

*The following oral history memoir is the result of 1 digitally-recorded session of an interview with Ruth Sidel by Cynthia Tobar on February 15, 2012 in New York City. This interview is part of the Welfare Rights Initiative Digital Oral History Archive Project.*

*Ruth Sidel has reviewed the transcript and has made minor corrections and emendations. The reader is asked to bear in mind that she or he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.*

*[starts at 0:00:00]*

*Cynthia Tobar:* Thank you for being here, can you please say your name and your role within the welfare rights admission.

*Ruth Sidel:* My name is Ruth Sidel and I am on the faculty advisory committee or whatever the word is for WII. I have been active with it since it started. Actually was part of the original committee that interviewed Melinda Lackey when she was hired to start it and form it. So I have been active all along.

*CT:* I wanted to ask you about your background, your early life and influences, your family, their education. I'm very interested in what your early childhood was like, any intellectual worlds you inhabited that sort of thing. Tell me a little bit about that and you can begin anywhere you would like.

*RS:* Okay, I come from Boston, grew up in a family of all men, two older brothers and a father. My mother died when I was very young. My father was a product of the typical immigrant narrative. He came to this country when he was two, three, very young and was very poor as a child, as he would say, as he told it. He sold newspapers and shined shoes on the street of East Boston. When he was a child, helped contribute to his family's economic wellbeing or lack of wellbeing and he, I think through force of personality and determination, stick-to-it-ness, whatever, went into business and went to work for somebody, then went into business and gradually moved from poverty to the working class, to the middle class to the upper middle class and by the time I was born it was essentially upper middle class but it was a tremendous rise, a steep climb and he really made it possible for me to be sitting here today, literally.

My brothers, who are much older than I were part of that climb, lived in each neighborhood as they moved from poverty to relative

comfort. One brother went to college, actually went to Harvard which I think remarkable. I think this immigrant stories are so remarkable when they really don't involve me. I came at the end of it. I was just lucky. My husband has a similar story, a father who came here at the age of 15 all by himself, brought over all of his family members and became, my father-in-law became a pharmacist. His son, my husband, went to Princeton. I just think it's remarkable. I don't sort of get how they did it all but anyway, it's always a given that I would—I went to a very good school. And it was a given that I would both go on to college and perhaps beyond or not, whatever and it was also a value in our family that we would all make some contribution to making the world a better place, whatever that might mean. But I think as long as I remember that was a very important value. My older brother, I have to brothers, one is two years older than the other, I was particularly close to the older of the two, close to both but close to Jerry.

He was politically, is, was and is, politically left and very active all of his life in political movements and the peace movement, in civil rights, in all of those important movements during those years. He was a tremendous influence on me. I would not have my politics if it weren't for Jerry. So it was always assumed that you learn as much as you can and you find a way of making contribution. So I went to college, and then through those years you went right on. You didn't take time off to figure out who you were or any of that stuff, which my kids certainly did. But that wasn't the norm. Then I went on to social work school. That was the way I thought, I felt I could make a difference in people's lives and I think it was also my intent to work with people, help people out of their own conflicts and worries and so forth and so on. I went to social work school directly from college and actually married the same day as I graduated from social work school. Had to get, practically a [papal] dispensation.

I'm exaggerating for effect but in those days you had to go to graduation or you wouldn't get your diploma. I had to say "I can't go. I can't go because my husband is a medical student and this is the only two weeks he has free." We got married instead of going to graduation. He comes from an also very politically active family. His father and mother, both very politically active and on the left, liberal left, lefter than mine actually. He decided to go into medicine. Debated which way to go and decided to go into medicine, luckily came to Boston for medical school so we met there. It was definitely his ethic and assumption that he would try also to do something to make the world a better and fairer place for

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everybody not just for the 1%, to use the language of today. We've been together ever since so we're lucky, lucky, lucky, lucky.

I have to say it again. Interestingly he started out in medicine as an internist, trained as an internist but became very active in the physicians antiwar movement while he was doing his residency and he said to me one day as we were driving from here to there "You know what I'd really like to do" he said "I'd like to do during the day what I do during the evening." Meaning "change the world" instead of making like a doctor doctor, you know, hands on doctor. So he switched from internal medicine to preventive medicine, social medicine which deals with inequality and medical inequality and medical care, healthcare systems and got into during his residency, the very beginning of the physicians antiwar, which of course at that time was the Vietnam war, movement, which he has been very active in ever since. I include him because our lives are so intertwined it's almost impossible to separate. He was one of the founders of PSR, physicians for social responsibility. And IPNW, international physicians for the prevention of nuclear war and he has written on this and all that.

I meanwhile worked in social work first in a poor primarily black neighborhood in Boston Roxbury which was sort of the black ghetto and then had a baby. Then went back to work and then had a baby and then stayed home for five years purposefully because I thought I was going to raise those children more fabulously than anybody else which is ridiculous but I thought at the time that's where I was in my head. While I was at home for five years I was very active in the anti Vietnam War movement and started, worked in organizations that stemmed from that political action for peace, blah, blah, blah. That's sort of what I did. And then when our younger of our two sons went to kindergarten, I went back to work part-time in social work. That's more detail than you ever wanted.

*CT:* No, not at all.

*RS:* Shortly after all of that my husband Vic decided, he was offered a fabulous job at Montefiore hospital in the Bronx. I was a real Bostian, my whole family in Boston, etc, etc but I said where thou goest I shall go. I mean that's always been my policy. If he wanted to move for work reasons or whatever we would move. We moved to New York. Our kids were like medium, medium young, medium age and I worked in the Bronx at a pediatric outpatient clinic for a year and a half, something like that. It was the time of the women's movement and suddenly dawned on me that there was probably something else out there besides social work. That the fact that I

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had chosen social work, which I loved. I loved every job I'd ever had. But I think I was influenced by the women's movement and by the idea that one had choices and options.

And of course I had choices because I had a partner who was bringing in significantly more money than I ever made in social work so I had choices to explore other possibilities. So it dawned on me that there is probably something other than social work out there that I should think about. Resigned my job and within a month before I could really move in any direction we were not quite out of the blue but almost, invited to China. That was before American's were in China at all. American's had been out, I don't know how familiar you are but American's haven't been really in China for 25 years because we did not recognize the people's republic of China and they weren't so keen on us either.

*CT:* What year was that?

*RS:* 1971. Vic and I were invited at anytime at our own convenience in the next two weeks, that's the way the letter said, anytime at our own convenience in the next two weeks to go to China for a month. Of course we had two children who were, I don't know, 11 and 12, something like that. A family in Boston, I didn't have help, I just didn't do that. That's not how we lived. It's not like I had anyone to take care of them. So anyway, we figured it out and we went and it changed my life. I wouldn't be here if it weren't for that invitation, literally. We went to China for a month, I felt like I was stepping off the face of the earth because Americans really knew very little about China except negative stereotypes, only the worst. Only the worst was ever said about Chinese, robots and whatever.

What we found of course was totally different. They invited Vic because he was in preventative medicine, social medicine. They invited me because I was his wife. They invited four doctors and their wives. When I got there they asked the doctors what they wanted to see and the doctors were all—one was ears, nose and throat, one was cardiology. Vic was preventative medicine, whatever and I sort of raised my hand and said "I'm very interested in women and children and their lives and the services provided for families, especially women and children." And everywhere we went for a month; and we went everywhere, I mean we were out every morning and every afternoon to a different place—a commune, a factory, whatever.

They integrated what I was interested in into every single thing we did. It was just remarkable. I was the only wife who sort of put that forward but in the two weeks before we went I sort of looked and tried to figure out what was I interested in looking at and that was what I was interested in. Half way through the trip I said to Vic, "There is a book here." I had never written a word in my life, except a letter to somebody, a master's thesis. I'd written a master's thesis. He said "How can you have a book after two weeks?" And I said "Trust me, there is a book here."

And I outlined the whole thing. I got back and sure enough somebody was interested, said "If you ever want to write something give me a call." An editor, who we vaguely knew and I did, wrote a book called "Women and Childcare in China" which was really like successful. People really wanted to read about it. They wanted to read about mutual aid. They wanted to read about how the communist government was trying to take care of children and women. We went to preschools and how the children were taught to help each other, love each other and take care of each other according to the words of Chairman Mao, literally, I'm quoting. The book went into paperback and sold even more copies and I spoke everywhere. I'd never given a speech before in my life, ever. Terrified but I had to do it because I knew stuff that other people didn't know and I had to communicate it.

One book led to the next book about neighborhood organization and I helped Vic finish his book on healthcare. The whole 70s I was writing about China and lecturing about China all over the country and in many parts of Europe. We were invited—I mean it was just unbelievable. It was a total life change and thrilling. About middle, toward the end of that decade I realized that China was not going to last forever. I mean, not China was not going to last forever but the topic for me, my making it my profession, which is what it was for about five years, that's what I did was write and speak about China everywhere. I gave a course at the Bank Street—anyway, I suddenly realized this wasn't going to last forever and I'd better get a degree.

So I toyed with everything from law school to anthropology to whatever. I finally decided to get a PhD in sociology. I have no idea why and I mean, I don't know really why I chose that except it sounded like me and what I'm doing. And wrote a book, wrote a dissertation which was published as a book on working class women in the Bronx. Well, no, in New York City. It was actually oral histories of working class women. There were like eight chapters or nine, all but the intro and a final chapter summing it up

and each chapter was in picture not picture but a story told in their words largely with my doing the connective words of their lives and their struggles. Right before I was to get my degree I saw an ad in the *New York Times* for three positions in the sociology department in Hunter College. One was child welfare. In social work I had done parent/child issues.

That was my specialty. Another one was, I don't know. Sociology medicine was the second one. I've forgotten the third. So I sent in my CV and I said I actually could do any of them but I, particular child welfare and sociology of medicine, I figured I had written about medicine in China so I could fake it. And I could learn whatever I had to learn. I got back a form letter saying "We have all of the people we want to interview. Unfortunately we are not interviewing anymore people." So I stuck the letter in my middle drawer of my desk, said "Okay, that's the way. You win a few, you lose a few." And our son, Mark, who at that time was a teenager wouldn't let it rest. He said "You know you should call." I said "Why would I call? They're not interviewing anybody else. Why would I call?" He said "Because you should call." And he kept after me; he's a very sweet person. He's always been very sweet so he's not like assertive, just very sweet and very persistent. "You know, you should call." I think it's really a gender issue. It never occurred to me to call. I got a letter saying they're not interviewing anymore people.

They're not interviewing anymore people. I shoved it in my desk and that was it. But Mark, who is not enormously assertive. I mean, he's assertive enough to have good career but he's not, you know, crazy assertive. "You should call." So finally to shut him up, literally, I called and the chair-- I said "this is Ruth Sidel calling"—to the secretary—"This is Ruth Sidel. I sent a CV in and I got this back." The secretary repeated my name to get it down, to make sure she heard the name right. She wrote "Ruth Sidel" and I spelled it and the chair was standing right there, the chair of the department. This was a long time ago so he's no longer with us on every level. But that's exactly what happened. And he's a very quirky person, he was. He took the phone away from her with, I mean she couldn't even say "just a minute please, here is Professor [Pinkney]. And I'm not comfortable at all. I'm sort of "Why am I doing this? What am I going to say?"

I was just doing it because Mark told me to. He takes the phone from the secretary and he says "Ruth Sidel?" and I said "Yes?" thinking I'm going to be put in jail or something. He says "China?" And I said "Yes." He says "I know..." and he named a name of

somebody who was active in the US China friendship association, a good friend of mine. In other words he's telling me he knows China. He's telling me his credentials. That he's a China type because he knows Ester [Galavin], that's the name, he says "I know Ester Galavin." "Okay, me too." He said "When can you come in for an interview?"

And I've been here ever since. It's the best job I've ever had and I love it and I love the students. It was a way of doing something I was found out that I was really kind of good at, which I never would have believed if you had said to me at any point that I would be a professor that stands in front of—just now I came from over 100 students—never would have believed it in a million years. I didn't even speak in class in social work school. Never even, I mean I knew everything, I studied it, never even—so one thing leads to the other, leads to the other, leads to the other and I felt also being at Hunter and CUNY that you could do something you loved and something I was even fairly good at and do something worthwhile because these were students who have less not more. People who have more don't need me. I mean, they can do their thing, they're going to make it all the rest. But the students here need to be told that they're terrific and I'm just the one to do it.

That's my thing. I've been here ever since teaching sociology which is the degree I got because China wasn't going to last forever. Shortly after I came [Johna Shelayla] became president of Hunter. She was one of these dynamic, bouncy, friendly people who got to know people. She knew who I was, I had no idea. I was nobody. I mean I was a socio professor two or three years on the job, whatever. But she made it her business to get to know people and we became sort of friendly. I don't mean friends but friendly and I made an appointment—or she said "Let's have lunch some day." I decided to take her up on it. So we made an appointment, we had lunch in the faculty dining room, wherever.

And I suggested that we needed center for the study of family policy, and would she be interested in supporting that kind of thing at Hunter. She said she would because she's that kind of a person—liberal, interested in stuff. I made a small case for it but I didn't really have to. She gave us money for tea and cookies to have meetings, to get a group of people together to brainstorm around setting up a center for the study of family policy. It's interesting she gave us money for tea and cookies. No fool is she. You supply food and they will come, right? That's how the center started.

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*CT:* Around what time was that?

*RS:* '80s.

*CT:* And who else was involved in the formation of this--

*RS:* Mimi [Abramovitz]. Mimi and I really got people together. I mean, I couldn't even give you names at the moment. We actually ran it for a year but it didn't take us a year to realize that neither one of us wanted to do this. We loved the idea. We were perfectly happy to support it but we didn't want to be the administrators. I don't know if it was a good thing or a bad thing but we persuaded Jan to become the head of the center of the study of family policy. That's where WRI came. It was Jan, I believe, I may be wrong, I don't know how Mimi remembers it but it certainly wasn't my idea to start WRI. I'm not sure when Jan actually took over. Because WRI has only been in existence since like '95 so this could have been mid '80s, late '80s by the time Jan got started. I think it could have been Jan's idea, Mimi's idea. It wasn't mine but it was at the time of course when welfare was, you know, welfare repeal was being considered in Congress.

I don't call it welfare reform. I only do that when I have to. I think we all realized, us students who were receiving welfare were going to be endangered and needed voices to help them—or people advising and all the rest—to help them get through their education because without education there is virtually little or no hope getting out and staying out of poverty, little did we know about the recession that was coming and all the rest. It was through the center that Jan, I guess Mimi maybe, got this idea for WRI and Melinda was hired. I'm sure you know the rest. That was all more than you ever wanted.

*CT:* It's all wonderful. It's exactly what I wanted. Can you reflect on that time, the formation of, from what you can observe as someone who didn't have a direct role in the formation but as somebody who was observing it taking place, its formation? Do you have any reflections or observations about that time?

*RS:* I think it was a thing, it was one of these entities which formed as it's being done. I think people had ideas about protecting students who were in need and who were receiving welfare and helping them to maximize their rights and all the rest. But I think when Melinda was head of it, I think it happened as it happened and it grew as it grew, for example I can't give you any dates at all but our affiliation or their affiliation, WRI's affiliation with the Queens



Law School. I have no idea how that came about but I think it evolved. Maybe they called to find out what people's rights were and one thing led to another and they formed relationships with terrific people over there who also believed in helping people who had less and trying to let people know their rights and all the rest.

I think that the whole mission of WRI evolved as it happened. Then I have no idea, Melinda will have told you how long she was here, before [Dolana] and Maureen took over. But they have been spectacular. I mean Melinda of course is spectacular human being period, no matter what she is doing. Dee and Moe have been really wonderful, really wonderful. I'll admit, I probably shouldn't but I will that I'm particularly friendly with Dee. I'm friendly with both of them but Dee and I go out to lunch. It's a difference between being really friendly and having more of a relationship. We try to get out to lunch three or four times a year and schmooze and talk and all that. I will admit straight out that I've tried to persuade her to move on just because I think she's so talented and she could really do anything. You stay at some place long enough and you never quite leave. Should she get a doctorate? Should she move on to the foundation world? Should she—I don't know but I do think she is exceptionally talented. And of course it's our good luck that she has not yet done that. But on the other hand she could do a lot more than she is doing. This is all just to say that I think they're both terrific and I think it's wonderful that they work together so magnificently.

*CT:* I guess backtracking more into, I guess, in justice at the time, it had been going on for quite some time this whole idea of how you term it "welfare repeal" during that era. Can you talk to me about your reflections having—did you witness this happening to students in your classes or did you have any background with--

*RS:* I've written about women in poverty for, I moved on from China to the dissertation about working class. They were low income working class women and then wrote about women and children last, '85 and then wrote a series of books on—and then a book on young women and how they were socialized on their own. I was sort of immersed in my writing about women and children in poverty and the negative stereotypes about them. The limitations that they had both within the society and under the laws, this has been what I have done in my writing.

In teaching, I've taught child welfare—well, I was hired for the child welfare slot. That was the slot that Al Pigmy hired me for so I've been teaching child welfare, meaning poverty, ever since.

There was no question that the '90s particularly, with Ronald Reagan, that's what started me writing about this, was the welfare queen imagery and the stereotyping. Not that it's new but he just refined it unfortunately. Then of course the conservative era of the early '90s with Newt Gingrich and welfare reform, as it's called, and then Clinton feeling he had to give away to the conservative forces in Congress, which of course I and Mimi and everybody else opposed tremendously and wrote about.

WRI and its mission really fell right into what we had been doing and what we had been interested in and we realized that students at Hunter were going to be particularly vulnerable at this time and needed to know their rights and needed to have somebody to back them up, etc, etc. It fits in with our ideology from the time we were—from the time I was born essentially to social work where I went into that to help people who had less, to teaching at Hunter to teaching child welfare to writing about poverty, etc.

CT: Immigrants, you mentioned one of your books—I have here *Women and Children Last*” the *Plight of Poor Women in Affluent America* and *On Her Own: Growing Up in the Shadow of the American Dream*. Could you describe what led you to write, I mean you kind of allude to that in the earlier dialogue but maybe if you had anything else you want to add about those particular books in regards to their reception at the time, when it happened and do you also feel that there are other areas that you identified as potential policy areas in your research that will concede ways in which it may have made a difference in the lives of poor women on welfare?

RS: Well who knows what makes a difference. I mean, I think what I was trying to do was highlight these stereotyping and the injustices to poor people in general but my thing is women and children. It always has been. Again, I did parents and children way back in social work. It's always been women and children. I think that what I was trying to do was highlight for the, not general population because I don't write books that are that popular, unfortunately. I wish they were but they are what I call additional paperback that people use in courses. Penguin paperbacks, you know, but they did reach a fair audience, fair sized audience.

I used my interest in and skills, if I can say skills, it doesn't sound right but you know what I mean, in interviewing in the books because these books are not primarily historical or policy, even though I deal with history and I deal with policy. They are mainly

books in which I interview people and use real life examples and vignettes of what happens to people when they're poor, how they have to struggle, etc, etc, how they fall into poverty. They various ways that people become poor, the new poor, people who weren't born poor but fell into poverty because of divorce, a separation, an illness, etc, etc, unemployment, whatever.

I try to really make the statistics and the policy come alive through the lives of people whom I have interviewed. I think that's really what my work is about. The most recent one is I just happen to have it here because I had to email somebody about one of the chapters, but the most recent one is about single mothers and showing that single mothers are not the stereotypes that the right wing would have you think.

CT: It's titled *Unsung Heroines*?

RS: Exactly, *Unsung Heroines* they're not people who have child after child after child with 42 different men and have no care for them and all the rest. They are rather strong, courageous, brave women who put their lives together remarkably well considering the circumstances and they're the ones who are really fabulous parents, not the men who walk away etc, etc. It's been a variation on the same theme really, almost entirely. WRI clearly fell into the same theme of helping people who were discriminated against by the larger society who were victimized, who were stereotyped, who were blamed for their poverty which most of us I think, I can say, think of as structural or bigotry rather than their fault and trying to illustrate that, dramatize that in a way that gets through to people. In a way that people can really understand and empathize with, that's my thing. WRI fell, was really part of all that.

CT: And how would you think, with the writing in your books and this continuing theme of yours, how it's helped increase this understanding of the significance of the need to shed a light on the status of women and children in particular and the role of work, the role of social welfare policy and how it can have a chance of improving family and women's lives?

RS: I mean what I did was use the interviews, to be really honest, the interviews are the hook to get people interested and to read it and to empathize. But I always have, a friend of mine says I always have a "what is to be done" chapter at the end, which is a quote from Lennon. Wouldn't the ultra right love that at the moment? If they call Obama a socialist, imagine what they'll call me, right? But I always have a chapter at the end saying what we should be

doing so I have a social policy component to the book. And I also try, Vic and I have not only gone to China but we've gone to many other countries looking at both healthcare and human service and particularly women and children services for women and children. We've been to Scandinavia.

We've been to Sweden. We've been to Denmark. We've been to England a lot. Soviet Union when it existed, Russia now. And we actually did a book on healthcare and international perspective so we've done an international social policy component of our work all along. China was the most important. China was the country we went back and back and back to and we wrote the most about and spoke the most about. But we've done many other countries. What I have done in my books is not only try to talk about who really the poor are in this country, not who people say they are. Not the stereotypes but the reality and bring that home via the interviews but then also talk about what other countries have done in terms of social policy and family policy and how other countries avoid our levels of poverty by having parental leave and by having children's allowances and by having preschool care etc, affordable preschool care, etc, etc.

All of my work has had this component of family policy and then not only family policy in other countries but what should we take because you never can take what other countries have done and just adapt it for this country because this country is different but what should we be taking from those countries and from our own experience in order to make it and what level of playing field. That's what I've tried to do in writing and actually I do the exact same thing in teaching. In child welfare I always have a component of international comparisons at the end. What should the United States be doing in family policy, at the very end. It fits in.

*CT:* What are some of the constraints in terms of what you have been able to do as an academic, as a researcher?

*RS:* You don't really reach a huge, wide population. My books have been way more successful than I ever would have thought. And when I say "successful" were not talking John Grisham here much less Harry Potter, right? There is a built in limit. Actually, there are built in constraints and conflicts because in order to publish, not that I've paid a lot of attention to this, but in order to publish stuff that is going to get you tenure and promotion and be respectable academically you have to be serious enough and dry enough and detailed enough and all the rest to be accepted by academia and

then you want to do—what I really do is crossover books but they only crossover so much.

People aren't going to, my books are not going to be; I always love the books at Barnes and Noble which came out in different colors. You know the blue and white covers, and red and white covers, a stack of books here and a stack of books there. Those were my books, right? My books, there were two, maybe, on the shelf. I'm not complaining and way more people ever read, I mean the fact that I can say "My books" is just astonishing to me because it never occurred to me I would write a word at all much less have anybody read it. But on the other hand they're not going to change many people's minds because many people, you know, a fair number have read it but you can only do—doing things the way most of us do it and that includes Mimi and Jan and all of us, you only reach who you reach. We're not going to change the world. We're going to make a little tiny dent in some people's minds and you add it all up and eventually maybe something will change.

*CT:* Can you describe to me your thoughts on the impacts of activism as an effective means of breaking down economic and social justice barriers for low income women and children?

*RS:* It depends on what you mean by activism. I mean if you mean sort of esoteric organizations by academics, I don't know. If you mean Occupy Wall Street, now you're into something. While we can be supportive of that and many people I know particularly medical people by the way, have been very supportive. I mean, they've gone down there when they were in Zucotti Park and really been a presence, a lot of people we know. I think that's very important. All of us in our way try. Jan is very active in the food and hunger communities. Mimi in her way; I, in some ways less so, I think I've been more writing and speaking. Vic is more of an activist in organizations than I am, for I don't know why.

*CT:* Paralleling the grassroots community involvement in organization going on with WRI for instance, the impact and the role that that has maybe perhaps hand in hand with the education---

*RS:* Well, I think what they do is important. I think they're working with legislatures is very important. I think their presence is important. I think they're speaking at conferences is very important and I think their working one-on-one with students is crucial. And I think they're motivating students and their cohorts and in their courses and in their internships. It's just very important that they're there. Can it really make a difference in the long run? Who knows?

All of the forces in this country raid against making any significant change are fearsome. You have to do every bit and every bit will help. But it's a long, huge process. I think that many of us have been, I don't know the right word, but brought down to earth by what the president has been able or not able to do.

By the constraints on him, many people have been disheartened and critical and all the rest but I think it's the measure of the constraints out there that make it very difficult for him in general to even talk about the poor much less do anything. I think it's very tough. I think every bit helps and one has to do what one can do. But I think it's very tough. And, AND, I think it's a long, long, one more long, long haul. In my child welfare class I tell the students for absolutely no good reason about the struggle against child labor. I never quiz on it. It's not an integral part of the course but I do it every semester that I teach the course because everybody is against child labor. Everybody, I mean who doesn't believe that a ten or 12, or 13 or 14—well 14 is a little too high—should not be in the factories and the mines instead of in school. Who doesn't believe that? It's something that, it's like God and country, everybody believes. It took 100 years from the first efforts to limit child labor until the fair labor standards act was passed in 1938, I think it was. A century for that to get passed.

*CT:* I noticed in your language you use the word "limit" instead of "eradicate."

*RS:* Well, absolutely because we still have it but I think that that really tells us something. I think that everybody has to be in this for the long haul. I think everybody has to know that if we're ever going to treat people who are living below the poverty line, near the poverty line, just above the poverty line; the poverty line being a ridiculous number anyway that it is a long, long haul and that we have to use every method we have whether it be writing, speaking, organizing, whatever and know that it will take us and the people after us, the people after us, the people before us to do it.

*CT:* In your view having observed WRI over the years, how has it changed since it's inception, I guess. Have you seen it grow stronger? Have you seen it progress?

*RS:* Well, I think it's hard to know whether it's grown stronger or not stronger but I think that they've reached out to legislatures more. Their alliances with legislatures I think have been very important. Their, [AMOSE's] work particularly, their work in Albany. Their reaching out to foundations I think has certainly grown stronger

and very important. I think their teaching, from what I've seen of it, which is limited but the teaching of one session just about every course and I see that operated. I think they're terrific. They're just wonderful. I think they really make an experience that is indelibly imprinted in most of the students. I can't say "all" I'm sure not all. Everything doesn't affect everybody the same.

But I think it's a really marvelous experience for the students and one in which they really learn by doing, which I believe in so strongly. I think that it has expanded and grown and strengthened. It does a really, really beautiful job. I only wish there were more ways of learning, like WRI and Hunter because that's the way to learn and the leaders are charismatic. What more could one want in role models and people really come to care about, what to be like, the whole package is terrific.

*CT:* I think we're done. Do you have any final words you'd like to add?

*RS:* Not really, only if you think of anything. I mean it's really very exciting to be a part of it all. It adds a real dimension, I think, to all of our lives, which would be otherwise taking up by teaching, grading, writing, you know the whole academic scramble which it's like a treadmill. You keep on going but WRI is sort of a whole different experience and I think very exciting for all of us who have been part, who have been lucky enough to be part of it all these years. It's really been a privilege and it's a privilege to know not only them but I know some of the students because they've been in my classes. Yeah, terrific, terrific; I think that really Hunter does not realize what a terrific thing it has here. If it did it would publicize it a little more. They're very lucky. Hunter is very lucky.

*CT:* Thank you so much.

*RS:* My pleasure, my pleasure.

*[End of Audio – 0:55:30]*