

Dorothy Sue Cobble

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Interviewed by Judy Waxman, January 2022

[Edited Transcript]

DSC: My name is Dorothy Sue Cobble and I was born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1949.

JW: Please tell me a little about your life as a child, adolescent, before you got involved in any women’s issues and please include your ethnic background.

DSC: I grew up in a blue-collar family in a neighborhood close to downtown Atlanta. Both my class background and being born in the South shaped my life and politics. I also grew up in a very religious family. I went to the Baptist Church maybe three or four times a week. By the end of high school I moved away from the Baptist Church intellectually and toward the Quaker faith. And once I went to college I moved even further away from the church and became more secular. But certainly as a child and adolescent, I was shaped by the Baptist Church. It was a double-edged sword, consoling and repressive. Yet my religious upbringing instilled in me many positive values -- values that helped propel me toward the women’s movement.

In my academic career I’ve written extensively about feminist movements and about the women who led movements for social reform in the past. I’m always surprised by how many of these women were influenced by religious teachings. In the first half of the twentieth century, the Social Gospel Movement, for example, inspired many of the leading women reformers. That version of Christianity taught that good Christians contribute to making the world a better place. Crucial for me too was the idea that all people are special and valuable – a notion I associate with my religious upbringing.

My parents of course also shaped my thinking and values. As I said, I grew up in a working-class family. My father was a locomotive engineer. He drove a train for the Southern Railway and so had his father and grandfather. I remember at college, at Smith, I would say, “Oh, my father is a locomotive engineer.” And my friends would persist in thinking he was a civil engineer. “No,” I would say again, “he drives a train, he’s a *locomotive* engineer.”

He became a union officer by the time I was 15 or 16. I heard lots of stories from him about the value of collective organizing and unions. He had a fierce anger at the way workers were mistreated and how one class looks down on another. He left me with an abiding sense of the injustices experienced by poor and working people and the need to do something about it.

Here is one story that will give you a sense of him. I was doing research on my 2004 book *The Other Women's Movement*, which is about labor feminism and the women who built the labor movement. I'm in the Southern Labor Archives in Atlanta, Georgia, and I get up from my desk to go to the bathroom. In the hallway is a large picture of the signing of Georgia's first minimum wage law in 1959. All the people are identified by name, except for one. He is listed as no name or "unable to identify. It was my father. So it was fun. I got to go tell the archivist, "I can tell you the name of that person."

My mother was just as influential but in a different way. She was a voracious learner, cared deeply about education, voted Democratic even when my father didn't (I promised her I wouldn't tell my father in 1980 when she didn't vote for Reagan), and admired people who acted with fairness and kindness toward others. She never finished high school because as the oldest child she was expected to help support the family, which she did, getting a job in an Atlanta sewing factory in the middle of the Great Depression. Later, she insisted on continuing to work outside the home and controlling how she spent her income. She also joined lots of community groups and was an officer in the women's auxiliary of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, as was my grandmother. Women's auxiliaries later came to be thought of as embarrassing second-class organizations, relics of pre-feminist days. But my mother and grandmother took great pleasure and pride in the lobbying, political education, and other work of the auxiliary.

So that's a bit about my background. And I can certainly talk about some of the civil rights activities that I got involved with in high school before I went away to college at Smith in 1967. Those were important, too.

JW: Do you want to talk about that, any of your civil rights background?

DSC: My involvement began fairly early, first as an observer. I was 11 years old and taking the bus to my music lesson, and I sat down in the wrong seat, meaning that I sat down next to a Black woman. Some of the white people in the bus started yelling at me, saying, "Get up, get up. You have to get out of that seat. Don't sit next to her." In truth, they weren't using such polite language. I didn't know what to do, but I'm actually a pretty shy person, and I just froze. I just stood my ground, whether out of fear or what, I just sat there. Both of us took a lot of abuse. I remember it as one of the longest bus rides of my life.

I didn't know how to think about what happened on that bus for a long time, but it stayed with me. I remember thinking about it again very seriously when my public high school started to integrate a few years later. It was the same issue with seats. I was in 8th grade home room and on the first day of the new school year we all came in and took our seats. This time I wasn't the offender. But a white classmate sat in the wrong chair and the teacher said, "You can't sit there. Get up. Get up. A Black person sat in that chair. It's dirty." It was 1962 and the first black student had enrolled at North Fulton High School. And there were, as these stories indicate, some stark and horrific injustices that I became more and more concerned with and involved with.

My high school was not successfully integrated until much later, but I got involved with the YWCA. These were multiracial programs. I began to cross the race lines in terms of friendships, in terms of activities. By my senior year in college, I was working with Hector Black, who was a Quaker activist who'd come from the North in 1965 to set up programs in Vine City, a poor Black community in Atlanta. And I worked in a Head Start program there. And there were lots of struggles in my family and in my community and among my friends about all these issues, but at that point, I was really happy to leave that behind and move North.

My boyfriend at the time had gone to Yale and I thought of going there too. But women were not allowed to apply to the elite men's schools. It was 1967. I applied to lots of other schools, and ended up deciding on Smith College, in part because – and I remember this quite distinctively -- reading a Smith recruiting brochure that lauded Smith as a place where you could think anything you wanted to think. That this was a place of intellectual inquiry and a place that valued women's minds and free thought. I thought, "That's for me." It certainly didn't turn out that way. But that's what drew me there. And I remember my father rode the train with me up to Massachusetts, and it was a whole new world.

JW: How did you get introduced then to the women's movement, women's issues?

DSC: I arrived at Smith in the fall of 1967, and that first year was really difficult, in part because I didn't have a great academic preparation for it in public school. But also, there was a lot of misunderstanding and condescension about Southerners. So anytime I opened my mouth, people thought I was an idiot. And then there were class issues, too. So that first year was difficult. I went back home and I told my father I wasn't going to continue at Smith. I was going to drop out. And he was furious because I had a full scholarship. And he said, "If you drop out, I'll never send you another dime." And he meant it, and he lived up to that.

That summer though I said, "Okay, I'll try again." And I went back for the fall 1968 semester. It got a little better. But I'd already promised myself that I would drop out. So I did. I think one of the tipping points was my involvement in trying to change some of the rules Smith had at the time. A few of us had organized. We were sort of on the left. I can't remember if we had our own women's SDS group by then. But initially I was involved with some of the anti-war and left organizing. And the men on the left -- or boys I should say -- from Amherst and UMass thought our issues at Smith were silly and insignificant – not really "political." So we formed our own separate women's group.

We had two issues. There were these college rules – parietals --that you had to be in the dorm by 10:00 or 11:00 at night. And that doesn't sound so serious, right? How bad could it be when the boys were facing the draft? But we thought of it as paternalistic and demeaning and as not letting us make our own decisions and treating us as children. And by that time, I was a full-blown anti-authoritarian. I was furious at any kind of structure of domination and control -- and at what I saw as unfairness and not letting people speak their mind and be themselves. We were angry at all that. We were also angry that we were required to wear dresses on Thursday night when the faculty, almost all men, would come to dinner.

Now, other nights you didn't have to wear dresses, but Thursday nights when the faculty came, you had to wear a dress. We organized against these dress codes and we thought we had won because the administration said, "Okay, we'll let you vote house by house about whether you want to do this." And we thought, "Great, no one's going to vote to make someone else wear a dress. Everyone will see that people should be allowed to choose the clothes they want to wear." Well, a lot of the houses agreed with us and abolished the dress requirement.

But in the house I was in, Ziskind, the women actually voted to keep the rule and require everybody in the house to wear a skirt on Thursdays. Well, I just couldn't understand this. Maybe it was in part, a sensibility I inherited. Sometimes I think, well, my father's side of the family, they were hillbillies, from Appalachia. And there's this individualistic rebel streak in that culture. So I'm a Southern rebel in that way. You know, everybody should be able to dress the way they want.

So that was my final semester. I thought, "Well, I've made the right decision." I actually got a job organizing against the war that spring, paid by the Methodist Church. The idea was to organize these huge anti-war speak-outs and rallies at the colleges in the area: Smith, Mt. Holyoke, Amherst, and UMass. At the same time, I kept up my friendships with some of the women in the Smith SDS because I was living in a little apartment in Northampton. But I wasn't really good at speaking at mass meetings, and I thought, "This isn't going so well." And I also didn't like the male culture of the anti-war movement. I found the men really macho. There was a lot of pressure for sex. They didn't want a girl speaking.

Then there were these class issues that made it hard for me to be part of the student left. It's hard to explain them. They're very subtle. But one that wasn't so subtle, for me anyway, was the anger of college kids directed against the soldiers in Vietnam. For me, the soldiers were boys I knew in high school. I was in the high school choir, a really important part of my upbringing. And pretty much the whole back row, the basses in the high school choir, they'd all been killed. And I just had a hard time with the anger at the soldiers. I felt sorry for them. I felt they were trapped. And understood how they thought they were doing the right thing, even if they weren't.

Anyway, there was a feminist click moment for me in 1969; I remember it really well. Actually there were a number of important things that happened to me in the spring of '69 in relation to the women's movement, but the first involved a senior at Smith, Sandy Lillydahl. We weren't close friends, but her name is just imprinted on my soul. She said, "Look, there's this thing called patriarchy, and all men have power over all women." And I said, "Oh, no, you're wrong." You know, "I love my daddy, I love my boyfriend." She just wouldn't give up and we spent the whole rest of the night arguing about this.

And I remember the morning sun coming up. And I said, "Sandy, I think the world just turned upside down. This is a whole new way of understanding what's wrong with things and seeing who has the power and how that's worked. And I want to figure this out." I thought: How did this thing called patriarchy happen? And how do I think about relationships with men in a

different way? And how do I think about relationships with my sisters in a different way? So that all-night conversation was really formative. I don't think we talked too much more after that. I remember she later wanted me to join a more politically militant group on the left, but I decided against it.

The next big event for me that spring was the arrival of W.I.T.C.H. on campus. W.I.T.C.H. stood for the Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell. I thought they were funny, they were creative, they were outrageous. I wanted to be one. They were from New York, and they had just come to visit Smith for a few days. But among that group was a woman I met for the first time who would change my life. We became very good friends. The most recent book that I've written, *For the Many: American Feminists and the Global Fight for Democratic Equality*, I dedicated to her.

JW: Who is she?

DSC: The woman I met when W.I.T.C.H. visited in 1969 was Florika Remetier. And only in the last couple of years, because of the Internet and because I was in Europe doing research for *For the Many*, did I finally get to fill in some of her background. She had come from Romania as a refugee with her family after the war. She was a musical prodigy then: a five-year-old playing classical violin. She later took up the bass guitar, played rhythm and blues and all kinds of music. But I was very excited about W.I.T.C.H. in 1969. I didn't move to New York to join them, but a few of us in Northampton started a kind of imitation feminist guerrilla theater group. The core of this group was the Smith SDS and the five women who started it.

And we tried to raise feminist consciousness at Smith through guerrilla theater skits that we performed outside on the lawn but also at Smith teas and other events – events to which we had not been invited. I don't know how well we did at changing people's minds, but we had a good time doing it. A lot of the skits were about the paternalism of Smith and our fury at the male faculty who said we didn't need to learn the things we were learning because we would just be using them in cocktail conversations with our lawyer husbands and all the rest.

So those are my Smith days. I should add though that I think Sandy Lillydahl tried to get Robin Morgan to include a chapter on Smith in *Sisterhood is Powerful*. I don't know how far she got, but I think it would have been a great chapter because Smith was the largest women's college, and it created a phenomenal number of feminists. And up until that time, it only had a male president. The contradictions were heightened for a lot of women who went there. They came with high expectations and were met with paternalistic sexist attitudes. It was an explosive mix that changed a lot of women and remade Smith too.

I only recently read the radical commencement speech Gloria Steinem gave at Smith in 1971, the year I would have graduated. She spoke approvingly of how Smith had begun to change. It had finally dropped its parietal rules, for example, and was starting to treat women as adults who could think for themselves. But she wanted more; she wanted Smith to take the lead in

creating a civil rights and feminist revolution. So things had changed at Smith by 1971 but those changes were just the beginning of a long overdue rethinking of what women could do and be.

I moved to New Haven the summer of 1969 and was involved in the women's movement for a while there. But I ended up moving to Berkeley in 1970. I realized I needed to finish my education, in part because I had worked at a lot of bad working-class jobs. I think one of my worst was working as a waitress at the Yale Cabaret café and being humiliated by the founder of the Cabaret, Robert Brustein, who had come to dine there. And I just remember thinking, "I have got to get a job where I don't have a boss and where I have more control over interactions with the public." And I became obsessed with that: I had to get out of the working class.

At the same time, I became good friends with Florika and another woman named Barbara Etta in New Haven. We all felt a bit of discomfort or alienation in the feminist consciousness-raising groups of the time. We felt that we were different and our difference wasn't fully acknowledged. I can't speak fully for Florika or Barbara, but for me, a lot had to do with listening to descriptions of middle-class family life and female oppression that seemed really different from my own experiences but were taken as universal and as shared by everyone.

We wrote a pamphlet about our experiences called "Class in the Women's Movement." I think it was my first publication. It later appeared in an underground Berkeley women's journal. Laura X collected some of those early feminist newspapers and journals and it may be part of her archive at the University. The journal was called *Libera, A Berkeley Journal of Women's Liberation*.

We also put together a slideshow based on *The SCUM Manifesto*, the 1967 book by Valerie Solanas. I showed it in various women's bookstores and venues in Berkeley and Oakland as well as in a few of my undergraduate classes.

SCUM stood for Society to Cut Up Men. And it turned out that Solanas was much more serious about this than we thought because she actually ended up kind of going off the rails and, as you know, trying to shoot and kill Andy Warhol. But at the time, we thought the book was satire, that she was the Jonathan Swift of her age. It was exaggerated, it was funny, lyrical. She was a stylist, and we thought it pointed and very funny.

Florika was a conceptual artist, among other things. She was doing these cut-up techniques that William Burroughs and others had pioneered, but she was doing it with a feminist twist. She would take sexist advertisements from the magazines and heighten their contradictions, as she put it. She'd take a hamburger ad, for example, and cut out a woman's face and put it in the hamburger. There are a couple of these doctored advertisements of hers in *Sisterhood is Powerful*, but she did a lot more of them. We made slides of them for the SCUM slideshow. Then we did a soundtrack based on the *SCUM Manifesto*, with Florika doing most of the voice over.

She had a deep voice with this beautiful accent. And I'll never forget, I think the opening line of *The SCUM Manifesto* the way Florika said it was, "Life at best being an utter bore, and no aspect being at all relevant to women." And then the thing goes on from there. So that was what our consciousness-raising group did. And we read political theory and bolstered each other's self-esteem. All three of us felt that we had grown up in families where the men could be aggressive and menacing and dominating, and that we had been ignored and demeaned in various ways growing up. We had our own little consciousness-raising group where we could validate and process our experiences and ideas.

I then moved to Berkeley, and Florika later moved to California too with her partner Paul. We remained close friends and I lived with them in San Francisco in 1972, my last year at UC Berkeley.

In California I became more and more involved in the labor movement. I think the question you asked earlier was, "When did you become involved in the women's movement?" And the way I think about movements for women is that there are many different kinds. There are some movements that are primarily female and focus on ending sex discrimination and addressing the issues women face as a sex. But then there are other kinds of movements that address multiple injustices but are also about women's emancipation and women's freedom. I would think of the civil rights movement as a movement for women's freedom, even though it included men and didn't always have the same issues that were given priority as, say, in women's liberation. I think of the labor movement in the same way.

When I became more involved in the labor movement, I saw myself as a feminist. But I also saw myself as somebody who was concerned with the particular issues of working-class and poor women and the ways their emancipation required a different set of priorities and policies than the emancipation of their more privileged sisters. So that's the direction I took.

I was lucky at UC Berkeley because I took one of the first Women's Studies classes they offered. It was taught by a woman who became my dear friend. She was a great, great teacher and writer and feminist, Melanie Kaye Kantrowitz. She died two or three years ago. She was a Comparative Literature faculty, but she designed and taught this fabulous Women's Studies course. We started with Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, and it was just this beautiful course. We read Tillie Olsen, Zora Neale Hurston, everything, and Melanie encouraged a variety of perspectives on women's freedom and how you get there. That was important to me because I was trying to take feminist issues into some of my other classes and failing abysmally.

I had a Marxist professor -- and he was a really big deal in the Philosophy Department -- who refused any notion that power differentials existed in the classroom. Nor would he entertain the idea that Marx had failed to capture fully all the dimensions of women's exploitation. The power of male professors over female students was an issue for me, but also male domination of any sort over women. My Marxist philosophy class was just one example of how women's

issues and experiences were misunderstood and devalued at the time. But I did survive Berkeley with the help of Melanie and other friends.

I think my contribution in the early 1970s was more as a speaker and writer, often alone in my study, than in any particular organization. I'm not a joiner, but I admire people who can be on the front lines of building organizations and who can deal with conflict and political infighting. I think I'm stronger and more persuasive in my writing than in interactions in committee meetings or mass meetings. But I have always tried to support those women who could speak out effectively in very public arenas. I would write and say things on their behalf. I wrote a lot in my early twenties, often in feminist pamphlets and things like that, what you would think of now as the blogosphere. And I would send things to *Redbook* too, which they'd send back.

I did finally end up in a position where I had considerable amount of authority and power and was able to make a difference in the labor movement and bring feminist issues into the labor movement. By 1977, I had found my way to a full scholarship at Stanford, and I finished there in 1986. But along the way I stopped my PhD research for a number of years to direct the Labor Studies program at City College of San Francisco. I was the first woman to do that and I met some resistance from the old guard male labor leaders.

I remember the man who said he thought I was capable of the job and should have it. His name was Jack Olsen, and he was married to Tillie Olsen. Tillie Olsen was a labor radical in the thirties and had written articles and short stories then that got enormous attention. She was hailed as a genius. *Partisan Review* published her work. She and Jack were close to the Communist Party and also involved in the 1934 San Francisco General Strike. Tillie was a feminist, and concerned in particular about the issues of working-class women, both in the home and in the labor force.

She stopped writing after her first big splash and then wrote poignantly about why working-class women don't write. She published some very powerful short stories about class and writing. "*I Stand Here Ironing*" is about a working-class woman dreaming about writing while standing at the ironing board doing the ironing for the family. Tillie followed that up with a book called *Silences*. She ended up being an incredibly important role model to lots of women writers. Just recently, *The New York Times* did a series on forgotten American writers. I think it was A.O. Scott or Dwight Garner, I can't remember which of those critics wrote about her, but she was featured, and it was marvelous to see that.

Jack was an extraordinary feminist and labor leader. He had founded the San Francisco City College Labor Studies Program and directed it for many years. The program came out of the great strikes of the '30s and '40s, and the labor organizing of those years. San Francisco was a union town, top to bottom, by the time I arrived in the 1970s and the longshoremen had made it that way. There was a famous story of the march inland. After the workers organized the docks, they just kept on marching. They organized the department stores, grocery stores, hotels and restaurants, everything; they made that possible. And Jack thought it was time a woman was director of Labor Studies, and he really made that happen.

But the labor movement as a whole wasn't always thrilled with some of the programs that I put on. Two examples stand out for me. One was a program I did on organizing clerical workers. This was the early '80s. Clerical workers had been organizing. This was the era where women in the labor movement were really starting to move into positions of leadership, particularly in places like California where there were large public sector and service sector unions, and they were demanding change. The pay equity movement, for example, was extraordinarily powerful. The economist Heidi Hartmann once did a great article about how all the states that passed these breakthrough pay equity laws in the '80s were union states. The campaigns came out of the labor movement. And women were also demanding the labor movement stop being so wedded to the notion that it needed big brawny men to have power. You could have a movement of nurses, a movement of office workers, and it could still be powerful.

I decided Labor Studies should have a conference on organizing clericals. We invited the Office Workers Union, the Teamsters, and other unions that represented clericals. But we also invited all these nonunion women's groups – associations, workplace caucuses, and community organizations. Many of the groups did not see their priority as collective bargaining; some also included management women and middle-class community allies in their ranks. Oh, my goodness. These were not your traditional forms of class struggle. But these were women who believed in collectivity. They wanted to improve women's lives and the life of everybody who worked in the workplace with them. We had a Big Tent approach and we invited them all, and it was a big brouhaha. And the Central Labor Council said, "You can't do that. These aren't traditional labor unions." I almost lost my job.

The Labor Council also wanted my department to boycott the San Francisco Mime Troupe because the troupe was a worker co-op, not a traditional collective bargaining unit. We refused that as well. It was the same issue: there's only one form of unionism. And I didn't agree with that. I ended up writing about that after I got my PhD and took a job at Rutgers. There are multiple forms of unionism, I argued, and each generation has to create the unionism that works for them. There'll be different kinds of labor organizations too, depending on whether you're a factory worker or whether you're a nurse's aide. There will be some things that are similar, but also things that differ. So that was a revelatory moment for me, one that shaped my intellectual concerns.

I remember working with Dolores Huerta. That was really exciting. We did a program on women labor leaders -- *Emerging, Surviving, Thriving*, I think we called it. And Dolores Huerta said, "Oh, okay, I can relate to that last one, thriving. I'll be there." We were thrilled about that.

I should backtrack a bit. As I said, I wanted to encourage different forms of unions and more discussion about how we needed to rethink the labor movement and reinvent it. But I was also really concerned with feminist issues around pay and prestige at the workplace, in part because I'd had a lot of pink-collar jobs, and in part because Louise Kapp Howe's book from 1977, *Pink-Collar Workers*, turned me around. That was a fabulous book.

I'd held a lot of those jobs, particularly waitressing, but I was not able to combine those kinds of jobs with supporting myself and going to college. As I said earlier, my father had disowned me. My mother used to slip me a little bit of money every once in a while, but I didn't get anything from my parents. I needed to find a job where I could make more than minimum wage.

I even had a job at *TV Guide Magazine* right after graduating from Berkeley that was a minimum wage job for college-educated girls. We were all in the same room, and there was one woman who had been there 40 years, and she got to move her desk to the front and turn it around. This was the classic pink-collar job. It was dead-end, minimum wage, and we got no respect, although we were the copy editors. There was a department of all men who were the salesmen. None of them had gone to college. They got real salaries. They also got to ogle us at office-sponsored luncheons. This was infuriating.

JW: What year was this?

DSC: This was 1973. I had just graduated from Berkeley. I tried temping as a Kelly Girl and various things before I got the TV Guide job. Then these male friends of mine said, "Hey, we found this great gig. You can come down to the Ship Scalers and Painter's Union Hall and you sit there and when the longshoremen aren't working, when there's not enough of them" – say it's Mother's Day, no longshoremen worked on Mother's Day – "the dispatcher will send you out to do longshore work." And I said, "Okay." And I got there and it was all men in the hiring hall. But I sat there and waited. And they didn't send me out. They didn't send me out.

Then one day the union dispatcher, we called him Big Bob, he said, "Come over here." He said, "I have to do this." He was so angry, he said, "Give me your plug. I'm sending you to a job." So, I got sent out. And I didn't know this, but he and the longshore union had been threatened by a sex discrimination lawsuit unless they integrated their ranks. The San Francisco group that brought up the issue was an organization called Equal Rights Advocates. I later became good friends with many of them. They were extraordinary women, and I worked closely with them later when I was head of Labor Studies. Women like Judy Kurtz and others.

Now that I'm talking about it, I realize how clever the longshore union was in their response to the threat of a sex discrimination lawsuit. They didn't integrate the really important local with the best jobs, which was Local 10, the stevedore local. They integrated Local 2, the ship scalers and painters. Ship scalers were mainly minority men, old guys. We crawled around and cleaned up the sludge in the double bottom tanks. Then we'd needlegun the lead paint off the tank walls and repaint them. It was dirty, dangerous, underground work. We sometimes got to do stevedore work, loading and unloading ships, a much better job, but not often.

Anyway, that job paid me more in one day than I got in a week at *TV Guide*. So the longshore union wages allowed me to finish my education and ultimately get a job at Rutgers. Not surprisingly, I ended up wanting to write about why women's jobs and men's jobs are worlds apart, why women get low pay, why they get no respect, why they have no control, and what would change that.

At Rutgers, I was hired in 1986 on what was called the “women’s line” at the Labor Center. At my job interview, I remember the Chair of the Department calling into the next room to his secretary, “Hey Gail, how much money is on that women’s line?” There were 12 of us in the department, 11 men and me. And I was supposed to do all the education in New Jersey for women trade unionists. I worked with some phenomenal women, Clara Dasher in the Newark Teachers Union, women in the garment unions, electrical workers, just amazing women. And we did a lot of women’s leadership classes. We hosted one of the AFL-CIO Union Women’s Summer Schools and brought in union women from Mexico and Canada to talk about solidarity across national borders. We also did a series of panels with activists and writers on pay equity, contingent work, family leave, and other topics. Those talks became the basis for a book I edited, *Women and Unions: Forging a Partnership*.

As time passed there was a shift toward integrating all the labor education programs and not setting aside money just for women’s programs. One could see this change as a positive step, as ending women’s second-class citizenship. But what it was going to mean in reality was that there would be fewer programs and resources for women. The battle over separatism or integration has always been one of the dilemmas of the women’s movement. You want equal status with men and access to their spaces, but sometimes you get to equality through separatism and sometimes you get there through integration. Integration can mean greater opportunity but it can also mean you become invisible and the problems women face don’t get attention.

My strategy was to found something called the *Center for Women and Work*. I started it in 1992, and it’s still going. I thought that if I institutionalized women’s programs by setting up a university center, the department would devote resources to women and their needs and would hire faculty who focused on furthering women’s education and activism in the labor movement. The Center has maintained its orientation toward issues faced by women workers and over the years it has expanded; different women have directed it and really moved it forward. So that was one of the things I felt I accomplished at Rutgers.

I also worked with the larger women’s movement and with other women’s programs within Rutgers to integrate issues of class and class inequality into women’s programs. Rutgers had one of the largest and most far-seeing Women’s Studies programs anywhere. Probably the most famous person to emerge from these programs is Charlotte Bunch. She directed the Center for Global Women’s Leadership. She was a pioneering feminist and activist for gay rights in the 1960s and 1970s. Later, she was crucial in the human rights movements at the UN and in helping spark the global campaigns against gender-based violence. She was one of the principal people pushing for women’s rights as human rights on the global stage.

But there were other pioneers too, like Ruth Mandel at the Center for American Women in Politics, and Mary S. Hartman, who just transformed the history profession. In 1974, she edited *Clio’s Consciousness Raised*, a book that got people to think about history in fundamentally different ways. I worked with those women on various initiatives. I also headed up the *Institute for Research on Women* for three years, a state-wide center set up to encourage cutting edge

thinking on women across the disciplines. At the Institute, I pulled together a group of scholars and activists from the US and abroad who were interested in opening up questions on class, labor, and immigration in women's lives. I also wrote my books and tried to make a contribution wherever I could. In those years, I published an anthology based on our Institute discussions, *The Sex of Class: Women Transforming American Labor* and I finished another book, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* which won a number of prizes.

JW: How would you say your involvement in these women's issues affected your personal life?

DSC: I've talked a lot about my intellectual development, and it was very important to me to try and understand the roots of social and economic injustice and to figure out how people can organize to make the world a fairer, more inclusive place. The women's movement brought a new dimension to my thinking, and I'm really grateful for that. It pushed me to make women more central to my work and to ask questions about how sex and gender matter.

It's been incredibly rewarding for me personally to be in conversation with women in the past – women who were organizing to improve society and in particular, trying to revalue the culture and spaces that women were pushed into, the things that were just dismissed as feminine, like caring and nurturing. The feminists I have written about were saying that we need to revalue women and the work they do. They wanted to create movements that further the liberation of everybody.

So the women's movement helped change me intellectually and it gave me a community. That wasn't true initially. At first there were just a few people that I felt I could trust and be myself with. I especially valued Florika and Barbara Etta in my early twenties when we talked about our sometimes violent upbringings and we read and wrote political theory. So initially the women's movement helped me survive and encouraged me to be myself. Then gradually my involvement in women's issues gave me a really electric, exciting, inspiring community of women – women I could be in conversation with, learn from, and organize alongside.