

**INTERVIEW WITH BERNARD SEMMEL
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY**

May 1, 1987

Dr. Hartzell: This is an interview with Bernard Semmel of the History Department at Stony Brook taken in his home in the Research Triangle down in Durham, North Carolina on the 30th of April 1987. You received this letter from Jerry Schubel, a call for files and written or oral recollections of Stony Brook's early years, and the letter which went with it. Well, the checklist of questions starts off with certain factual data. Number 1, name, department, rank, position.

Bernard Semmel: Bernard Semmel, History Department. When I arrived at Oyster Bay in 1960, I was an assistant professor. I was promoted in 1962 to an associate professor, in 1964 I became a full professor.

Dr. Hartzell: What year did you come to Stony Brook, that you have answered. How old were you at the time?

Bernard Semmel: I was 32 years old at the time.

Dr. Hartzell: That was 1960.

Bernard Semmel: 1960.

Dr. Hartzell: From what institution and position did you come?

Bernard Semmel: I had been abroad for two years on a Rockefeller Foundation grant. I'd previously worked from 1956 to 1958 at a small Presbyterian school in Missouri, Park College, Parkville, Missouri.

Dr. Hartzell: Who was primarily responsible for your coming to Stony Brook, how'd you hear about Stony Brook?

Bernard Semmel: Right, an English friend, a sociologist at Oxford, knowing that I was interested in a job, preferably close to New York City, wrote to Ben Nelson.

Dr. Hartzell: He was then, where was he, was he at Stony Brook?

Bernard Semmel: He was a full professor of sociology at Stony Brook, and it was Ben who asked me to come out for an interview.

Dr. Hartzell: He was interviewing then for the History Department?

Bernard Semmel: There were no departments at the time.

Dr. Hartzell: Division.

Bernard Semmel: There were divisions, and the two people who pretty well were in charge of the social science division was, first of all, Jay Williams, who later became chairman of the Political Science Department, and then Ben Nelson, who later became chairman of the Sociology Department.

Dr. Hartzell: All right, why did you come, this is question 6; what factors were most important in your decision?

Bernard Semmel: I had read about the possibilities, the plans that the State had begun to disseminate about the future of Stony Brook as a graduate institution of the first rank, those were pretty much the words employed, as I recollect. And it seemed that to be associated with such an institution so close to New York City was a good thing.

Dr. Hartzell: Did you read the Heald Report?

Bernard Semmel: I hadn't read it, but I had read about it.

Dr. Hartzell: I see, you used some of the words that were in the Heald Report.

Bernard Semmel: I know, this was the Report conclusions were very much in my mind when I accepted the appointment to Stony Brook. I had another offer, which met many of the same conditions, one at the Queens College, and I rejected it in good part because when I was interviewed at Stony Brook, an effort was made by those interviewing me to discuss matters of substance, matters that concerned social theory and history. At Queens the Dean at the time in his effort to attract me spoke of the pension benefits; I felt too young to think in terms of pension benefits then.

Dr. Hartzell: What was your understanding of the purposes behind the creation of Stony Brook, what was the vision being transformed into reality?

Bernard Semmel: It seemed to me that New York State had long been backward in establishing a State University, this was no doubt due to the influence of private universities in the State. Finally, it seemed that as a result of some aggressive action on the part of Nelson Rockefeller, who was then Governor

Dr. Hartzell: How about Dewey?

Bernard Semmel: Well, Dewey had begun the effort in the late forties, hadn't he. But it was Rockefeller it seemed to me that was really pushing the Dewey plan forward, and that finally New York State would have a State University; and I thought of Stony Brook as the Berkeley of the system. Indeed, although others may claim credit for having said this first, it's my impression, this may be a self-serving memory -- I don't think so -- that it was I who semi-jocosely spoke of Stony Brook as the Berkeley as the East as early as 1960.

Dr. Hartzell: Is that right. What were your impressions of Stony Brook when you first came, this is question 8, the campus, the people, the leadership, the spirit?

Bernard Semmel: Of course, when I went for an interview, the University was not yet at Stony Brook, we were at Oyster Bay, and Coe Hall was funded, I regretted learning that we were to move rather further out on the Island. If I had known how long a distance, both in mileage and in time, we were from New York City, I might have hesitated; I might very well have chosen Queens College. But I did not know, and the setting of Coe Cottage, the setting of the Oyster Bay campus was beautiful. If I had known the campus at Stony Brook was going to look for a good many years as a result of the long period of construction, I might have hesitated once more.

Dr. Hartzell: It certainly wasn't aesthetic.

Bernard Semmel: No, it certainly wasn't. But, as I said earlier, my immediate reaction to the spirit of the institution was favorable, if only because people were prepared to talk about serious issues.

Dr. Hartzell: What were in your mind the advantages of proximity to New York City for you?

Bernard Semmel: It meant first of all being close to library facilities, the New York Public Library and Columbia University library. The library that we now have at Stony Brook, of course, has become a good one, as good a one as one could hope to find when one remembers that the University when we began thirty years ago. But never in the course of my teaching career at Stony Brook have I found it satisfactory for my purposes. I've always had to go into New York, and I've had to make trips to England on a fairly regular basis. These trips were designed not only to tap primary material, archives and the like, but I was even obliged to use the Hansard, the parliamentary debates in London because the microfiche or whatever micro device was used, microrecord of the

Dr. Hartzell: Microfilm.

Bernard Semmel: Microfilm it might have been, but I think actually the parliamentary debates were microfiche, I'm not certain. In any event my eyes just weren't up to it. I much preferred the full materials.

Dr. Hartzell: You couldn't get a complete set of Hansard in the New York Public or Columbia?

Bernard Semmel: Could, but at times, and of course, I did use the Hansard at both Columbia and the New York Public Library, but at times, when in England, and an opportunity presented itself, I would find myself using Hansard there rather than rely on return to New York and the New York Public Library. It was never very convenient to go into New York.

Dr. Hartzell: What events, what persons, what experiences stand out in your mind while you were at Oyster Bay and then afterwards?

Bernard Semmel: Well, there were serious difficulties at Oyster Bay. There were

Dr. Hartzell: Was President Lee there then when you came?

Bernard Semmel: No, he had yet to come. Yes, but, and of course, Lee's coming exacerbated the difficulties. The chief issue so far as the social sciences and humanities were concerned was apparently, I should say grew apparently from a dispute concerning teaching techniques. On one side were people who ranged themselves behind the

Columbia Contemporary Civilization Program, on the other side were people who swore by the University of Chicago's way of dealing with such questions.

Dr. Hartzell: What was that?

Bernard Semmel: One was never fully certain, although ideology was thrust forward as the chief explanation for the dispute, it became clear fairly soon that we had a power struggle in a teapot. There were substantial ideological differences. When I came, a group of people who had been at Columbia and had taught the Contemporary Civilization Program at Columbia had just been denied tenure, and there was rather full coverage of this fact in *The New York Times*. This, too, made me hesitate, but such questions were always arising in universities in the New York City area. I hardly believe that Queens, for example, would have been free of such difficulties.

Dr. Hartzell: Was Sidney Gelber there when

Bernard Semmel: Yes, he uniquely among the people who came from Columbia had received tenure as a full professor of philosophy.

Dr. Hartzell: I see.

Bernard Semmel: After President Lee arrived Sidney would become Dean.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, that's one set of disputes. What is your view of the reasons for Lee's leaving?

Bernard Semmel: The Chicago contingent, which had formerly been the dominant contingent, the Dean of the College before Lee's coming,

Dr. Hartzell: Leonard Olsen.

Bernard Semmel: Leonard Olsen had come from Chicago, waged a vendetta against Lee. They apparently had friends in Albany whom they informed of developments on campus

Dr. Hartzell: Do you know who those friends were?

Bernard Semmel: I knew, but I'm afraid I don't recall.

Dr. Hartzell: Yes. Lee was an engineer, Olsen was a philosopher.

Bernard Semmel: I can tell you how Lee was hired as president of the institution.

Dr. Hartzell: All right.

Bernard Semmel: Insofar as I know the story, I don't pretend that these facts are absolutely accurate, but these tales I should say, facts are absolutely accurate, but I have reason to believe that this is true. Leonard Olsen, who was Dean, rather expected that he would become president of the institution. When candidates for the presidency were presented to the people at Stony Brook, they were uniformly turned down by Olsen and others of the Chicago contingent, the expectation being, of course, that Olsen would ultimately become president. Lee was presented as a candidate for the position of Dean of the School of Engineering. As I have heard the tale, since Olsen and others had been so strongly condemnatory in their view of all previous candidates for the deanship for the presidency of the college, they felt an obligation to at least approve of one candidate presented to them, and they were rather extravagant in their praise for Lee as Dean of the School of Engineering, and the people at Albany, who were tiring of all the turndowns of candidates they had sent to the institution, said, well, here's a candidate you like, we'll make him president. And from what I've heard, this is what occurred. It was a great disappointment to the Chicago contingent.

Dr. Hartzell: Olsen did not have a Ph. D.

Bernard Semmel: He did not, now.

Dr. Hartzell: And he was an assistant to Carlson in the central office, he came in with Carlson. Who were some of the others in the History Department, were you the first appointee in the History Department?

Bernard Semmel: Not quite, there had been before I came, two historians in the social science division -- Ralph Bowen, who had come from Elmira College and before that had been at Columbia; and Emmanuel Chill, who, I don't know quite where he had taught previously, but went on to a career at the City College -- both were French historians, but both of them were members of the Columbia contingent that failed to receive tenure. To replace them, I was one of, there were three historians that were appointed at the same time I was -- myself; another British historian Roger Prouty by

name, who unfortunately failed to receive tenure and ultimately went to the University of Massachusetts at Boston; and Daniel Gasman, who has gone on to work in the history of science, history of ideas, who also failed to receive tenure, in his case because his dissertation was long delayed, and he went on to a good career at the John Jay College of the City University. Gasman was, and is, a very good historian, a loss to the Department. The other person hired, another person, I should say, hired that same year was a political scientist, Michael Parenti, who also failed to receive tenure, and has had a rather curious career in the intervening years. He has never had tenure elsewhere, but he has written a best selling textbook with a Marxist slant that apparently great numbers of political science classes use as additional reading, and this is apparently enough to support him, that is the royalties from this text. Are you interested in this kind of detail?

Dr. Hartzell: I am interested in anything you can think of that describes the quality of the faculty that was being assembled, where they came from.

Bernard Semmel: The people from Chicago, I hope this doesn't sound too invidious, but on the whole the people from Chicago were less well credentialed than people coming from other institutions.

Dr. Hartzell: I think Olsen didn't have a great deal of time to look before he had to have a faculty on board and get things started.

Bernard Semmel: That's undoubtedly the reason for this situation.

Dr. Hartzell: He went back to the place with which he was familiar.

Bernard Semmel: Most familiar. Now, I don't mean to suggest that there weren't very good people as well who came from Chicago, this was certainly the case. Someone like Richard Levin, for example, in the English Department, was first rate and continues to be a first rate member of the faculty, one of the more distinguished people in English literature in the country.

Dr. Hartzell: What about, did Martin Travis come from Chicago?

Bernard Semmel: No, he came the following year from Stanford.

Dr. Hartzell: From Stanford.

Bernard Semmel: Yes.

Dr. Hartzell: What expectations did you yourself have when you came, and have these worked out for you, has this been a good place for you, has Stony Brook been a good place for you?

Bernard Semmel: I can't really give you an unambiguous answer to that question. Probably not.

Dr. Hartzell: Why?

Bernard Semmel: I think primarily because there were inadequate research facilities, it was rather a drain to be rushing into New York City for my work. I think that's the principal reason.

Dr. Hartzell: What about your colleagues, were they a stimulating group?

Bernard Semmel: You mean in the department, or outside of the department?

Dr. Hartzell: Both.

Bernard Semmel: Both. There were a good number of very stimulating people, both in and outside of the department with whom I became friendly and this was certainly good. I, however, had hoped to find a university that constituted more of an intellectual community than Stony Brook provided.

Dr. Hartzell: Now, what time frame are you talking about?

Bernard Semmel: From the beginning to the present.

Dr. Hartzell: From the beginning to the present.

Bernard Semmel: Yes, I think in part perhaps our closeness to New York City had something to do, even though I've been complaining about not being sufficiently close, it had something to do with the failure to construct an intellectual community. If one had been further away from the metropolis and other resources, it is conceivable that the people at Stony Brook would have turned more to each other for intellectual stimulation. It seems to me that one of the grand things missing in the social organization of Stony Brook is a faculty club where one could come in for lunch or the late afternoon for a

drink and be able to converse with members of one's own division or with members of other divisions.

Dr. Hartzell: I think that's in the pipeline.

Bernard Semmel: Too late for me I'm afraid. It's rather a shame that something wasn't done along these lines very early.

Dr. Hartzell: Sunwood was supposed to be the faculty club. It was given by Ward Melville for that purpose. It was too far from the campus.

Bernard Semmel: Yes, I'm afraid so.

Dr. Hartzell: Whose responsibility within an institution like Stony Brook is it to see to it or to foster or develop in some way an academic community.

Bernard Semmel: I suspect the responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of the faculty themselves or the faculty itself. And somehow that didn't work. I think secondarily it rested on the administration, which might have done something to promote such an institution. There were sufficient numbers of people on the faculty who would have responded. Leadership would have been useful, but certainly one doesn't blame the administration for the fact such a community didn't develop.

Dr. Hartzell: What went awry with the luncheon club on the second floor of the Chemistry Department?

Bernard Semmel: One paid a certain fee, depending on your salary, it was pro-rated to the salary as I recollect. I belonged, others did, but apparently the number of people who belonged, the fees they were ready to pay were not sufficient to keep up the facility.

Dr. Hartzell: It was an economic problem then?

Bernard Semmel: It was an economic problem. Now, one can argue that the faculty was to blame for not subscribing its funds. One can also argue that very few institutions of this sort can operate without a subsidy from the University, and that a president of the University ought to have arranged the budget in some way to provide for the difference between expenses and income.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you know the economics of the Columbia faculty club?

Bernard Semmel: I don't think they are doing terribly well, but I don't have the full facts.

Dr. Hartzell: It's close enough to the campus.

Bernard Semmel: It's close enough to the campus. Of course, it's a rather a huge facility. It isn't quite on the same order of the Commons Room on the second floor of the Chemistry Building, but it requires a rather considerable staff round the clock. The second floor Commons arrangement was minimal. It would have required very little staff.

Dr. Hartzell: Where did the leadership come from in Oyster Bay, the kind that you would approve of, who were the leaders?

Bernard Semmel: Well, since I identified very strongly with one of the contingents, I find myself approving of their behavior as leaders. In 1961 Richard Morse came to the Department from the University of Puerto Rico. Unfortunately, he left the Department after that year to go to Yale.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you know why he left?

Bernard Semmel: There were a number of reasons. Among them, it's difficult to say a number of reasons because one might argue that the call from Yale would be so attractive to a historian that anyone would go. But, in fact, Dick was not that anxious to go to Yale. He would have remained if a position had been open for his wife, who was a dancer, but the State was not interested in opening such a position, and that became decisive, particularly since there were possibilities for such a position at Yale. I'm certain if they actually worked out for her.

Dr. Hartzell: I heard about him, but I came after he'd left. How long do you think it took for the two sides that had developed in Oyster Bay to bury the hatchet and get on with the job at Stony Brook?

Bernard Semmel: Several years. And indeed every so often one can see evidences of the old hostility emerge after all these years. But, of course, what finally solved the problem with the early division, that is, essentially solved it, even though elements of the

early division remained as I said, was the even greater divisions induced by the difficulties in the late sixties and early seventies, divisions growing out of the student and faculty reactions to the Vietnam War. These too persist within various departments.

Dr. Hartzell: In what ways?

Bernard Semmel: Well, departments were divided at that point, a terribly small minority in each department found itself in a position that could only be called less radical.

Dr. Hartzell: They were in a minority.

Bernard Semmel: Very much so, determined to maintain, among other things, some semblance of the old program and these political divisions are still remembered. So far as the History Department is concerned, along with departments throughout the country, this is hardly unique to Stony Brook, survey courses, History I and II type courses were tossed overboard. A few of us attempted to save them, but as I recall when I spoke in favor of the survey course, there was only person who joined me.

Dr. Hartzell: Who was he, remember?

Bernard Semmel: I'm afraid I've prevaricated on that score. I didn't want to present myself as the only honest man on campus. I certainly can't think of anyone who joined me on that score, nor for the record do I think of myself as the only honest man. Perhaps I am simply an old fashioned man, but I do note that there is a move back to the survey courses throughout the country. Now, it's the mood at the time was an overpowering one. It was largely right-thinking people, as they defined themselves, opposed survey courses. It went with denouncing the Cambodian intrusion and opposition to the draft and so on. It seemed impossible to suggest that one could oppose the Vietnam War and still favor the survey course. And as I say, this wasn't simply Stony Brook, throughout the country divisions of this sort and along very similar lines occurred.

Dr. Hartzell: What about the quality of the people, of the faculty that were appointed let's say between 1962 and 1970 or 1971?

Bernard Semmel: It varied. There were some very good people and some that weren't quite so good, these generally speaking have left for one reason or another. This was a difficult time, as you know, universities were expanding throughout the country, and it was not that easy to get good faculty to come a University that to outward appearances was a construction lot. People would come to Stony Brook and be rather turned off. We did, despite this, we did very well.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, let's see, do you want to say some of the people in the Department, Angress, for instance, from Berkeley.

Bernard Semmel: Yes, we're speaking of what period, from 1962 to

Dr. Hartzell: Yes, I was thinking starting on the Stony Brook campus, 1962 was when we went out there.

Bernard Semmel: Right, to the present.

Dr. Hartzell: Yes, well.

Bernard Semmel: Or to 197

Dr. Hartzell: I think 1971 because Bentley and I both left the administration.

Bernard Semmel: The, Angress as you say, I probably will be very deficient in noting all the people, having had a full meal I will probably leave a number off. But Eric Lampard and Bill Taylor came from Wisconsin. Bill had previously been at Harvard.

Dr. Hartzell: Anybody in Economics?

Bernard Semmel: Oh, well, Ed Ames may have come at about that time. I think he is one of the people who have been much undervalued by the University and by his department. A brilliant man with a knowledge of many fields of economics, not at all the narrow specialist. He did quantitative work as well, but he went rather far beyond that. And in addition, during that period is when, as I recollect, Rosenthal came and Lebowitz and a good many other people. I don't mean to be invidious, it's just a question of what pops to my mind.

Dr. Hartzell: Has there been any outside estimate of the quality of departments other than the estimates that have been made in the sciences?

Bernard Semmel: Well, yes. Now, I think I can even provide a date on this, if this is what you have in mind. We were in England in 1974-75, and I believe it was at this time that at the behest of the central headquarters of the University, a committee was appointed to survey history departments, not only throughout the graduate centers of the State University, but in the private sector as well, and as I recollect, after having gone through them all, the universities that were regarded as they best, that is, the history departments which were regarded as the best, and there were very few which were mentioned, included Stony Brook, NYU, the Graduate School of the City University, Columbia. Now as I remember it, that was it.

Dr. Hartzell: Those four.

Bernard Semmel: Yeah, what was a surprise, for example, as to why Rochester wasn't among those mentioned. Now it was either in the fall semester of 1974 or the spring semester of 1975 that this survey was made, as I recollect.

Dr. Hartzell: There were some unfavorable comments about Albany, Albany's history department at some point, I don't remember.

Bernard Semmel: Yes, well, Albany, there was a time when Albany was even denied, as I recollect, the Ph. D. program. It had a master's program, but not a Ph. D. program. But

Dr. Hartzell: When did the History Department get its Ph. D. program?

Bernard Semmel: Well, the first year in which we admitted graduate students was 1966, as I remember.

Dr. Hartzell: That would be the M. A. then.

Bernard Semmel: I think at that time we had the possibility of both the M. A. and Ph. D., but of course we admitted at that point M. A. students.

Dr. Hartzell: Did you have any relations with the central office yourself off campus, any institutions off campus?

Bernard Semmel: Nope.

Dr. Hartzell: Did you hold any offices in the American Historical Society, for instance, or

Bernard Semmel: Yes, I just completed a term as a member of the professional division, as it's called, it's the professional division committee of the American Historical Society.

Dr. Hartzell: Just now.

Bernard Semmel: Just this past, 1986.

Dr. Hartzell: Three year term?

Bernard Semmel: A three year term.

Dr. Hartzell: What do you feel you had accomplished at Stony Brook by 1971, for instance?

Bernard Semmel: In terms of my own work?

Dr. Hartzell: Your own work, your own teaching, any faculty committees.

Bernard Semmel: Oh, I was rather active, as a matter of fact, on faculty committees. In the sixties I was a member of the Executive Committee, for example. I think I mentioned that I was chairman of the Department between 1966 and 1969. I served as a member of the Grievance Committee, though I'm not quite sure whether that was before 1971 or after 1971. I was a member of the what was then called the Promotion and Tenure Committee.

Dr. Hartzell: What is it now?

Bernard Semmel: I'm afraid I still call it Promotion and Tenure, but it has another name. As far as University service, up to that point I think that may be it.

Dr. Hartzell: Can you name individuals that did things that were important for the future development of the University as a whole or some part of it, see, one purpose of any history if it is to be written is to try to explain how the University was developed to its present stature, by what steps and if there are individuals involved.

Bernard Semmel: Well, Stanley Ross, of course, played a very important role in the University as Dean. I don't think there is any question of that. And as important was

Karl Hartzell who, at a very difficult time in the University's existence, came as a stabilizing force; a man who was able to create bridges between different groups, and who acted as well as a force for sobriety and sanity when the Dean, Stanley Ross, who for all his virtues, when the Dean sometimes went off on a deep end. I think that Johnny Toll was an important influence on the University. There have been complaints made about his being more interested in construction than in the curriculum, and to some extent these complaints are justified, but it was at a time when construction was of first urgency.

Dr. Hartzell: Order of priorities.

Bernard Semmel: And one can only be thankful that he proceeded as he did, if only because it has made it possible for the University not to resemble a construction lot before I retire.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you want to make any comments about the relative balance within the University as between the sciences, social sciences and humanities, in any form.

Bernard Semmel: I think this is one of those areas in which Johnny Toll might have failed the University. The administration was much more interested in advancing the sciences than it was in advancing the humanities or the social sciences.

Dr. Hartzell: Would you say that one reason was that was what he knew how to do best?

Bernard Semmel: I suspect that's it, but I think in addition there was a disrespect on the part of the sciences for what they considered the soft subjects of the other two branches of the University. The sciences felt that they were making a grander contribution to the financial health of the University because the National Science Foundation was delivering great pockets of support for work in the sciences. The humanities and social sciences don't have these possibilities and it was presumed that, therefore, they were less valuable.

Dr. Hartzell: Was there anybody in Albany who could have helped to right the balance, anybody stand out in your mind in Albany?

Bernard Semmel: I'm afraid I really didn't have any grand insight into what was happening in Albany. I couldn't give you names. I had a better sense of that in the early year or two of the University.

Dr. Hartzell: Sam Gould doesn't give you any picture?

Bernard Semmel: If I knew more about what was occurring in Albany I no doubt would know whether Gould acted well or poorly, I simply don't know.

Dr. Hartzell: The same for Ernest Boyer or Wharton.

Bernard Semmel: Again, I knew that they were in office, but I had no way of knowing how supportive they were for Stony Brook or for any of the programs that I considered valuable at Stony Brook.

Dr. Hartzell: Did the History Department or the Economics or Political Science Departments run any invitational conferences that you were aware of?

Bernard Semmel: Yes, but I don't think I could tell you about any of them.

Dr. Hartzell: I see. What about the future of the institution, how do you feel about it, the future of Stony Brook?

Bernard Semmel: I feel relatively sanguine about the future of the institution. I am pleased to learn that the Faculty Club is in the works but, for example, I would feel more pleased about the future if library funds were adequate, more adequate than they have apparently been during the last several years.

Dr. Hartzell: They've cut down on them?

Bernard Semmel: They have, and I think, despite all I've just said, this is a mixed statement in that I had, if I had been asked in 1960 what position the University would have in American academic life by 1987, I would have thought that we would be much further ahead of the game.

Dr. Hartzell: Than we are.

Bernard Semmel: Than we are, much further, ahead of the game. I would hardly believe that we would achieve the status of Berkeley of the East, but I would have thought that we were poised for such a leap. I don't believe we are as things stand.

Dr. Hartzell: And why do you think we are not?

Bernard Semmel: Well, I suspect that in large part we are suffering from the disease that all academic life in America has suffered from in the last generation, a readiness to accept mediocrity at every level. I by no means want to suggest that we are a mediocre institution or that the faculty is mediocre, but nonetheless the readiness to accept whatever happens to be about. I am particularly unhappy with the student body, the undergraduates. The graduates, we've been very lucky in the History Department, we have a very good set of graduate students. Why we have done so well the last several years, I can't say, but we have done very well. But the undergraduates that I have taught in the last four, five, six years are a hopeless bunch. Most of them oughtn't to be in college. This doesn't mean that there aren't among the undergraduates very good people, there are. I don't mean to condemn them all, but this most recent generation of undergraduates is ill-prepared, essentially interested only in getting a degree so they can get out and get a job. They don't read, they are humorless, which of course is self-serving; it means that past years undergraduates have laughed at my jokes more readily than undergraduates today seem to. They sit and they take notes very assiduously, they can't write, they don't contribute to class, really, it's a very bad situation. What prevents me from saying that this makes the future at Stony Brook absolutely dismal is my recognition that all these questions are relative, and from what I gather, virtually everything I have said could be said by faculty members in institutions throughout the country, and not only state universities but a good many privileged private institutions.

Dr. Hartzell: Where do you get your information?

Bernard Semmel: From colleagues at other institutions in some cases, in other cases I have been on a number of visiting committees, I won't say where, but in fact

[end of tape and interview]