

Recording Log

Narrator: Dr. Sandra Sutphen

Interviewer: Cassandra Edwards

Date: October 14, 2003; 3:00 P.M.

Length: 2 hours 6 minutes

Abstract: An oral history of Dr. Sandra Sutphen, professor and Director of California State University, Fullerton's Faculty Development Center. The purpose of this interview is to gather information regarding her antiwar activities during the Vietnam era. This interview part of an oral history project for Dr. Natalie Fousekis' History 493 Oral History course. Specifically, this interview deals with Dr. Sutphen's formative years in New Jersey and her activities as an undergraduate at Douglas College, and then as a graduate student at Rutgers University; her political involvement during her college years; when and why she switched loyalties from the Republican to the Democratic party; her activities working on various civil rights issues; how she became involved with Students for a Democratic Society while at Ohio's Bowling Green University; the avenues her activism took once she moved to California; her involvement with the campus protests in the spring of 1970; and her reflections on the lessons from the Vietnam era.

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No. of Tracks: 3

| Time Stamp | Topic |
|-------------------|---|
| [Track 1] | |
| 0:02:13 | [Opening Announcement] |
| 0:08:43 | Early years in Hackensack, New Jersey; what her parents did for a living. Her father was a political journalist and her mother worked for a Justice of the Peace. |
| 0:11:25 | High school years |

- 0:15:30 Political atmosphere in her home while she was growing up. Her father was a liberal Republican and her mother was the more conservative of the two. Because of her father's profession, politicians were part of the family's social circle. Her father loved to entertain and their house was frequently filled with politicians and reporters.
- 0:17:39 Receives scholarship and attends Douglas College where she majored in chemistry, then biochemistry, then journalism, and eventually political science with a goal of becoming a political journalist "just like [her] father."
- 0:21:10 Became fourth page editor of college newspaper during her senior year. only Republican on the staff so she wrote the Republican column; discusses the 1960 presidential debate between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon; believed that Kennedy solidly won the debate, the only positive thing she could write was that the debates "reinforced the fact that there was real competition between the two parties"; sent the column to her father who responded, "this is the best you could say?"; realized she would have difficulty towing the party line.
- 0:26:28 (CE: How exactly did you get from the right to the left of the political spectrum). While in graduate school, worked for the Republican State Central Committee of New Jersey until the Republicans nominated Barry Goldwater as the presidential candidate; realized then that she could not in good conscience remain Republican. "I thought Barry Goldwater was the most awful person in the world."
- 0:29:50 Describes things that changed her mind about being a Republican - first, the response of a Republican colleague who, on upon finding out that Kennedy had been shot in Dallas said, "I sure hope it wasn't a Republican."; states that, "it was at that point that I began to pull myself really pulling away from this group of people who I thought were insensitive. I was quite naïve"; from that point on she thought there was something else she might want to do.
- 0:31:51 The nomination of Barry Goldwater also caused her to question why the party would nominate someone so extreme; resigned from Republican State Central Committee and returned full time to graduate school at Rutgers.
- 0:34:20 (CE: "Describe your political and social activism in college") Attempts at getting involved in Civil Rights Movement in 1962; volunteered but they told her she could make coffee and copies; this turned her off from getting too involved in the movement; states that her activities at this time morphed gradually into the antiwar movement.

- 0:35:02 Volunteered in 1964 or 1965 for the Community Action Project received funding from the Great Society to open a Head Start Program; about her participation in setting up the program – just “doing whatever it took” to get the program going.
- 0:37:10 (CE: “In an earlier interview you stated that you had written letters to Kennedy and Johnson to end involvement in Vietnam. Can you tell me more about when and why you started writing letters?”) She has always written letters; about the letter she wrote to Johnson; the reply came from the Department of Justice, which indicated that all protest letters were being filtered through the FBI.
- 0:38:00 Antiwar activities while at Rutgers; participated in a series of sit-ins, teach-ins, and public demonstrations; recalls that there was a sense of daring because some of the speakers were deemed very controversial at the time; involvement of all political science graduate students in the protests.
- 0:39:45 (CE: “Your first full-time faculty position was at Bowling Green. You were instrumental in starting a Faculty-Student Peace Movement. Can you tell me how this came about?”) About her association with the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in Ann Arbor, Michigan which is approximately 40 miles from Bowling Green; describes Steve Weissman of SDS coming to Bowling Green for recruitment; recalls she was attracted to him and “hung around with him for a while.”
- 0:40:23 Her naïvete with regard to SDS and its origins, and what political activism and demonstrations were all about; initial shock at learning about the Marxist roots of SDS.
- 0:41:18 (CE: “What would you say you learned most from your time in Ann Arbor?”) “The real acknowledgement that organization is a really difficult thing to do, because even though Steve was a student he spent 80% of his time working for SDS...I was stunned at how much time it took...and the level of dedication was not something I was going to get involved with...I had to work.”
- 0:42:49 Decides to educate herself on Marxism and the origins of SDS. “I thought it was just an antiwar movement. I didn’t realize it meant a full panoply of political and social change...and eventually, of course, I was persuaded by it. The more I read the more I was persuaded by it. But I certainly walked into it without really understanding what it encompassed.”

- 0:44:10 Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King and accusations of being a Communist; her belief that had Communism not been such a perjorative term it “would have been a compliment rather than an accusation.”
- 0:45:00 [End of Track 1]
- 0:00:00 [Track 2 Begins]
- 0:03:49 While at Bowling Green State University she identifies more with the students than with the faculty.
- 0:05:38 Arrives at CSUF in 1967 and was amazed that Orange County was so socially liberal yet politically conservative. “It really was ‘sex, drugs, and rock and roll.’”
- 0:08:02 Becomes disaffected with established political process in 1967-1968 “primarily because of the war,...I really didn’t understand why Congress was not listening to the masses of people demonstrating so I just became disaffected from the established political process...and when Bobby Kennedy was shot in 1968 I stopped voting for four years.”
- 0:11:34 Remained involved in politics but not in the mainstream; empathizes with her students today and their political apathy. By 1968 the Civil Rights Movement and the antiwar movement were so intertwined she could not distinguish between the two; continued writing letters protesting U.S. involvement in the war.
- 0:15:00 (CE: “There was a group of students on campus called Student Mobilization Committee. Can you tell me a little bit about them, and were you involved with their activities?”) Her understanding that it was a small group (30 to 40 students max) but that they were fairly well organized and quite vocal. Most were political science students. She was not involved with the group but knew several of the students.
- 0:19:29 Used the classroom as a forum for her antiwar sentiment. In 1969-1970 she helped develop and team-taught a course addressing environmental awareness and political action, but “the war crept into everything and we talked about it all the time.”
- 0:21:56 Participated in counseling services for students trying to avoid the draft; describes the posters on the walls of the room outlining ways a student could avoid the draft.

- 0:26:41 (CE: “Tell me about the relationship between administration and the antiwar faculty/students during this time.”) She did not know many administrators at that time so wasn’t aware of their feelings. Within the Political Science Department, which had the most female faculty members of any campus in the nation, most were against the war and actively spoke out.
- 0:29:30 About the mood on the CSUF campus being much more liberal than that of the community at large; students and faculty wishing to protest went to Los Angeles to do so.
- 0:33:38 Raised the issue of the war in Vietnam in class frequently, and students wanted to discuss it; used the war as a research tool for students to find out more about Vietnam, the United Nations, U.S. history and why we were involved in the war; addresses claims that professors sometimes inflated grades so students could avoid the draft; states she didn’t personally inflate grades but notes that she gave higher grades because, “students were much more involved and were producing good work...I could tell a real difference in terms of levels of involvement and the quality of work because it really mattered.”
- 0:35:24 (CE: “When did you become personally involved in the antiwar movement on the CSUF campus?”) Describes the day Ronald Reagan gave his speech in the gym and the police came onto campus; guesses that she’d been involved all along via the faculty union whose members were all against the war; surmises that she just happened to “be in the right place at the wrong time.”
- 0:36:26 When Ronald Reagan came to speak on campus; she went primarily to boo; recalls that the crowd was very disrespectful and wouldn’t permit him to speak; remembers the two students yelling, “Fuck you, Ronald Reagan!”; recalls the police arrived and arrested the two students; remembers “standing outside the gym and wondering ‘What am I supposed to do now? Am I supposed to go home? Shouldn’t something be happening?’ I didn’t see anything happening so I went home.”
- 0:38:46 Governor closed the CSU campuses; during this time an Open Campus was established whereby students could gather and discuss the issues and conflict affecting the campus, community, and nation; was among one of the faculty who volunteered to give lectures and ‘teach ins’ to educate the students and faculty about the current events.

- 0:40:03 Lectured about the presidency and the role of the President with respect to the prevailing political situation; tried to “give a balanced view of why Nixon made the decisions that he did but what the students thought I was doing was apologizing for Nixon’s behavior, why he simply couldn’t get us out of the war, that he had constituencies to answer to, and nobody wanted to hear that. I can’t remember ever being booed before. They didn’t not like me, they just didn’t want to hear it.”
- 0:41:09 (CE: “Are there any differences or similarities between your activism as a student and as a faculty member?”) Still identified more with students than with colleagues; her best friends were students; felt an obligation to be honest with them about the way she felt; discusses the role of the political scientist as part of the community and having an obligation to voice opinions, rather than be an objective observer of events.
- 0:42:56 Knew other professors who were steadfastly against the war, were vocal about it, but absolutely refused to sign any antiwar petition that circulated.
- 0:43:29 (CE: “How was the political climate on campus different from that of the surrounding community?”) Relates that there were a few places students could go that were “bastions of support for the antiwar movement” but that the students felt there were very few places they could go and be publicly antiwar; states opinion that most went to Los Angeles to protest.
- 0:44:38 (CE: “In your opinion, what was the impact of the antiwar movement?”) Believes the student movement, combined with the release of the Pentagon Papers showed that the public had been misled.
- 0:45:02 (CE: “On a personal level, how did you carry your activism forward into the 1970s and 1980s?”) Became deeply involved in the women’s movement and exploring feminism as a lifestyle and an intellectual and academic pursuit; redirected her activism into women’s issues.
- 045:39 [End of Track 2]
- 0:00:01 [Track 3 Begins]
- 0:04:27 (CE: “Since we are in a period of international unrest, do you see any similarities or differences between the Vietnam era and now?”) “It’s exactly the same. Exactly the same thing is happening. We have a president who is lying to the public about what’s going on. LBJ created the Gulf of Tonkin, and Bush created Weapons of Mass Destruction. The parallels are so exact.”

- 0:08:34 (CE: "Where is your activism now?") Signs petitions and now that she can afford to, she contributes monetarily to causes such as moveon.org and True Majority; no longer marches.
- 0:16:49 Feelings about why students aren't involved now as much as they were in the Vietnam era; belief that if students faced the draft, if the war impacted them directly, they would be much more outspoken against it; believes that there isn't anyone out there explaining to the people what is going on and since it is a complex issue it "turns people off."
- 0:18:04 Asserts that the government learned from Vietnam that the American public will not tolerate massive troop commitment overseas; doesn't believe the U.S. will stay in Afghanistan very long even though we are propping up its government.
- 0:21:16 (CE: "Where do you think the events of 9/11 fit into this?") Believes that Bush's lack of international experience and ignorance of other people's beliefs led to 9/11 being a missed opportunity for reaching out to others; thinks that for the U.S. to become a true world leader the government must work with the United Nations and Saudi Arabia to stop the flow of money to terrorist organizations.
- 0:22:58 Discusses Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney's article in 1998 advocating imposing democracy upon tyrannical states; states that the Army had targeted Iraq as someone to attack/defeat prior to 9/11.
- 0:24:04 States her belief that Ho Chi Minh could have unified the Vietnamese, but Sadaam Hussein "wasn't that kind of person."
- 0:27:40 (CE: "As an antiwar activist, what do you think Americans could do to stop the present course of action?") Believes the war would have to be brought home to the American people; "The only way Vietnam ended was because people began to see body bags coming home. It's happening now but it doesn't affect a lot of people."; believes that if people really understood the financial cost of the war they would actively protest against the war.
- 0:29:45 (CE: "What would you say to someone who wanted to become active right now?") Would put them in touch with a colleague who is very involved in protests on a street corner near South Coast Plaza, "It's only a little bit, but the more who do it, the more who will listen."
- 0:34:01 Advises against protesting now because of the supermarket strikes.
- 0:35:58 [End of Track 3]