AKH: I started as an assistant instructor at Douglass, and that was just a euphemism I think, for being a research assistant or a teaching assistant. I was a graduate student. I had just given birth to a baby, my first. I gave birth in June 1964. And after it became clear that I was pregnant, and I suppose this tells you something about what Rutgers was like in those early years, getting pregnant was not something that was approved of for graduate students, and I did it and had a baby. And my fellowship – I had a fellowship – was taken away because I had done the unforgivable thing and proved that I wasn't a serious student. And ultimately, with some negotiation, the department agreed that if I would teach at Douglass, they would give me the same amount of money for teaching, and take my exams before the end of the following year they, and do reasonably well, I suppose, they would give me back my fellowship for the year after. So the year I was an assistant instructor, my first year of college teaching, I was commuting from the Bronx, I had a tiny baby who I was nursing [laughter]. I was studying for my exams, which I hadn't yet taken. I was finishing up my last course to finish up, and I was going crazy. 1964, 1965 was the year that the upheavals at Rutgers actually began. It was the years when, they were very exciting years. Actually, quite wonderful, when the campus was involved in anti-war activities of all kinds. When Eugene Genovese gave his famous speech at a teach-in, in which he declared that he did not oppose a Vietcong victory but would welcome it, and all of the subsequent fireworks. There was a lot of political activity that the graduate students were engaged in. In fact, I often say that you couldn't be a graduate student in those years without being political. And if you were an American History graduate student, they were wonderful years. There were anti-poverty programs that you could participate in. There were community action programs. There were anti-war protests. It was quite a wonderful political moment for pretty much everything except feminist issues [laughter].

JC: Why not feminist issues?

AKH: Why not feminist issues? Well, I think part of it was that there were very few female graduate students, even in history then. In my cohort when I entered, there were three, and by the time I finished, I think I was the only one left. One finished her degree ultimately, one never finished her degree. The year before me, there had been a couple, and one had run off to Italy, and so women were seen as a disgrace to the department. So it wasn't a good time for women, and there wasn't a kind of supportive atmosphere. By the time I finished my degree in '68, of course the women's movement then was beginning, but that was a generation of women that came after me. I finished my degree at Rutgers. But in the last between 65 and 68, I was mostly off campus on fellowship doing research for the dissertation and then finishing the dissertation. I wasn't as active in New Brunswick as a lot of other people were because I was in New York and I had a baby [laughter]. And, but I was active in New York in both anti-war and civil rights. It came - The development of feminist consciousness came about after I'd left, so I can't talk very much about that. What I can say is that, as graduate students, we had pretty much no female faculty. There were a couple of very distinguished faculty members who were full-time faculty members, full-time professors at Douglass, and who occasionally taught a course in the History department at Rutgers, at the New Brunswick campus. In those days, the campuses were the faculties were separate. And those women were quite important.

AKH: So for example, one of them Margaret Judson, who was a British Tudor-Stuart historian invited me to come with her towards the end of my graduate career to the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, which was then still a fairly small meeting place. Met once a year, was mostly social for
women who were historians. And that was you know, my first introduction, if you like, to what, to what a feminist community of historians might be like. And it was that group actually which pulled me into women's history. Most of us, there was no such field as women's history. It used to be called pots-and-pans history. But that group probably led by Margaret Judson and a few other people who were attached to, associated with graduate institutions of all kinds, but Rutgers was one of them. So among the members of that group, when I got there, were people like Lois Banner who had taught at Rutgers and was at Princeton. Sandy Cooper, who was then teaching at Douglass. Mary Hartman, who was then teaching at Douglass. So I can't say there was no feminist consciousness. I'd say that such feminist consciousness as there was, was probably located at Douglass College.

The original Berkshire Conference, founded in 1937 by female historians, was founded by historians who felt that they'd been excluded by the men at the annual meetings of the American Historical Association and the Organization of American Historians. And they were pretty much excluded because the men in the evenings gathered in smokers at which women weren't welcome. And so the women in those days, decided that they would form their own little group, and they met once a year, a group probably of no more than twenty or thirty people, once a year somewhere in the Berkshire Hills. And so they called themselves the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians.

Around 1971 or so, when my generation of historians was introduced to that group, as I say, I was brought there by Margaret Judson, and others were brought there by their own professors or women historians they'd encountered. And around 1971, I think I got my dates pretty much right, the younger members of the group thought it would be a great idea to have a conference that was not just of women historians, but about women's history. And that conversation, which was rather fraught at the time and pretty much opposed by many of the older members of the group, was actually carried through by Mary Hartman and Lois Banner, who agreed that they would sponsor the first conference, which was held in 1973. We now call that the Big Berks.

The Big Berkshire Conference of Women Historians was immediately a success. It was about women's history and invited papers from all kinds of, men and women, but mostly women who were then engaged in the new field of women's history. And the very first conference, which was at Douglass, attracted perhaps a thousand people, just many more than any of us had ever imagined. And from there, and since then, it's been meeting every three years. An annual group of around 2,000, sometimes 2,200, people gather together to talk about many elements of women's history and to create community among women historians and historians of women's history, who are both men and women.

Well, it was an enormous influence and it came in two separate ways. The first was intellectual. And here I'd say it's a little odd to say this, but it was the absence of, certainly the absence of women's history and the absence of labor history, which didn't exist anywhere in those days. But the presence of the spirit of inquiry you might call it a new left spirit a spirit of perhaps cynicism against the old historical truisms of consensus and so on, that was largely inspired by the war in Vietnam and our desire to question decisions that were made by figures in the past and to sort out how history had managed to get itself written in ways that so ignored the lives and the interests of ordinary people. And for me, those kinds of questions opened the door to labor history. And labor history was then, I'd say in its infancy around the country. Of course, it already existed in much of Europe and certainly in Britain and great historians like Edward Thompson were already writing labor histories, which we were reading. And the late '60s, my dissertation the work I did after I finished, were inspired by the kinds of questions that were being asked by those people.

AKH: So that was on the one hand, and then of course on the other hand, there was Douglass. And despite the fact that there were no women at Columbia, none in the faculty and few as graduate students, Douglass was a central space for historians who were women, as well as historians who were men. It certainly wasn't only women, but it was a place where women could thrive and did thrive. And...
though I was only briefly attached to it, I met there people who would remain friends for the rest of my life and who brought with them a spirit that, when I finished my degree and I went out into the world, I took with me that spirit. And of course, the timing was perfect. You know, I finished my dissertation in '68 and the women's movement was already underfoot, as it were. And I sometimes say, I raised my eyes from the dissertation and there was, there were consciousness-raising groups and there were community groups of women and I joined in. And partly I joined in because my experiences with the women at Douglass in the early Berkshire conferences taught me that there were real issues there that we could do something about.

Douglass didn't exactly lose its faculty. Its faculty came to identify with the History department, the central History department at Rutgers. So it was no longer its own separate faculty with its own spirit and its own hiring choices and so on. And in that sense, it was a loss. It was, in my view, a rather large loss, although I think it was compensated for by the rise of women's history and the women's movement, in exactly the period when the faculty was moving, you might say. You lose that key group departmentally, but inter-departmentally, or interdisciplinarily, it sustains itself. So the women's studies program maintained that sense of community. And that started, now I can't remember the exact dates, but it's mid-70s.

And the women's studies program might have been, and probably was, I wasn't there then, but a very good substitute. It became a place, I know at Hofstra, where I was then teaching, it became the place where women could gather and did meet and did talk about their concerns as well as about their intellectual endeavors and student programs. So you might talk about a shifting instead of a loss. Although Radcliffe was, didn't have the benefit of a sturdy women's study program. And I do believe that Rutgers would not have had the benefit of such a program either, had there not been a really strong core of female faculty at Douglass, at Livingston College who were desirous, willing, able, eager to keep it going.

And they did keep it going and that was really you know, it was just you know, it was enormously useful within the institution but then it, we should remember that many of the women in the institution, especially many of the women historians, were also active outside the institution and in the profession as a whole. So it wasn't as though the women historians were isolated. They remained active both within and outside the institution in different ways.

It had changed enormously. it was an integrated department, but the Rutgers history department unlike most other history departments, which to be sure, had a female doing women's history, or perhaps two, the Rutgers history department had already become a department which had noticed that the field of women's history existed and that to effectively teach that field to graduate students, would make it one of the leading departments in the country. And Rutgers, to its great credit, took advantage of that. hiring not only women who were clued in to women's history, and here I think of black women, white women but also men who were clued in to the subject of gender. So, who were supportive of the issue.

AKH: So, the department itself, unlike when I was there, had a kind of depth in women and gender that was unimaginable almost anywhere in the whole country but was certainly unique.

I was brought in, in '88, with a joint appointment in history and in women's studies. Part of the reason it was a joint appointment is because a program cannot hire its own faculty member. There's no tenure in the program. So, although a program can bring in people on an adjunct basis or a temporary basis, it doesn't have the authority to hire people with tenure. And so it does not create, or cannot create, a fully-formed, permanent faculty. A department can.

The program in Rutgers, like the program elsewhere, before I was there consisted of people who came from other departments and who volunteered a course or two, and who volunteered, and the word volunteered is crucial here, to serve on committees. Curriculum committees, hiring committees, and so on, in the program. But everybody doing that was doing that at the cost of, or in addition to
time spent in their own departments. Now if you're a young faculty member eager to participate in women's studies and giving half your time to women's studies and coming up for tenure in another department, you're in trouble because the department that gives you tenure is immediately going to say, well wait a minute, this person didn't do her bit for us. So the, having of a program, it had strengths and weaknesses, but it was fundamentally weakest at its capacity to create a faculty. I was against the idea of making it a department because the strength of a program is that it can draw from so many elements of the university. And with the kind of faculty that Rutgers had, which in departments like Geography and English and Anthropology and Political Science and History and on and on, had women who I wanted to be able to teach for us. So to be able to draw on them I needed to have a program. To turn it into a department with perhaps four or five, or at best six lines would have limited the program in my view. And so at the point which I came in and given the kind of institution that Rutgers was, I thought it was so much better to just draw on the strength of the entire university. And I was lucky because the women in the university were already a kind of community. They were already committed to women's studies. They you know, with some resistance and some hesitation and some years off here and there were willing to give their time and their energy, and there were enough senior faculty, so they weren't afraid of not getting tenure in the programs. And with a little, I have to say, it was hard work and arm-twisting, I was able to persuade department chairs and the like to let go of some of their senior faculty some of the time to teach in program. The Institute of Women's Leadership had not begun. And that happened, let me add another link that is crucial. I developed at Rutgers a kind of halfway policy, which is that I asked the department chairs of large departments to release faculty members for 25 or even 50% of their teaching load for a limited number of years to commit them to teaching in the program. And that sort of 25% or 50% faculty enabled us to build a core of faculty who, though they were not in a department, had officially been released and could feel free to teach.

The Institute for Women's Leadership followed on that initiative. In other words, we now had a women's studies program that was grounded. And when Mary Hartman, who was then dean at Rutgers, sorry, when Mary Hartman, who was then dean at Douglass College proposed that the leaders of the major women's programs get together, which was all it was, at the beginning. She pulled together the women's studies program, which was then already stronger than it had been in the past and was already a kind of sturdy unit. The Center for, now what is Charlotte Bunch's center called?

JC: Center for Global Women's Leadership.
AKH: Center for Global Women's Leadership. It had a longer name in the old days. But Charlotte Bunch, the Center for Global Women's Leadership, the Institute for Research on Women which was then headed by Carol Smith the Institute for Women and Work, which came out of the labor relations school of political science, the Eagleton, head of the Eagleton Institute Ruth Mandel, who was the active women in politics chair, the Center for Women in Politics. The five of us met quite regularly for many months, perhaps as much as a year. And out of those meetings, and at first the meetings were informal and they were designed to help each other you know, somebody had received a budget cut, somebody else needed to figure out how to pay for speakers or to run a conference, and we would all pitch in and brainstorm and help each other. An unattractive dean [laughter], you know, unattractive in the sense of, of unfavorable to women's programs had been brought in somewhere or other. How were we to make a statement saying that we existed? Well, we did it by, sometimes by signing letters, sometimes by sending Mary Hartman, who was our leader, to speak for us, sometimes simply by demonstrating that we weren't just single units, we were a bunch of programs tied together. And out of that came a discussion of how we could create
ourselves as an institution. And there were long and very funny discussions. Could we call ourselves a school for women's activities, or could we call ourselves an institute, and what did it mean to be an institute as opposed to a school, and it was Mary Hartman who led us in the direction of Institute for Women's Leadership.

Yes, there was, there was indeed, and I have to say, once again [laughter], that I was one of the people who was uncomfortable with that word, partly because Mary Hartman believed, and she turned out to have been right, that corporate leadership was one of the things we should address. And I, being a labor historian [laughter], thought, well I'm not interested in corporate leadership, I'm interested in training young women to lead themselves, their unions, their activities. You know, it was a different kind of leadership. But we compromised and we called it the Institute for Women's Leadership. And we got together and got Mary Hartman an appointment as Head of the Institute for Women's Leadership.

Now, I have to say, money is active in this. Mary had a wonderfully loyal component of women alumnae of Douglass College. She was very good at persuading them and convincing them about raising money. She raised money to build first one building and then a second building, which could function as a center for women's leadership. Women's studies, which had operated out of the chapel, the basement of the chapel for two decades, was now moved to a wonderful new building where Charlotte Bunch's program was moved and the Institute for Research on Women. And the existence of those buildings and the money that Mary Hartman demonstrated could be raised on behalf of women's programs were major breakthroughs in the university as whole, which now could not help but acknowledge the influence and the power of women's programs. I think from then on, it's not that it was easy, but from then on, the program began to sort of develop a national, an international reputation. Charlotte Bunch's program drew, you know, international attention and visitors and women and you know, it was a, a major breakthrough.

Charlotte Bunch was brought in the first place, as a visitor, and out of her international activities on behalf of women and then she stayed for another two years and established a Center for Women's Global Leadership which it was clear was flourishing and drawing attention. But because she didn't have a degree she did not have tenure. And then the question was, how could we get her tenure. It turned out that you couldn't get her tenure anywhere without the right credentials. but when the, the department originated, so this now a year after I left, I was still at Rutgers when the conversation was in effect, though I was no longer heading the program, when I was now in the History department full time. And we had a meeting about how to get Charlotte tenure. Well, I had wonderful academic credentials at that point, and among the people who were leading the program I was, and because I wasn't in the program anymore, I had a kind of credibility that not very many other people have.

AKH: So I managed to use my skills in writing letters of recommendation and together. Ruth Mandel wrote such a letter, but she was already involved. Cora Kaplan who was still there, wrote such a letter. But I have to say that it was easy for me to write a letter in which I could talk about her equivalent credentials. She had done a book. She had run a couple of conferences. She had published technical guidelines to how to promote women's not just women's leadership. She had created a slogan by then, the “women's rights are human rights” slogan came from her center. And so we simply presented her as having the equivalent of the PhD, and luckily for us, the administration bought it. And she now has tenure. And because women's studies was a department, she could get tenure in the department. That was one of the advantages of turning it into a department. Without that, I don't think she would have succeeded.

You know, in 1918, when Douglass was founded, women's education, college education was not any longer unique. What was unique was that a state university should have a women's division. There were of course a lot of Midwestern universities that had already admitted women as co-educational
students. And many of those universities, instead of giving scholarship aid to needy women, simply offered them jobs. Well, what kind of job would you want for a woman as opposed to a man? You might offer a man a job as a research assistant in a lab. But in 1918, in 1880, you know, in all those years, what kind of a job would you offer a woman? Well, you’d offer the job of, you know, doing the laundry or cleaning house or, or shining shoes for the guys who were then still relatively privileged.

Now both Rutgers and Douglass were then private universities. They were not sponsored by the state. So the people who went to Rutgers, the guys who went to Rutgers, like the guys who went to Princeton but not in the same category, came from fairly well-off, not upper class but fairly well-off middle class families. The women who went to Douglass may have come from the same kinds of families, but they would also tend to come from relatively poorer families. So without looking, I would guess that there was a kind of bifurcated student population, the kinds of women who went to Wellesley and Vassar and so on, but many first generation female college students who were eager to become teachers to some of them, even physicians in those days, to make their marks. And the only way they could do it was by going to college.

How were they going to support themselves if their families couldn’t support them? Well, you know, participating in their own upkeep. So the boarding houses were also places where they lived and worked to keep up themselves, and they used them to service other, you know, the guys who were in the neighborhood on different campuses, but in the neighborhood at the same time. I don't think, I mean it was, it was certainly imaginable in the '20s for a woman to go to college. That was no longer an issue, in fact, more women than men graduated from high school in the '20s and even in the '30s. But how was a woman to help herself through college when a family didn’t have quite enough money or couldn't really afford to do it? By doing what was known as women’s work.

Social work was women’s work by that period, but it was relatively new and you needed a college degree to do it. teaching, nursing those were the jobs that women tended to go for. Jobs in finance, business, banking, they were virtually nonexistent for women, except at the lower level, the secretarial level, and you didn't go to college.

AKH: In the 19th century, Oberlin famously put its women to work, Oberlin, the first co-educational private school, but first co-educational school famously put women to work taking care of men cooking and cleaning and doing everything for the men. So worse than Douglass. And I think for many of the same reasons. You know, you could admit women into college like men, they had to support themselves much of the time. men could support themselves by doing men’s work. By, you know, helping their professors, by chopping wood even, by you know, in the old Abraham Lincoln myth working their way through in men's jobs. But the women's jobs were, were household jobs. We have many illustrations of women who, for example, worked for five years or seven years in the Lowell cotton factories, the textile mills, saved up their money and then went off to Oberlin or elsewhere to get themselves an education.

Men, men in the 19th and early part of the 20th century were valued not for their intellect, but for their brawn, for the most part. And for the kinds of jobs that men did, apprenticeships, mentoring, were the ways up in the world, even if that way up - With the banking industry. It was often family that moved them in that direction. Not so for women. Women for example, we know that African-American families in the late 19th century and early 20th century, post-Civil War, would often scrape to invest money in a girl's education because it was easier for black girls or young women to get jobs than it was for black men to get jobs, or at least to get jobs that might support a family. So that while black men were still consigned to the lowest level of jobs, there were openings for black women in nursing, especially, and in teaching for these jobs were not only available, but people were hungry to find people. So it paid for a family to invest in a girl’s schooling.

Immigrant families would invest, often, not in a college education for girls but in secretarial school for girls. So a year or two after high school, to turn a young woman who might just be a run-of-the-mill
clerk in an office into a high-powered secretary could mean all the difference for younger siblings, who might then be supported through college. So I think part of the answer to your question is the labor market. When in the '30s, late '30s, '40s, '50s, the labor market demands that males as well as females have a college education, there's a reversal in those statistics. The GI bill starts to pay for guys to go to school, and reluctantly families will send their women. In the '50s, I can remember this, people used to talk about sending women to college to get an MRS degree. You know, find a good husband. Right. Exactly. And I, I must say that I myself am guilty of. You know, I'm that generation, you know. We went to college, we found a good husband, and then we divorced him [laughter]. That was another story.

I'd say that one could define Rutgers place in women's studies by looking broadly at the field. it begins with Rutgers having the perspicacity, if you like, to attract and acknowledge the power of intellectual women, and then to acknowledge, in their separate departments, the fields, the disciplinary fields that women were engaged in. I think that Rutgers did not resist or only grudgingly created, the way Columbia grudgingly created, a women's studies program. It created it with energy it recruited, not always successfully, but recruited good people who could play a role in that program. when they brought me into the program, they brought me in with a free hand and because Rutgers was committed to tenured female faculty women were not afraid to do what they could do. Now that's the internal sense. But then I think the big lesson of Rutgers, it has to do with cohorts I think. The fact that there was a large enough cohort so that there was support for pressuring the university, but also outside the university. So that when Lois Banner wanted, and Mary Hartman wanted to bring the first Berkshire Conference to Douglass College, there wasn't any resistance to that. There was a desire to promote it. That was an expensive venture, and yet the university was willing to take a chance. And that had to do with the fact that Rutgers already had this cohort of women. I think intellectually, because there was a large cohort of women, you know, strength goes to strength, so other women moved there. Ruth Mandel's Center for Women in Politics made a major splash in exactly the period when there was no Hillary Clinton out there. There was a Geraldine Ferraro at one point.

AKH: And women were beginning to wonder, why weren't women in politics? How could they enter politics? There was Ruth Mandel, able to do it. The Institute for Research on Women was created and became a place where there were occasional institutes for research on women. There was a very good one at Minnesota. There were institutes elsewhere, but those institutes at Rutgers existed in combination with a dynamic women's studies program, the Center for Global Leadership. You know, in other words, it's about cohorts and breadth, and I think that's the lesson. I think we've learned that lesson from African-American history and historians. We've learned it from the Civil Rights Movement. No tokenism, no single person, but a commitment to the larger set of issues that are raised and I think that's what makes it possible, possible for women because there's more of them. There are more females of more different kinds. More difficult for other minority groups, but I think that's nevertheless the lesson, is, is that the larger issues can't just be represented by a single program or a single person.

Critical mass, thank you. That's, that's the word I'm looking for. But a mass that then, you know, is, has tentacles and hooks into various places in the university, and then enables and forces, pushes, encourages the university to speak, not just to one unit or one person, but to a wide arrange of such people. That, I have to say, was Mary Hartman's power and influence, if I had to give credit to anybody, I'd say. She was dean at Douglas College and she understood that Douglas College had a mission in the university. Not just a mission in itself, but a mission in the university. And she brilliantly led all of us, I think just brilliantly, led all of us into understanding that if we could do this at Rutgers, if
we could create a place where women's issues at various levels were paid attention to, that that
would become a model, a place. And people still flood to Rutgers. I think and think about Rutgers as
exactly that kind of place.
In the case of Rutgers, the Institute for Women’s Leadership, with its now I think with seven, nine …
The Institute for Women’s Leadership, with its nine different bodies who come from all over the
place, as long as that institute exists and flourishes and exercises its voice, I don't think there's a
danger that it will dissipate. So I don't think it’s a question of where the faculty are located, I think it’s
that the faculty can come together in a community and share, speak, as, you know, with a powerful
voice. And that's, I think, that's, I think the lesson and that's how I think it'll continue at, at Rutgers. I
think if the Institute for Women’s Leadership were to collapse, disintegrate, if they couldn't find a
strong director, then we'd be in trouble. Very sad that Alison Bernstein is gone now. I think she was a

JC: Did you know her?
AKH: I did. I knew her well and I knew her since she was a young person [laughter] working, before she
got to the Ford Foundation. She was a historian of note and she was just exactly the kind of
dynamic, inspirational leader that Rutgers needed. I think it'll be very hard to find somebody.
But I think that commitment is important, and I think that commitment will rest on a dean at Douglass
College who's committed to helping to support it. Since I think Douglass is still the pivot behind the
Institute.