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Dartmouth College Oral History Program
The Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Nora Cai ‘27

CAI: This is Nora Cai. Today is February 11, 2025, and I’m conducting this oral history interview for the Dartmouth Vietnam Project. I’m recording this interview by Zoom video call on the campus of Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, with Professor Carolyn Woods Eisenberg, who is joining me from Brooklyn, New York. Professor, thank you so much for speaking with me today.

EISENBERG: Happy to do this.

CAI: Before we begin the interview, I’d like to just mention a couple of your published works, just for ease of reference in case they are brought up later in the interview. Professor Eisenberg’s first book, which was published in 1996, is titled, *Drawing the Line: The American Decision to Divide Germany, 1944-1949*. And then her second book is titled *Fire and Rain: Nixon, Kissinger, and the Wars in Southeast Asia*, which was published in 2023 and won the Bancroft Prize in 2024. Just to start off, I’d like to ask, when and where were you born?

EISENBERG: I was born in—I have to stop [laughter]—1945 in the Bronx [NY], which I still have the accent from.

CAI: [laughter] And what was your specific birthday, if I may ask?

EISENBERG: 5/5/45.

CAI: Okay, and what was it like growing up in the Bronx, in New York?

EISENBERG: Well, really, we only lived in the Bronx for about five years, and then we, like many millions of other people, moved to the suburbs. So, I would say most of my growing up was

really in the suburban setting, which fit with a lot of things that people say about the suburbs in the 1950s. It was new. A lot of Americans, if they were white, were experiencing a lot of upward mobility. And one thing was interesting at that time was—to afford a house in the suburbs was possible for a very wide range of people. You didn't have—I think about what housing is like now, which is a nightmare. But back then, there was a lot of new housing. People had GI loans. [Large] numbers of people on my block had union jobs, so their income was actually pretty good. So there was a little bit more economic diversity in the suburb. But anyway, that's where I grew up.

But I had—when you're growing up, you have all sorts of experiences, some good, some bad. But I would say on balance that it was a happy time. And actually, even into my old age, there are friends that were my friends way back then who are still my friends now. So that's a nice thing. And I think very often now, young people don't have any of that continuity for various reasons.

CAI: And who else was in your family? Did you have any siblings? Or were you with your parents?

EISENBERG: My mother and my father. They were actually—they had met in law school. But for the time that I was growing up, although my mother was an attorney, and I always think she was a better student than my father, this was in the 1950s so she didn't work for a lot of our growing up. And then when she finally went back to work, she initially was a substitute in my junior high school because that was the least disruptive. And it really wasn't until we were mostly all gone or well-launched that then she began to use her legal education. So she wrote law books for a while, and then, actually, when she turned 70, she opened up a practice. Which was a little odd, but anyway, I think it reflected the fact that she had actually not used those skills in all those other years.

CAI: Interesting. And do you think what your parents did, their focus on law, influenced your interests at all? Or were your interests entirely different?

EISENBERG: I think what—just as far as going to law school is—my entire life, people would say, "Oh, you're going to be just like your parents, you are going to go to law school." So, I had X-ed that out as even—that was off my radar. God punished me, because two of my three daughters are lawyers, and my son-in-law is a lawyer [laughter], so we're kind of like, "Oh my god." So I definitely ruled that out.

I actually think I was very fortunate. I mean, not that I had the most perfect parents in the world, but they were interested in a lot of things. And my father in particular—had he not been poor—I think he had maybe been a student of Henry Steele Commager, and Henry Steel Commager said, "Why don't you go forward?" And my father didn't have money, and it seemed impractical. But he had this interest in history and also foreign policy. And actually that was a very important thing. So I was that nerdy kid that, for example, when the Suez Crisis happened, and I was probably eleven or something, my father was glued to the television watching the [United Nations] Security Council deliberate. And I watched that with him, and he would explain to me, "This is the Russian person, and this is—" whatever.

So I would say I was very lucky in that way. And my parents were really intellectual, but in a really nice way. They were just interested in things. And then they were a little bit of a space cadet. I can remember my mother coming in and bringing me one of Plato's *Dialogues*, and I'm twelve. I don't really want to read this. She said "[inaudible] Just read it. You'll like it." So it was like that. It wasn't high tone. It was more mellow.

And they were politically—I should add just one other thing that's probably relevant. These were not radical parents, but they were politically interested. My mother worked with the League of Women Voters on things related to issues of

McCarthyism. Which was a very big topic—that civil liberties. And my father was a Democratic Committee man, and then at some point they both became involved in CORE, so I wouldn't say that they were super-duper political fanatics, but it was in the household. That was definitely present.

CAI: I see. And by CORE, do you mean the Congress of Racial Equity?

EISENBERG: Congress of Racial Equality.

CAI: Or equality? Okay, got it.

EISENBERG: At some point—actually, this came later, I was actually out of the house by this time—but the schools in our town had been very segregated, so there was a big effort to change that. They were involved in that. Again, I wouldn't describe them as political zealots, but I would say that they had ideas about how to live a life.

CAI: Do you think their involvements against segregation in your childhood influenced your interests at all? Or did that make an impression on you as you were growing up?

EISENBERG: It was present, and one of the things that happened that was pretty significant was that—I had this bee in my bonnet. I didn't go to sleepaway camp. For most of my life, I was home. But when I was fourteen they said, "Okay, there's money. You can go to sleepaway camp." And then I had this bee in my bonnet, which is that I didn't want to go to a segregated camp. I wanted an integrated camp, but actually there weren't that many. And my cousin, whose family were really radical people—they might have even been communists, I am never sure of that—but my cousin went to an integrated camp. My mother is like, "Okay, well your cousin goes to one. Go with your cousin." I don't actually think that my parents realized how radical this place really was. It's just like "Susie's had a good time; you'll have a good time." So, that was a place where I really met a whole bunch of teenagers who really were very political. That had a

lot of effect on me. A number of them—various people's fathers had been in jail for Smith Act, and various people's fathers were civil liberties lawyers, so there was a whole—and other union organizers—so I met people that were a little bit different than my classmates. And it was integrated, so civil rights was a topic that people were concerned about.

CAI: When you reference the Smith Act, is that the 1940 Smith Act restricting free expression or overthrow of the government?

EISENBERG: I think that was the—I actually don't even remember anymore. I think it had to do with being a member of the Communist Party and whether you would testify or not. I feel like there were a whole bunch of cases where people refused to testify and took the Fifth Amendment, but then that wasn't acceptable, and some of them went to jail. There were a number of pieces of legislation, but what I'm saying is I entered in a world of people where that was a part of their lives. Much more there—a lot of the friends from camp were people whose parents were much more politically left and much more active than my parents were.

CAI: When you say, "politically left," what sorts of causes were they interested in, or what did you end up becoming more interested in this experience?

EISENBERG: Well, again, it was more like I found people who shared my interests because I was a slightly nerdy kid. I wasn't super nerdy because I actually had a fair amount of friends. If you were super nerdy, you didn't actually have a lot of friends. But it was maybe finding more people my age who read books, for example, which I thought—and there was a lot of reading in the summer. There was a lot of sharing of things. Again, civil liberties were a question. So I'm reasonably sure that that influenced the decisions that I made later.

Civil rights was huge. The camp was integrated. There were actually a number of—I remember two Black sisters from Mississippi who were there on scholarship, and where we

had lots of conversations about what the situation was. And there were some other people my age, who were—maybe their siblings were already getting arrested in Georgia. The sense of the civil rights movement being very close at that camp was much more pronounced even than whatever my parents were doing.

The other thing that was very—two other things. One was not just civil rights, but labor, because a lot of the kids in camp—their parents had been organizers of major unions during the ‘30s and ‘40s. The labor thing was a very big deal.

And then finally, there was a foreign policy interest as well in terms of nuclear issues—that was very big. Why we were having a nuclear arms race? That wasn’t a good thing. Relations with Russia and hardline treatment of China, these were all things that were getting talked about. Although there were individuals in my school that were also interested in these things, this was much more intense—meeting a whole group of kids my age who cared about this.

CAI: When was this? Was this during high school or before high school?

EISENBERG: I think it was 1959.

CAI: Okay.

EISENBERG: I think I was maybe in transition from junior high school to high school around that time period.

CAI: Okay. By the time you entered high school, did you have an idea of what you were academically interested in, or a career in mind, or was it up for anything?

EISENBERG: Well first, I had a lot of interests. So, it wasn’t one thing. I was certainly very interested in history. I guess one thing that had started—and it actually started even when I was in ninth grade—was anti-nuclear test ban organizing. And students in the high school—I feel like this started before I

was even there—but students in the high school had organized a SANE [National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy] nuclear policy youth group. And that was very—they were resisting when there were civil defense drills. People were like, “No, we’re not doing that. It’s making us have the illusion that we’re going to survive a nuclear holocaust. That’s stupid.” So that was already in place in high school, and I feel like by the end of junior high, I was already in that. So that was a pretty big issue. I would say the critical issue in that was really a nuclear test ban, because this is when there was a lot of scientific findings which were showing that these bombs that were getting tested in Nevada were killing people, entering the milk supply, that the level of cancer was very high. So that organizing had already started even before I had set foot in high school. That was a whole culture in and of itself.

CAI: Were there any extracurricular activities that were particularly memorable, or that you were interested in in high school?

EISENBERG: Well, I was a debater, you can probably tell. By the time I was a senior—I was in charge. I was like—they will tell you it was a big joke—everybody kept calling me “The Boss.” I was the head of our debate club. I actually was not an especially good debater, but that was a big activity. And it was funny, because, this is just idiosyncratic, but when I went to high school, all the principal and all these various officials had all been warned that I was coming, and that I was a menace [laughter]. I was never told that until many years later that was the case. But anyway, people were warned. The principal was told, “Never let her near our school paper.”

But weirdly, paradoxically, everybody then wanted to get to know me. So actually, contrary to what—and the head of the newspaper kept saying, “Why don’t you work for the newspaper?” And I said, “No, I’m never doing that ever, ever again.” But weirdly, in high school, it was a favorable thing. People were really interested, I got to know everybody [laughter], I had good faculty friends. The principal was a

right-wing person though, but still, she had reached out, and so we became friends. So all of the stress that I had experienced as a younger person, when I was really in trouble, actually wasn't true in high school. It was much more benign.

CAI: Do you think they were right to warn that you would be a "menace" in—

EISENBERG: No, it was stupid. That's kind of the point. So supposing in junior high school, our newspaper had had an article about UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund]. Like, really? Was that so—? The things that they were trying to ban—and I do think it's relevant lesson for today—but the things that they were really alarmed about were stupid. And what would have happened if they just left me alone was that it would have been a good paper. That kids who really liked to write would write, and we have interesting articles, and we could all have lived happily ever after. But that's part of what political repression does, is that apart from closing out debates that people really need to have, it also actually just prevents things that don't have that political edge—but good things to happen. I think that even in terms of Israel-Palestine again, we would really benefit at our school for having more cultural activities about what's going on in Palestine. Nobody would be the worst for that, but there's such a tightness that that's not quite happening.

CAI: And so you felt that tightness as well in your high school experience?

EISENBERG: Pardon?

CAI: Did you feel that tightness as well in your high school experience?

EISENBERG: Well, you see also that was when times were changing. There were some experiences that were like this. So for example, one of the things in the olden times was you have civil defense drills at school, and the siren would go on and

you put your head on a locker and pretend that you were safe. So that became a point of protest. And again, that had happened even before I entered high school—that there were students who were saying, “This is stupid, blah, blah, blah, we’re not going to do it.” There had been protests. So then, when I was in that high school—because then I became part of that older group and so did my friends, many of them—I remember we made blue armbands that said, “Civil defense is no defense.” And the principal went ballistic. And teachers went running around ripping the blue things off of students’ arms. So that was very unfortunate.

Anyway, I think I ended up the last person with a blue armband. But [laughter] it was funny, one of my friends—he and I together were with our blue armband—and we’re in the principal’s office, and my friend Peter’s parents called and told him to take the damn armband off. And so he did. So I was the last person with an armband on. And we’re still friends. We’re talking about things that happened 60 years ago. To this day, whenever we see each other, he has to bring this up and explain that his father did the right thing [laughter]. It stayed with him. We have to go over that again. How did his father did what he did? How did I feel about what he did? [laughter] It was like, no.

So it wasn’t totally free in the high school, but it was better. The atmosphere was better. And one of the things that happened is—do you know the folk singer, Pete Seeger? Does that mean anything to you?

CAI: No.

EISENBERG: He was a very famous folk singer back then.

CAI: Okay.

EISENBERG: And he had been called before the Senate internal securities committee [Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security] and, like many other left people, refused to answer questions. And so he had been cited for contempt, which again, many

people had had that. So unknowingly our high school had made a contract with him at a student suggestion that he was going to do a concert for us and then it would be for the scholarship fund. So that was going along merrily, and then the American Legion heard about it. And they had a whole thing in the paper about how this communist was coming to the school and they were going to picket and blah, blah, blah. So that became a big upheaval.

And I always remember—so I was in conversations about that with the principal, who I actually did come to like quite well. But she was on this thing. She said—well, she wanted to call him up and ask him if he was a communist. And I said, "Well, he might be going to jail because he doesn't want to say that in the Senate. Do you really think you're gonna call and say, 'Hi, Pete, are you a communist?'" [laughter]. Like, no. But what did happen is that Pete Seeger's agent said if they canceled his contract that he was going to sue our high school. So he came, and then he had all these patriotic songs that he always sang anyway. We all sang "This Land is Your Land."

But my larger point is, I think what was happening in those years is that the effect of McCarthyism was starting—was really beginning to—there was more relaxation about things all around. Because a lot of people think that McCarthyism is him as the senator, but he was just the face of it. There were all kinds of repressive institutions and the kinds of incidents—like I'm telling you about not writing about UNICEF—was happening all over the country. So people were really, for a long time in the '50s and into the early '60s—people really were afraid, and institutions were afraid. But it was definitely thawing. I would say by the time I graduated high school that the atmosphere was not as frightened as it became later.

CAI: And I'm curious what you wrote about UNICEF. Was it related to communism at all, or was it just—

EISENBERG: No it wasn't! [laughter]

[crosstalk]

EISENBERG: Because see back then, what could be more wholesome than UNICEF? People go in this orange thing. But at that point, I think the sponsors—first of all, they were excessive. This concern was absurd, but they're thinking, "UN [United Nations], internationalism, Russia, there's going to be something to matter with it." And that's what I'm talking about. The level of fear—I see that look on their face—that something would appear in the Benjamin Franklin junior high school newspaper that would get them in trouble. That was the issue for them.

CAI: I see.

[crosstalk]

EISENBERG: And also that if I was going to do that, God knows what other things I would write about. So this fear—it's a terrible thing.

CAI: And so when they objected to your paper, did it ever end up getting published? Or did—

EISENBERG: No.

CAI: I see.

EISENBERG: No, they just made it the same old, boring paper it was going to be in the first place. Their idea of a newspaper was that you would have—every article would be about with the names of all the kids that were in clubs. Like "Oh, the soccer team has blah, blah. blah." No, it just became as boring as it was in the first place.

But honestly, the takeaway—well, it was rough for me as a kid. Actually that year was hard. And, no it was not nothing. But I think these kinds of things on many different levels of society were happening to people for lots of different

reasons. Teachers in classrooms being afraid about what would be said.

Oh, I actually have something interesting I will say about this. You may want to get past my childhood, but I will say a very interesting thing, and this does have to do with repression. So ninth grade, we're asked to do—yes, this was also ninth grade. We're supposed to do these projects about countries or current events things. We're supposed to clip newspaper articles and whatever. Anyway, I had this bee in my bonnet, which I already had had anyway. Which is, probably being a journalist, that I thought I would really have a much better report if I went to the Cuban consulate. So I think we're talking here—might have been '61—that that would be a good idea. And this was just at the period where the US relations with Cuba was falling apart, and I think actually the recognition of Cuba—I think the US had cut off relations. But the US, by treaty, has to let the consulate be in—can't interfere with the consulate. So Cuban consulate is in New York.

So my friend and I—we make an appointment to go to the consulate for my report. And this is actually incredible—I actually tell my classes—so go to the consulate, it's dead. Nothing is happening, because they're being isolated. So there are the staff. And we were ecstatic, because we were two junior high school girls and there were two college boys there who were also doing reports, and they have nothing to do in the consulate but talk to us. So we are there the entire day, and what—or it felt like it was the entire day—and they are telling us that the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] is destabilizing their country. Is doing all of these things to make the [Fidel] Castro regime look inept or weak or whatever. And for a part of the time, they're bringing out pictures to show us of factories that they say that the CIA had sabotaged. They also said that the CIA was sabotaging their transportation system, that buses had blown up, and they're just going on and on. It feels like an endless thing of what they say is happening. The US is trying to overthrow Castro, and they're doing all these things. So we're just

sitting there, they're just telling us this. And I guess we have pictures that they gave us.

So the four of us walk out. It's dark and we're freaked out about what they've told us. And I just remember us walking through Central Park, the four of us, and we're saying, "What should we do? Is it true? Are they lying to us? Is the US blowing up fact—" I'm saying we are in shock [laughter]. So anyway, my friend Anita and I in our junior high school class decide we're going to tell the class what we learned at the Cuban consulate and show some of the pictures they had given us. And what we were going to say was that we didn't know if it was true. That we as—given everything—we were not in a position to make an informed assessment of this. But we actually thought it was pretty—we were pretty flipped out by hearing what they had to say. And we wanted to let the class know that this is what they'd said, and people in the class could just take it or whatever.

So we give this whole thing, and then the teacher calls our parents, predictably, and says he knows that neither of us is a communist, but he's very concerned that other people would get that impression. And so he thought it would be in our best interest if we would stop talking about it [laughter]. We kind of did.

And then so I got—I don't think I was at Dartmouth then—but I go on to teach American foreign policy, and Anita, my friend, is a journalist for KPFA. And the Church Committee comes out with this report a zillion years later about the CIA. And it was just what they told us [laughter]. It was worse, even, about all the time—how they tried to assassinate Castro and they poisoned his cigar, and all the—. We called each other and said, "Oh, my God, that's so weird. They were telling us the truth."

So that I always tell my classes about. So that's another indication of—I don't know how much you want to spend these years—but it's another indication of what the atmosphere was at that time.

CAI: And just to go back really quick, what was your friend's name?

EISENBERG: Anita Franco.

CAI: Anita Franco, okay. Yeah, that's really interesting. And just to move forward towards your experience at UChicago [University of Chicago], how did you end up there? Were you considering other colleges or what inspired you to end up at UChicago?

EISENBERG: Well, how I ended up there was that I was on four waiting lists, because [laughter] I was a mathematical moron. And so I had those 650 math things that were not good. So I had all these good things that I—good grades in history and whatever but a disaster in math and chemistry. And so I was a waiting list person. And I had gotten into Wisconsin [University of Wisconsin-Madison], and I was fine with the idea that I would go to Wisconsin. I wasn't that disappointed. But you could exactly see how they were thinking about it in the admissions office. So I got into Chicago in August. I was the last person to be admitted. And hilariously, because I was very active in Chicago and a lot of political things, every now and again, the director of admissions would remind me I was the last person [laughter] that got in. I have this vision of him going by and saying, "Last person." So that was why.

So I went to University of Chicago. It was an incredibly political time there. One thing which then does relate to later is that there was a very active civil rights CORE chapter at Chicago. And actually that—Bernie Sanders was there as a student. He was actually there. He graduated the year just before I came, but he actually, I think, had been Head of CORE as a student. And so that—there was a lot of stuff around civil rights, a lot of involvement. University of Chicago is this little island in the South side, so there's this ghetto on both sides. And the school segregation was absolutely horrifying. So there was just a lot of involvement with the issue of desegregation.

In general, what was really great, from my point of view, about being in Chicago [IL] was that it was very easy to get involved in things in the city. That you were not—the campus really faced out into a larger thing. There was just a lot. I remember my first quarter at Chicago— because we run that same crazy system you are—is [laughter] I remember doing a whole research project on the Daley Machine in Chicago, which was pretty fascinating. And working for a forum candidate. So there was a lot of things to do.

And then as well, there was a lot of—I would say by '64, '65 it was anti-war activity. And that was a very big part of the college experience. It's not like—it wasn't necessarily everybody, maybe it wasn't even a majority, but I would say the issues of civil rights and the war in Vietnam in particular were very salient. They were very essential to the college experience. And then I also was—we had something called the Student Political Action Committee, which was a lot of people. At one point, I was the head of that. But it was a very interesting time. And again, nothing's perfect. I'm sure you've noticed that in your college experience, that everything doesn't go well. But it was really a growth experience and in many ways—

And then there was this other funny, odd thing, which was that [John F.] Kennedy was assassinated my freshman year, and Vice President—

CAI: That's 1963?

EISENBERG: November '63. And one of the people that had been Kennedy's legislative assistant in the House of Representatives became the vice president at the University of Chicago. And he was very interested—he was a shill for [Robert F.] Bobby Kennedy. He was very interested in making connections between active young people and people who have been part of the Kennedyland. And I think it was partly because that's what he knew about, but it was also partly because the question of Bobby running was

always floating around. So weirdly, he reached out to a lot of student activists, including me. So we're invited to these events with Ted Sorensen and Pierre Salinger, and these Kennedy—actually never Bobby.

And then finally—so that was interesting—and then the third thing that was really interesting was that Martin Luther King [Jr.] came to Chicago because he wanted to do a project in a northern city. It was a experiment. And so he came to the university—I think I was a junior then? He was partly there to get students involved with his effort. And he came to campus, and he gave a big speech, and then that created a whole series of open housing marches in Chicago that he was involved in—and then when he left his lieutenants Jesse Jackson and James Bell. So again, it was pretty exciting and dangerous.

But one thing I often have discussions with my students from our learning about this period, which I think is really different for them, is that in that time period, in the '60s, people who are involved in these larger projects were reaching out to students. It wasn't like we were sitting in our dorms and saying, "Oh, well, gee, I'd like to meet Dr. King." He's there. Bayard Rustin was there. Numbers of people from SNCC, and they're coming to talk to students, and they're inviting students to participate in things. So that's a very different mental situation. I think about that a lot. I don't think my students have anything like that—of being recruited and made to feel important. Which I think we all did—we were a little crazy, but we had that feeling.

CAI: And when you say SNCC, is that the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee?

EISENBERG: That's the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. And they had a—it was actually a branch in Chicago, but most of them were in the south. But what they did was—so my junior year was Mississippi Summer. I don't know, does that ring any bells for you?

CAI: Yeah, yeah.

EISENBERG: So they were recruiting college students that summer to go. And so they were up at our campus doing that. Now, if you wanted to go to Mississippi Summer and do voter registration and you were not 21 years old, you had to have parental permission. So I actually wanted to go, but my mother's view was, "Not over my dead body. You're not going. I'm not signing. No." And then when Schwerner, and Cheney, and Goodman disappeared—I don't know if that resonates to you at all. Because we were still in struggle about whether I could go or not go, but then these three civil rights workers disappeared, and their parents were on television, and my mother was saying, "I'm not going to be that woman. I'm not going. You can't go."

But other students did. And so again, there was a very vibrant sense of—they went for the summer, a bunch of people did, came back, had a lot of complex experiences. But it really infused the campus life, I would say.

CAI: I see. And this is the summer of 1964. The Freedom Summer also?

EISENBERG: Right, that was 1964.

CAI: I see. And—

[crosstalk]

CAI: Sorry, yeah.

EISENBERG: No but they came out—this was a common thing. My then boyfriend, who subsequently became my husband, was a student at the University of Michigan. And in 1965, when there was all that stuff happening in Alabama with Selma and people getting beaten up on the bridge and marching to Montgomery—very similarly, SNCC kids arrived at the University of Michigan and said, "We need you to come march with us." And so people got in their cars, including my

then boyfriend, and drove from Michigan to Alabama and were part of that.

But again, I'm very mindful of this, because I feel like my students don't have anything like it. I don't even like sometimes to teach about protest, because I feel like it makes them feel like they're losers. And I keep wanting to say, "No, it was different. People invited us." It was a different time.

CAI: And do you feel like back then, it was easy to join a protest, or did you feel scared at all about the danger of being a part of that?

EISENBERG: Well, it depends what the protest was. There were a lot of Vietnam things. There were very civil rights things in Chicago. What was terrifying was when Martin Luther King came to Chicago, a big focus of his activity was open housing. And they were marching through these white neighborhoods—mostly white working class neighborhoods that were really racist and no Black people could be there—and that's what they were doing. So that summer, there was enormous violence. If you were marching in those places, in those neighborhoods, the violence was huge. And it was terrifying.

And actually—so I was in Chicago that summer because I was trying to pass biology, and I was in danger of never graduating [laughter]. So in terms of those marches that were so dangerous, I had all these excuses. Like, "If I go in this March, I'm going to fail biology. It's no joke. I have to worry about biology." So in constant stress. But I did go on one of them, and it was terrifying. But I learned from that. I mean, the level of hatred from these teenage boys and then these white women on their stoops that are screaming and cursing. And in Chicago, as opposed to Mississippi, the police did actually—they were providing protection. So we're marching, and we're two abreast, and I'm marching with this Black woman who seems to be about 85 years old and enormously more brave than I am. And so it's two of us

abreast, and then there's a cop on either side. So you'd think that's pretty safe. They were bottles flying, bricks are flying. People are spitting, cursing. I'm terrified. And this woman—[laughter] I'm holding her hand, I always remember this. I'm thinking, "What's wrong with her? She's not afraid. Why am I—?" And she keeps saying, "Don't look at it." Meanwhile I crash. And she—"Don't look. Look straight ahead. Don't look at them. Keep walking. You're not looking. Remember, you're not looking. Nothing's going to happen. You're just—." So I have that memory of that march, but I've never forgotten the hatred that was there and the hysteria, actually, of people. And then you had these boys, with their motorcycles, and they had Confederate flags. You could have been in Mississippi for that situation.

CAI: And which summer was this? Was it still—

EISENBERG: That wasn't that summer. So it must have my summer [pause]. Might have been the summer of '66. I think that's when King came to Chicago, and I think that's when I was failing biology. [laughter] Which it was more important.

CAI: [laughter] And before we move on to your time at Columbia, I just wanted to go back and check—You mentioned something about your mom warning you not to go to the Mississippi Summer Project because of the disappearance of a few activists. Was that James Cheney and—

EISENBERG: Yeah.

CAI: Michael Schwerner, and the third one was?

EISENBERG: Andy Goodman.

CAI: Okay. And Andrew Goodman, yeah.

EISENBERG: Because what was happening that summer—I couldn't go without my parents' signature because I wasn't 21. So we were fighting about it. But students were going down in waves to Mississippi. It wasn't like everybody is in one trip.

And actually, Andy Goodman—no, Mickey Schwerner had been there. He was a little older, and he had actually been in Mississippi for a while. Andrew Goodman disappeared the first day that he was in Mississippi. And James Chaney was a Black young man from Mississippi, so the three of them had gone to inspect the church. They were arrested. They were led out of jail at 10 o'clock at night, and then no one ever saw them again. So it was pretty clear that they probably had been killed. And so in terms of my ongoing struggle with my parents, my mother—because we were still arguing about it, but once those kids disappeared, my mother says, "There's no way. I will never sign for you to go. Don't go."

And truthfully, I was relieved. Doing these things, it's not like you just—"Oh, this is fun. I'll just go." It was scary. It's just that you felt that it was the right thing to do. And one thing that I was talking about with my classes sometimes is that a lot of the civil rights activity was initiated by Black college students and Black high school students. And that was not lost on us. And so you're sitting in the University of Chicago, and you know what's going on in Alabama, Mississippi, because it's a lot of information going back and forth. And so there's a part of you that you're seeing that these Black students are doing this. And you're saying to yourself, "Well, they're doing it. Shouldn't I do it? Right? What?" So again, it's a very different context, I think, from now in terms of the clarity of certain things.

CAI: And, yeah, I guess that's a good segue into your time at Columbia [University]. Before we get into the occupation, how did you end up at Columbia? What was your thinking there in terms of pursuing a master's degree?

EISENBERG: A Ph.D.? Well, truthfully [laughter] it ended up because—I was getting married, and my husband and I each applied to ten graduate schools, and I actually got into Harvard, and he didn't. [laughter] And so he got money from Columbia. So that's what happened. So I actually came into Columbia and didn't have any financial support. That's what I'm telling you.

Don't make that mistake. But at that time—so I was there for a year I didn't have financial support, but then I got a fellowship at the end of my first year.

So I wasn't that miserable. I mean, there was this little part of my brain like, "Gee, too bad I didn't go where I was getting money and could have been important." But it wasn't the most horrible fate. So that was a good choice in terms of academics. There were lots of interesting faculty, et cetera. So. The big news for us was we were married. We were 22 years old, and suddenly we're a married couple in the Upper West Side. That was weird.

CAI: You arrive at Columbia in 1967, is that—?

EISENBERG: Correct.

CAI: Okay.

EISENBERG: And he's in the Philosophy Department. I'm in the History Department.

CAI: Sorry, I missed what department was he in?

EISENBERG: He was in philosophy.

CAI: I see okay. And did you have an idea of what you were researching in the History Department at Columbia?

EISENBERG: That's partly—I think I was saying that to you earlier—I didn't—and this I don't think I was different from a lot of other—I didn't have a professional identity. I wasn't thinking practically like you need to. So what happened—and this does have ramifications for Dartmouth—is I didn't have—at that time, if you're going to get a Ph.D., you had to do a master's first. So I didn't even have in my brain "oh, well, what I do my master's on is going to slap me, and I'm going to be this kind of person or that and have that."

So I decided to do this master's thesis on the fight for community control of schools in New York City, but particularly in Harlem [NY]. And I was very interested in that, because what I was interested in was the fact that many of the people who were pushing for community control of schools and Black principals and the whole thing were people who had fought for integration. And I thought that was really—and in Chicago, the things were still at this integration stage, and I had been somewhat involved in that. And so I was really just interested in understanding what had happened. Like, what was that about? So when I picked my master's thesis, I didn't think, "Oh, I'm now going to be an X historian." And somewhere in my brain, I actually think I was thinking that I would go back into foreign policy, which I was really interested in.

So I worked on this thesis just because I was interested in it. And then I learned a lot. I spent a lot of time in Harlem, I got the archives of this group. And as has been true for every project I've ever done, I took a million years to do it. So I took the most time anybody did to write my master's thesis. And then actually my plan was to go on and write a dissertation that would be on foreign policy. However, somebody or other in the History Department asked other people in the History Department if they had read my master's thesis. And then it was said by somebody to somebody, "This master's thesis is more like a Ph.D. Maybe she could just work on it for six months and be done." And so that's actually what happened. So I'm in my mind like "I'm going to be writing about foreign policy, and I'm going to be here for eternity," and all of a sudden, I'm going to have a Ph.D. And I hadn't even decided I wanted to be a historian at that point professionally, I just was interested [laughter]. All of a sudden—then it occurs to me "Oh, well, if I'm getting my Ph.D. right now, then I actually lose my fellowship." So that—"Oh I better get a job."

So I was 26 years old and hadn't really picked a field, but I got hired by Dartmouth, initially to replace their urban historian—although I never thought of myself as that—on a

one year line. And I guess I had had other job offers at that point, but it was fast. Between the time I knew that I was going to do these revisions on my thesis and be done and got hired by Dartmouth. All of it was very compressed. And I think it's fair to say I didn't have any personal identity with being a faculty member. At all [laughter]. It was zero. I mean, it's not that I didn't want to be. It's just that I was finishing ahead of my friends. My husband was like nowhere in his thesis.

Anyway, that's how I actually ended up at Dartmouth. I got recruited, and then they pushed me a little bit because I was in contention for being a professor at the University of Wisconsin. Anyway, that decision got made in a very snappy way.

CAI: And so just for a sense of the timeline, was it in 1971 that you received your dissertation?

EISENBERG: Correct. I finished it. They wanted me to do some revisions. So I did some revisions, then I actually defended my thesis. You had five people at Columbia that were there. And then some people had criticism. So I actually had to take—there's a way at Columbia—I don't know if it's still true that—they'll tell you that you passed. But if they tell you need revisions, they want you to do them, and the person that's your advisor has to sign off. So it was a little bit extra. And actually, I don't think I finished it until maybe the third week of August. Alan had already moved up to Vermont, and I was sitting there still doing it, but everything happened very fast.

CAI: And Alan is your husband?

EISENBERG: Right.

CAI: I see. And so that's Alan Eisenberg?

EISENEBERG: Yes.

CAI: Okay. And so you mentioned Dartmouth, which I'm also really interested in. But before we get there, during your time researching civil rights at Columbia, did you feel like those issues were also present on campus as they were at the University of Chicago?

EISENBERG: Well, they were present. Although again, I was really trying to understand the transition from civil—from an integrationist perspective to a black power perspective. And that was a very dramatic shift. But there were issues going on about Columbia's relationship to Harlem. They were a big slumlord, for example. And also their admissions policy left a lot to be desired. When I came to Columbia, there was an SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] chapter, which was really made up pretty much of people that were in Columbia College. And that SDS chapter had been around for a long time. There was also Student African—SAS [Society of Afro-American Students]. I can't remember the initials, which is a Black—

CAI: Afro-American Society?

EISENBERG: What?

CAI: Student Afro-American Society, is that?

EISENBERG: Yeah, that might have been what the name was. And that was also mostly undergraduate Black students on campus. So these groups were existing. And initially, I didn't have that much to do with either of those groups. But one of the things then that became an issue—apart from Columbia being a slumlord, which is somewhat of concern to people—is that in Morningside Park—I don't know if you can picture it—but it was a park between Columbia and Harlem. And the park was used by kids in Harlem. And then Columbia decided to build a gym in that area, which was going to dramatically affect the use of that facility for people in Harlem. So that became a big focal point for organizing.
I don't think I was really that involved on the Columbia campus with that.

I think more—when I was doing the research for my thesis, I was more interviewing people. And actually, at that period of time, there was a lot of anger in the Black community about white people who did research. And that had some other effects, which we could maybe not go into exactly right now. But I was always getting yelled at when I was doing my research, like "Why are you here? We're sick of white people? Don't you get the message, we hate white people." So it was actually a little stressful. Everybody wasn't saying "hooray for you that you're studying this." So in terms of civil rights, I was more focused on that.

And then, we're talking 1967, '68, so the war is really heating up. This is really the escalation—certainly in '67. So I think at that point, I was more relating to anti-war activities that were going on off campus. Until the spring of '68 when everything comes home to roost. But there was a lot of stuff going on in the city about the war. And there's a fact that keeps getting stated, which whenever I say it in class, I see that it doesn't really make an impact. But going from 16,000 American troops up to 550,000 American troops was huge. The ramifications in this society were enormous. And so the sense of this war being totally out of control was very profound.

So there was a lot of things to be a part of. You didn't necessarily have to be active on the Columbia campus. So I was doing more—I went to the Pentagon March, various things like that.

CAI: And the Pentagon March was 1967?

EISENBERG: Right.

CAI: Okay, I see.

EISENBERG: In the fall of '67. It was huge. It was a bit of a counter cultural march, because it was this whole thing about, we're going to levitate the Pentagon, and people were chanting [laughter]. It

was kind of a funny thing. But then the people who stayed—which was not me—into the nigh., A lot of—police, really, were ferocious, and a lot of people got really hurt at that.

Could we stop for just a sec?

CAI: Sorry, what did you say? Oh, yes, yes, of course, I will pause the recording.

[Recording paused.]

CAI: Okay, the recording has been resumed. So just going back to your time at Columbia, you briefly mentioned the spring of '68 as a time when you started getting more involved with politics on campus. I was wondering if you could elaborate on that and what that felt like, or what that looked like.

EISENBERG: Well, so what happened in '68 was that one of the things that SDS in particular had been raising as an issue is the whole question about the university's complicity with the war. And the fact that they were doing research which they were lying about for—they were literally doing weapons research on campus. And the university was part of something called the IDA, Institute for Defense Analyses, which was a whole operation whereby American elite universities are collaborating with the Pentagon. So that became an issue.

And then in the spring of '68, there was a demonstration, which was originally just about the gym being built and about IDA. And then there was a march to the gym where it was supposed to be built, and that's sort of the way—there was no plan. And then people said, "Let's go to Hamilton Hall." And so then people—again, the leadership of this was very much from the undergraduates and very overwhelmingly male. So people went into Hamilton Hall, and that was white students and Black students, and so we had that dual focus.

And then somebody had the—this part I wasn't there for—but somebody had the bright idea of the Dean of a college had his office there. Why not lock him in his office? So that

had happened. And then people are also thinking, “Maybe we should stay in this building and [Zoom call connection was briefly disrupted; after several seconds, connection was re-established and Eisenberg resumed speaking.]

Okay, I had had a lot of experience about sit-ins before coming to Columbia, which was in my head about those experiences. I didn’t love a lot of it. I had also been the chair of various left organizations and campus at Chicago, and I came away from some of those experiences with mixed feelings. But that’s a whole long story in itself.

Anyway, so we’re in Hamilton Hall, and I think my husband came in, so we’re both there. So they have graduate students there as well as undergraduates. I actually thought that atmosphere was pretty crazy, and I was half being there not just as a protester, but because I actually was concerned that things were getting out of hand. And one of the things is that on that first night, civil rights people from Harlem, grown-up people, came into the building as well. And the truth is that it really raised the level of anxiety, because it seemed pretty clear that some of those people had guns. So it was actually a messed up situation. I truthfully ended up staying there partly because I was concerned that people were being crazy. I wasn’t there like just, “Oh, hooray. Let’s tie up the school.” And I was very concerned about the dean being locked up, and that that was crazy and somebody needed to try to get the dean out. And also that if people had weapons, they needed to be gotten out. And I felt I was a little bit older. I was also a TA [teaching assistant] so I felt older. So I was half staying—I would say too for the reason that night that I actually felt that this situation was getting really out of hand.

And then about two or three in the morning, the Black students said to the white students, “Get out of here. We’re going to run our own building, our own sit-in, and we don’t want you here. So that was very heavy. There’s a lot to be said about that in general about why did they kick out the whites. And there were some good reasons. But partly what was going on was this whole male thing about “how strong

are you? How brave are you? What do you—?" Like, fake "I'm going to die in Hamilton Hall." It was a lot of craziness in the beginning.

But anyway, the black students said to the white students, "We want you to leave now, but go take another building." So then some people then from Hamilton Hall broke into Low [Memorial] Library—smashed the windows and went in there. Which actually, I didn't think was a good thing either and didn't do it. I didn't go into Low and neither did Allen. And we thought that it was really—again, it was just too hyper, too crazy.

But then as this whole protest developed, which was partly about the treatment of Columbia of the racial community around them and partly about defense research—I was in sympathy with those demands—the event expanded so that there were ultimately five buildings that were occupied. Which I think hilarious when I think of these administrators—how going crazy there's the demonstration for two hours, and they're like, "Wow." And at Columbia, there were five buildings occupied—place is totally paralyzed.

So one of the five buildings, which was Fayerweather [Hall]—where, if you end up at Columbia, you'll see more Fayerweather than you ever want to—that's where the grad students were. So a lot of who was at—I mean, there were others. Ultimately, there were 500 students in Fayerweather, but of those 500 a lot of them were grad students. And so then that building was not crazy.

And then what happened was that a steering committee for the whole event was set up, and Ferris Booth Hall was the student center. So each of the buildings had two representatives to the steering committee, which met the whole time. So I was on that steering committee, and I think I was the only woman on the steering committee. And I was older than most of the people, not all of them but most of them. And again, I was suddenly—for me, this was a complicated thing, because I totally agreed with the

demands. I thought that these young men were actually being lunatics, and that they were kind of irresponsible. So some part of me was there for that reason, still. That I felt that there was a need for some people to try to tamp things down.

And then we had a huge fight, because the people on the steering committee were in touch with the mayor's office—constantly in touch. And there was a point when it was decided that the police were going to come on campus. And the steering committee knew that, and we knew when they were going to come. So I said, "Well, let's go back and tell the people in the buildings." And a lot of the people on the steering committee said no—that I wasn't being a revolutionary, and that "why did we have to tell people, because maybe people would leave if they knew the police were coming." [laughter] So I thought that was really not right. I think maybe we should be more democratic, let people know what's happening. So that was actually a very, very difficult experience—being on that steering committee. And whenever we have had Columbia reunions, I always say that as the most hated person on the steering committee, and everyone agrees. Nobody says, "Oh no, you got it wrong." And actually, the head of all that was Mark Rudd, whose name you might have heard as the leader. He was impossible back then, but we actually are friends. I helped edit his [laughter]—when he wrote his biography.

See but this is the moment where what's happening at Columbia, which I did not agree with, was people were moving to "we're revolutionaries, we're going to be violent, we have to smash the state." It's a lot of posturing. Mark was a symbol of that. There was so much wrong with it. I couldn't even begin to say what was wrong with it.

But then one of the things that happened at Columbia—which for some reason nobody ever really says—which is that when the police came on campus, at a couple of the buildings, people resisted arrest. And when that happened, there was some violence. But mostly there wasn't. Alan and I

got arrested in Fayerweather. They arrested 500 people in Fayerweather—many of their graduate students. But our police officer was actually pretty nice. In fact he was so nice that when I was in my jail cell, he at some point came by my jail cell just to say he knew there had been violence. He just wanted to tell me that Alan was fine. It was nice. This never gets reported.

But what the cops did that was insane was they beat up the kids on campus. In other words, you have all these students that are not in buildings. They're standing around. They want to see what's happening. The police come flying through. They beat up everybody. Only a very small fraction of the kids that were hurt were people that were actually in the buildings. It's the most ridiculous thing ever. It's a little bit like Annelise [Orleck] getting dragged, but multiply that by hundreds. Those of us who were in the buildings were in jail, the campus—we didn't get out of jail until, I don't know, sometime—we were there till the next afternoon. So we missed a lot, but when we came on campus, there were all these students walking around with bandages and bleeding. So that turned the whole campus, that was the thing. So once that happened, the whole campus went on strike. And basically that was it. I think what happened was that professors were told to meet their classes—that if classes wanted to continue to meet that that was okay, but that every class should meet with the professor and decide whether they wanted to meet or not. I actually have a lot to say about that, but I'm going to spare you all of it so—about how that came down. But in any event, the campus was then basically closed. A lot of the Columbia leadership, who had been pretty pumped up, and they went on to take leadership in SDS.

CAI: SDS the Students for a Democratic Society, right?

EISENBERG: But this is when SDS decided not to be democratic, but they were now going to be underground, violent, et cetera. And then, if you were at Columbia at that time, that happening was no surprise. And it was partly, I think that development

that made me feel that I should stay in these deliberations. Because I felt they were endangering other students by their behavior. And then they really ruined SDS. So one of the things was that they went underground. There were a lot of things that happened. I think they destroyed SDS. So anyway, that's a whole story in itself, but it is very interesting just in one respect, which is—Mark became very contrite about his role. And he's never recovered. He's actually—will go to his grave feeling terrible about this. It's not a little thing. He's very ashamed.

And actually, when the stuff was happening last spring at Columbia, we actually talked about it. Because he was being asked by the media, especially when people took Hamilton Hall. He was getting a lot of reporters' calls. And he was very conflicted about talking to them, because he just didn't feel like he should be an authority on anything. He felt like he really behaved very poorly. I like him a lot. I feel like he's a very sensitive, thoughtful older person.

Anyway—but the thing that becomes more relevant to you actually is that one of the effects of all that in '68 is that graduate students got really organized. And so we had a graduate history union that was created then, and that was operating for the rest of my time in grad school. And it was a lot of political involvement, and Cambodia was a very big moment.

So one of the things for me—my orals was scheduled about ten days after—or five days after the [Richard] Nixon announced that he was going into Cambodia.

CAI: Is this in 1970?

EISENBERG: 1970. It was spring of 1970. And so partly, it was a big issue for me, because I was in this graduate union, and I'm thinking, "We want people to do stuff." Which mostly was going out into working class communities and talking to people. That was what we were doing. And I said, "No, I'm going to sit in the library and study for my orals." That's

terrible. So I called Richard Hofstadter, who was chairing my committee at that point, and I said, “I’m just going to delay my orals till September.” And he said, “Why?” And I said, “Because I’m not going to study for them anymore, and I don’t want it to go badly—we agreed on that. And then what happened was that he called me back a day or two later. He said, “Look, this is really stupid. If you don’t want to study, don’t study.” And “just come and do it, and if it’s bad and you fail, then you fail, then you’re not going to be in the same place. You’ll take them in September. But who knows, you might pass it.”

So what then happened in the interim was that Hofstadter got very sick and rushed to the hospital right in that time period. And I had my orals in Fayerweather, and I had the worst orals that anybody has ever had. I felt like nobody could think of a question that I could answer. I really was like, “Oh my god, this is terrible. Who was our first president? I don’t know.” So I did pass no matter what, because I knew that—whatever.

But I would just say the whole time, to slightly round this up, is that really, from ‘68 right on to when I left in ‘71, the graduate students were really organized. And there were very good friendships that came out of that. Because for the whole first year I was at Columbia, my husband and I—we were from New York, so we knew people—we made no friends. We had zero friends, because Columbia was so impersonal.

[Call connection interrupted.]

CAI: Oh, sorry, you cut out again.

[Recording paused.]

Okay, I’ve resumed the recording after some connection issues. So you were talking about how Columbia is quite impersonal, and how the graduate student body became more organized, is that right?

EISENBERG: Not just organized, we made friends. One thing was that graduate students that were arrested—which there are quite a few—were initially threatened that they were going to take our fellowships away. So that was a whole question about, what would we plead guilty, not guilty—so I don't remember any of the details, except that it meant that we had a lot of meetings. And that would be graduate students not just in history, but in anthropology, sociology, whatever. So there were those kinds of meetings.

So first of all, you met a lot of people that way. But the other thing was that a lot of the history students also—we had our graduate history union, which we'd had for three years by that time. And maybe not—but from '68 on till the moment I left, there was that. And so that was really great. We had arguments, but first of all, we really made friends. And I'm still friends with people—quite good friends with people who are part of that, including a person that I met in jail, who I had never met before. It was a place to meet people. We were both [laughter] up against the bars of the cell, and "you look familiar," "oh you look familiar—". So it turned out she was in European history, so we got to know each other. And then we became friends. And she still—I do a lot of stuff that's related to peace, stuff especially around Israel-Palestine. So that particular friend—that was I met literally in jail. She's still in all those groups.

But I guess I want to say two things about it. It became a way to have friends. We also had study groups that were outside of the regular curriculum. There was a guy from Princeton, Arno Mayer, who is very famous and who died fairly recently. And he was very interested on the connection between social history and foreign policy and military. He was an integrated thinker. So we just had a seminar with him that wasn't a seminar. We just met with him every week. So it was a very vibrant time, really. I would say in the history department—I'm sure it's nothing like that now—but that's what it was. So that was background. When I went to Dartmouth, that's what I was in. So politics were big.

CAI: And speaking of politics during the time, the Kent State University shootings were quite significant, which I think occurred in 1970. Did that affect the atmosphere at all?

EISENBERG: Well, first of all, it affected that I had the worst orals that anybody ever had. That was that. There was a lot of political activity on campus. Faculty were furious about that decision—a university—. So there was even organized faculty protest. But the political action that people did was not directed at the university, which is very different from '68. And again, the history students, for example—we decided to go door to door in a working class community and talk to people about this. And that wasn't so unusual. When my husband was in philosophy at that point, they also went to some other community—the philosophy students did. So it was kind of a sense at that point that it was important to just talk to people about the issue. So I feel like that's what we did. And that was interesting.

I remember one thing—the history students found this kid who was AWOL [absent without leave], who was in the military. I remember—I wasn't that discovered this, but others found this boy, and he was terrified. He was AWOL, he didn't want to go and God knows. People then connected that kid up to an attorney and got him some kind of help and back up. There was a lot of activity, but it was kind of off campus. I would say that was.

CAI: Okay, and so I guess we can move on to Dartmouth now. You arrived there in 1971, is that—

EISENBERG: I arrived there in 1971.

CAI: Okay.

EISENBERG: And I'm coming out of that, so this probably could make a little more sense. It's a very political campus. And more to the point was I wasn't thinking like a professional. This is very different from it would be now even. First of all, I didn't

even have a field. I never decided I was an urban person. I was going to write about foreign policy. And I was so oblivious that I didn't even know when I was in the history department. For example, I was hired on an urban thing, but I wanted to teach about foreign policy, so I just did. It never occurred to me that that could be a problem. Probably the person who was very boring who did teach foreign policy was probably furious, but I wasn't thinking like that.

The other point I would make on this is that I wasn't alone in thinking in this different way. I was not the only young person that was coming there who—all of us in this sort of cadre of people were really interested in working with students, and really interested in doing good classes and high quality classes and having lots of discussion. So it wasn't like people were like, "Oh, I don't care where—I'm just gonna goof off here." There was not any of that. But it was not thinking in a professional way, like "What do I need to do to stay here?"

And then nobody really mentored me. For example, my idea is that—you may know this—which is at a university or anything, you have to be on committees. That's part of your service, whether you're going to come up for renewal or you come up for tenure. What's your service? So I'm put on these committees, and I think I'm in a club. Like, "Oh, do I think this committee is interesting? No, I don't like this committee" [laughter]. And nobody—I didn't get the memo. You don't act like that [laughter]. I was really, in some ways, really out to lunch.

But partly, the other half of that, which is relevant to you and your project is that to some significant degree, Dartmouth was affected by what was happening in the society. So, if I had arrived there in that state of mind in 1959 or 1989 or something, it wouldn't have been even passable behavior. But Dartmouth was—first of all, there were things going on on campus. Parkhurst had happened—

CAI: The Parkhurst [Hall] Occupation in 1969?

EISENBERG: I think that's when—and students were arrested. I think that was pretty serious.

CAI: Right.

EISENBERG: Maybe more serious than anything. So to some degree, both with respect to faculty and with respect to students there, Dartmouth was being affected by these currents that are flowing through the country at this point. And I think that to some degree—people might differ about this—so Alan is writing this dissertation that looks like it's never going to get done. But he's writing it, and I think when we came he had long hair, I had long hair. I think people were really eager to meet us. People weren't unfriendly. People thought we were kind of cool, which we were amazed at, I have to say. Like "Oh my God, how weird is this?"

CAI: Is that related to your participation at Columbia?

EISENBERG: Yeah, and the whole thing. We were coming out of this whole culture that was developing—to some extent already existed at Dartmouth. But I would say there was more receptiveness to us personally and not just personally, but even open to things that later would have been unacceptable. I never graded people, I think I mentioned that to you, it was like—

CAI: And what was the reaction to—

EISENBERG: But this is really more about Dartmouth, so we should give it credit here. So this is the period there's all these alternate ideas about education, right? That's in fashion. And actually, I had been grading Columbia students so that was really a big experience. From grading Columbia students, I had decided that I never wanted to grade anybody ever again, and I thought it was really stupid. And I could tell you more about that, but you'd be here till midnight, which is to say I had very firm views. So pretty early—I don't even know if I did this right away, but maybe second quarter—I said in my

classes, “Look, I really think grades are stupid. And I really want us to learn together. So here’s my deal. If you’re in this class, you have to hand in all the work, and you can’t cut class. If you come to all the classes and you do all the work, when the term ends, give yourself whatever grade you want. Just don’t bother me about it.” So what I’m trying to tell you is that there’s at least six other people on campus that were doing the same thing. It wasn’t just me being weird.

So one thing you could probably—we may have talked about this one in pre-interview. One thing that was actually pretty fascinating is that—except for one class that I taught that was actually—it was not a good class, it was my fault, it wasn’t their fault—but the students did an unbelievable amount of work. It wasn’t like people said, “Oh, good, she’s this lunatic teaching my class and I’ll never do anything.” It actually was very, very motivating. And I think for all of us who did this—that we had very similar experiences. That the level of participation and engagement was really excellent. So at a certain point, what I’m telling you is—and I have to say, nobody ever said anything—No one in the history department was like, “What? Are you crazy?” [laughter]. Can you imagine somebody coming in now and saying, “Don’t bother me. Give yourself whatever grade you want”?

But what was very interesting is that somewhere, enough people started doing experimental things in that general area that a couple of people—I keep thinking of Rogers Elliot, who I don’t know if he’s even alive anymore—but anyway, Rogers—people started getting freaked out about grade inflation. Because one thing that was happening was students were giving themselves very high grades, which I didn’t really care about. I just wanted them to do the work. And again, I’m saying “me,” but this was not just me.

So there was then this reaction in the faculty about how is this going on. And then there was a fake thing—I think it was totally fake—that Harvard Law School had written and said, “We’re never taking anyone from Dartmouth because your grades are too high.” I truly think that was fabricated. But in

any event, it came up in the faculty that there should be a crackdown.

And what was really interesting—I was trying to find this, and I couldn't do it quickly—was we wrote a grading report arguing that grading was really stupid, and anybody with the brain in the head knew it. And that they should not try to impose uniformity. That people should be allowed to do whatever they want. And I think it's true that twenty faculty members signed that. It was a lot.

Because I think I was telling you in our pre-interview—I'm pretty sure Jim Wright signed it, who was then an untenured professor. And when I got rehired to come back as a visitor, he was the Dean at that point, and so we were actually quite friendly. And he said, "You were doing your crackpot thing." And I said, "You signed that report." That "crackpot report" [laughter] or whatever. But I'm telling you that little incident because it does tell you something about the atmosphere at that time that I think it's unimaginable. And my school would never tolerate—Hofstra [University] would fire you in a minute. That's not okay. But what I'm trying to say is that in this time period at Dartmouth, there were student political groups and there was more openness.

So after I had been there—I had come in as a visiting professor in urban history. One of the things that was also really interesting exactly that time was that there was somebody in the admissions office, who was a Dartmouth alum, a Black guy, who had made the case that Dartmouth should recruit from the inner city. That they should throw away their usual recruitment plan, and that they should contact guidance counselors in inner city schools and have them identify students that they thought were promising. And just bring them to Dartmouth and give them full scholarship.

So because I was officially the urbanist, and I was teaching stuff in urban affairs, I had a lot of those kids. I don't know if we talked about that at all, but anyway—from the South Bronx [NY] to south side of Chicago [IL], Jersey City [NJ],

Newark [NJ]. I probably—because I taught urban courses—had a larger proportion of those students. And of course, they felt like they had landed on Mars.

I just remember—I might have told you this, but—I remember this kid was in my class, Ricky. He's in my class, and it's just about Thanksgiving. And I remember him sitting in my office and saying, "I'm going home for Thanksgiving. I live in the projects, and my mom is on welfare. I don't even know how to tell her what I'm in." He said, "Do you understand how—?" I talked to a lot of those kids and it was very challenging for them to be there.

But one of my questions actually, which has not been answered, I know that later that the view at Dartmouth was that this approach was wrong, and that they shouldn't recruit in that way. But one of the things that happened that was really weird was I was in Washington [D.C.] in the Union Station, and this man calls out to me. And I turn around, and it's this very niftily dressed man with a briefcase. I look and it's Ricky Jones, and he's a lawyer [laughter].

CAI: So this is years after?

EISENBERG: A million years after. And I then heard from another student who I think is head of Port Authority [of New York and New Jersey] now, who's another kid who was really—had a terrible high school background. And who now has vast authority and an important person in the Port Authority. I've always wondered about how—the line at Dartmouth was that this was a failure, but I don't actually know if it—I've always wondered if that's really true. What the evidence was—I really don't know.

CAI: Interesting. So you mentioned that the general atmosphere of the campus was very experimental at the time. Do you think that affected at all the anti-war activities on campus, or the acceptance of those or reception of those activities?

EISENBERG: The atmosphere was totally different about that. So first of all, in Reed Hall, which is where the History Department was, which was quite different from Carson Hall, there was a ton of people. Reed Hall was very—I'm talking about Reed Hall when I was there the first time, because I came back. But the whole atmosphere was different anyway. Faculty was there. There was a lounge. The place had students all the time. I don't think that was true—when I came back, that wasn't true.

A lot of the students who were hanging around were—well, some of them were these Black kids who felt like they were in Mars. But a lot of the more political kids hung around. But not just that. So just in terms of even student-faculty relations, it was very informal. And I don't know if it ever was again. You might have a better sense of that than I do at this point. There was an expectation students would be in our house. People were in and out. It was a much freer atmosphere. And I would say that in general that there was more receptivity to protest. I don't think it ever happened that anybody ever said to me, "Don't do this."

I think that the closest—and I probably mentioned this to you—was when we had this demonstration—civil disobedience of faculty in Lebanon [NH]. And that was a faculty—there was a decision. We were going to get arrested, and it was also a decision not to have students get arrested with us. That felt really irresponsible. So because we got arrested, I missed my class. And so the guy who was acting chair then did call me in about that, and he told me X kid was really mad and didn't feel that I was fulfilling my responsibility. So he said that, and maybe he said, "Try not to get arrested that often." [laughter] Do you know what I'm saying? It's like that. Comparing to what there is now, it's really different. And one of the things that—I can't remember if I told you this when you did your pre-interview, or even when I gave that talk, or you weren't there but—in 1972 in the spring. So that was my first year there.

And one of the things is also that—so I came in as a visiting professor, and I wasn't feeling desperate to stay. I had various other job offers. So I wasn't on edge about it. But pretty rapidly when I was on campus, the Government Department was going to give me a regular contract. And then, because the Government Department is going to give me a regular contract, the History Department gave me a regular contract. So nobody said, "Oh, this person is too weird." Like "she has to go [inaudible]" [laughter].

And one thing is that—I think I told you this—I asked not to stay. I said I didn't want a contract renewal. That was not a hostile thing on my part at all. I really just wanted to be doing something different. And there was also a factor of my husband. So I never faced the question of would I be reappointed. And it could be that I wouldn't have been.

[crosstalk]

CAI: Oh, sorry.

EISENBERG: Never crossed—I didn't think [inaudible] planet are you on. But my immediate experience was being welcomed and supported. But the reason I raise it is because I do have these other friends who were fired, who were excellent. They were not renewed, or they didn't get tenure. So I don't know—the history department was a little bit more liberal—but I don't know what would really have happened. But what I am saying is that this is very hospitable. I really was left free to do whatever I wanted. And it was pretty stimulating.

One thing about my teaching that is very different from now is—I had this course that everybody called "atrocities." It was from Hiroshima to My Lai. And that course was just full of bad news about everything. Everything terrible that had ever happened was in this class. And I wouldn't do that now, even with Israel-Palestine, but in a way, it was more reasonable to do it back then, because the students had all absorbed the official truth about history. Their high school history had given them a set of ideas that were already there, so to

introduce something deviant was bouncing off what they had learned before. So it didn't feel like you were just brainwashing them. It was good discussion.

And there too, nobody—I think there was this cranky guy who had been head of History named Lou [Louis] Morton, who's long gone [inaudible]. And he got mad because in one of my courses, I assigned a Peyton Place because I thought it was culturally—this was a great thing that had sex in it and that was unusual. So he complained about that.

But what I'm telling you is, there was an openness. Oh, and what I started to say was so moving along to '72 when we had a lot of protests. Not just—there was protests at CRREL [Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory], there was a bunch of things.

CAI: CRREL. Is that the—

EISENBERG: The lab something.

CAI: Yeah, the engineering research lab in Lyme, New Hampshire?

EISENBERG: Right. And I think—I don't remember exactly—I feel like there were people that got arrested at CRREL also. I didn't because one of the professors, Marysa Navarro, was in my car, and she was getting her citizenship just then, and she really did not want to get arrested. So I remember that we drove off. But I think people were arrested there.

But with this faculty arrest, something I didn't know till I was doing research in the archives is that the Ivy League presidents, including John Kemeny, went to Washington [D.C.] then. They asked to see Nixon, who didn't want to see them. But they met with Henry Kissinger. And again, I have the transcript someplace. It's probably somewhere with my grading report. They—all of them, and the president of MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]—they were really pressing Kissinger that they have to stop the war because

it's ruining their campuses. It wasn't the most inspiring message. There could be other reasons, do you know what I'm saying? But it was very clear that they were feeling the pressure. Think about that, as opposed to what these college presidents have just done.

CAI: And this was after the spring of 1972, that they wrote this letter?

EISENBERG: They didn't just write the letter. They went in person.

CAI: I see.

EISENBERG: And then they stayed and they lobbied Congress. None of us knew that at all. But it's become relevant because this is a very different situation. They weren't that idealistic. It wasn't like they were saying things like "well, there's a lot of people that we're killing for no good reason." They didn't say that. They just said our campuses were disrupted. But nevertheless, the effect of the protest was not to have them crack down on the protest, right? It was to put pressure on the policymakers. So that was interesting—that was something I didn't know at the time. I don't think anybody really knew. But it was a different atmosphere.

And the other thing was that—I think I had mentioned to you also that the spring of '72 was significant because that moment was when large numbers of North Vietnamese troops came charging into the South. And it was really a shock. Because the Nixon people had magically convinced themselves that they had solved the problem and then all of a sudden there are hundreds of thousands of troops coming in. And they're quite afraid actually that the other side is going to win. So their response to that was to do massive bombing in Hanoi [Vietnam] and Haiphong [Vietnam]. And they hadn't really done that kind of bombing in cities up till that point.

So there was an emergency faculty meeting—maybe there was even more than one—about what should Dartmouth do

as an institution, and should Dartmouth cancel classes? And it's possible—I don't know this, but I wouldn't be surprised if Dartmouth also canceled classes during the Cambodia invasion. I literally don't know that.

But so there was a big debate about that. And I just remember this one person saying that he took inspiration from the fact that when the Germans were bombing London [UK], that the people in London carried on and did their work. [laughter] It was silence, like who's going to tell him that the British were now bombing other people. They were bombing—right they were being bombed by somebody else. So no one wanted to be the person to say that.

But the debate in the faculty was really about literally canceling classes. And I think the decision was that they would leave it up to the individual professor. They did not want to do a college-wide thing.

And then this faculty action that I'm telling you about—I can't remember the order—but that faculty action of trying to block this draft bus was—that kind of happened in the History Department. I remember that we had more than one meeting in the History Department lounge of faculty—not just History people, but other people—to talk about what we should do. And what would make sense, and to figure out the plan. And the big topic was, what about students? And that's what I'm telling you. There was a decision that you don't want to encourage students to run that kind of risk. So that was a whole other thing. So there's a subset of faculty that were very involved in an ongoing way.

CAI: And just to get the details right, this is May in 1972 and there is a bus going to a center in New Hampshire with draftees inside the bus. Is that right?

EISENBERG: That was what—to put it in perspective, because it was a draft bus that would leave from Lebanon. Now, to put it in perspective—I don't know that we exactly knew this, but the draft bus was like Omar's taxi. It was less than advertised

[laughter]. Two or three lone people from Lebanon would be in the taxi. So I don't know if we really appreciated that it was a taxi,

But the decision was that we were going to sit-in in front of the bus and not move. And therefore it seemed more than likely that we would get arrested. And I think I was mentioning—there is an article in The New York Times which seems to describe that there were 1000 students there. I have no memory of that. I do have a memory of the taxi. And it wasn't nothing. So Alan and I had been arrested at Columbia, but it wasn't like we just said, "Oh—," that this is a big nothing. It was really scary. I keep wanting to say there were twenty people that were in jail.

And I may have mentioned to you that my husband got a job in jail. Did I tell you that?

CAI: No.

EISENBERG: That was a little nice thing. His thing was he was getting his degree of philosophy, and he was trying to change careers to being a psychologist person. And in order to make this change, he needed to get a job. But in psychology—he had to show some something—that he wasn't just a philosopher. So he had written—I don't know how many letters to local groups offering to work for them. Nobody wanted to hire a philosopher.

But when we were in jail, the head of the mental health center at Dartmouth was in the cell. And so [laughter] this is really true. I'm not exaggerating. So those of us who didn't know each other that well—mostly we knew each other, but we didn't know him, for example. So it was an opportunity to get acquainted. And so Alan was explaining to him about how he was a philosopher, and no one wanted to hire. So the guy who was head of the mental health center said, "Well, don't worry, I'll—when we get out of here, I'll have to hire you on an orderly line, but I'm going to have you trained. And then you'll be able—if you're applying to a graduate

program, you'll have had supervision and stuff." So it actually worked out very well.

One of the funny things is that when I was in Vietnam doing research—if you want to do research in Vietnam, they check you out. So I had made many requests, and they seem to have looked into us. So I guess that people in Vietnam knew that we had been arrested—maybe once, twice—they seemed to know that. And so when I was going to my various interviews, a couple of times I had the experience of these Vietnamese people saying, "Oh, we're so grateful for the sacrifice of you and your husband." And I'm thinking, really, this is not what it means to be in jail in Vietnam. My husband got a job [laughter]. I feel so ridiculous saying this. Anyway, so that was part of it.

CAI: Do you think for the other faculty that also participated, was the mood similar? Or were they also slightly fearful, slightly—

EISENBERG: Yeah, of course we were all fearful. It's just a thing to get arrested, unless you're really crazy. And then we got arrested, and then we were—I forget what we were accused of—some petty crime, but criminal trespass. My arrests get confused. But Jonathan Mirsky, who is one of the people that organized this—I was trying to think of who is the person—he actually brought some major person who had been part of the Johnson administration to our trial in Lebanon. Because every case of all the arrested people had never been able to include in the trial testimony about whether the war itself was criminal. Somehow or other people wanted to make that case. and never managed. And so Jonathan made it a whole thing about—I'm blocking out who it was—but he got this top official to come and testify and say that we were trying to avoid criminal action on the part of the US government. So the trial got bigger, but I don't feel like anything ever happened to us. And I think I might have mentioned that there was another group of faculty that got arrested in the fall.

CAI: In the fall of 1972?

EISENBERG: Right.

CAI: Okay.

EISENBERG: Leo Spitzer keeps saying that—he was saying that [pause] I think he felt like the charges got dropped. But I'm not—I don't know if you knew him, but he was in the History Department for decades.

CAI: Yeah, I think he mentions his charges becoming unconstitutional? We've interviewed him for the project.

EISENBERG: Right. So they were like our friends to this day. But right. So there was another wave of protest.

I think there was a lot of feeling at Dartmouth, and I think it was through the faculty, and to some extent even some students—that there was all this activity that was going on around the country, all this resistance, and that Dartmouth is a little bit of a backwater. And there was kind of a desire to be part of it, rather than the opposite.

And one other thing I would just also add in this thing—I get a little bit mixed up between when I was there the first time and when I came back. But there were conservative students at Dartmouth, and by the time I came back there was The Dartmouth Review, and people had really bad experiences. But I would say—with the exception of one person who gave me the worst write up ever in the teacher evaluation, totally horrible—I actually found the conservative students to be perfectly relatable. I didn't find them rude, I didn't find them disruptive, I felt that they contributed to class discussion. And maybe it was clearer to me when I came back because people were really upset about The Dartmouth Review, but I would say that was not my general experience. I felt that people might disagree, and the campus wasn't that conservative. But even for kids who were, I feel there was an openness to discussion.

CAI: And so back to the—I remember you mentioned that there was a debate about whether or not classes should be canceled. Did that end up happening, or did the faculty—

EISENBERG: Well, it didn't, except a bunch of us were in jail when classes were supposed to happen. So that was an interruption. I actually can't remember—there was certainly no policy decision. That was what was debated in the faculty, and the conclusion was that the school was not going to shut down, which maybe had happened during Cambodia. And maybe there was a general thing that people could make a decision of their own.

CAI: And what were the general attitudes of the college administration? Did it feel like they were being receptive to all this activity on campus?

EISENBERG: Remember that I'm the most marginal person you can imagine. I always think that I was eleven years old and why am I there? But I really had no contact of any substance with the administration. What is the case is that my friends were fired. The biggest one was Jonathan.

CAI: Professor Mirsky.

EISENBERG: It was so monumentally stupid. It was just a terrible decision. And truthfully, the History Department was somewhat complicit in that. I forget exactly how the vote went, but then the case went to the administration and to Leonard [M.] Rieser, who I think was Dean of—he was the third in command. I forget what his title was. And he was terrible. And Leonard was actually terrible. My friend Joan Smith, who was in sociology—she was also not given tenure. That's the way it happened. Jonathan didn't get tenure, and Joan didn't get tenure, and these were ridiculous decisions. And my knowledge is that the administration was very unhelpful in both of those cases. And who exactly—the Sociology Department, I think they were more—well, I was going to say they were worse than the History Department, but I'm not

sure that's true. So those are the two people that I knew that actually had to come up for tenure and really should have gotten it.

And Jonathan was just a terrible loss to the school. I couldn't possibly overstate his influence on campus. He was this totally committed teacher. He was somebody that students would go there, and they talked to him for hours. I was a young faculty member there, and when I came, he's telling me every five seconds I need to read this, I need to read that news. But his sincerity and his commitment was so palpable. Later he became pretty conservative, actually, when they went back to England. But that was a tragedy. It was very stupid.

So that's why I'm saying I don't know if I would have actually survived, but it never came to that. And I think there was bad feeling that was there, because I think people in the History Department felt—or a lot of them did—that I had gotten great treatment. Which was true. And why would I leave? It seemed very ungrateful. And I might have been somewhat obnoxious at the time. I wouldn't rule that out as a possibility. So when I left, I felt that there was bad feeling that I left, and I never came back on campus for ten years. And then I did.

CAI: And so speaking of—so you leave Dartmouth in 1975, is that—

EISENBERG: Yeah, [inaudible].

CAI: And you end up for a short time at CUNY University in New York?

EISENBERG: I end up with nothing [laughter]. I had been hired, and I still remember I was sitting in Silsby [Hall]. I was hired, I was expecting to start in two weeks, and every single person in CUNY who was hired new for any of the CUNY schools—we all got axed. So that was not the moment that I was going to go back and ask the History Department to extend my time there. That did not feel right.

And so then I had—that takes up a lot of time—I had a period which was kind of a struggle. And it was complicated because one of the other issues was having kids. And I really wanted to have children then, and I also didn't want my career to prevent that. So I had a lot of some different—I had to scramble for a while. And I had three kids in that time period after leaving Dartmouth. And then the job market was much worse.

So it was somewhat in that context that I came back as a visiting—first I came back in the MALS [Master of Arts in Liberal Studies] program.

CAI: Sorry, in the what program?

EISENBERG: Master of Liberal Studies. Do you know what that program is?

CAI: No. Master of Liberal Studies.

EISENBERG: If you look at it, you'll see it. There's a master's program at Dartmouth in liberal studies, and it's people getting their masters in mostly interdisciplinary work. And various people in the History Department taught in that. So the first time I came back, I came back in that program. But I went right back to Reed Hall. So it was really weird. It was like being back. And then everybody was nice and friendly. Some new people had been at it, but a fair amount of people I knew from the first place. And then nobody remembered anything. Like how did I leave? What happened? [laughter] It was nothing. And I also had three kids at that point. So when I started teaching in MALS, I was back in Reed, so it felt completely familiar. And then I was asked to be a visitor in History. And then I actually got offered a full-time job at Hofstra. So I took it. This is New York, but—

CAI: So just to establish the timeline here, was it in 1988 that you returned to Dartmouth?

EISENBERG: I think that's when I came back. I'm sorry it's a little blurry, but I think it was probably around then.

CAI: Okay, and then 1990 you arrive at Hofstra University?

EISENBERG: Yeah. I feel like I got offered the Hofstra job at the same time that I was actually in the History Department. And it was a little weird, because I did actually feel when I came back that—I felt people were really nice. And people were asking if I would be willing to stay. So again, I might have been very stupid. I didn't feel like that was impossible. But I wasn't dying to do it, and I had a full-time job in New York, which was excellent.

But the other thing I was saying to you is that in all those years—in some of those intervening years, and then even after being at Hofstra—I always had this part-time thing that I did almost all the time. And that was that I taught a CUNY program for adults who had never gone to college. And I can't even think of—I feel I want to say I did that for fifteen or twenty years. So I did it at the time I was marginally employed, and then I did it when I was full time employed. But that was a pretty significant part of my professional life—was actually doing that, which I love doing.

CAI: And this was at the Center for Worker Education?

EISENBERG: Center for Worker Education. It was a phenomenal place. It was really great. And I was fine just doing this one course, but it was just a really good experience.

And I think I told you in the pre-interview, and it's true, is that apart from these tales that I'm sharing with you, one of the things that really did hang over me from the minute that I had this job at Dartmouth was I was really acutely aware of educational inequality. I spent years thinking about that, both being involved in Chicago and then my dissertation. And I felt like I was in a very privileged place. And it was benign. I didn't experience—other people had found meanness, but I didn't [laughter]. So it wasn't that. But I definitely had the

thought, especially when I was there the first time, deciding about a contract renewal.

I felt like I'm in my 20s, and what are you going to do with your life? Where are you going to use your skills? And I had that in my head from the beginning.

So a lot of people say—especially left people will say—sometimes, "Oh, you were at Dartmouth. That must have been terrible." It wasn't. It was actually kind of nice. I had good experiences. But I did feel "Okay, I have gifts as a teacher." I felt like I was a good teacher, and I thought I should use it for people who don't necessarily have the same access. So that was no joke. I had that from the very beginning, and so the fact that I was able—Hofstra is middle ground. It's not such a privileged place, and there's more of a mix of kids. But this isn't exactly the most unprivileged people either. But working for the Center for Worker Ed—I also did some other things like that. I taught welfare mothers for a while, I actually taught prison guards for a while.

CAI: And is this all before you went to teach at Hofstra, or during?

EISENBERG: No, I think I did—I'm trying to remember the sequence of this. I would say more of that there it was before I was full-time at Hofstra.

CAI: So part-time at Hofstra? Or—

EISENBERG: Full. No, no, when I went to Hofstra, I was hired full time.

CAI: I see, I see, okay.

EISENBERG: Okay. And it was a little bit also I had had three kids at that point. When I came back to Dartmouth, it was also in the context where my book was—book one was being published by Cambridge [University Press]. So that was—truthfully, from a Dartmouth perspective, that's pretty good. And so I was in that—.

And so then I taught in the History Department. I got offered a full-time job. I took the full-time job. I actually kept my part time job teaching at the Center for Worker Ed. I did that for a long time. That's what I did most, and so I had that. And then I was invited back numbers of times in MALS. So I taught in the summer up until 2003.

CAI: At Dartmouth?

EISENBERG: Yeah.

CAI: Okay, interesting. And so—

EISENBERG: So it was kind of in and out.

CAI: And does it feel different teaching in such different contexts, like at the Center versus students at Dartmouth?

EISENBERG: Yeah, it's very different.

CAI: Is there anything you've learned from—

EISENBERG: I've learned a lot. But what I would say—because this is actually something that—if I ever retire, which remains a question, could happen one of these days—one of the things that I have thought about is actually writing about my experience having taught a lot of different kinds of people at different times in my career. I feel very lucky about that. There were times when I was never sure I was going to—I was in New York, am I going to get a full time job? Nobody wants to hire a woman, foreign policy—things didn't always look that relaxing. And certainly when I was leaving Dartmouth and I just lost my job, that was bad. It was definitely a bad thing. So it's not like everything was hunky dory. But I feel like the fact that I was able to do a lot of things—and if I ever retire, I might go back to the Center for Worker Ed. That would not be out of the question. So I feel like I'm very lucky, because I got to know lots of different kinds of people.

What I have learned from it is that—and I'm very mindful of this, because my granddaughter's just gone through the college process, which I think is insane, to be blunt—is that the differences of people's intelligence is not that great. Now maybe there are areas of intelligence, like some particular skills like math, and maybe some people really—maybe it's a very big gap. But when you're teaching in social sciences, you're teaching history with this vast apparatus of "who's smart, who's on top, who's getting in" —the differences are not great. And it's very exaggerated. And SATs and all these things make it seem like it's so very—.

In my early years at Hofstra—this has changed, but in my early years, I would sometimes teach summer session. And at that time, when I taught a summer session, kids who lived in Long Island [NY] who needed to make up a course or something would register. And a summer class in June—I might have Hofstra students, and somebody from Yale [University] and somebody from Swarthmore [College]. And somebody from Smith [College]. And one of the things I kept saying, I'd want to have somebody walk into this classroom and listen to the conversation, and you tell me who is the Yale person and who is the Swarthmore person, and who is the humble, Hofstra person? Can you tell us? Because I feel like that's—if I was going to say one thing that I've learned, it's not that there are no differences. Because in terms of skills, who reads what books before they came to college—and I did teach women on welfare with obviously a different experience—but when you're just asking the question, you're having a discussion, who's the smartest in the room? And by the way, does that matter? I think that there's just so much less of a gap, and that people's potential for doing the work—that's a very widespread potential. And the question is whether you have institutions that are making people get to use that potential. So I actually do think that's one of my—and I periodically think I would like to describe some of the experiences I've had in classrooms.

A lot of people—there's a bad Dartmouth vibe out there to some extent. "It's rich, it's sexist, it's this, it's that." And I'm

telling you, I don't know, many times I was asked how it must have been terrible there. No, not at all.

CAI: Interesting.

EISENBERG: Right, but how different is the opportunities that are given to different groups of people. That's where I think it's really consequential.

CAI: And I want to move forward a little bit to your—

EISENBERG: You're not exhausted yet? I feel like I've never talked so long [laughter].

CAI: [laughter] No worries. Yeah, we're almost to the end.

EISENBERG: Let me just get some water.

CAI: Yeah, yeah, of course. I'll pause the recording.

[Recording paused.]

CAI: Okay, so just resumed the recording. And actually, I'd like to briefly return to your experience at Dartmouth. And you mentioned that the faculty and students were interacting a lot, especially in the Reed Hall lounge, and so I was wondering if you could elaborate more on the relationship between faculty and students? And if you have any memories of that in general?

EISENBERG: Well, just in terms of abstractly—and again, I'm not an authority on this by any means. But I did notice from the time that I—so my last class in 1975 and then I was back teaching in the History Department in 1988 or somewhere in that time period—I did feel that—in both cases, I was in the same building I'd ever been in, which was I kind of like, because I felt very home there—but I did think it was different. What I thought was that the pressure on the faculty to be important researchers and be professionally—have a high profile—have really changed relationships and even

how often were people in their offices and so forth. It would be a very rare afternoon when I would say the first time—let's say it's four o'clock, when there'd be a ton of people in their offices, and there'd be students. And you'd be sitting in the lounge, and then people would say, "Oh my god, I better leave" because it's five, it's six. But I'm saying so it was very fluid. And I didn't feel it was true when I came back [in 1988].

And one of the ways that was manifest, actually, was—so I taught for a quarter, and then several students that I had had in a seminar asked me for recommendations. And I said, "I'm kind of the lowliest person you could get." If you're applying to anything, they'll want a regular person [laughter]—can then say you're the best student they ever met. But a lot of students said they didn't have relationships with faculty, and that would not have been said, for better or worse—that would have been very unusual back in 1972 or '73. There was more relationships than you could imagine.

And I would say, you know, that I had really good experiences with students. There's some Dartmouth students that I am in touch with still. And even have had occasion—I think I had mentioned to you John Cavanagh, who was my student, who got involved through Jonathan [Mirsky]—he got involved and interested in what was happening in Laos way back when he was our student. Then John went on to become head of the Institute for Policy Studies, which is a very major left-ish think tank. So he and I have actually worked on things over the year a little bit. And then I'm doing a little bit of work with the Laotian organization called Legacies of War, which John helped found. And all grew out of his Dartmouth experience. He was saying he couldn't believe that this had come full circle after so many decades.

So I would say I had lots of good experiences. And when I came back, I still felt the same way. But even now—it was so interesting, because I felt like I was getting to know students really fast, and I hadn't been here, really. But I feel like it was very valuable. I feel like I learned a lot from students. My first

book, which is really about the origins of the Cold War in Europe—I think I had mentioned to you previously—in a way, that had really come out of my Dartmouth teaching. And very specifically, I had done a seminar—God knows, 1973, '74—on the origins of the Cold War and the historiographic debates about the Cold War. And that was just a really good class, and a lot of issues got crystallized from that experience. I think it had a lot to do with the way that I framed my research. I then went on to spend another fifteen years just doing this research. But those conversations were actually pretty important in doing it.

CAI: Very interesting, thank you. Following your publishing the first book, you went on to work on *Fire and Rain*, which was published last year, is that correct?

EISENBERG: At the beginning of '74.

CAI: Okay.

EISENBERG: I think that was right? Maybe it was '73.

CAI: That you started working on it?

EISENBERG: Last year-and-a-half.

CAI: Okay. So in the process of researching that—it was obviously about the Vietnam War, and you had protested against the Vietnam War during your time at Dartmouth. Do you think your views about that changed or became more nuanced as you researched the subject?

EISENBERG: I think it became—it was never really a question that I thought that the Vietnam War was a catastrophe and should never have happened, and nothing that I ever learned since really altered that. But I was less interested in proving that it was bad than in explaining how it happened.

And not like it just happened for five minutes, right? It went on and on. And the Nixon period is really interesting,

because Tet Offensive had already happened. The US had been unsuccessful with 550,000 people there. There was a lot of reason—why couldn't Richard Nixon have just said, "This war—the Democrats have made a mess of it. They got us into it. They're conducting it stupidly. I'm getting us out of it. Goodbye." He didn't do that and let another four years went by. So I was very interested in that issue—is how to understand how that happened. So that was one of the things.

Oddly enough, a thing that I wasn't interested in, but then I got more interested in when I was starting to reclassify documents is the role of the peace movement. And partly I wanted to describe that for future generations—something about what that was like. But oddly enough, it wasn't that much of a question in my mind. Like, what was the impact of the peace movement? Weirdly, I wasn't exactly focused on that. But once I started to read these documents, I realized the peace movement was way more influential in terms of what happened in the Nixon years than I had ever imagined. So that was really fascinating—to see that, because it wasn't my preconception at all. And I think of anything, it was a little bit of the opposite, which is feeling like the peace movement had been pretty unsuccessful. And so I actually changed about that.

And then I had another—so I had certain questions that were in my mind that were interesting me, other than wanting to convey to readers what this was like, what was this war? But then the other thing—and actually, this is a little bit of a Dartmouth thing, because this guy Jere [R.] Daniell ['55], who was my next door neighbor in Reed Hall, and we always had arguments. And the whole time I was there, he kept telling me over and over, "Don't you see that Nixon's a genius? Look what he's doing with China. Look what he's doing with Russia." We had this discussion a million times. And I was actually really interested in what was the relationship between the war in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and the diplomacy that Kissinger was carrying out with the Soviet Union and China. I really wanted to understand that.

And when I first started this project, Joan Hoff-Wilson, who's a very eminent historian—and I told her what I was interested in—she said, "You're never going to see those transcripts. You'll never know. Don't even bother. Don't waste your time." But actually, they all became available, which took up another five years of my life reading them. But a lot of stuff emerged. So I actually spent a fair amount of time reading the transcripts of the negotiations with the Soviet Union and China and trying to find a way to analyze that and to do it in a way that would not put my audience to sleep, which was a challenge. So I had all these interests. It wasn't like I'm writing a book to tell you how bad things were. Which my book does show very clearly how bad things were. But that wasn't just—I didn't have that kind of crusading spirit about—What I really wanted to understand was how this could ever have happened, and that that was just a lot of work.

One other thing—then I'll stop on my book—which is going to Vietnam was very consequential. Have you gone there yet, Nora, for one of your classes?

CAI: Oh, I'm hoping to in the future, but not yet.

EISENBERG: It was so interesting to go. And I had set up in advance—I had countless interviews when I was in there. I was only there for a month, but I interviewed ridiculous amounts of people, and I feel like I learned so much from doing it. It was not so much like, "Oh, this person said X." Although I did interview Madam [Nguyen Thi] Binh, who was the—I don't know if that means anything to you—but she was the head of the PRG [Provisional Revolutionary Government] delegation in Paris, and then when the North won, she became vice president of Vietnam.

So I'd asked to meet her, and I didn't think anybody would say yes. And then I actually spent almost as much time with her as I'm spending with you [laughter], and she was very chatty. That conversation was very revealing, but it wasn't

even so much the conversations. It was meeting people and seeing where things happened. First of all, I could figure out how things were. “Oh, we’re on—where’s the A Shau Valley? I don’t know where it is.” Well, actually it is some place. And what does it mean to go through the A Shau Valley, and when you’re saying that the Northern troops came down, I could picture how it could—

At one point in my trip, I was being taken almost from the coast of the South China Sea across Vietnam right to the Laotian border. And one of the people that was accompanying us had been, as a kid, Viet Cong. And as we’re just driving along, he’s saying, “Oh, this is where we went. Let’s stop here. I’ll show you. This is where—we went up with our bicycles, and then we—.” [laughter] It was suddenly reducing this mythical thing to human dimensions. And so I think just seeing it and lending some reality to this thing—that if you were an American protester, you had your own stereotypical images, and then coming there and just seeing what it looked like. And one point we were in the Mekong Delta, and there still a million people in the Mekong Delta. It’s incredibly dense. And we’re looking—my husband was with me and we’re like, “Nixon thought he was gonna pacify this area? Like, really? That’s what they—?” And seeing it was just a whole thing. So, I feel like I learned a lot along the way.

CAI: And do you remember what date or year you traveled to Vietnam for this?

EISENBERG: Feel like it was either—it was a while ago, it was early in this process—so I feel like it was maybe 2010.

CAI: Okay.

EISENBERG: I think right now, actually, they’re in a period which is getting more repressive again. There’s a lot of reasons for thinking that. But when we were there, I feel like it was pretty relaxed atmosphere. And some of it was very poignant. At one point, because of the advice of this other journalist, Nick Turse, I

asked to go to see Tây Ninh Province, which is right on the border of Cambodia. And why did we go to that? Nick Turse said, “Go to Tây Ninh. Just go there.” [laughter] We’re in this van. My husband said, “Why are we going to this place?” And I said, “I actually don’t know. Nick told me to go.” So we go to Tây Ninh Province, which is right on the border of Cambodia. And they had set up interviews, and we were only going to do this for a day.

And so we finished the interviews. Somebody—they said people would like us to stay for dinner. And my husband was tired, so I asked our guide, “Should we stay for dinner?” He said, “Of course, you stay for dinner, you stupid people.” So it turns out they had made a banquet for us—a huge banquet. And then what was fascinating—people wanted to tell their stories. I ended up feeling very terrible about this, because I felt like, what are you doing here? People want to tell their stories, and you don’t have the time to listen. So I didn’t love that. But just having people start telling their stories to us of what they had lived through and just being in that whole atmosphere. And also this sounds really idiotic, but they were real people. There’s some weird way—if you’re in the anti-war movement, obviously you thought that they were real people, but you didn’t know these real people. And so seeing these real people, I think it helped me to write much better.

CAI: Yeah, that’s very interesting. And to finish off the interview, you’ve occupied so many roles in the university, from being an undergraduate student to a graduate student, to now being a professor, fulfilling your original vision of teaching foreign policy. So in the current moment, what do you think you see as your role as a professor, in terms of engaging in politics in the university and interacting with students? Has that changed at all?

EISENBERG: Well, it’s changed right now because the level of repression that’s coming down is something that I had never encountered—I don’t think existed before—of what’s happening. And the way in which antisemitism is being

weaponized as a way to quash dissent. So you're in another land in terms of that. Honestly, that brings me back to junior high school when those advisors wouldn't let me write about the UN—except this is much more dangerous.

And so one of the things that is true right now is we're doing a lot of faculty organizing in support of our students. So that's taking time. And we actually have pushed the administration—we just had a thing—the faculty tried to push the administration into liberalizing. And the last meeting that they had with students they seemed to be bending some rules. But the students are planning to do a protest tomorrow—which happily I'm not on campus—but it'll be the test about whether the administration is going to be more liberal. So one part of my job is that, I think. And a lot of other faculty feel the same way. We have a group. So that's a little different, because I don't think I've ever had to really fight for the right of students to be able to express themselves. That's really different.

One of the other ways I feel like it's different is I want the students in my class, first of all, to feel that they're capable of learning, which weirdly they don't necessarily feel that way. And I want them to feel empowered, that they—not in an idiotic way—but I want them to feel like the things that are going on outside the university, not just about Israel-Palestine—as far as I could see, Trump is destroying the government right now. The level of damage that they're doing in three weeks is not to be believed. And what I'd like my students to feel—I don't want to bang in their head "you should think this versus that," but I would like them to feel that the things that are going on around them are really significant, number one. And number two, that they have a role to play, whatever that is. I don't think faculty tell students what they're supposed to do. Because right now, what's happening in Washington on my campus—I don't know if it's true at Dartmouth—except for Israel-Palestine—what's happening, it's barely registering. The assault on the constitution.

So those are my goals. I'd like students to feel like A. that they're responsible to know what's going on, B. that if they do try to learn they could be competent, and there's a lot of roles for them to play. Once they got in their head that they could matter, then there's lots of things to do. And we started this two hours ago trying to—[pause]. I'm actually now losing the thread, believe it or not three hours in [laughter] [inaudible]. I'd like them to feel that they matter. That they can do things.

And I would say one thing that's a little bit different from Dartmouth, if I was comparing the students I have now to the students I met in Dartmouth, I think in general, that Dartmouth students have a much better sense of self. That they actually do feel more empowered in general. I wouldn't go that far with it, because whatever, but that their views matter, that their role is going to matter. buBt I don't know that my students really feel that way. So that's kind of what I think part of my role is.

I think I now actually lost you if that's possible.

CAI: I'm still here.

EISENBERG: How have I lost you?

CAI: Can you hear me?

EISENBERG: Maybe it's telling you that it was time to stop talking.

[Recording paused.]

CAI: Okay, just resumed the recording after some tech issues. But I think that's a great way to end the interview—thinking about how students do have a role beyond just within the classroom. And just learning and engaging in politics. Thank you so much Professor Eisenberg for speaking at length with me today.

EISENBERG: Thank you for being such a great listener. And one of the really nice things is meeting you. And I hope we'll actually meet again.

CAI: Of course, I'll end the recording here.

[End of interview].