And there are a number of other programs like that on campus. But whether that is going to be, once again, unsuspended (currently it's still suspended)—whether they'll be allowed to admit any new students into this major remains unclear. Or whether it's going to be an enrichment program at Oakes. I believe Mary Beth is trying to get that approved through the Committee on Educational Policy, to break the suspension, and, once again, have a relatively small and limited number of students admitted to this unique and small major, with a very small number of faculty committed to its continuation.

Rabkin: I see. So currently both of those actions still stand—not only the disestablishment of the department, but the suspension of the major. Those were separate decisions.

Rotkin: Yes. And I believe there are some people who believe that someday we may reverse the disestablishment. But that's a long way off, whereas there's

some hope that, much more short term, maybe even in the next quarter, or before next fall, [they'll] be able to end the suspension of the major, which is a separate issue. And whether students will once again be able to be admitted to a community studies major—with no department, so you wouldn't have a department manager; you'd be run through whoever the financial wizard is over at Oakes who takes care of classroom space, and funding, and making sure that people's curriculum vitae are sent up for the appropriate place when their reviews take place.

So, again, this would be done through the college and through the division, but not through a department. So when Mary Beth comes up for her next merit review, or her full professorship review, or whatever (I don't know where she's at in her career), that's going to be a kind of a not-normal process. She won't be unique; this has happened throughout the history of UCSC, where people don't have a department as a home. They're doing something where they're teaching their regular courses, and they go through the same review as everybody else, but the group putting them forward to the dean for their review is either a college or a program, or something other than the actual department that most people go through to get to the review process.

Rabkin: Interesting.

Rotkin: Very messy, in short.

Rabkin: Yes. Can you talk about the impact of the end of the major as we knew it on the larger community, beyond the university?

Rotkin: Yes. There are a lot of very unhappy people in Santa Cruz—particularly throughout the social service network, the human service network in Santa Cruz. I think community studies is probably the best-known part of the university for an awful lot of people who run things like the AIDS Project, the Santa Cruz Community Counseling Center (which has some groups, including Youth Services and a whole bunch of other things that are out there). There's a group called the Human Care Alliance made up of nonprofits that get funding from Santa Cruz County and/or the four cities in the county, that wrote extensive letters and mobilized to defend the community studies major when they heard it was being cut. Because these programs depended tremendously on us for volunteer interns. They didn't have to pay anything for them. We had people who came full time for six months from community studies. Or, even if not that, at least eight hours a week for ten weeks, rather than four hours a week. Or came many times, every quarter for several years, for four hours a week. So they really got a lot of work out of them along with training them and teaching them things. So they're very unhappy about this, and I still hear people moaning about the end of the community studies department when I run into them in the community. They're quite aware that this program's been ended, and very upset about it.

And every so often—they're still not sure, they hear some rumor, because there's still a little group around, the rump group as I describe it, of community

studies—they'll see a little announcement about something in community studies and go, "Is it back? Is it back?" Or they'll announce that, oh, maybe it never went away. Or, "I thought it ended! What happened?" I'll get these emails from people asking what's up. I now have a couple of things on my desktop, because I get asked often enough, I don't want to go looking for them: here's what's happening in community studies.

Rabkin: Little form-letter updates?

Rotkin: Yeah. I try hard to avoid making attacks on anybody, or making it personal. It's just at the level of: this is the current state of the program, and what you might be able to find out, and you should go contact Mary Beth Pudup or Joanie Peterson, who're most knowledgeable about what's going on with this program. But there's a lot of unhappiness about this.

I still get contacts from students. I still have a UCSC email address and I still get emails, I'd say, every other week—so maybe twenty-five a year or something last year—from students wanting to know how they can find an internship, or how do they get in the community studies major. People still don't know that it's gone away. It's very sad when you get those. I try and make suggestions to them about where they might find a program that will help them get some experiential education, or what faculty members on campus might be sympathetic to these kinds of things. It's a handful of people who would still individually sponsor them without being given any reinforcement or support in terms of reduction of other kinds of work. So it's extra work for anybody that wants to do it.

Even to the point of having lecturers, who are legally not *allowed* to do anything like field studies unless they're paid separately for them, who would *like* to teach a couple of field studies each year, being told "you can't do it." And trying—ironically, as a union leader—to negotiate a special arrangement that would not be precedent-setting, that would allow a lecturer to teach one or two of these where they're clearly volunteering to do it, and not being made to do extra work. And so ironically, as a union member, I'm trying to work out something to have people work for free, and getting rejected by the university. Because I and others have been so successful in persuading the university that they can't make people work for free. (laughs) So it's my own work coming back to bite me on the butt.

Rabkin: Understandably.

Rotkin: So I'd say in general there's a lot of unhappiness. It's not just Santa Cruz. It's throughout California. There're a couple of programs in Seattle that I hear from. And they still send me updates: we're looking for interns to do this, and interns to do that. And in Portland. We must have had two or three programs there [where we] sent one or two students every year, working with programs for undocumented workers who were day laborers—people who'd work for the day, you know. You stand out in front of hardware stores or lumber companies to get jobs. There's a great program in Portland and another one in Seattle that we always sent one or two students to every year. I just got something from both of those two programs about a week ago, asking what they have to do to get students for this coming summer and fall.

Rabkin: These are programs that serve day laborers?

Rotkin: They serve day laborers. They provide them with some safety, and get them off of the sidewalk in front of lumber companies (which makes people in town unhappy), and make sure that when they do work for the day, they'll actually get paid and not cheated by the people that are hiring them. And a whole bunch of protections. [So they] don't have to stand out in the rain looking for work; there's a union hiring hall, in effect, even though it's not union per se, but a day worker hiring hall. And gotten the unions to accept the idea that there are going to be day laborers who may not be union members, and that they're not carpenter's union members, but nonetheless are going to be out there doing this work, and try and negotiate those arrangements, which are very complex.

Rabkin: Wow.

Rotkin: So we had students who were learning about how to do this kind of work. And these programs would also teach these immigrants how to speak English, provide them with contextual preparation for working in the world of the United States, and how they might not get in trouble with the authorities. And all kinds of other things.

Rabkin: So programs as far away as Seattle and Portland are—

Rotkin: —and New York City, where people are working with street vendors, trying to get legal protections for people that are doing street vending in Brooklyn and the Bronx. So I hear from these programs. They're still looking for students. And basically I forward these to programs that might be willing to find someone to work with them. But I'm also letting them know that the program ended, and that they're less likely to get students than they might have been in the past. It's very sad when that happens.

You also asked me to tell you something about my leaving the program, and what happened to me. I'm only going to tell you this because it's such a funny story, and it shouldn't get lost to history. I don't think I've told you this; if I have, stop me.

Rabkin: Not on tape.

Rotkin: I'll tell this in the shortest way I can tell it, but it will take a moment. When we were doing the first contract for the lecturers, back in the late eighties, we didn't really know much about how to write a labor contract. So those of us that were working on this—the first bargaining team, and I was a member of that—. I was not a full member, but I came because I represented people who were not regular lecturers, but field study coordinators, of which there were about nine or ten around the state, plus other people—supervisors of teacher education—so I was the kind of catch-all-category person that came and looked at what these people will do, and what we should have in the contract to protect

them, and what language would not rule them out because they were not strictly classroom lecturers, although they were doing academic work.

In any case, we didn't know what we were doing. So we said, "Let's find out what other people have in their contracts, and put that stuff in our contract." So we found language in other contracts that said: in making layoff decisions, employers shouldn't be "arbitrary, capricious or unreasonable." (I don't know if you've ever heard this story. You have—or maybe not. I will go on.) So we thought, "Let's put that in our contract." So we proposed, formally, the language: "In making layoff decisions, the university shall not be arbitrary, capricious or unreasonable." And the university responded by saying they were willing to put language in the contract that said they wouldn't be arbitrary or capricious, but they weren't sure what the legal meaning of "unreasonable" was. So they really didn't want to put that language in the contract. I remember, at the time, counterproposing, "How about the following language." We caucused, and we came back and said, "How about language that says, 'In making layoff decisions, UC shall not be arbitrary or capricious. The university reserves the right to be unreasonable.'"

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: And of course we're being facetious, and we're trying to embarrass them by their withholding that language. And because of that, we were successful in getting them to accept all three. The language in the contract then read (and we got it adopted), that in making layoff decisions, UC shall not be arbitrary,

capricious or unreasonable. And at the time of doing that, I thought, this is kind of interesting language, but it's never really going to be used. Because, really, most layoff decisions are fights about the wrong *order* of layoff (they've laid off a person with [more] seniority, and they shouldn't have done it in that order), *or* they're laying off a person when their work is still there. And [the employers] are dreaming about some senate member teaching a course, but really, they're going to have a lecturer do it, and the layoff is dishonest, because this regular, ongoing lecturer is going to now be replaced by a new lecturer when they were unsuccessful in hiring a senate member.

Rabkin: And the union rules prevent them from doing that.

Rotkin: And the union rules prevent them from doing that. So, I thought, those are the main ways you use a layoff article. And I can't imagine—it's so abstract, you know. How would you even show that somebody had been arbitrary, capricious or unreasonable? What would the evidence be that that had happened? But it's nice language to have in your contract, and it makes them at least not do something completely ridiculous, was our thought.

And sure enough, for about twenty years, nobody ever used that phrase. We had lots of layoff grievances, but they were over the wrong order of layoff, not enough notice time for your layoff, things like that.

Then I got a layoff notice—this is now over two years ago, in 2009 but for 2010—that I was going to be laid off because the community studies program was going

to be ended. So the dean, the division, sent me a layoff notice. They gave me more than a year's notice, which was following not only the absolute rules in the contract, but even the spirit of how much time lecturers should have, after all these years of work, to be notified. So I was unhappy about it, because I was not ready to retire, and I thought I had something to offer the university, and I loved the community studies program. We were still fighting over the community studies program's existence. But I thought to myself, you know, there's not a legal basis for fighting this, because if they're going to end the program, they're not going to need a field coordinator, and that is a logical and reasonable legal reason for laying off a person from a Unit 18 position. So, I'd better start preparing for my termination, my layoff. I'll be legally able to retire, because I've been here enough years; I'm vested in the program. So I'm going to retire, I guess, next June (it would have been)—about a year ahead in June.

So I was getting ready for this layoff. And we reached the spring—it was probably, like, April or something before my June layoff was imminent, on its way, about to happen—when I was sent a notice that they were about to increase the fees for summer session students, which had been relatively cheap. They were going to quadruple those fees. They were going to be raised to—I forget what they were earlier, but they were going to be raised to 3460 dollars for three courses, for a full-time field study student in the summer.

By then, the community studies department was requiring students to enroll in two quarters of field study—I'd mentioned that earlier—so we were getting money from the summer, and the summer money that was coming in was being

used to pay my salary, basically—plus other money left over to pay for other lecturers, and enrichment courses in the department, and everything else. And this was at the old level. All of a sudden, there was going to be—I did the quick calculation. I based this on 111 students. By then we were already reducing the number of students in the major, because this cutback was taking place. So 111 students times 3460 bucks: almost 400,000 dollars being raised by these students in the summer. And for these students, the only cost to the university was *me*. Because these students were away from campus. They were not taking advantage of counseling; they were not going to the College Night dinner. They were not getting psychological counseling if they were having problems. They were calling Mike Rotkin on the telephone. (By then the assistant was already gone.) So the only cost for this program in the summertime was my salary, plus, let's argue, 10 percent of my salary for the lost opportunity to have me have an office and a computer and a telephone. Pretty cheap. And that all came to less than 100,000 dollars a year, and they were making almost 400,000 dollars a year.

So I filed a grievance, on the basis that laying me off was arbitrary, capricious and unreasonable—because the university was not going to save money by laying me off; it was going to lose money. Because they couldn't take the money and use it for something else—because if these students weren't on field study, they were not going to paying the fees. So without the summer fees, there was no money to be redistributed. So why would you turn down almost 400,000 dollars a year to get rid of me, and not have students adequately served, for what was going to be at least another year of students in the pipeline? I asked for a remedy of six more months of full-time work to finish up the students on the full-time

field study, these 111 students going through the program, through the fall quarter. And then they could lay me off at the end of December—that would have been 2010.

I had a hearing. The first-level grievance hearing officer turned out to be Ruby Rich, my department chair—which is actually not the proper way to handle a grievance, because the decision was made by the *dean* to lay me off, not Ruby Rich or anybody else. And by the rules of the university and the contract, I should have been going to somebody above the level of the dean, to hear a grievance about the dean's decision. But for whatever reason, the labor relations department declared that my first-level hearing officer was going to be Ruby Rich. And I thought, I'll do as well with her at the first step. I didn't expect to win at the first step anyway. Typically in these grievances, you have to almost get to arbitration outside of the university to win a grievance like this, because the university people defend each other in terms of the grievance. Not always, but often it's the case.

So I went to a hearing with Ruby Rich, laid out my case that it was arbitrary and capricious to lay me off. The program was going to lose money, the program that she was the chair of. I was going to be laid off, when I wanted to continue working, and the students were going to get screwed. And she declared that it was arbitrary, capricious, and unreasonable to lay me off, that she found for me in the grievance hearing at the first step, and that the remedy was not only six months at the first step, but six months full time, then another year at three-quarter time, because there were going to be continuing students for the year

following. They didn't need a full-time field coordinator, but they still needed somebody around to do that work. So I won my grievance, and there I was.

And then, as it turned out, in the following year—I was then at three-quarter time, officially, but during that year they offered two courses that I had taught before, or could demonstrate that I was an excellent teacher of. One was called *Community Activism*. It would be hard to find somebody better prepared to teach that course than me. And they had hired a new graduate student to teach it who was going to become a new lecturer—same person in both cases, a nice guy who I like, and reasonable enough to teach the course, but I have legal rights to a recall for two years after being laid off. So I challenged both of those courses. I'd found out about them at different times, and filed first one grievance and then another. The first grievance I won, and they told me that it was too late to hire me to teach that spring quarter course that was going to be happening that spring, during my year of three-quarter time. But the executive vice-chancellor, Alison Galloway, didn't direct, but strongly suggested, that the department should find a way to hire me for some other course that needed to be taught. So I, on that basis, was hired for that course, *Introduction to Community Activism*, but in the fall quarter following, not that spring. So in the fall quarter I got additional time, increased on top of my three-quarter time.

The other course that was being offered—I can't remember which one it was, but it was another course I had taught, and for that course it was too late to offer it to me because they were going to lay me off at the end of December of 2011. But they offered me some money in lieu of teaching that course. It wasn't the full

amount, but I ended up getting 95 percent of my salary for that year, with those three grievances that I had filed.

But then, eventually, my layoff finally became real, and I decided, on December 31st of 2011, to retire from the university, which I did. So I have now been retired for just a little over a year from the university, based on that decision. Because I've now retired, I've lost my right to be automatically recalled to any courses, but they can recall me if they want me to teach. I've put a request in to virtually every social science department—not all of them, six out of eight, I think—explaining my willingness to either revamp my Marxism course to make it more disciplinarily focused in their discipline, to teach courses they've had taught before that they need somebody for at the last minute (because I'm prepared to quickly get up to speed on a course), or to offer some course their students would like, and organize the course that they'd like to have taught, in some way. Or anything else they're interested in. (laughs)

And so far I have not heard back from any of those people, except I've heard some interest from Paul Lubeck, from the (I should have mentioned this in the internship programs) Global Information Internship Program, which is a separate program that's done separately, but in some way related to sociology that I don't fully understand, that he's organized, that has some resources. It's funded outside of the university, and the university can't stop them from doing a lot of stuff, because their money's all from outside. He has offered me some work—not yet clear what, but we're going to talk about it, coming up soon

here—helping them with internships in that program at the global level, because I have lots of contacts from what I developed in community studies.

So I think I have some future. Not at full time. I'm not even that interested in a full-time job anymore. But some additional teaching or field-study-type work with the university, whether through Oakes, whether through Merrill, whether through the GIIP, or Global Information Internship Program. I think I'm not quite done with UCSC. So we'll see how that goes.

Rabkin: So just to cap that story: Were you the first and so far only person to invoke the “arbitrary, capricious and unreasonable” clause in the contract?

Rotkin: I believe I am the first and only and last person to ever actually make use of that particular phrase on a layoff.

I worked hard over the years at finding ways to invoke the wrong order of layoff, or the argument that—not that it's arbitrary or capricious, but (this is getting into sort of the weeds of labor stuff, but I'll just say quickly) if a lecturer has taught a class before, and it's offered, they have a right to that course, and we almost always win those grievances. The burden of proof is on us to demonstrate that somebody *could* teach a course in their field that's never taught it before at UC—because they've taught it somewhere else, and it's very close to the course that's being offered, and therefore they should have bumping rights over a lecturer that's less senior than them. That's not an automatic thing; that's more like we have to persuade, ultimately, an arbitrator, if it comes to it, that the

person really is an expert in this area, and it would be—it's not quite arbitrary and capricious, that it would be a violation of the recall-rights language, which suggests that we have a right to recall if we're prepared to teach the course. And, again, it's automatic if you've actually taught it at UC in recent years. It's a little bit more of a struggle to demonstrate that [you should be entitled to teach the course because] you're an expert (you've written three books in the field or something)—that's not automatic, but a bunch of those cases I've won. But that's not really about arbitrary and capricious layoffs; that's much more about, the person has a right to a recall, and whether they do or don't have that right is something that you struggle over with the kind of ambiguous language about who has a right to teach a course.

Rabkin: Someday, perhaps, we will be able to do a series of interviews about your union work—

Rotkin: Yes.

Rabkin: —which would also be a lot of fun.

I want to ask you something else about community studies, and that is whether, over the forty years of its existence as a department, it inspired or spawned the birth of comparable programs or departments at other institutions.

Rotkin: Community studies had an at least national, if not international, reputation of sorts. It was not a household name by any means, but people in the

field of experiential education certainly know about us. We went to a bunch of national conferences—I went almost every year, for a while, to the National Society for Experiential Education, or NSEE. It had earlier names—NSIE, Internships and Experiential Education. They dropped the internship name. This is, I think I mentioned earlier, a national organization that included secondary and high-school-type programs in experiential education.

Rabkin: Yes.

Rotkin: It had hundreds if not, at some point, thousands of people. It often had keynote speakers like Paolo Freire, one year. It was a pretty big group.

Rabkin: It had a publication, too—?

Rotkin: Yes, they had lots of publications—telling you how to set up internship programs, experiential education programs. But also, there's a national guide to experiential opportunities; a guide to internships nationally and internationally, they'd publish every year. They're still in existence, although I think they've cut back because the ability of people to pay the dues and to show up at the meetings has been cut back as higher ed's been facing cuts around the country, under the budget problems we've been facing in aid to higher education around the country.

So that organization was one way we got our name out there. But also just word of mouth, people coming to visit, our students getting out there in the world and

having impacts and people asking, where'd you get your education, and things like that.

We had at least a number of formal requests to find more information about our program. We've had visits from Boston University, that wanted to set up an experiential education program, and they sent people to Santa Cruz to talk with us and interview us, and stayed around town for three or four days to gather enough—how does this really work. In addition to documents, trying to actually interview people and find that stuff out. I was paid by the University of Maryland, Baltimore, to come for three days and to offer seminars to them on how to set up an experiential education program—which they were trying to do, and which they did. It was focused on Baltimore. Everybody in their program was going to do local field studies. And they were very interested in how their students could do that in Baltimore and have it tied to an academically sound program. So I talked to their faculty about that, and offered a couple of examples and things about community studies, and some talks about what our students had done, and so forth. We also had some interest from Macalester College on how to set up such a program, and I made one visit there that they invited me to. They paid my way for that. The one at Maryland, I was not only paid for my expenses—travel and hotel—but they actually paid me an honorarium of some sort to show up and give these talks. Macalester, I think they just paid my expenses, with no money on the side. Boston, I don't think paid us anything, but they paid for the people who came from their college to learn about us.

Those are the only places I'm aware of that did formal attempts at creating a similar program. Lots of other places would ask us about them, and get partial information, and take some of our documents and use them in the creation of things. But I'm not aware of anything like a formal community studies experiential education program anywhere other than those three colleges.

Rabkin: Did those go on and establish programs?

Rotkin: Yeah, so Boston University has one; Macalester's got a major of some kind, but it's pretty small scale. And the one at Maryland's running full speed, and they've got a very large program. It doesn't go to all of Maryland or all of the country and the world, but it's focused on Baltimore. It's much more of a study-of-a-city kind of program. It's more of a traditional community studies study of Baltimore, Maryland—its history, its organizations. But a lot of their students are placed with nonprofits and governmental agencies, and it's very much like the way community studies worked for the local placements, which were always about—maybe a quarter to a third of our placements in community studies were in Santa Cruz County. And I think they had 100 percent of their placements in the city of Baltimore. The University of Maryland had several campuses, one of which was in Baltimore, and it was for that campus—it was the big experiential education program.

Rabkin: Is there anything else you'd like to say about community studies before we move on to some broader and different questions?

Rotkin: One thing I wanted to add: You had asked me a question in writing, earlier, about, did I ever find myself in awkward situations because I was both on campus and active as mayor and council member. And the answer is yes—there were lots of awkward times. Let me start by saying in all my years, I never had a chancellor, or anybody high up in the administration, threaten me, or vaguely imply that I was going to get in trouble if I didn't carry the university's water on political issues in the community. I have to give them respect for that. It might have been tempting, I'm sure, many times.

For example, I was the mayor when the university got sued by the City of Santa Cruz, in 1985, for its long-range development plan. I was the major author of at least two ballot measures trying to make UC responsible for limited growth and responsible growth. When College Eight was being built, there was an EIR [environmental impact report] for the college that the city sued over. Bill Friedland was the head of the building committee and I was the mayor of Santa Cruz in 1985-1986. So it was a little tense at times, about how this was all going.

Rabkin: So you were legally going up against your old mentor and colleague—

Rotkin: And my employer. Full-time job employer. And as I said, at that time, no chancellor ever came to me and said, "You want to keep your job? Do the right thing." It never happened. I was always thinking it might.

Now, I've always taken a consistent position, and I feel comfortable with this—but it doesn't mean it's not awkward at times in various meetings—that it really

is none of the city's business what's taught at UCSC. That's one of the virtues (it's got other problems) of having Article Nine in the state constitution that says the university does not need to come to a local community to get building approval.

Because, let's just say, for example—it wouldn't happen in Santa Cruz, but let's say there's some university in San Diego where they want to offer a new evolutionary biology program. And let's say, for the sake of argument (I don't know that it's the case) that the city council in San Diego doesn't believe in evolution. And they say, "No, we're not going to give you a building permit for this, because we don't believe you should be teaching evolution, because we think it's an affront to the Lord," or something. So it's one of the nice things about the autonomy of the university, is it doesn't have to answer to local communities about what they teach at the university. Which, if you have a conservative town, or a place that doesn't believe in modern intellectual values or something, or they don't think you should be doing research on global warming because they don't believe in global warming—they could screw around with you, and make it difficult to have the physical plant necessary to expand areas of research.

So I've always respected the idea that (as much as I feel like cities and communities should have a lot of say about universities in their towns) it really is none of the city's business what departments are being offered, or whether there's three colleges or five, or what's being studied, or what students are being brought here to study, or what graduate programs are created, and things like that.

So I respect that. It's got its downsides, because it means that those decisions are made, ultimately, by the regents, who are not necessarily representative of the interests of the people of the state of California, any more so than the city council of any particular little town. In fact, in some ways they're much worse than most city councils are likely to be in California.

Rabkin: Does this clause extend to development decisions that affect the infrastructure of the local community?

Rotkin: So what this autonomy means, in effect, is the city of Santa Cruz does not have building permit control over a building. So you could build what was considered an earthquake-not-safe building on the campus, and the city doesn't have the right to say a single thing about it. Unlike every other developer, or every other homeowner in Santa Cruz who wants to build a new bedroom—you come to the city and you go to the planning department and you have a permit, and you have to meet the California building codes to be able to have that happen, and you need to have an environmental study that's under the control of the city of Santa Cruz in terms of what your impact is on butterflies in that area, and water, and air quality, and everything else. The university has no obligation to go to the City of Santa Cruz for *anything* about any building they do, or any development whatsoever. They're exempt from local planning.

Rabkin: What about a development that's going to—just so we put a really fine point on this—what about a development on campus property that is going to

draw resources from the city, or produce waste that affects the municipal waste situation, for example?

Rotkin: The city is in what's known as a Responsible Agency position, which means when an EIR is done by the university, in which they [UC] are the agency that actually gets to decide whether it's an adequate EIR (in other words, they get to be the fox watching their own henhouse), the city has a right to make comments about the scope of the EIR and what's going to be studied, and to make comments about the draft EIR. And then we're done. And, ultimately, the Regents get to decide if the EIR is adequately addressing the concerns that we raised as a city. Which means you have no control, ultimately, other than to go to state court and argue that the EIR doesn't meet state law requirements, not the needs of the City of Santa Cruz.

And to be clear about how bad this is, it doesn't even have to be on university property. The university could rent a piece of property in the community. And let's say when they rent the Holiday Inn and decide to run a dorm in what was previously a hotel in Santa Cruz, the city has no control of planning over how they make any modifications to that building, because it was part of the educational effort of the University of California. They're exempt from local planning. As is, for example, the EDD, the Economic Development Department, which has a building in Santa Cruz somewhere, on land that the state rents from some private owner; they don't actually own their own land there. And the fact that it's a state function exempts that state agency from any oversight by the local city that the place is being built.

Every university campus is exempt from that kind of local control. So when UC Berkeley decides to expand its football stadium into the local community and wipe out affordable housing to do so, the city of Berkeley has no say over that expansion.

So recently, when the chancellor of Santa Cruz agreed to resolve eleven lawsuits with the City of Santa Cruz and the County of Santa Cruz, through an agreement that they would pay their fair share of water costs and a bunch of other sorts of things, and settle those suits by agreeing that they would at least submit their building plans for city review (even though ultimately the city couldn't say yes or no, but at least the university would make its best efforts to take those comments seriously and implement them in their actual building plans), that was the chancellor basically giving the city more power to have input in what's going on than any campus has ever had in UC history. It was unprecedented and really important for us [as a city], and why the people that are willing to let that go—and there are some in town—are really making, we think, a really big mistake, because most cities don't have the ability that the City of Santa Cruz has to get university money to improve traffic intersections, water improvements, and a bunch of other stuff that the university claims it has no obligation for.

The fact that our students from campus drive on city roads—[most campuses] say, “Well, you [the community] get the benefits of a university, and you can pay the costs of it, too, and we're not giving you *any* money for your roads and your town.” What our chancellor was willing to do was say, “Let's figure out what our

fair costs of these roads are, and we will agree to pay the fair share of our cost of intersection improvements, public transit improvements, the bus system”—all kinds of stuff that most campuses tell the local city, “Take a hike. Leave us alone.”

Anyway, I’ve often found myself in these awkward positions, and my position was always: the university has an absolute right to decide what its teaching mission is, how many students it wants to admit. We don’t have the right to tell them, “You can’t bring students to this campus.” What a city should have the right to do is make sure the university addresses the impacts—the environmental, social, economic impacts on the community of bringing that number of staff people, faculty, or students to a community.

And that’s the way the city has always carefully framed its lawsuits. We’ve never gone after them, saying, “We don’t like what you’re going to do up there in the woods.” No, they can do whatever they want up there in the woods. Our argument has been, “You can’t put X number of new cars on the road without addressing the impact to the environment. Because California law—not the local planning documents—requires you (under CEQA, California Environmental Quality Act) to do mitigation of any impacts that you have. Or make findings of overriding consideration, that what you’re doing is so important that you don’t have to pay attention to the impacts—which is something a university could do, but puts them in an awkward place politically, when they admit, “We’re making a mess of something, and we’re just not going to pay attention to it.” They have a legal right to do that, but that puts the city in a better position to politically argue

that this is unfair, unreasonable—and embarrass the university into doing something about the problem they've created. They at least have to document that there is a problem, and address what they are and are not willing to do to mitigate it. And it becomes public information what the negative impacts of their growth are on the community.

So all of the city's suits, and the county's suits, have always not been about, "We don't like having a bigger university. It would be a better university for the students, educationally, if it were smaller. Can't you stay with the small, intimate undergraduate institution you used to be? It's better for the students, who are many of our constituents." It's inappropriate for the city to say stuff like that.

Rabkin: Yes, sure.

Rotkin: We stay the heck out of those questions, and we look at what's going to happen to our roads, what's going to happen to the use of our parks by UC students, how much are we now spending for the police department because students have more wild parties than your average citizen (because of their age—not because they're students but because they're young people, and young people tend to have wilder parties, etcetera). And those are things we have a right to comment on and to try and do something about, and make the university do something about them.

Rabkin: And you have standing in those areas, because the constitutional autonomy of the university is limited in some areas, by CEQA [California Environmental Quality Act] and by other areas of state law?

Rotkin: They're still autonomous from the local planning effort, but they're not autonomous from the law of the state of California. They are responsible for addressing the environmental impacts to the resources agency of the state of California. And so we appeal to those agencies to join us in stopping the university as a state institution, not as a local community, from doing those things. So we appeal, for example, to John Laird, the secretary of resources of the state of California, former mayor of the city of Santa Cruz, to help us challenge the university when we think they're doing things—not that are educationally unsound (none of our business), but that are, planning-wise, unsound, in terms of our need for our community.

Now, one other area that I had potential conflicts in that are really important to understand—potentially more than awkward, really strange: As the mayor of Santa Cruz, and as a council member, I was the chair of the Social Service Committee for the city council of Santa Cruz, for all the years I served on the city council, which was twenty-six years out of the last thirty four now (and twenty-six out of thirty-two up until the years I stopped being on the city council). A lot of years. That Social Service Committee decides how to fund various nonprofit agencies in the City of Santa Cruz.

So, wearing my city council hat, I'm going to decide, how much money should I give to the [Santa Cruz] AIDS Project? Wearing my university hat, as a field study coordinator, I'm reading field notes from students who work for the AIDS program in Santa Cruz. (I'm going to make up examples that are unspecific as to year and student, or anything else.) I'm sitting on knowledge, from reading a student's field notes, that (let's take one really concrete example)— The AIDS Project has a position that no one should ever get free needles given to them for intravenous drug use. But there's an *exchange* program, where if a drug user brings their needles in, they can one-for-one exchange needles for another. It's not totally legal, and it's awkward in state law and everything else, but we've worked out protocols with the police department in a lot of progressive communities (and Santa Cruz is one of them, and Santa Cruz County is one of them), where the police and the sheriff look the other way when it comes to these needle exchange programs—because we think they're helpful for dealing with the AIDS crisis, and having fewer needles lying around in parks and things like that.

But I read in field notes that some students are feeling so sorry for somebody that shows up without a needle, and who's feeling bad about it or something, that they've found a way to give some extra needles to this person, who's delivering them to other drug users in the county. Knowing that the police department is outraged at the concept of people being given new needles, because they feel those are the needles that end up in the parks, I know that the AIDS Project is not always following its protocols. And that's knowledge that I have from where? From students' field notes that are private information, not available to

anybody—and it's in my head. Then I'm sitting, the same week, in a committee meeting of the AIDS Project, deciding what level of funding they should get, and whether their program is an effective program.

So I'm giving one example of many. I know that some program's got a problem, or that the information they're sharing that they cooked the books—all kinds of stuff.

Rabkin: Because you have privileged information.

Rotkin: These field notes from students. Privileged information. So I have to create a firewall, basically, between the two parts of my life, in which [I] *never* defund an agency because I found out something about them through a student's field notes. On the other hand, I'm not an idiot, and I don't want to see bad practices going on or something else, so I have to try and find a way that never becomes a problem for the student whose notes I read, never becomes a funding problem for the agency, but much more subtly, to get the agency to recognize (through the students or in some other way) that they're not really following their own protocols, and that something needs to be done about this problem.

So I found my job working with the students, to get them to understand, what's the consequences of you giving away free needles to people in this program, and when the police department does find out about it (because they will, not through me, but it will come out through some other way), that you're going to basically destroy a needle exchange program that's managed to be put together

by a lot of people over a lot of time, that has a big impact on a lot of people's lives and on the AIDS pandemic.

Rabkin: And in this particular case, it's the student himself—

Rotkin: (or herself)

Rabkin: —him or herself who is engaged in the practice that's questionable. But that's not always the case.

Rotkin: Not always. Or they're observing that somebody else is doing that or something.

So I need to find a way—not because I'm the mayor of Santa Cruz and concerned about what my police department might think about it, but because I'm concerned about the AIDS Project, which I care about, and because I'm concerned about the student getting in trouble with the AIDS Project if it's ever found out—not to tell them what to do (because I'm not giving directions to these students that are out there in the field; I'm not running the AIDS needle exchange program), but I'm raising questions with my students about their field notes. Which I do. It's not just about the quality of the field notes; it's also about the issues that are being raised in the field notes. That's one of the reasons I was a good field coordinator, because I'm getting them thinking about: what's the political fallout of you ignoring the protocols of this program that have been so carefully established, and that the AIDS director meets with the police chief once

a month to talk about how it's going, and they don't know what's going on in their own program. And I'm not going to reveal it to them through these field notes. How do I get something to happen? So I've got to get this student that's revealed this to me to have it become their problem, and get them to figure out.

I wasn't 100 percent successful. Sometimes I was able to get students to understand why they should change that and take it up. It became a big topic for discussion of the field notes and for the students' papers, and sometimes for protocols about stuff, and how maybe the protocols should be modified, and the extent to which the police (even though they were supposed to be looking the other way) were actually harassing some of the needle-exchange people, both for good and bad reasons, in terms of how they were doing their needle exchange.

And so I took it, again, with an absolute firewall, taking my job as somebody giving this field study student good advice about how they might help their program be successful, *not* about my concerns, as mayor, that we were funding a program that was ignoring public safety protocols. I went through that, I think, from the time I started as a field study coordinator, because I started that program in 1979, and that was the year I was elected city council member in Santa Cruz. There was always this tension. It was never the end of the world. I can't remember any examples where it was like, oh my god, I'm in the middle of a—there was never life-threatening stuff that I was in the middle of, and hiding, protecting some killer or something (you know, which could happen, I suppose, in this kind of a job). But it was certainly public policy issues, and not wanting to sort of disrupt a program or its funding because of the separate, private

knowledge that I had that no mayor typically would have from his programs (laughs) that was going on.

I also would be meeting with the directors of programs that I knew more about what was happening in their program than they did. And so, once again: how do you point people to thinking about how to run their programs more effectively without in any way putting them on the path of somebody who's working for them, or who's an intern for them, that's ignoring their policies? How do you get to that stuff? So it was interesting. It was fascinating. I found it really enjoyable. And a lot of my work was, I'd be wearing my hat (which I often wore as a council member, and the head of the social service program) talking to the providers of social services in Santa Cruz about how they needed to give their students better training, without ever giving the example of the problems that I knew pointed to me, as to why they needed better training of their interns.

So I was balancing some pretty kind of hairy stuff. I think I was very, very careful to never expose a student's field notes to anybody public, and at the same time to not ignore what really could have become serious problems that would have blown up a couple of, both field study internship possibilities, but also actual funded nonprofit agencies who were sometimes receiving 100,000 dollars a year from the City of Santa Cruz.

Rabkin: That sounds like a very challenging balancing act to maintain all on your own, to have to keep your own counsel about those conflicts and tensions. I

wonder if you had places you could go when you felt like, “gee, it would be nice to consult with somebody about this.”

Rotkin: I have to say I never talked with anybody about it. It was all in my own head, and trying to think through how to make it happen.

Rabkin: Interesting.

Rotkin: Just trying to wrestle with it. Because I just thought, how could I talk about a student’s field notes with anybody?

Rabkin: Yes.

Rotkin: I respected those for the whole time I did it. I never had conversations—I might talk in abstractions about field notes: what should I do about the fact that all of our students are being too vague in their field notes, or I might talk to a faculty advisor about some of the field notes being weak in an area, or talk to the *Preparation for Field Study* teacher about what I was learning from the field notes about what they might want to emphasize more next year when they taught the class. But I would never say, so-and-so in their field notes is weak in this area, and what can you do about it, or something. I thought that was inappropriate, for me to reveal field notes.

Rabkin: Yes.

Rotkin: So, no. I always found it interesting and challenging, but I never found myself losing sleep over it. I was always basically able to make it work in an effective way. So it was one of the challenges of the job that I had that I think other people didn't.

I have to say, it certainly put me in a better position on both sides of that divide—to be more effective as a councilmember and understanding what's really going on in these agencies, 'cause I had students who were there daily working with them, and it made me a better field study advisor, to know what some of the problems were that were being faced by these social service agencies, and be able to clue students in to, what do you need to do to prepare to be effective as a social change activist inside of these groups? Because I knew the funding problems they were having, and the issues that were going on politically, in which the AIDS Project was up against not just funding shortages, but also problems with the police department and other kinds of issues. So how do you get at those things? So I think I played a particularly effective role from the knowledge I had. But there were these lonely moments when you're thinking, "Nobody knows what I know!" (laughs)

Rabkin: (laughs) Right!

Rotkin: And if they ever give me sodium pentothal, there's going to be hell to pay! (laughs)

Rabkin: In that same realm of the unusual number and combination of hats that you've worn over the years: You had said something about wanting to talk about overlaps between your work as a community studies field coordinator and your campus activism—both with the lecturers' union and perhaps in other areas. I don't know if you've covered all of that that you wanted to.

Rotkin: No, I'll just add that—and this has to do, I think, something about the role of the university in local politics. Let me just say, generally, my view. I can sum that up, because I've thought about that a lot, written about it and thought about it a lot. I think Bill Domhoff (and I've told him this) overemphasizes the role of the university in the social change that took place in Santa Cruz. I think the university played an absolutely key role, and I will describe it as a necessary piece of the puzzle, because without the university, I doubt the changes that came to Santa Cruz would have gone as far as they did or been as significant as they were. But I see the university as being *necessary but not sufficient* for those changes. (I'm using that little logical formulation.) And I think Bill sometimes thinks it was both necessary and sufficient for the change. I think if they had had a progressive university, as we did, with an innovative undergraduate program, as they did, and no grades, and all of the things that attracted more progressive students, and a focus on environmental issues, and at the time when it was founded brought up young, progressive faculty, and all those things I've talked about earlier—that was the necessary piece of making this a more progressive community.²⁰

²⁰ See the oral history with Bill Domhoff (interviews conducted in April and May 2013; transcript in process as of September 9, 2013). Forthcoming publication 2014.

But without the neighborhood organizing— Bill sometimes makes that connection by thinking, well, community studies was the link to the neighborhood organizing. Again, community studies was a key factor in some of that neighborhood organizing. Certainly the organizing I was doing wouldn't have happened if I hadn't come with Bill Friedland to Santa Cruz and gotten active in the New American Movement and all the other kind of stuff that happened to make those things go. But there was other neighborhood organizing happening—not only here, but in other communities in California, that had nothing to do with UC Santa Cruz being formed in this particular town. And if it weren't for the Westside neighborhood group, and the Downtown Neighbors, and the Western Limits neighborhood organization, and the Lower Ocean neighborhood, and all these different groups, I don't think we would have had the success that we did in building a progressive majority on the city council. I think we would have been more like Chico, or something, where they had a brief interlude of a very progressive, left-wing council that was quickly overwhelmed and moved back to a right-wing town when they didn't find a way to solidify their movement in the community, but really remained a kind of student movement that never sunk roots in the local community.

And so community studies played a particular role, as Bill Domhoff emphasizes, in connecting the campus to the community. But even with community studies, if it hadn't been for pretty separate kinds of efforts going on from the community, not tied to the university, from people that never had any connection to UCSC, I don't think we would have become the left-wing town that we are, the

progressive community that we are in Santa Cruz, just with the university being here.

But I have to say, I personally was very fortunate in having come to this town, it being the size town it was, where a single activist can actually see results of work. Much, much harder in New York City or Los Angeles. Possible. But only very rare people can make that happen. Whereas I can see my mark on Santa Cruz as a town of 60,000 people. I don't think I would have known that in LA or New York. Not just me, but other people that have played a role in building stuff.

If it hadn't been for connection to community studies—supposing I had been a history of consciousness student, and I had wandered off into the weeds of postmodern analysis: it's possible to imagine myself as somebody off in the realms of philosophy, and/or left-wing politics not tied to a local town and actual activism in real politics at the municipal level. So the fact that I got a TAship in community studies my first quarter—you know, not an accident. And the extent to which the community studies' model moved from, say, fieldwork in agriculture into whatever the students were interested in, and not by accident, local politics became something they cared about.

So a bunch of accidental things tied UCSC, community studies, [and] the community. The fact that I was on campus and that I only need five hours' sleep a night! How much is due to that?! That I can do a full-time job and more, because I put in more than my forty hours in my job at the university, and still

have time to be a city council member, which is about a half-time job, or a mayor, which is a full-time job, *and* be a union activist. And because I was not just a union activist, but an academic, and actually had a job, so I could become a rank-and-file activist, along with leadership at the union.

So a lot of stuff was sort of accidental: I was in the right place at the right time, with the right connections to play a much bigger role than any one person had any right to think they might be playing here. So, to what extent was my union work effective because I wasn't just coming to a union job, where I went up on campus once in a while, but I had an office on campus, where the union could store all of its crap? (And the union has lots of crap: leaflets, posters, buttons, flyers, T-shirts in my office at UCSC. It's my office. I can put whatever I want in my office.) Where I could have a phone number that I was at most of the day doing my university job, and still, in that same office, overlap, taking calls about the city council.

[Or I could] have (and this is funny) Ron Lau, who had owned the property that Bookshop Santa Cruz was on, and that was a developable property after the earthquake when that got collapsed, stand in line with UCSC students outside my office door in Oakes, waiting to talk to me about his property that he wanted to develop in Santa Cruz—even though I was basically talking to students, and 95 percent of the people in line waiting to talk to me were students wanting to talk about a course or an independent study or whatever. And there was Ron Lau, waiting for his twenty minutes to talk to me about his development project in downtown Santa Cruz.

Rabkin: In your capacity as a city council person or a mayor?

Rotkin: Yeah, he had no interest in talking to me about community studies. He was there to meet with the mayor, and he couldn't find the time to meet with me downtown, so he heard I have office hours, and shows up there to meet with me.

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: Lots of people would call me on the phone about city business. And I didn't make a distinction—like, you can only talk to me about business on this phone or on that phone. I was just always careful to do more work than anybody expected of me in each of my different jobs. So the union work was mostly not paid, till more recently, but I did a lot of it. The job with the city was paid—first fifty bucks a month, for my first ten years as a council member, and a hundred as the mayor, for the two times I served as mayor in the first ten years. But then it got raised to 800 bucks a month, and then \$1000, and the mayor got \$2000.

So I was doing, not enough to really do it full time as a job, but it was nothing to sneeze at: serious money from two institutions, the university and the city, both of which are giving me, now, retirement. The city retirement—you couldn't live on it alone, but it's not chickenfeed. I'm making about 1400 bucks a month from the city of Santa Cruz, because it's based on your single highest year—that was my last year as mayor, and I was paid 2500 bucks, and I was there enough years

that the formula they have turned that into about half my salary as the mayor. So I have money from that. I got a very healthy retirement from the university.

But back to this issue: I was just in a really good place to be running around, back and forth, between the writing I was doing about organizing, which was really my big area of interest, and how you do community organizing, which I was teaching classes about. I taught classes about electoral politics (never about my own election, but able to use what I had learned to teach students about that kind of work), teaching community organizing classes, teaching classes on community programs and their funding, how to organize nonprofits, teaching students how to write grants. I wouldn't have known how to do that stuff if it weren't for my city connection. I wouldn't have been as well informed as a councilmember without reading everything that was every written, as part of my teaching work, about how cities run, and about how they do progressive things, and how do you economically challenge the existing order in a city position.

So I've lived a very fortunate life, since coming here in 1969, that's allowed me to work in overlapping areas and still give everybody more than they expected out of me. So I've never had—that I'm aware of, at least—complaints that I was falling down on the job and not delivering. Except for students that never came to class, and argued that my class was boring but never showed up. (laughs) If you ever teach a large class—and I taught a class with 530 students—you're going to get a couple that are going to tell you you're terrible, who you know never showed up (laughs). But otherwise I got great student reviews, because I was serious about my students, and never fell down on the job of taking teaching

seriously. I missed three city council meetings in twenty-six years of council meetings, which was a record for sure. Most councilmembers would miss three meetings in a *year*; I missed three in twenty-six years. And I count as missing one where I had to go home early; I only missed two full meetings. But I had to go home early because I was deathly ill at a meeting, and was driven home in the back seat throwing up. I had to call for help. But basically I took all my work seriously and loved what I did.

I'm a very fortunate person, that I did what I love doing, I got paid well for it, more than comfortably for it, and was able to integrate the different things that I did, that most people think of as unconnected, and made them very much a connection for me personally. And, more and more, to find ways that they were connected while still being careful not to violate the expectations and protocols of the different arenas in which I was working. So I find it challenging, and exciting, and fun work. I've never been bored, since I moved to Santa Cruz in 1969, for five minutes in my entire life, I have to say. So—it's worked out well for me.

Rabkin: (laughs) Wonderful, Mike.

We're coming to a close, but I wonder if I could ask you about one other area that you touched on a few minutes ago. You mentioned the progressive nature of the people and institutions that were part of the early UCSC campus. And you are one of the people who's been around here for a long time. So you have witnessed quite a long history of this institution, and with it a lot of changes—including

shifts away from some of those originally quite progressive attitudes and institutions, like the move from narrative evaluations to letter grades; perhaps changing attitudes toward interdisciplinary and experiential education—

Rotkin: —co-teaching—

Rabkin: —expansion of graduate programs, perhaps less emphasis on undergraduate education—

Rotkin: —[and] non-disciplinary programs—a long list. Not everything, but a significant move away from those kinds [of things], and back to a focus on research, at the expense, I believe, of undergraduate teaching.

The faculty that came here came at a time when everything was up for grabs in higher education. I was admitted to a grad program with, I think, seventeen students, who were all over the map in terms of things they were interested in, but in history of consciousness—a philosophical, intellectual graduate program, not much focus (at least in the conceivers' minds) of an activist program; much more about intellectual work. Not that they didn't want to be engaged in the intellectual world—but really, this was not a community studies program or an experiential education program. This was a hit-the-great-Western-thinkers, a much more philosophical approach. And yet, every student in that program really, honestly believed, without an exception, that education was going to be very different, in the next year or two up into the future. The whole place was going to be shaken up by a revolution in education. Everybody just imagined a

very different world than we live in now. And that the kind of thing that UCSC was working with—experimental, alternative educational forms, much more personal connection in the classroom, breaking down the [divisions between the] academic from the personal and the academic from the political, the ivory tower nature of the university evaporating, and more and more people would have to tie—whatever they did, you’d have to be able to talk to, not just academics, but other people, about why this all mattered.

That’s the kind of people who were graduate students in 1964, ‘65, ‘66, ‘67, ‘68 and ‘69, up through maybe even ‘72, ‘73, ‘74—that whole period. It’s basically “the sixties,” as those people had been graduate students. And whatever you think about the sixties, imagine: the people that had been undergraduates and graduate students while that was going on were now becoming professors, or applying for jobs as professors. That’s the kind of people UCSC hired. They wanted people who were interdisciplinary, who wanted to come to a place that didn’t have grades, and were not about sorting students, and who didn’t imagine their job as being a researcher, and undergraduates were a pain in the butt. These were people who wanted to be teachers, that were in fact less interested in publishing stuff in the proper journals, and wanting to really imagine themselves as educators. Not that they didn’t have research goals or intellectual interests, but they were going to bring the three-part mission of the university back into some reality.

And that’s who was getting hired here, in every discipline. It wasn’t just about the humanities or social sciences. That’s who they brought here as math teachers,

as physics teachers. These were people who had been active in SDS, in the student movement—particularly because they were hiring people from the elite and Ivy League colleges, where, frankly, the student movement was more active than it was in working-class colleges. Not that there wasn't some student movement there in the sixties. But where were there big, well-known rebellions? Columbia. Harvard. Cornell University. Brown. Dartmouth. These were places where students were up in arms. The University of Chicago, University of Michigan—those were the grad students that UCSC was looking for in every field. And Berkeley—not to leave out the other places—UCLA and everywhere else. And that's who they hired as faculty—not because of their activism per se, but because they were people who understood where education was going, and were interested in interdisciplinary, alternative ways of approaching education, who were not so wedded to the discipline of physics that they wouldn't be interested in what was going on in biology at the same time. Or so much interested in literature that they wouldn't care about landscape architecture, you know? So they would hire a Tom Vog[ler], rather than somebody who was deeply steeped in the narrowest aspects of literature. And who could teach an interdisciplinary course in literature, because that's who they wanted to bring here. And that's why they would be willing to hire somebody like a Friedland, who came with an idea of an interdisciplinary program [for] undergraduate students, with experiential aspects to it.

So it's not accident that UCSC, for a while at least, was a very alternative place, with faculty who were quite willing to not care about their publications as much

as others—although they worked on them. And you would get serious consideration for a tenure position with *adequate* research and brilliant teaching.

As more and more people around the world began to change, and UCSC became an outlier and an anomaly, people were hired from the same places they were being hired from before, but now were not so sure that the university's going to be a different kind of place. There was retrenchment back to graduate studies, back to disciplinary studies, back to publishing yourself in the right place, to increased expectations of publication on the part of faculty, so there's not *time* to put the time into your undergraduate students that you might have been hoping to put in there, because you had better get published or you're not going to get tenure, or you're not going to get the merit increases that you expect in terms of salary.

And so you watch a slow erosion, in which—I would say, this is a parallel that some of the readers or listeners of this may not understand, but in the same way that Marxists believed that you could not create socialism in one country, because the capitalist world market would just come and thrash you, as happened to the Soviet Union, and maybe to China before we're done—you can't have an alternative educational system in one university, and expect that somehow eventually you're not going to be swallowed up.

There's this movie, "The History Book," which is a history of capitalism that was done by a bunch of socialists that did this about 1974, I think it was, when it was first done, that I used every year in my *Introduction to Marxism* class. It was made

originally for Danish children's television, for eight-year-olds. They show what would happen if socialism was created in one country. And they show a world map in which everybody's got a capitalist's top hat, as a symbol of capitalism, and then a red star arrives on one little country. And then all the top hats go over and swallow the red star, and it becomes another top-hat place.

Rabkin: (laughs)

Rotkin: That little visual image captures it pretty well. How long can you run a place that people are hoping to send their graduate students back to other places that have more cosmopolitan educational values—of research is all that matters, disciplines are what matter, publications in the refereed journals that are appropriate for your field are what matter? And you're not doing that kind of work? You're getting tenure without doing that? Or you're being published in edgy new kinds of journals that are interdisciplinary, and that are making real knowledge happen that really matters? The AIDS research you're doing is not purely biological; it's tied to a bunch of fractal studies in math, and very cutting-edge kinds of stuff that people want to understand—epidemiology in relation, not just to biology, but sociology and other fields? And that's what you've been doing? And meanwhile, you're in a biology department that wants to know, have you published most recently in *Human Evolution*, or (I don't even know the field that well, but) whatever the appropriate refereed journals are in biology? You're not going to get tenure. Or if you get tenure, you're going to squeak by, but you're going to be somebody who your colleagues are constantly giving, at

best, one merit increase, when you were hoping for accelerations, or something more. You're in trouble.

And so, over time, I think it's that cosmopolitan pressure of where you're sending your graduate students, what your colleagues are doing. Your reputation is not worth much as a great teacher at UCSC; your reputation is what did you publish, and what are you known for in the rest of the world of sociology, or biology, or literature—doesn't matter what discipline you're in.

For example, in the arts—music, art, theater arts—you watch a lot of lecturers teaching dance, and artistic work of one kind or another, and teaching photography and all these kinds of fields, and giving people a kind of a theoretical fix on how to approach this in new ways, and you decide at some point, “Hey, that's kind of like tradesman's work!” Quote-unquote, from the dean of the arts—not the current one, but the previous one, who announces that basically, we should be about the *theory* of the arts. We should be hiring senate faculty members who can talk about the *theory* of theater and theater arts—not actually teach a class on how to put on a play or direct one, but, like, what's going on in postmodern theory about what [in] the theater should be happening. And they start laying off lecturers. And now the students who are demanding the practical courses that will actually teach them how to play the bassoon at a classical level (but play it with some informed knowledge about what's going on in the arts)— Instead: “No. You can study what kind of music you should be playing, but we're not going to offer courses in playing bassoon anymore.” And it's harder and harder to find someone to be in the school orchestra because

there's no more classes left for people who are taking that kind of—they don't have anybody who can play the bassoon. They've got people who can *talk* about the bassoon.

That's what's been going on at UCSC. And it's not surprising, and it's sad, and it's unfortunate. But I think that pressure came, not because anybody did anything evil, but just because we live in a world where— I'll use this metaphor: it's like the shark. It's a model that either grows, and people see it as the future of where things are going, or it sort of sits there as a kind of outlier, and people see, more and more, that it's not what's going on in the mainstream. And then it becomes a place where, if you go there, and you do what happens at UCSC, nobody will ever hire you from UCSC to a job at Dartmouth. Or, to get really crass about it, because nobody really wants to go to Dartmouth (it's too cold there in the winter), but where you can't get a job offer from Dartmouth that you can use to leverage to get a pay increase at Santa Cruz. Because that's how academia actually works. If you want to get a significant pay increase, you go somewhere else and get them to give you a job offer; then you go back to your dean and say, "I can go to Dartmouth if you don't give me a pay increase!" And the dean caves and gives you the money.

There was a day last year in which Bob Samuels, the president of the University Council of the American Federation of Teachers, did a study at UCLA, and I'm not making this up or exaggerating: not one member of the Academic Senate at UCLA was being paid on scale. Every single senate faculty member at UCLA had found some way to leverage a pay rate that was above the pay scale that

they were actually meritoriously moved to. And how did they do that? Because people at UCLA can just apply for jobs all over the place, and eventually, somebody, somewhere, that was considered a good institution that might be threatening to UCLA—Harvard, Stanford, USC, whatever—would offer you a job. You had no intention of going there, and you would bring that job offer to your dean, who would then give you 10,000 or 20,000 dollars more a year to keep working where you were. And so everybody at UCLA had actual pay that was above the scale they were supposed to be at. And the majority of faculty in the UC system are probably off-scale. It's not 100 percent like at UCLA, and I'm not sure that's true today at UCLA—but there was a day last year when, on that day, you'd look at the *Sacramento Bee's* listing of what everybody makes for pay, against the positions they held and what the pay rates were supposed to be for those scales—not one senate member in the entire, large UCLA campus was being paid on scale. And nobody below scale. Everybody above scale.

So that's what happened to UCSC, ultimately, I think, is they were in a cosmopolitan world of higher education where they were not successful in creating (this is another Mao quote) "one, two, and more, and many" UCSCs. Instead, one UCSC and maybe a couple of half-hearted experiments. That made a lot of sense in 1965; I'm not so sure it makes sense in 2015.

Another factor going on here is: the tendency towards focus on research and industry service, and therefore, focus more on the natural sciences and engineering and professional schools, and away from undergraduate, liberal arts education, started way before even Santa Cruz was founded. Because if you go

back to an important book that—I don't think it *drove* this as much as *recognized* it: Clark Kerr wrote a book called *The Uses of the University*. He wrote it in 1960, I think, or '61, somewhere right around there. And the same year, President [James Alfred] Perkins, at Cornell, wrote a book called *The University in Transition*. And both books make exactly the same point: there's a new wave of industry connection coming down. Universities will either get tied into that in some way, or they're going to fail to be adequately funded in the future. And this is going to be difficult for universities, because it's going to undermine their traditional obligation to be critics of what's going on in society and in daily life. But the funding's going to come from people that embrace this connection, and look for their funding through some connection with industry and the development of the private sector.

Clark Kerr shamelessly says, "It's where it's going. We can be unhappy about it." "I'm unhappy about it," says Kerr. "It's not going to be good for the university, but it's our only option. Any university that doesn't step up and become part of this wave is going to be left behind."

I think UC has been moving in that direction. Community studies was an exception to that direction, and built as a counter to it, and an important one. Ironically, Clark Kerr himself played a key role in making that happen. But his intellectual analysis of where higher education was going was, "We're going to become handmaidens to industry—and get used to it." And he was more or less insulting, almost at this level: "If you don't see this and understand it, you're an idiot." It was just almost in that tone that that book was delivered.

There's a great critique of this book by Hal Draper, who was a leftist in Berkeley at the time. He wrote a very trenchant (which I learned a lot from) critique of that book by Clark Kerr. (I'm sure if you Google it you can find this thing.) But that tendency of all of higher education to move in the direction it's moved—which is the counter-direction to UCSC and everything it had in mind—moved in quantitative directions; scientific directions; [toward] practical implementation, but not about social change, but for the status quo, and for what capital needs, not for what human beings might need—that stuff was deeply ensconced by the time I got here in 1969. UCSC moved against that trend for another almost decade, but by the middle of the 1970s for sure, late seventies, by the early eighties we were already moving back in the direction of the general trend. And that's not surprising, that that's where stuff went.

Rabkin: Mike, is there anything else you'd like to say before we turn off the recorder?

Rotkin: I think there's way too much already! Thank you for your patience in putting up with my talking about this. (laughs) And I hope I didn't do too much backtracking or double-counting here, but I did my best to not repeat stories. So hopefully that worked out.

Rabkin: No. It's beautiful. Thank you. It's been a pleasure.

Rotkin: Likewise.

About the Interviewer and Editor:

Sarah Rabkin taught in UC Santa Cruz writing program and environmental studies department for over twenty-five years. She holds a BA in biology from Harvard University and a graduate certificate in Science Communication from UCSC. Her book of essays, *What I Learned at Bug Camp*, was published in 2011.