

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH SARAH R. ROBBINS

CONDUCTED BY DEDE YOW AND THOMAS A. SCOTT

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TS: Sarah, why don't we just begin, for the record, with where you were born, when you were born, where you grew up and a few things like that?

SR: Oh, fun! Let's see, High Point, North Carolina, and I lived in North Carolina until 1967, when I came to Agnes Scott. Dede and I were both at Agnes Scott.

TS: Oh. So you were born about 1950?

SR: 1949.

DY: We're the same age.

TS: So you came to Agnes Scott from North Carolina. Did you major in English?

SR: I did. And I minored in French. I didn't graduate from Agnes Scott, though. I dropped out and went and lived in Italy for three and a half years. My husband was drafted; he was in graduate school during the one year of the Vietnam War when they drafted grad students. Fortunately, though, he ended up in intelligence service for the [U.S.] Air Force and then, even more fortunately, got an assignment to go to Italy. So, that was too good to pass up.

TS: A real tough assignment, wasn't it?

SR: I dropped out and went over there. When we came home, we went back to North Carolina, and I ended up having one year at UNC as an undergrad. So I transferred there; I have a degree from there as a B.A. in English and then did a master's there. We came back to Georgia and lived in Savannah for three years before going to Michigan for fifteen years.

TS: Were you teaching?

SR: I was teaching in Savannah at the Benedictine School.

TS: Your bachelor's degree was straight English or education?

SR: Straight English.

DY: But your master's was French. Didn't you do a thesis in French, Sarah?

SR: No, my master's was in English with a concentration in Italian and French, and I did a comparative lit thesis. It was fun. I was a medievalist then, believe it or not, before I saw the light.

DY: I was one, too.

TS: Well, Benedictine is the ideal place to go then for a medievalist.

SR: Yes, it was. A very good place to go.

TS: Now what was it's full name?

SR: Benedictine Academy [now known as Benedictine Military School]. It was an all boys' school run by Benedictine monks, so most of the teachers were Benedictine monks. There were three women teaching or working in the library when I was there.

DY: What is that order like, Sarah? I know Franciscan.

SR: They're very un-Jesuit; they're very literally jovial and very...

DY: Like the picture you have of them?

SR: Like the picture that you have of them. They had a priory attached to the school, and they had wild parties on Friday nights.

TS: Oh, my goodness.

SR: Yes, they really did. It was fun; it was a very fun place to work. When we got in the car to move to Michigan, I cried for the first two days. I just could hardly bear it, but Michigan was also great. It was a neat place to live.

TS: What did you go to Michigan for?

SR: John was in TV news then. He had been a TV journalist in Savannah, and then we went up to Michigan for a bigger station, better job, more money.

TS: What town?

SR: The station was in Flint, which is about an hour north of Detroit.

DY: I like your story about getting out of the car on the Fourth of July and freezing.

SR: Yes, it was freezing cold. We were driving up there in July for the move, and we stopped in Ohio. We got out of the car, and it was very, very cold and gray and windy. I literally looked at John and said, "What have you done?" [laughter]

TS: Flint's real big in the auto industry and those big strikes back in the 1930s.

SR: Yes, it was an interesting time to be there. Many of the people who had been involved in the strike in the 1930s were in the senior era of union leadership. John actually got very interested in labor history and economic history and had a

revelation because his dad had broken a union in the textile industry in North Carolina—his dad and his granddad. John went from being anti-union to ending up being the union steward at the TV station during the time we were there. It was a very change-oriented time for us.

DY: The sins of the fathers were not visited on the sons.

SR: They were not visited on us.

TS: So what did you do when you went up there?

SR: I taught school. I taught K-12 and middle school—junior high. I taught at a K-8 for a while; I taught community college. I taught at a K-12 for a while. Then I went to the University of Michigan [U-M], Ann Arbor, and that's where I got my doctorate.

DY: You had an administrative position, did you not?

SR: I did. I was the director of curriculum and the director of the upper school at the independent school where I was working the five years before I got my doctorate.

TS: The independent school was created by whom?

SR: That school had a very interesting history. It was called The Valley School, and it was a private school created by progressive, liberal parents in the Flint area. They wanted to start a private school for their children where they could do experimental things. It had begun in the 1970s as an open-classroom school and was a very experimental, really interesting environment. It was highly internationalized. Many of the physicians in the Flint area for some reason were from non-U.S. backgrounds, and we had a number of children of physicians at the school—many Asian children, Russian children. It was a really, really interesting place to work. It had a very diverse student body ethnically.

TS: Which is interesting for a private school.

SR: Very interesting for a private school. The school was much more diverse than the public schools in the area. The schools in Flint tended to be predominantly African-American, and the schools in the suburbs, like Grand Blanc, tended to be almost like 95+ percent white. We were highly international, so it was interesting. It was a great place to work. It was very open to experimentation and trying different things with curriculum in terms of content and teaching strategies.

TS: So you learned a lot about teaching there.

SR: I learned a lot about teaching there; I really did. It was a great place to learn about teaching. The staff was very interesting, smart and energetic, and the students were absolutely brilliant. I'm still in touch with many, many of my students from that period. A number of them live in Atlanta, actually, now, so that we see fairly often.

TS: Shows how smart they were, doesn't it?

SR: Yes. They figured out the right place to go.

TS: Did you ever take an education course?

SR: Oh, that's a great question. I took some education courses for certification at Armstrong Atlantic [State] University in the summers when I lived in Savannah. Because Benedictine was a private school, they were able to hire me on an emergency certificate with my master's in English. I went two summers and took enough education courses just to get certified. So by the time we moved from Georgia—I taught in Georgia for three years in Savannah—I had a Georgia teaching certificate.

DY: But you haven't ever taught in public schools.

SR: Yes, I have. When we lived in Michigan, I taught in public schools when we first moved up there.

TS: So you got a Michigan certificate?

SR: Yes. I got a Michigan certificate, and I taught at Flushing Junior High School. For awhile I taught at Mott Community College, when the girls were little.

TS: You didn't have to take any extra courses to get certified in Michigan?

SR: No, because Georgia and Michigan have reciprocity; they honor each other's certificates. It was fortunate that I had gotten the quickie certificate. Actually, that is a relevant question in terms of Kennesaw's history. I've been a big proponent of quick certification programs since I'm a product of one myself. I'm a believer that sometimes provisional certification of someone with a major in the field is a good way to go and a good way to get into the profession.

TS: Yes. Well, how did you get interested in American studies?

SR: Oh, good question. The program that I went into at Michigan was an interdisciplinary program. We had lived in Flint for about eleven years when I went into the program, and I had had what in some ways was a change in interest, [although] in some ways it wasn't. The medieval program at UNC when I was there was very culturally based. It placed a lot of emphasis on learning about history and culture as well as textual studies. Having lived in Europe for three years and traveling extensively, I was really interested in things like architecture, archaeology and stuff like that. So when we moved to Flint, I frequently joked to people that I had lived in two foreign countries: Italy and Michigan. And I found Michigan more foreign to my southern sensibilities than I had found Italy to be. So I really did have an attitude that it was a very different culture, and it was a culture I needed to learn about. What I began to learn about was the importance of labor history to the area—the absolutely central role that the auto industry had played for good and evil in the place, how important social class difference was in

a way that I had never understood. Through that process of literally living in a new space, I got very interested in American culture.

TS: Plus you had all those different ethnic groups.

SR: All those different ethnic groups. So when I went to the University of Michigan, I elected to get a lot of American studies courses to try to understand better where I was—literally, you know, the space where I was. It was a great experience; it was a great learning experience.

DY: That happens in our Georgia Writers, Georgia History course. We'll have students like the woman from Boston who is in our class. It really is an alien culture when people from outside the region come to the South.

SR: It really is. Where you live is really important to who you are.

DY: And your understanding of where you are, I guess.

SR: And your understanding. Yes.

DY: So your Ph.D. is in American studies?

SR: It's English and English education with a concentration in American studies; so it's an interdisciplinary degree. And the English and English Ed program at Michigan is unusual in that it's housed in the English Department. It's a collaborative program, but it's housed in the English department. In the entire program, I took two education courses, and they were cross-listed, both of them. Well, let's see, no. I had one course, actually, in literacy development that was delivered in the College of Education. That was not cross-listed, and that was the only education course I had.

DY: Why don't we have a course in literacy development? Or do we? We don't have anything that sounds like that.

SR: We don't have anything quite like this one. Karen [K.] Wixson, who became the dean of the College of Education at Michigan, taught that [course] the very first—and it was really interesting—the first semester I was there. I had two other classes. One was with Jay [L.] Robinson. He was in the English department, and he taught a course on the politics of literacy in American culture that I took the same term that I took that education course on literacy. The third course that I took was a literature course with Julie Ellison, who is now the director of the Imagining America program at the University of Michigan. Her course was Nineteenth Century Anglo-American Literature.

TS: One of the things we're really interested in is mentors; you know, people that maybe directed us in a certain direction and had influences on us.

SR: That's a great question. I think there are two things I want to say about that. One is, when I was at UNC, there was a sort of dearth—not exactly a dearth, but an absence of mentors. And there were no tenured women in English when I was at

UNC in the 1970s. There were two women there the year that I was in graduate school; one was visiting, and one was new. I was very kindly mentored by men on the faculty but also mentored in ways that would not be considered appropriate today. Much of the advice that I got had to do with the fact that as a woman, my choices would be limited, and those kinds of things were explicitly said. On the other hand, there was a big turning point for me. When we went to Chapel Hill, my goal was to finish my undergraduate degree because I had dropped out. I went to an advisement session that first semester there with a man from the English department whom I met only once in my life but who totally changed my life.

DY: Oh, how wonderful. Tell us about it.

SR: He sat and looked at my transcript without saying a word. In fact, I was getting nervous because he just kept staring at it. He was staring at it and staring at it and staring at it, and I was getting more and more nervous by the minute. I thought, “Oh, my gosh, he’s made some terrible discovery. He’s going to tell me that they’re going to kick me out or something.” [laughter] Finally, he looked up and he said, “Well, okay, you can finish next semester minus one course, which you can do in the summer. You can go ahead and start the master’s program at the same time, and in four years you’ll have your doctorate.”

DY: Wow.

SR: He said, “I’ll help you get your application materials together.” It was quite remarkable. So when I say that most of the folks had a sort of limited sense, there was this incredible moment when somebody just literally looking at a piece of paper could see a trajectory that I had not been able to imagine for myself.

TS: Did you know who that was?

SR: His name was Charles Moran.

TS: And you didn’t have any contact with him after that?

SR: Never. He was in the English department, but he was the Mike [Michael T.] Tierce of the English department. One reason I have such total respect for Mike is I have a personal sense of how careful student advisement—that maybe only takes fifteen minutes, can I literally spent fifteen minutes with the man, and it completely changed my life.

TS: For those who don’t know, Mike Tierce is the academic advisor for all the English majors on campus.

SR: Well, just being aware that even though it seems like a tedious little task to sit down with a student, it’s so crucial. Sometimes we need to remember that students can’t see the possibilities unless we highlight them. He was fabulous.

DY: I’d like to see more faculty involvement in advising, and I mean really involved.

- SR: I think it's happening at the graduate level here.
- DY: I think it is, too.
- SR: In some really great ways, and I hope we'll continue to work on that. But anyway, there weren't any women in the department [at UNC]. In contrast, when I got to Michigan—and I frequently tell people I had two generations of training because I was at UNC in the 1970s, and I was at Michigan in the 1990s.
- DY: You did have that.
- SR: Early 1990s. So I literally had two generations of training, and the women who trained me at Michigan had had the same experience that I had at UNC. When they arrived at Michigan, there were no tenured women. They were the generation who had fought the battle to get the first tenured spots for women, and they were very strong, powerful, smart mentors. Names I would say would be Julie Ellison, June Howard and Anne Gere—especially those three.
- TS: What was it other than that they're women and had come through the ropes the hard way?
- SR: All three of them were on my dissertation committee along with Karen and Marlon [B.] Ross, who is an African-American scholar focusing in both eighteenth and nineteenth century literature. All of the people on my committee were very much committed to interdisciplinary research; they had a confidence about the possibility of doing interdisciplinary research and not being afraid of trying to do it. That was very, very helpful. And they helped in material ways. I remember June Howard, for instance, checking out a laptop computer so that the first time I went to an archive in Chicago to work on Jane Addams, I had a laptop with me.
- DY: Those things make a difference.
- SR: A huge difference for somebody that couldn't afford a laptop. There were folks in the program that gave me a modem; I had one of the first external Hayes modems that U-M purchased, as a grad student. So I could go home to Flint and do stuff online, because it was so far—seventy-five miles one way to drive to Michigan.
- TS: I was wondering how far it was.
- SR: Yes, seventy-five miles each way. So I had a lot of white-knuckle days in the snow, going and coming.
- TS: Oh, my. I guess there's a lot of technology that is gratefully gone for good.
- DY: I think Annette Bairan mentioned modems in her doctoral research; she was working with Georgia State.
- TS: And Patti [Patricia H.] Reggio also.

DY: Yes.

SR: And I think that's part of where I got interested in technology. I set up the first online discussion board that anybody had set up in an English Ed course that I was teaching at Michigan, partly because I was seventy-five miles away. It was a way that I could get to the students since I didn't want to drive there every single day if I didn't have to.

TS: Well, you finished in 1993. There wasn't much of an Internet out there, was there?

SR: No, there wasn't. It was brand new. In fact, we had a Kaypro computer, one of the first. It was an enormous computer; it took forever to boot up. DOS was it; there was no Windows then. It was pretty primitive.

TS: It was a start.

SR: Yes. But I was fast-tracked. We made it a contract as a family that I would do it in three years. So I started and finished in three years. That was fast.

DY: And your girls were twelve, ten—around there?

SR: Yes, they were in elementary school.

TS: You had your hands full.

SR: Yes. It was fun, though; it was fun.

DY: You get more done when you have all that to juggle, don't you?

SR: Yes, you do. I think so.

DY: You lose a lot of sleep, but you still get a lot done.

TS: Well, as long as you don't sleep.

SR: Yes. And we had—I guess the other thing, in terms of sort of thinking about gender in history and culture—we had tremendous childcare from the school where I had been teaching, former students who were completely invested in my getting my doctorate. They would pick the girls up, take them home, get their dinner and take them in in the morning.

TS: So you're still teaching while you're going through graduate school?

SR: I was teaching part time. So I had a lot of help from students.

TS: Why the English Ed as opposed to straight English?

SR: Oh, that's a good question. Partly because the English education program was, at the time, very sort of "out there" and interdisciplinary. It had a very progressive model for getting people involved in doing research their very first semester,

which really appealed to me. I had been teaching for a long time and was sort of eager to get immersed in the professional work right away. The American culture program [is what] I actually would have done except that I couldn't do it as quickly. The English Ed program—and really, English and English Education was the name of the program—had a framework for the exams which made it possible to finish quicker. I had a Regent's fellowship, so I was actually being paid to take classes and everything. So that helped make it possible, too.

DY: When you went on the market, you went on the market as English Ed?

SR: I did. I went on the market as English Ed with a focus on American literature. Part of what I did was, I went around and talked to people. I had developed a big interest in the teaching of American literature and had actually done one of my preliminary exams on the history of American literature in the University curriculum and the school curriculum. So I had a real interest in going somewhere where I could be in the English department rather than the College of Education and where I could do work in American literature as well as teacher preparation and support.

TS: What was your dissertation?

SR: It was on American women writers in the nineteenth century and the connection between authorship and teaching for nineteenth century women writers.

DY: Maybe this is a good time to ask why you came to KSU?

SR: Oh, there are a couple of good reasons. One quick reason is that it was sort of neat to think about coming back to Georgia, having been in Georgia twice, once as a student at Agnes Scott, and once as a teacher very early in my career. I had knowledge of the area, literally the metro-Atlanta area. I had a knowledge of the history of education of Georgia, and a sense of the possibilities. I knew that I wanted to work with practicing teachers even more than pre-service teachers because I had found the possibilities for my own growth to be so important to my teaching. It seemed to me that while teacher preparation at the first stage is really important, because people tend to have very long careers—whether they're doing university or K-12 teaching—professional development of educators while they're working is really the most important thing. So when I went around for campus visits, one of the things that I asked every place I went was if I could meet with some teachers that the department was working with. Of all the places that I went—and I had six campus visits, and I had an offer from every place I went—but Kennesaw was the only place that could produce multiple teachers that they were already doing things with. It meant that I wouldn't be starting totally from scratch in trying to establish relationships.

DY: Whom did you connect with when you first came here?

SR: Stella Ross.

DY: Of course.

SR: And Bob [Robert G.] Barrier had a number of school teachers working in the Writing Center. I should say another thing that was very attractive about Kennesaw was the comfort level that school teachers felt in interacting with Bob. Their vision of the Writing Center as a place where they were welcome, where it was okay to come, ask questions and sort of be connected—that was very neat to see. The other sort of especially attractive thing about Kennesaw was, because we were living in Michigan during the—and, Tom, you should correct me because I might be wrong about this—[but] I think the timeframe that we were there, which was 1979 to 1993, was the most pronounced downturn in the auto industry in history.

TS: Right.

SR: So the entire time that we were there, what we were watching was the contraction of institutional education delivery because of constant loss of tax revenue as the auto industry factories closed. We were there when [the film] *Roger and Me* was made. In fact, the editor of the film was a former Valley School student. We had watched Michael Moore go from editing a marginal alternative newspaper, *The Flint Voice*, to the beginnings of his career as a film labor activist, and most important was...

TS: His infamous career.

SR: Infamous career. And that's another story; there's a lot that's inaccurate in that film that I really feel angry about sometimes. But anyway, it was a period when it became very painfully obvious that public education in particular, and perhaps most particularly public education at the university level, would always be the potential victim of any loss of state revenue; it would be the first thing that would be cut.

DY: Economic downturns.

TS: Yes, well, it's such a big part of the budget, it's vulnerable.

SR: It's such a big part of the budget. And having lived through that and watched the effect that it had on people and on learning, one thing that I wanted to do was not go somewhere where things were going down. I wanted to go somewhere where things were going up. When I did my campus visit here, Ed [Edwin A.] Rugg, bless his heart, had prepared—and that was back when Ed met with candidates.

TS: Ed being the Vice President of Academic Affairs, or whatever his title was at the time.

SR: Yes, he was. And he had a fabulous set of flow charts that he showed me, one of which showed the enrollment growth at Kennesaw, [another] which showed the increase of the state budget for education. . . .

TS: Which was happening when Zell Miller was governor.

- SR: Zell Miller was governor. And one of which was the university system budget. Now, he very conveniently left out the parts about Kennesaw being under-funded at that point, but he certainly presented a convincing case of growth. The power of growth was very compelling.
- TS: You're right about Michigan. That was when the oil prices got so high, and everybody started buying Toyotas and Hondas. The auto industry was so arrogant; they thought they were going to have a monopoly forever.
- SR: Yes, forever. Things changed. We were there during a sea-change period so those were key reasons. And my husband was planning on starting a writing business. He was ready to stop doing TV news on the street corner.
- TS: So he could do that anywhere then.
- SR: He could, but he also was smart enough to know that a major metro area would be an easier place to get going than a little bitty college town. So that affected our decision, too. And, of course, the climate is more pleasant in the South.
- DY: Oh, the weather climate.
- SR: The weather climate.
- TS: Yes.
- DY: Well, there were obvious compelling reasons why you came to Kennesaw, and I think those reasons still exist for faculty.
- SR: Yes. Oh, I left out one thing I should say, too. The day that I came to do my presentation to the faculty, I looked out in the audience and saw Jo Allen Bradham—she had been my teacher at Agnes Scott. When I was doing interviews at MLA [Modern Language Association], and then doing campus visits, all my advisors at Michigan tried to dissuade me from even looking at Kennesaw because it wasn't a Class I Research Institution. They really didn't think it was the place that I should go. But I thought, "Well, it's a place worth looking at." Because at the MLA interview, the things I heard [about Kennesaw] were interesting, so I felt it was at least a place worth looking at. When I came for the campus visit, I was curious, but I was not at that point convinced by any means that it would be a good place to come. But the combination of the story I told earlier about all the school teachers being here and about Ed's argument. . . . The other thing was, Jo Allen had a good story to tell about why she had changed from Agnes Scott, which was clearly a place that I loved very much, to come here that made it seem like, "Well, this must be an okay place if somebody that intellectual, that interesting, that committed to liberal arts education, was here." It was a real affirmation of the place.
- TS: Did you actually do some job interviews at the Research I places?

- SR: Yes. All the other places that I was looking at except for one were research institutions.
- DY: Well, we're awfully glad you came.
- SR: Well, thanks! I'm glad I came, too. It was a fun thing to do.
- DY: Once you got here, why have you stayed? This is not a question just for you, Sarah; this is for everyone. Why have you stayed here? You came in '94?
- SR: I came in 1993. I made a commitment to my children that when we moved, wherever we moved to, we would stay until at least they finished high school. They did not want to leave Michigan. They had grown up there, and they had no desire to move. So we talked about the fact that wherever we went, we would stay long enough for them to finish high school. So I knew when I came—and I think that's something for people beginning at any place to consider—I knew when I came that I would be here for about, at a minimum, eight years. I think that knowing that you have a certain commitment to the institution, you don't see it as a place that you're stopping on your way to somewhere else. You see it as a place where you want to make a contribution, where you want to become a part of the community and get connected to the mission, the institution and so forth. That sort of feeds into doing things that make you excited about staying. Once you've made a commitment to be at a place for awhile, you want to make it a great place to be.
- DY: But, Sarah, knowing you as I have so well and for so long, I would think even if you were going to be some place for a year, you would get in there, you would work, you would
- TS: Make that commitment for that one year.
- DY: Yes, exactly.
- TS: But you know, it's been amazing how many people we've interviewed that, say, came in in the 1970s and said, "Well, I thought I'd stay a year or two until something better turned up." Then they liked the faculty here and stayed.
- SR: Yes. And that's certainly another answer: I think the students here are incredibly interesting. They come from diverse life experiences; they work really hard, and they care about their learning in a way that's very exciting. I think part of the reason that I shared the little story about Ed Rugg is, I do believe that his little talk with me that day was dead-on. The fact is that, since I've been here, Kennesaw has remained in a growth mode, not only in terms of numbers, but in terms of programs. It's a place that allows for, and even encourages, new ideas. It encourages curriculum development; it encourages experimentation. And I think that's really something very attractive about the place. I also think the centrality of teaching and learning is really attractive; it makes it a fun place to do all the components of your work. I've heard some people at other institutions talk about "my work" versus "my teaching," and that's not something that would be a part of

the culture here. No matter how much research you do, your teaching is still supposed to be really important. It is, and it's treated that way by everybody. I think that's really a wonderful thing. I think Kennesaw has a very strong sense of its professional faculty member as having a public responsibility. I like working at a public institution; I like being accountable to the citizens for what I do. To me, that's not scary. It's important and exciting because I think it cuts both ways. I really see myself as preparing citizens for active participation in community life. So why would I want to go work at a private school that isn't directly and constantly engaged in the public agenda? I like being at a public institution.

TS: Well, we've really been asking everybody about the intellectual climate when they came and how it's changed and so on. That's really what you're talking about here, I think, is the intellectual climate at Kennesaw.

SR: Absolutely. It's a very rich intellectual climate that's very integrated across the various roles of faculty members' lives, and I think that's really powerful. I think the students play a central role in shaping the academic climate, and I think that's really neat. I like the diversity of political opinions here.

TS: You didn't have that at Michigan?

SR: Michigan—I mean, it's a stereotype in a sense that's unfair because there are many rigorous conservative thinkers at Michigan, certainly, but I think they're more in the minority. I think that the University of Michigan sort of sees itself, in some ways, as a progressive space and takes that role very seriously. I think it's actually quite appropriate for the state in which it's the flagship, but I think Georgia has a different history, a different kind of agenda for public education. Not just here, but also at UGA. I think, in some ways, it's more complex here.

TS: I was going to say that just defining these terms can get very complex. Because, I mean, some people might think it's really conservative to be engaged with the public.

SR: Yes, I know. It's interesting. And I think that appealed—the idea of public engagement to me is a space and an enterprise that cuts across the red state/blue state kind of political agenda. I had a very interesting meeting with Sarah [W.] Freedman, who's at UC Berkeley, during a conference one time when we were first working on the Keeping and Creating American Communities project. It's an NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] funded project that we've been doing that's had a life even beyond its funded life of three years. It was a quarter-million-dollar funding package initially. When we first were putting it together and had begun to get some information out from the project, [Freedman] had asked to meet with me. We were sort of talking about it. I was describing it, and there was this really interesting pause in the conversation where she said, "That's the most interesting thing because you actually can work with both conservatives and liberals," as if that were a bizarre and unusual thing to do, you know. And I guess in a sense

- DY: Well, I guess if you're at Berkeley, it is! [laughter]
- SR: And I said, "Well, yes, but that's part of who we are." And I wouldn't frame something so that I could work with both ends of the spectrum; it would just be a part of who we are and what we do here. I think that's really important and helpful for the community and a good way to learn and grow intellectually—to have the welcoming of diverse opinions.
- DY: Do you think the intellectual climate has changed since you've been here? Or let me ask you how you see it's changed, Sarah, because I think it has.
- SR: I think it has. I think there's a more explicit focus on more traditional scholarship than there used to be, and I think that's very healthy. I don't see that as diminishing the commitment to teaching. I think good scholarship informs teaching. I think we grow as teachers when we are growing as scholars; I think we want our students to enjoy discovery learning and project-based learning and doing research. Before—I think it was before you hit the go button, Tom—you were talking about the tenth graders at [North Cobb High School] learning how to do research where they live. I think we live in an age now where it's impossible to learn a content field. You can't do it; there's too much knowledge already there. So what you have to learn is some interesting thing in the content field and, more importantly, how to make knowledge, how to synthesize knowledge, how to put knowledge in action. So I think that Kennesaw is uniquely positioned because of its tradition to do things with scholarship and through its affirmation of scholarship that's happening now. That really will help make it a national leader in the process I see going on nationally. It's happening in the other direction at Class I Research Institutions, I think. I see more emphasis on public engagement and more emphasis on teaching. I think we're meeting in the middle, and I think it's very healthy in both directions.
- TS: I think back to the progressive era when some of the institutions like Wisconsin and Chicago and so on—that engagement with the public was a big part of who they were in trying to reform society by getting involved in both political science and economics and what-have-you.
- SR: Yes. You know, I think, Tom, well, certainly an over-simplified analogy that I would make, in women's studies now there's been a kind of rediscovery of the intellectual agenda of Jane Addams and a shift away from seeing her just as a practitioner. On the flip side, in education history we're kind of rediscovering [John] Dewey as an activist and not just as a thinker. And Dewey lived at Hull-House for awhile.
- TS: I didn't know that.
- SR: He lived at Hull House, and Addams and Dewey were very close. I really see Kennesaw as the Addams of the university system, kind of under-valued in terms of the theory that's embedded in the work and under-valued in terms of the intellectual rigor. Meanwhile, I think sometimes people who work in the Class I's

are very active in community outreach and all kinds of service work, but they get cubby-holed into the Dewey role. I really see, as I say, a move where we're going to recognize the middle a little more and be moving a little more to the middle from both ends.

TS: Well, I think any time you're doing something that's really original you can't expect everybody to understand what you're doing.

SR: Oh, that's the truth; that's the truth.

TS: How did you get involved with NEH and all the grant writing, the summer workshops and all of that?

SR: Oh, good. Well, you know, I mentioned I had asked when I was visiting to meet with teachers who were already connected to the university. Stella Ross was working in the Writing Center; she was the language arts coordinator for the Cobb schools at the time. She and Meribeth Cooper literally made an appointment with me in October; I had not even been here two months yet. [They] came out and sat in my little office across from Carol [D.] Edwards, walked in that day and said, "You know, we've heard about this thing called the National Writing Project, and we want one." I just was stunned. I looked at them and said, "I just got here." [laughter] "I haven't even unpacked all my boxes, I just really can't . . . maybe in a couple of years." I said, "Really, people, that's the kind of thing you should do after you get tenure."

DY: Well, and also given the context of what was going on when you came in.

SR: Yes, absolutely. We were in the throes of dealing with the NCATE [National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education] fiasco. It was rough. Anyway, Kennesaw had lost its NCATE certification which, of course, I did not know because it happened—I mean, the visit had happened in the spring after I agreed to come. The report came in the fall right after I got here, and the whole first year was mayhem trying to arrange for a return visit the next fall. I found myself in charge of the English Ed [English Education] program, which I did not think I was going to be doing when I came. I thought I would be playing a support role.

TS: Did somebody leave?

SR: The reorganization shifted the teacher preparation responsibility into the discipline departments. I had sort of figured that a senior faculty member would take the lead, and initially there were some conversations about Mary Zoghby doing it. Then they asked me to do it instead. Mary was certainly a wonderful colleague, but it really sort of thrust me into a leadership role.

TS: Was Mary still in the English department at that time?

SR: She sure was.

TS: She became department chair of something...

- DY: It was developmental studies at that time, and Mary had left developmental studies by the time you got here.
- SR: Okay. Yes, she was in the English department when I came here.
- TS: Okay, so she came back to the English department having been a chair in developmental studies.
- SR: And, in a sense, she had a role similar to mine in that she was really focused, I think, more on world lit and working with teacher prep and teacher ed. I was focused more on American lit, so I think in that way, we're a really nice complement to each other.
- DY: Mary was interested in scholarship.
- SR: Yes, she was. She had been real active in developing the world lit curriculum for the new World Lit course that had been developed. I mean, she was a great mentoring colleague, but just in terms of the administrative responsibilities for the English Ed program—as the secondary program was moved into the department—she understandably, knowing she was sort of near the end of her career, didn't want to do it. I was in the throes of all of that. So my initial reaction when Meribeth Cooper and Stella Ross said, "Let's start a writing project site," was like, "Maybe in five years."
- TS: What is Cooper's first name?
- SR: Meribeth. She was the language arts coordinator for middle grades in Cobb, and Stella was for high school. However, they sort of blackmailed me. They said, "Well, you've been saying you need good places to put your student teachers, and you've been saying that you want us to partner with you in teacher prep. You've been asking us to do all these things to help you. Can you really do that and then not turn around and help us with . . . ?" It was kind of hard to say, "No." So I said, "Okay, why don't we turn in a proposal? The word on the grapevine is you get turned down the first couple of times anyway, so we'll turn one in, and then we'll . . ."
- DY: Thought you had some time to buy, didn't you?
- SR: Yes. And they funded it. So there we were. The very first summer I was here, we did our first Summer Institute in 1994. And, like that spring, Dede and I decided to do the first NEH proposal for women's lit, *Domesticating the Secondary Canon*. And again, honestly, I didn't think we'd get funded, did you?
- DY: Not at all. Even though it was a wonderful proposal and we knew it was. But, oh, that was great fun. The summer of 1995.
- SR: Yes. It was a great proposal. The summer of 1995.
- DY: That was the first NEH Summer Institute.

- SR: It was real exciting.
- DY: Ten years ago.
- DY: We just celebrated the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project's ten-year anniversary.
- TS: So, the National Writing Project—that's where the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project comes from?
- SR: The Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project is a local site of the National Writing Project network. The National Writing Project network is 180 sites around the country, almost every one of which is located at a university. So, we're one of five in Georgia now.
- TS: What exactly do you do with the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project?
- SR: We do a Summer Institute for teachers. We do a continuity program for teachers who are already affiliated with the site somehow—professional development opportunities like reading groups, conferences, training courses, collaborative grant-funded projects, and curriculum development activities. Then we do in-services for area schools; we do professional development offerings for schools under contracts. We might sign a contract and do a one-week institute specifically tailored for a particular school district's needs.
- TS: Now, you started out with a grant, and that's where that quarter-million dollar grant came from?
- SR: The initial NWP grants were \$15,000 a year; they're now \$40,000 a year. What happens is that you apply for a renewal of your site license every year. Your site license gets evaluated; then they renew your affiliation, or don't [renew], or put you on probation. That's been a sort of steady source of financial support for the work with teachers. The National Endowment for the Humanities funds discrete projects that have a start date and an end date, and we've had three major grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The one that Dede and I did in 1995-96, *Domesticating the Secondary Canon*, focused on women's literature. Then we had one, *Making American Literature*, which was organized around the history of American literature instruction and what the new American literature terms were going to be in the twenty-first century. That was a collaborative project that we did with the University of Michigan and UC Berkeley over three years. Then, more recently, the quarter-million dollar one, *Keeping and Creating American Communities*, which was a national
- TS: *Keeping and Creating*?
- SR: *Keeping and Creating American Communities*. That was the quarter-million dollar one that was funded primarily by NEH with some support from the National Writing Project.

- TS: So your funding has really all come from national grants?
- SR: We've had a number of grants from the Georgia Humanities Council also; one from the DeWitt Wallace Reader's Digest Foundation, one from the Bingham Trust. And then we've had some smaller grants from regional vendors.
- TS: I was going to ask if you went out and raised any money for your projects.
- SR: Yes, actually a couple of times. For the Keeping and Creating American Communities project, when NEH first contacted us, they said they were going to give us \$210,000. We could have an additional \$15,000 if we matched it. So I had to run around and find more money. So, yes, we've done some fundraising that way. We've also brought in income through the staff development program because we charge for doing that work. Most of that money goes back directly to the teachers who deliver the courses, but some of it comes back to Kennesaw.
- TS: I just know from trying to put on one symposium last year, and two this year, how much work it is. I just hate to think how much time you've put into all of this in an administrative type way.
- SR: An enormous amount of administrative time.
- DY: And you haven't had any support in terms of administrative support except for part-time this year.
- SR: This is the first year that we have had any administrative staff support. All the staff support we've paid for ourselves out of staff development income until this year, and it's made a huge difference. Speaking of scholarship, I have to honestly say. . . you know, I had several books come out this year. I think I would probably have had a number of books come out much sooner and been much more productive as a scholar with more administrative support earlier. As we look to the future of Kennesaw, I hope that that will be part of the change in culture here.
- TS: Yes. When you think about it, it's a horrible waste of talent when you've got to be the secretary as well as the project manager.
- SR: It's interesting that you said that, Tom. At one point, for three or four annual reviews in a row, I literally was writing in my annual review a section on my secretarial work that I was titling, you know, "My Secretarial Work." I got too depressed doing it. I was logging my secretarial time, and I was many weeks spending thirty, thirty-five, forty hours a week on secretarial stuff in support of the program. Especially in the early years, when I was both English Ed coordinator and doing these other things, I had an enormous amount of administrative and clerical work. It was hard.
- TS: Of course, it's essential, and you've got to have someone detail-oriented. But like you say, you could have been writing some books, too.

SR: And also running the program rather than running the paper. I think it would have been a better use of my time, and we would have been more productive on things like working with teachers to work with our pre-service students. Things like fundraising; you can't do fundraising when you're having to sit there filling out forms for things. So that, I think, is a really important change. And I think another absolutely crucial moment—and this might actually be an interesting thing, an important thing to have as part of the oral history. I don't know if you've had an opportunity to talk to Nancy [E.] Zumoff?

TS: Not yet; we are going to.

SR: Well, it'll be interesting to see if she remembers this. You know, Nancy was one of the early leaders in bringing grant funding to Kennesaw. Nancy and I had had some conversations for literally about a year, sort of in the middle period of the time that I've been here, about how hard it was to run the programs that we were getting funding to run because we were spending so much time monitoring our budgets. At that point, there was absolutely no support for budget management of grants. I used to spend hours and hours and hours not just filling out forms to pay for things but creating records to track the expenditures. There was no support for doing that, and Nancy was doing the same. Finally...

TS: Are you talking about support from the business office?

SR: From the business services office and from the Grants and Sponsored Programs office.

DY: Nor from the department.

SR: No, right. So finally we had some extended conversations with [B.] Earle Holley, and they hired Shannon [A.] Kinman to work in the office of Grants and Sponsored Programs. Then after that, they hired two staff administrative accountants to work with her, and that was an absolute sea change. I mean, my life changed dramatically at that point because at least I could find out how much money I had without literally having to enter in—I was entering in every single transaction, every purchase of stamps. I was keying in and tracking every transaction myself until then. It was a great shift in time commitment that opened up possibilities for more focus on program, scholarship and teaching.

TS: That is interesting. I've got a little grant from the Georgia Humanities Council. The Office of Sponsored Programs called me up as soon as we got the grant and told me to come over for a meeting, so we met last week over that.

SR: And they send you those monthly budget reports. See, there was no such thing as that when I started; nothing like that at all.

TS: So you're responsible for that, I guess.

SR: Anyway, Nancy and I at one point had a conversation about how each of us had written in our annual review without talking to the other that we thought that was

the most significant contribution we had made during our time at Kennesaw. When I told my chair that—to give her credit—Laura [Dabundo] said, “You cannot mean that.” [laughter] I said, “I absolutely do because until this happened, it wasn’t possible.” There are not many people that would have the patience to sit there and do it, and I think it really made a big difference.

- TS: But I think in terms of the changing intellectual climate, we probably had to go through that stage because our administrators hadn’t done this, and they didn’t know.
- SR: That’s right; growing pains. I do think it’s hard to make those transitions, and I think it’s a continuing challenge for Kennesaw. In the same way that we’re having to constantly build buildings, we have to build infrastructure.
- DY: Good analogy.
- SR: I think the infrastructure of staff and administrative support, like everything else, hasn’t been able to keep up with the other. And I think it’s really, really important to realize that until you have infrastructures of support, the enhanced scholarship, the community activism—all the other things that we really do need to do can’t really happen to the extent that they ought to. We’ve made such great progress in the past few years; it’s really, really exciting.
- DY: Well, they do happen, and the way they happen is because it’s taken out of the faculty hide. That’s been the main thrust since I’ve been at Kennesaw, and I hope that that’s changing.
- SR: It seems like...
- DY: But your experience is just so sadly true.
- SR: Yes, yes.
- DY: I want to go back to something you said at the beginning. Of course, I’ve watched these many years with joy all your good work; but because of your own experience as a teacher in high school and middle school, you have been so committed to intellectual development of teaching.
- SR: Absolutely.
- DY: I know that you’ve got the books coming out that the teachers have done as well as your own scholarship. What—and this is one of our canned questions, too, so riff on it any way that you want to—what do you see as your most significant professional accomplishments? What makes your heart sing about all that you have done?
- SR: Oh, that’s really interesting. I’m not sure I can name one thing.
- DY: You don’t have to. You can open an umbrella and then

SR: Okay. Well, I think figuring out how to synthesize the teaching and the scholarship in ways that would potentially have a public impact on other people's learning has been really important to me. Figuring out ways to make the traditional scholarship, which I love doing—I love working in the archives, I love the most traditional kind of scholarship you can do—but figuring out ways to connect that to daily life and real people and get other people excited about doing work that will make new knowledge. Bringing undergraduates and graduate students into the process of making scholarship, helping them see themselves as scholars, helping them, literally, do the work of scholarship.

DY: And you've done that with the school teachers.

SR: Yes. I would say that helping teachers do that process for themselves, so that they can do it with their students, has been really important to me. It's really interesting. I guess this would be a good illustration: I've had conversations with people who know my work in American literature and know nothing about my work with teachers. I've had conversations with people who know my work with school teachers and don't know that I work in the more traditional, within-the-discipline kind of thing.

DY: That I find surprising.

SR: But more and more, what I'm finding is people who know both aspects of the work that I do and people who see the connections. It was interesting; in MLA this year I gave a talk on Catharine Maria Sedgwick and the recovery of Sedgwick's place in the American literature curriculum.

TS: Who was that again?

SR: She was a nineteenth century writer. Catharine with a "C," and then Maria, like they pronounced it then, Maria, M-a-r-i-a—they pronounced it Moria back then. And Sedgwick is S-e-d-g-w-i-c-k. It was interesting because the panel was [made up of] Paul Lauter, who, you know, is the editor of the *Heath Anthology [of American Literature]*, and Susan [K.] Harris, who is Hallmark Professor at University of Kansas; and Sandra Zagarell.

SR: Oh, it was really fun! She's at Oberlin. Part of what I talked about was getting Sedgwick into the schools, getting women writers into the schools, and how difficult it still is sometimes because the anthologies still under represent women writers and minority writers. They still don't know what to do with them if they have them in there; they don't know how to make literature be about the whole community. If they have a woman writer in there, sometimes it's a little short lyric poem. Anyway, part of what I talked about was the anthology that my daughter is teaching from in her high school, what the new one that they bought this year looks like, how far it's come from the one they bought five years ago, but how far behind it still is in some ways. It was interesting; I had so many people come up to me afterwards and say, "You know, I teach so many pre-service teachers in American lit class, and I really was interested in what you

talked about.” Or, “My daughter’s a teacher.” Or, they were interested in thinking about that whole point of overlap. I’m not sure I would have given that talk five years ago. I probably would have just talked about Catherine Maria Sedgwick; I’m not sure I would have talked about her as she shows up in the schools. I actually gave the keynote for the women’s breakfast at the American Studies Association this fall, and I talked about connections between the research I’m doing on a missionary to Africa at the turn of the century and the public outreach work that I’m doing. I had so many people say afterwards how interesting it was to think about those connections. I’ve had a number of people contact me since then, and that’s a talk that I wouldn’t have given five years ago. So I really see the fields coming together more, too. You know, we were talking about the Dewey-Addams thing earlier, not just in terms of individual people, but also the kind of institutional culture shifting a little bit, and that’s exciting. I think—finally to get back to your question, which I didn’t forget—to be a part of that process, to really see myself making institutional change. I just last week accepted the request of the MLA to be the American Literature Section Executive Director for four years.

DY: Congratulations!

SR: Thank you. I’m very excited about it! In an interesting sideline, actually, when they first asked me, they described the job, and I said, “It sounds great; I’d really love to do it. I think it’s neat to be working with the *American Literature Journal*, the flagship journal, working with the presidents—because I’ll be working with four different presidents, and that will really be fun—working with the council and trying to think about what the institutional role of the American lit section is within a larger umbrella of the MLA. To think about what the role of an organization structured around the study of literature is, because it’s those big questions about the liberal arts and where they fit and all that sort of thing. It’s just really interesting. But there was this little sticking point about the fact that the ballots need to be mailed out, and there’s cost involved. And I said, “You know, we don’t have any money at Kennesaw. I can’t agree to take this on because I can’t force my institution to take on something that’s going to run \$1,200 or \$1,400 a year.” It was really cool. Houston Baker at Duke stepped up and said, “We’ll pay for it. We need to have the experience of having somebody who’s working at a place different than us being a part of the process.”

DY: I’m thinking about what a shame that is that our institution can’t support that.

SR: It’s part of what I see changing. I think we’re going to be at that point, and I see us in a transition. I see us in a point, at a place, where faculty from this institution can move into those kinds of roles. But it gets back to my point about infrastructure. We don’t have all the infrastructure yet. The previous executive director had a grad student assigned to her by her institution to do the clerical stuff. She had a course release, had a budget. I think as our graduate programs grow, as we get more infrastructure, it’ll be easier for people to get involved in these kinds of opportunities. I’m not embarrassed to be in the transition period when we all have to work to make it start to happen.

DY: Well, good Sarah.

SR: You know, I'm not embarrassed to be in that transition and say, "We're not quite there yet. How can we make this possible? How can we make it happen?" And I think it was better to say that than just to say no, because look what happened. I think it's kind of cool for Duke to pay to have Kennesaw involved!

DY: Do you call that *noblesse oblige*?

SR: Well, maybe so, but okay.

DY: I think it's wonderful. There's nothing wrong with *noblesse oblige*.

TS: Well, they've got the money, and we've got the expertise here.

DY: There you go.

SR: That's right. So, I think it's cool. I see it as a transition, and I think it brings us to the table. The more we're at the table, the more we find out how it's done. Then we know what to ask for back here, and we know how to.

DY: Once you're there, they want to come back.

SR: Exactly. So it's exciting. And again, to answer your question, to be involved in institution building—and to be involved in institution building here in a really sustained way, looking to the future—means we need to look for ways to be involved in institution building in other institutional structures.

TS: And, you know, I guess, too, my thinking is that when we hire a new dean, for instance, we don't need somebody who's just been a department chair. We need somebody who's done the kind of things that Sarah's talking about so that they'll understand what's expected, what needs to be done.

SR: Right. That's exactly what we need. And it's interesting that you say that, Tom. I really see us at a pivotal moment right now. I think this is one of those moments that people will look back on. It's one thing to be named the university; it's another thing to really build the kinds of structures and practices that enact the role in a comfortable and sustained way. I think we're right at that pivotal moment. We need to bring somebody in who's done this kind of work at other places and can bring that expertise to us.

TS: When you think about it, there's been an incredibly short time since we've become a university. Nine years, and I mean, there's a tremendous change, I think, compared to '96 and what we're doing and the way people are thinking on campus.

SR: I do, too. It's an exciting time to be here.

TS: Yes. One of the things we talk to a lot of people about is master teaching, and I think that's exactly what you've been describing with all the things that you've

been doing. I like Bill Hill's definition of a master teacher as somebody who teaches the teachers.

SR: Oh, yes. That's great.

TS: And that's really what you've been doing, isn't it?

SR: Absolutely. The Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project, the National Writing Project model is teachers teaching teachers. It's fascinating to me to watch that model, which was originally conceived of as K-12, being sort of adopted at the university level in a more explicit way than it was in the past and [with] commitments being made institutionally. This is another change that I see happening at Class I's—you know, friends that I have—more of a focus on professional development of the faculty member as a teacher; more thinking about what it means to be a master teacher and not just a productive scholar. I think that's really important. I've been really interested—in the past six months, I've started doing some work with the AASCU—American Association of State Colleges and Universities—on faculty development at other institutions, university faculty development. I'm working with Julie Ellison right now—we were talking about mentors back at Michigan—I'm working with Julie Ellison right now on putting together a program for faculty development that will be delivered through AASCU for AASCU member institutions for faculty who want to find ways to blend their scholarship with public engagement work. We're planning workshops, and it's been interesting to me to see the carryover from the techniques of the National Writing Project for working with K-12—how many of those carry over just fine to working with university faculty. So it's neat to see that becoming more and more a place where—and that's another place where I think Kennesaw's been in the lead with realizing that faculty development is an ongoing process that happens at every stage of your career.

TS: Yes. Do you see us evolving into a Research I Institution, or do you think we've got a different road map that is more important?

SR: I think we have to be a Research I Institution; I think the way the state is growing, it would be unconscionable for us not to fulfill the need. If you look at other university systems like North Carolina and California and see the way that you have multiple Class I's all contributing to the economic growth of the state and to the active citizenship—to teacher preparation, to all the things that are best done when you have a strong university system—I think it's something that we have to do. However, that said, I think we can be in the forefront nationally of representing and enacting what a Class I Research Institution does when it has the commitment to active public engagement and to integration of teaching and scholarship. I think we can teach a lot of the old-time Class I's a thing or two in that area. So I see us both as learning from the kind of dean that you described that we need to bring in right now for Humanities and Social Sciences, and also modeling and really making a unique contribution.

- TS: In terms of our writing a history of Kennesaw State, do you think those are the model states we ought to be looking at to understand Kennesaw in context—North Carolina and California?
- SR: Yes. Maybe Wisconsin; also, maybe to a lesser extent, Michigan. I'll give an example that people can probably identify with based on an earlier conversation that we had. I grew up in Greensboro, North Carolina. We talked a little while ago about Patti Reggio leaving [KSU], what a terrible loss it was to have Patti Reggio leave, and how part of Patti Reggio's leaving had to do with her going to a Research I institution where she could continue to grow as a researcher and also to teach other researchers—to be a teacher of teachers, which isn't an option here at this point in that way. When I was growing up in Greensboro, UNCG was not the institution that it is today. It was not producing Ph.D.s. It did not have a Ph.D. in English; it does now. It did not play the role that it does in the state of North Carolina that it does today. Neither did UNC Charlotte; neither did East Carolina or Western Carolina. So, when I look at the history of the university system in North Carolina from my time growing up there to where it is today, I say, why can't we be like that? Why can't we be the UNCG ten years from now? I don't see any reason why we can't. And it's an interesting parallel, actually. One reason why I would suggest UNCG as an interesting place for us to study is, like Kennesaw, UNCG's history is closely tied to teacher education. It was a normal school, and then it was a woman's college. It has the same historical and sustained, continuing commitment to teacher education as a central part of its role, even now, as it did historically. And yet, it's been able to take on these additional things, too, but to inflect them in a way that honors the history of the place.
- TS: Yes. I have one other general question and that's about all these books that you're coming out with in the last year or two with your scholarship in terms of publication. Could you talk a little bit about what you've been writing about?
- SR: Oh, thank you. Yes, that's great. Two of the books came out of the NEH project, and I can honestly say they would not have happened without the external resources. That's part of what made it possible to do the work, to create the gigantic website we have for that project, which I also consider a very important publication and a useful one that's probably getting used more day to day than the two books will. Also, we're standing on the shoulders of years of work of the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project teaching teachers how to do research and writing and seeing themselves as professional writers writing about their teaching, so I think that's been important. We've had great support from the National Writing Project, not only in terms of money, but also in terms of intellectual commitment and belief in the work. That's been great. And we've had great teacher leadership. Both of the volumes that are coming out of the Keeping and Creating American Communities project—and, in fact, the second one came last night; I went home, and it was in the mail—one's published by Teachers College Press of Columbia University, the other by the National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE]. The one that Teachers College Press has published is called *Writing America*; the one that NCTE has published is called *Writing Our*

Communities. Each of them has a teacher co-editor who was a complete partner in the process from the beginning and did the same kind of work that I did on the editing. Mimi Dyer co-edited for *Writing America* and Dave Winter for *Writing Our Communities*.

TS: So these are a collection of chapters or articles by the people who have come through this program?

SR: By the people who have come for the program. One is a collection of Boyeresque scholarship of teaching essays; the other is more of a manual with lesson plans. But not just lesson plans—it also has reflective essays by the teachers about their work and student work samples, which is a real neat innovation. I think both of those books are going to get a lot of use, and I'm really proud of them. Dede has been working with us on another project called *Teachers Writing Groups*, which is another collection of essays with another teacher co-editor, George Seaman from Lassiter High School.

DY: And that's coming out in the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project.

SR: That's coming out in the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project.

TS: Is Dave Winter still in graduate school?

SR: He is at Grady High School and teaching history. He got a master's in history at Georgia State. And Mimi Dyer is about to complete her doctorate in leadership, so that's been real exciting. But the new book that's sort of in process is called *Teachers Writing Groups*, and the co-editors for that besides me and Dede are George Seaman and Kathi Yancey from Clemson University. We've just gotten back reviews from the external readers for that manuscript, and it's moving into the process. I signed a contract this fall with Cambridge University Press; I'm working on a book on Harriet Beecher Stowe for the...

TS: Oh, wonderful.

SR: It's called, very simply, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: An Introduction*. It's part of a series of books that they're doing on major authors, and I'm doing a Stowe book for them. So that's fun; I'm having a good time working on that. And you know, we were talking earlier about involving students and research. Louise Sherwood, one of my students last semester, an undergraduate student who is interested in library science as a career, is doing an internship with me doing some of the research work for me.

DY: I didn't know that.

TS: Wasn't she one of your English students in our Georgia literature, Georgia history class?

DY: That's correct. She was in our class.

SR: Yes. She's fabulous. In fact, before I came over here, I was meeting with her. She's working on updating my bibliography because my last article on Stowe is a couple of years old. [She's] seeing what we have in the Bentley [Rare Book Collection]—we have a lot of first editions of Stowe—what the illustrations in those might be and some other projects. And then Ann Pullen and I are working on an edition of letters by a missionary to Africa; we had a number of students involved in the early stages of that project through a faculty incentive grant. I still have a student intern working on that, Margie Hendrix, in addition to working with Ann, and that project is slowly but surely moving forward. Editorial projects, you know, sometimes take way longer than you would think. And the book that just came out [through] University of Pittsburgh Press, *Managing Literacy: Mothering America*, is on nineteenth century women writers.

DY: Which I can't wait to use when I teach the survey this summer on American women writers.

SR: Yes!!

DY: [My daughter] Ruthie's African-American professor at University of Virginia—Deborah McDowell—says that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the book that every college student should read.

SR: Absolutely, yes; it really is.

DY: Before anyone graduates from college.

SR: Yes, I think that's really crucial.

DY: Are you using it in your course on best sellers?

SR: Yes, I am. And then I'm using response texts. We're actually reading Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children*.

DY: I am, too.

SR: Oh, cool! We've got to get together and talk about that.

DY: We sure do.

TS: *Uncle Tom's Children* came out of the WPA Federal Writers Project.

SR: It sure did. Speaking of institutional culture—it's really interesting to think about the federal government's role in the production of that text and then the development of a number of minority writers during that time period. It's really, really interesting. And in fact, I'm glad you said that, Tom, because the project on the horizon, once I get the Stowe book finished—and part of the reason I agreed to do that is because I have this other project on the horizon, and I'm in the early stages of working on a book on *Authorship in American Culture* and the sort of institutional structures that shape authorship in American culture. One chapter in that is going to be about Oprah. I have a draft, an early version of that chapter

that's going to be in a book called *Oprah: The Phenomenon*, which is being edited by an historian. I'm so excited to be in a history book. I feel like it's a great affirmation to be in a book edited by an historian; I'm really excited about it. [laughter]

DY: That will be fun to read!

SR: Yes, it's fun. It's a fun essay.

TS: Well, just this year you won two big awards on campus—the first Distinguished Professor Award and also the Scholarship Award.

SR: Thank you, yes. It's a great year. Great year. Very exciting and very affirming.

TS: And then you got flooded out of your office [when the first floor of the new English Building flooded shortly after opening].

SR: Just to make sure that we not get too complacent, right? I just want to say how excited I am that y'all are doing this [History of KSU] for the institution. I think it's really important and going to be a great resource for people.

TS: I think as we put these interviews online, and if anybody reads them, that they're going to see that there's far more going on in this institution than you can imagine. I mean, there's a lot more than I was aware of before we started doing these interviews.

SR: Oh, absolutely. I tried to say something in August when I had the happy surprise of getting the award [that] the true honor is to be named as someone worth honoring from the faculty here. The faculty here is so incredibly talented, so amazingly dedicated, so terrifically hard-working.

DY: And highly productive.

SR: And just incredibly productive. And a quick story, I guess, that I really should save; I know we've been here so long, and y'all have been so good to let me say all kinds of stuff. But earlier today, I was walking across campus, and I bumped into Pam [Pamela B.] Cole. She said she had gotten her letter from Betty [L.] Siegel about her promotion, and we were sort of celebrating together for a minute. It was interesting; when I was putting together my portfolio for the award review process, I sent her an e-mail and said, "Pam, I've been nominated for this award and wondered if you would write a letter." And our e-mails cross because she was the nominee from...

TS: She was nominated, too.

SR: And almost at the same moment, I wrote to Nancy Zumoff...

TS: Who was also nominated.

SR: Who was also a nominee.

TS: Of course, Pam got the Distinguished Service Award.

SR: Pam got the Distinguished Service, and Nancy, of course, is much decorated, as we would say.

TS: She received the Scholarship Award before.

SR: She received the Scholarship Award before. At one point, Nancy, Pam and I were laughing about the fact that we really could write great letters for each other because of how much we respect each other's work. So, what a great group to be a part of. It's amazing that this institution has an incredible faculty. It really, really does.

DY: Thank you, Sarah.

SR: Oh, thank you all.

DY: This has been absolutely delightful.

INDEX

- Addams, Jane, 7, 14
Agnes Scott College, 1, 9, 11
American Association of State Colleges & Universities (AASCU), 24
American Studies Association, 22
Armstrong Atlantic State University, 4
Authorship in American Culture, 27
Automobile industry, decline of, 10-11
- Bairan, L. Annette, 7
Baker, Houston, 22
Barrier, Robert G., 10
Benedictine Academy [Military School], Savannah, 1-2, 4
Benedictine order, 2
Bingham Trust, 18
Boyer scholarship model, 26
Bradham, Jo Allen, 11
- California university system, 24-25
Cambridge University Press, 26
Class I research institutions, 11-12, 14-15, 24-25
Clemson University, 26
Cole, Pamela B., 28-29
Columbia University Teachers College Press, 25
Cooper, Meribeth, 15-16
- Dabundo, Laura S., 20
Dewey, John, 14
DeWitt Wallace Readers Digest Foundation, 18
Domesticating the Secondary Canon NEH workshop, 16-17
Dyer, Mimi, 26
- East Carolina University, 25
Edwards, Carol D., 15
Ellison, Julie, 5, 7, 24
- Flint, Michigan, 2-4, 7, 10
Flint Voice, 10
Flushing [Michigan] Junior High School, 4
Freedman, Sarah W., 13
- Georgia Humanities Council, 18-19
Gere, Anne, 7
Grady High School, Atlanta, 26

Harriet Beecher Stowe: An Introduction, 26

Harris, Susan K., 21

Heath *Anthology of American Literature*, 21

Hendrix, Margie, 27

High Point, North Carolina, 1

Holley, B. Earle, 19

Howard, June, 7

Hull House, Chicago, 14

Imagining America program, 5

Keeping and Creating American Communities NEH workshop, 13, 17-18, 25

Kennesaw State University

Teacher certification, 4

Advisement, 6-7

English education program, 9, 15-16, 18

Writing Center, 10, 15

Growth and growing pains, 10-12, 18-20, 22-23

Scholarship and teaching, 11, 14-15, 18, 24-25

Students, 12-13

Centrality of teaching and learning, 12-13

Public engagement and public responsibility, 13-15, 24

Intellectual climate, 13-14, 20-22

Diversity of opinions, 13-14

NCATE accreditation, 15

Scholarship and service, 18-19, 22-23

Office of Sponsored Programs, 19-20

English Building, 28

Kinman, Shannon A., 19

Lassiter High School, Cobb County, Georgia, 26

Lauter, Paul, 21

Managing Literacy: Mothering America, 27

McDowell, Deborah, 27

Michigan university system, 25

Miller, Zell, 10-11

Modern Language Association, 11, 21-22

Moore, Michael, 10

Moran, Charles, 6

Mott Community College, Flint, Michigan, 4

National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), 15

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), 25-26

National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), 13, 15-17, 25

North Carolina university system, 24-25

North Cobb High School, Cobb County, Georgia, 14

Oprah: The Phenomenon, 28

Pullen, Ann W. E., 27

Reggio, Patricia H., 7, 25

Robbins, John, 1-3, 11

Robbins, Sarah R.

Birth and childhood, 1, 25

Life in Italy, 1

Student days at University of North Carolina, 1, 5-7

Teaching experience in public and private schools, 1-4, 8-9

Relocation to Michigan, 2-5

Doctorate at University of Michigan, 3-5, 7-9

Mentors, 5-7

Interest in technology, 7-8

Teaching at University of Michigan, 8

Children, 8, 12, 21

Reasons for coming to KSU, 9-11

Grants, 13, 15-19

National Writing Project, 15-17, 24-25

NEH summer institutes, 16-17

Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project, 17, 24-26

Scholarship, 18, 21-22, 25-28

Professional accomplishments, 19-28

Robinson, Jay L., 5

Roger and Me, 10

Ross, Marlon B., 7

Ross, Stella, 9, 15-16

Rugg, Edwin A., 10-12

Savannah, Georgia, 1, 4

Seaman, George, 26

Sedgwick, Catharine Maria, 21

Siegel, Betty L., 28

Sherwood, Louise, 26-27

Stowe, Harriet Beecher, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 27

Teachers Writing Groups, 26

Tierce, Michael T., 6

University of California Berkeley, 13-14, 17

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 3-5, 7-9, 11, 13, 17, 24

University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 1

University of North Carolina Charlotte 25

University of North Carolina Greensboro, 25
University of Pittsburgh Press, 27

Valley School, Flint, Michigan, 3, 8, 10

Western Carolina University, 25

Winfrey, Oprah, 27-28

Winter, David, 26

Wisconsin university system, 25

Wixson, Karen K., 5, 7

WPA Federal Writers Project, 27

Wright, Richard, *Uncle Tom's Children*, 27

Writing America, 26

Writing Our Communities, 26

Yancey, Kathi, 26

Yow, Dede, 1, 16-17, 27

Yow, Ruth C., 27

Zagarell, Sandra, 21

Zoghby, Mary, 15-16

Zumoff, Nancy E., 19, 28-29