

# The View

*Four senior faculty members talk about academic life—gender and equity, the work of public intellectuals, and career choice.*



Here on the Web, is their conversation in full. It was recorded in Murkland Hall on March 23, 2005. It was transcribed by Renate Jurden and edited by Jeffrey Diefendorf, Susan Dumais, and Carrie Sherman.

*from left to right*

**Marilyn Hoskin (MH)** Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Professor of Political Science

**Jeffrey Diefendorf, (JD and moderator)** Professor of History and Senior Faculty Fellow in Liberal Arts

**Ellen Fitzpatrick (EF)** Carpenter Professor of History

**Susan Schibanoff (SS)** Professor of English and Women's Studies

**JD** We're embarking upon a discussion with three of the most distinguished members of the faculty at UNH in the College of Liberal Arts. Professor Sue Schibanoff came to UNH in 1971, having earned her B.A. at Cornell University. She's a member of the English department as well as a core faculty member in Women's Studies, and she's just been awarded the highest honor in the College—the Lindberg Prize for outstanding scholar in teaching. Sue works on Medieval Renaissance literature, and she's completing a new book on Chaucer.

Professor Ellen Fitzpatrick is currently Carpenter Professor of History. She earned her B.A. at Hampshire College and her Ph.D. at Brandeis. She taught at Wellesley, MIT, and Harvard University before coming to UNH in 1997. She has written widely in the area of modern American history, on intellectual history, and everyone has seen her increasingly as a regular commentator on the *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* on National Public Television.

Marilyn Hoskin studied at Mount Holyoke and earned her Ph.D. in Political Science at UCLA. She is a scholar of European and German politics and has written on immigration matters. Marilyn came to UNH in 1995 as Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Professor of Political Science. She's now the most senior of the top-level administrators on campus.

When I came to UNH in 1976, I think there was only one woman who was a full professor on the entire faculty at UNH. Your careers are evidence of a sea-change here at this institution and in higher education, or at least in Liberal Arts more broadly. Let's talk about your career trajectories: how you chose your fields of study, your careers to date, and your experiences as women in higher education. And I want to stress I really see this as a conversation. I don't want it to be just a two-way dialogue between one of you and me, but a conversation among all of us. So please respond, jump in, react to each other. But for a bit of guidance, Sue, why don't you start off and tell us a little bit about the decisions you made and your choice of fields, career, where it began intellectually, and where you see yourself going?

**SS** I anticipated this question, so I did my homework, and I still have the same answer: I made no conscious choices—no conscious choices—about my education. I went to an undergraduate school where I did well. In English you go on, so I went on and got a Ph.D. Once you've earned a Ph.D. in English, you go on and you teach. I fell into Medieval Studies, which I dearly love, but I can't say that I grew up reading Arthurian romances, because I didn't. I literally fell into that field. I headed from Cornell to UCLA with the idea that I was going to be an Americanist, not a Medievalist, and I was going to work on Henry James because I had sort of an intellectual epiphany over Henry James at about the time I think most undergraduates do, somewhere in their early junior year. I had one of those light-bulb moments and I thought, this is my future. So I went off to UCLA thinking I was going to be an Americanist working on Henry James—and I'm really glad I didn't. I was ready to enroll in a James seminar to pursue that interest, and the seminar door was closed. They were not taking people who weren't doing dissertations. Here I was a first-year student, being as naïve as you could be. So a Chaucer seminar happened to be open and I thought, "Oh all right, I'll take that." I'd taken an undergraduate Chaucer class and I could read Middle English, so I took it and I fell in love with it. I loved it partly because it was hard, and I was in the days of loving intellectual challenges. Then I followed that path all the way through, and I've never taught American literature. But you asked me where my trajectory will be from here. I don't plan on teaching, but . . . I'll let somebody else jump in. Maybe someone had a more planned out career than I did.

**JD** Ellen, how about you? Until you came to UNH, you spent all of your time in the world of private education, and now you are in a public institution. What Sue said I think is certainly true, how often it is that academics fall into things, that they fall into topics and fields, some of which one develops and others not.

**EF** When I came up here for my interview there was a sort of closing of the circle in my life. I had grown up in Amherst, Massachusetts, and my father was a professor at UMass. My parents had both gone to what was then Massachusetts State College. I had grown up in a college town, and we lived in the part of town that was closer to Amherst College. My whole world was infused with college life. This was in the 1950s and the early 60s. There were bonfires in the fall and parades for homecoming. It was a wonderful time to live in Amherst, still a very small town in those days, despite the surrounding colleges. In terms of my studies and thinking about history, I was always very interested and preoccupied with the past. For good and bad reasons, I suppose, or for helpful and not so helpful reasons. When I went to Hampshire College, I took a course on Tudor Stuart history that I absolutely loved, and in fact everything I studied in history, I loved. It was challenging and interesting. But what [Sue] said about a conscious decision about a career—I had absolutely no idea. I was so naïve about what it meant to be a faculty member, despite the fact that my father was a professor. I wanted to go to graduate school because I loved to be in school and study. I liked learning history, and I had no sense of what I was going to do with a Ph.D. It also seemed to me that, for people I admired, it was the level of achievement that I wanted to reach. But I never thought then, I'll be a college professor. It never even occurred to me. I didn't know what I would do with a degree. I had no idea that that's pretty much what your options were in those days, if you were lucky. So it was really the old-fashioned love of learning that propelled me into graduate school. It was wonderful when I came up here and saw UNH, despite having been in all these private institutions. When I drove on the loop road coming into the campus, and I saw the fields and cow barns, I felt a sense of coming home. It's kind of a long-winded response to what you asked, but the utter naïveté with which I approached all this is startling to me in retrospect. I had no ambition other than to excel in learning.

**JD** Oh, I know I didn't. In my senior year I was still planning on going to law school, but that seemed boring, so I decided to stick with history. Well Marilyn, it's your turn and I'd like you to say something about how you went from being an academic to being an administrator; and how your experience as a faculty member shapes what you think about the job you do as a dean.

**MH** I can do that. I won't repeat the life history, because it is strikingly similar to my good colleagues. I think a lot of academics stay in school and go on because they love what they are studying. There is no simpler answer than that. I remember telling my undergraduate adviser, I want to go to graduate school because I'm interested in the subject matter. That was all that was said about it, and things went from there. As you know, I went to UCLA and initially started studying the Middle East, but had some major-league obstacles with Arabic, which wasn't friendly to my style of learning, so I did some shifts. One of the things that it probably told me, but I wouldn't realize it until much later, is that you move around with things that you're strong and good at, try other things, and sometimes you keep doing that and you don't narrow as you become older. As a senior graduate student or a scholar, you find yourself wanting to move to the left or the right or into

another area. I did that. Had I realized what it was when I was doing it, I would have said, isn't this fascinating. But in truth most of us just do it because it's what happens to us. I began work on German parties, moved from there to the socialization of German and American teenagers, developed an interest in immigrants and how they learn about politics and how people react to them, and that became a new level of interest. I've really studied or written in three or four areas that are usually some other people's subfields. It reflects some of that diletantishness that academics have; they see stuff and they're curious. At an adult level you can use those interests to become a dean, as unimpressive as that sounds, really. One of the reasons for moving amongst areas is that you begin to appreciate what other people do. It fascinates you, and you have an idea when a job opportunity comes up—and I don't think many of us go looking for these opportunities—someone asks us if we'd do something on a committee or as a fill-in as an associate dean or head of a task force. The next thing you know you realize that you really enjoy this because you are working with people from all over. If you have the personality for it, you can help them do good things and participate vicariously in their intellectual activities, and universities get better if people can do that. You can make the excuse that you are doing it so the university will run better. There is some of that, because the ego in administrators says I want to do that because I think I can do it better than the people who are doing it there now. Or I could do something, add something to that. It's just a little bit of ego about being able to work with different people and provide a little bit of something that will let essentially the raw material, which are the faculty, do what they do best and help develop. So part of it starts accidentally, and you end up being an associate dean because someone asks you to do it and it seems like fun. Then you realize that this sort of position satisfies your intellectual interests. It allows you to traverse all kinds of areas, and lo and behold—I suspect it's because you're dean—everyone wants to tell you what they do and that's fascinating. So at one level, being a dean is a little bit like being an undergraduate, working amongst the general education courses and picking out the things you like to do. If I look back over my career, I realize that I was there from day one. I started off as a music major, then started studying the Middle East, then German politics. I moved around as things interested me. I will never be the person who writes the single greatest book on one topic, but I think I will have an appreciation for a lot of them and help other people do their work. It's a very different kind of career. I sometimes call it the aging undergraduate syndrome, but it is a lot of fun.

**JD** There are no regrets that you didn't become a caterer?

**MH** I also had many jobs of one kind or another, including catering, the profession to which Jeff is alluding. When I was a graduate student, some friends and I took up catering on a bet from a faculty member that we could provide the catering for this party at a cheaper cost if only he would invite the graduate students—that was the deal. And we did, he did, we all went, and the next thing we knew we were catering every weekend for quite a long time. But that got old very fast.

**SS** And one of you was Martha Stewart right?

**MH** That's my model, absolutely.

**JD** Since I've been here, working as a Senior Faculty Fellow, spending part of my time helping administer the College, one thing I find a little different is that when one is a historian, like Ellen and me, and probably when one is a student of literature like Sue, many of the projects that we work on stretch off into the distance. These not only take years of study, but often years of writing and ruminating. Then it takes two years just to finish the production process of a book before it finally comes out. One of the things about my work as an administrator is there is perhaps more of a possibility of seeing some projects completed within a shorter period of time. One can help institute a new program. I think administrators often work on a very different time-frame than do faculty. Do you agree?

**MH** No question about that, and because there are so many people working around you, you can tune in and tune out into people's lives when they need it or when you're welcome or when something could use an audience, audition, concert, reading, or grant. Those are actually some of the helpful traffic-cop aspects of the job. While you do need to stop some things, I think the goal is to keep the green light on for as many things as possible. That's very rewarding. Again, it's not exactly the peeping Tom syndrome, but it is the vicarious experience of watching some wonderful projects come to completion.

**JD** You know that one of the things that faculty are required to balance is the "sacred triad": teaching, research, and service. I'd be interested to hear you all comment on that. Particularly again as I said because the three of us certainly often have, as Marilyn said earlier, liked the sort of longer-term kind of scholarly projects. I know there are times when we are frustrated by obligations such as suddenly teaching new courses or having to do something that can be seen as an obstacle to that research.

**SS** I don't feel that we're all really capable of starring in those three fields of teaching, research, and service. I think we all as faculty members have an obligation to participate in those three. I think after you get tenured and have demonstrated that you can do all three at least reasonably well and hopefully one really well, my sense is that people begin to specialize a little bit more. I suggest to my junior colleagues who are feeling very pressured about committees that they sit down and think this through—what contribution can you make that nobody else can make? You know if somebody else can be on this committee or if nobody else can be on this committee and, if you have the expertise, then that's where you need to go. People can think proactively about it rather than cringing every time one of those

campus envelopes comes, which are usually invitations to join a new committee. I encourage junior colleagues to think about their own program, their own agenda, and what they can contribute best. Follow that agenda as much as possible and then say no to other things. That's at least been my advice, and to some extent, my own plan in certainly the last ten years.

**EF** I'd like to think about it in the context of other places that I've taught. I began at the liberal arts college at Wellesley. That was a wonderful place to learn how to teach. There was a tremendous emphasis there on the teaching, and the students were very attentive and wonderful. Wellesley also had standards for research and service and so forth, but I was in a visiting appointment there, so I was free from some of those responsibilities. In the years that I was at Harvard, a big research university with graduate students, while the undergraduate teaching was important, it was much more about performance—going in and giving lectures to hundreds of students and having graduate students do the more individualized work with undergraduates.

**JD** Like grading.

**EF** Yes, you're right. It is a bit of a euphemism, but I was on a zillion committees then because they wanted a woman on every committee. There weren't that many women to go around, so there was a lot of service of that kind. I think UNH is actually a pretty forgiving environment for all of these things. That is, the demands for service don't strike me as excessive within an institution. The classes here are smaller, you can get to know the students, there's good support for teaching, and the University's been good about leaves and having opportunities for research. So it is in a way the middle of these two extremes. If I compare it to the demands on faculty at other institutions, there is a kind of balance that one can achieve here that I think makes for a fairly rich life.

**MH** Certainly one of the virtues of the size of the institution that Ellen and Sue have alluded to is this flexibility. People think that the bigger the place, the more flexible it is, but that's not always true. You know if you've been teaching at Berkeley or UCLA and you were in German history, that's pretty much all you're ever going to teach is German history in the century in which you specialize. And here—maybe because of necessity but also because of the openness of the departments and the encouragement to try something new and the sense that it isn't going to sink your career if you teach something that isn't the topic of your latest book—you are freed up. It's a liberating experience. I'm not sure that people always recognize those institutional values that come with this kind institution. I've been at both large and small institutions as well, and I see that tremendous virtue, too. Obviously you have some of the downsides, but the ability to move around if you want into other areas, develop a course, to work on something with people from another discipline, I think is very intriguing here. I see people doing it all the time and it is very refreshing.

**JD** Ellen, a minute ago you said you were at Harvard and you were on lots of committees among other things. Why don't you all reflect on the gender question. As we speak and as people have been speaking at Harvard for the last few weeks, this is a hot issue.

**EF** [Laughing] Misspeaking at Harvard might be better.

**JD** ...or misspeaking. All they're talking about down there is the place of women in the institution. Of course the debate is about women in sciences, first and foremost, and not necessarily women in the liberal arts. Talk a bit about what this has meant. Certainly when I came to UNH, there were two women in the history department, and so when one talked about affirmative action or anything about affirmative action, that really meant, what are we going to do about hiring women. Now there are enough women in the history department, and affirmative action is a phrase where I don't think the gender question is really playing a primary role, at least in our department. People are really talking about something else when they talk about affirmative action. So there has been a change. Talk a bit about what this has meant for the history of higher education.

**MH** I think all three of us were in what was probably a lucky cohort when we left graduate school. At least doors were beginning to open. Many of the props were in place. People were interested in the possibility that hiring women would be a positive thing for a department. Some obviously hadn't quite made it to that threshold, but most had. Daycare was not only available in a lot of places, but it was routinely thought that you'd be able to use those props. When we entered, I think we were able to take advantage of some things while still feeling the pinch of being in departments [that had very few women]. For example, I was the only woman in the department in Buffalo for some twelve years before they hired a second woman who was able to stay for more than a year. So the gender issues, it seems to me, have come to the point where women feel as fully participant, especially in colleges of arts and sciences, and women are able to enter those worlds without having to either prove themselves or fight against people who want to keep doors closed. That said, it is still not necessarily the mode of choice to have women understand that these careers are wide open to them, and the biases that exist in engineering and science are very real. You see it on those elite campuses, but I think that members of this group are probably seeing that sea-change that occurred over a relatively long period. But if you would have compared us to the women who taught us, they were literally chastised for having children, expected to take sick days rather than maternity leave; all of those things, we certainly didn't see that in raw form. I think that you may be quite right in saying that the gender issue is one that we have our arms around, and there are an awful lot of people watching the store at Harvard. Where there are sufficient numbers of women, those controversies just are going to be less likely to happen. We do need to move into other areas I believe—the representation of minority groups is not as healthy—and to look for ways to facilitate that. As a woman, I've felt the barbs, I've seen the stings, but they've never left me very seriously damaged.

**JD** How about as an administrator? Here at UNH we've had two women in a row who have been presidents. Our chief financial officer is a woman. But on the other hand, the deans of the academic colleges at UNH are all men, with the exception of you. Does that create any tensions or difficulties?

**MH** No, I really don't think it has. I think in part because the men who are in similar positions have grown up in the same time period. If they haven't become successful at it by now, they're never going to become a dean here. I think we are seeing people who are open-minded go into these positions, those who are without the biases and who have the willingness to embrace those questions quite well, certainly in the sciences. And again, we've been especially attentive to that over the past several months just because the discussion has been so hot. We are looking at ways to make those career paths as attractive to younger women as the career paths were to us as women of our own generation.

**SS** I'm going to come at this at a slightly different angle, and your comment a minute ago made me think about this comparative angle. I wrote a letter to the editor of the New York Times about the Larry Summers issue. They neglected to publish it, but here's what I said to them: It was institutions like this one that did the revolutionary work in changing academia. Harvard sat back and waited until feminism was acceptable, fashionable, publishable. Then they began cherry-picking from all of the "grass-roots" organizations like this one, the faculty, the stars, and so on. I think that says an awful lot about the virtues in particular of the state institution, where women got a foothold earlier. We just had more room to experiment intellectually. The most exciting period in my time—other than Henry James finally making sense—were those years in the 70s when I was reading Adrienne Rich and everything was just starting to click together in my mind. I was also an assistant professor and dealing with all of the overload there, but my mind was on fire. This was the kind of institution that allowed me to institutionalize that fire and help turn it into a program and all of the accompanying changes that go with that. This is a slightly different approach to it, but I'm going back to that issue of where change starts. It starts in places like this. I think maybe the difference, Ellen, that you felt at Harvard is that the change started there so much later because—not to demonize Harvard—but the elite schools waited. And they missed the best part of it.

**EF** When I began my career, my first book was on the topic of women and the history of higher education, so this is a subject that I think about not only from my own experience and from being a member of the academy but in the historical perspective as well. From the very beginning of the emergence of modern higher education, the state universities were always more open to women than the private institutions, which had very often had longer, more difficult and more institutionalized sets of barriers to overcome. There was a culture and environment that I think made progress difficult in many of those places. When I was there, Wellesley was really in many ways a kind of matriarchy. It had had an entirely female faculty until the 1930s or 40s. By the time I got there, it actually had turned around. They had hired a lot of men, so it was about fifty/fifty. When I was at Harvard, it was

a period when the history department was in the throes of a very difficult transition. I was there in the period when those tensions were at their height, I would say. Since then, things have improved dramatically, or so I've been told. But I think if you look at the discipline of history, too, within this there is a history of pervasive sex discrimination, in the field and really in the academy. This is certainly very much at odds with all of the ideals and values that we claim to endorse as academics. A new generation of academics has opened the doors for women academics—all of us among the women have benefited from the changes. However, that change has not erased problems in many parts of higher education, and institutional barriers to women remain. I certainly have not felt such barriers at UNH. I am now a senior professor. But I've certainly felt, I would say, an awareness of institutional barriers many times. I think about what you were saying earlier about how over the course of your life as a professor different things matter to you and become more salient. My time here has coincided with the time in my career where I have overcome many of these obstacles. But I don't for a moment imagine that they don't exist anymore simply because I've moved past the point when they were very real in my own life.

**JD** I should probably admit on record that one person that was cherry-picked, as you said, from my department to go to Harvard was Laurel Ulrich. In the interest of full disclosure I convinced Marilyn that hiring Ellen to come to UNH would help the history department—a decision I'm very proud of.

**EF** And let me interject that this relationship with Jeff is actually a perfect example of the way in which women's experience in higher education may not be predictable along the lines of the way the outside world might see it. I've been very fortunate to have people like Jeff, who have encouraged my career. At a turning point in my career, Jeff appeared. It was an incredible gift for me and I was very fortunate. It isn't always the case that your friends come in the guise of the same sex. You imagine the solidarity among women and that we're all supporting each other through the ranks. It doesn't always go that way. I think it's important to keep in mind that these things are much more complex than they appear on the surface.

**SS** The thing that I find so infuriating with Larry Summers and that whole case is that he's playing devil's advocate to a situation where the research is out there to answer the question. We've done this already. That's the part that worries me about women's studies, that we have to reinvent this wheel every 20 or 30 years. I'm hoping that we don't, but many of the questions that he was raising "just to facilitate discussion," he says, have been answered in the research about women's capacity for science, in this case. If Summers is a bell-weather of what we're going to have to go through here, that worries me a little bit. We're going to have to redo this.

**MH** We need to stretch the spectrum of our understanding, too. We believe in the academy that we have an open mind and are able to see areas in which there may be lingering questions about natural abilities and propensities and social pressures, but of course the vast majority of students that come to us are not children of academic parents. They come from all over the place, where

a lot of misconceptions about what girls do and what boys do and what could be good for them in a greater society still are very strong. We would like to think that we've gotten over it. We've gotten over it here to a large extent but certainly not in the greater society. All you need to prove that is go to a movie sometime and listen to people around you and their comments about the people in the movies, about the teenagers sitting next to them, or anything in that order. So that's one area. The other thing is that the structure of science does need to be treated a little bit differently. To be successful in science, people work in labs, they work in teams with a pecking order and rules for who gets to be first author, who gets to claim this research, who gets to be the top person on the grant. Those things are very much more similar to the corporate world than they are to the rest of academic life. We need to see that there are different ways of operating. We need to be aware of the kind of different expectations of people in these areas—just the time in the trenches that graduate students and post-docs are expected to spend essentially as nonpeople while they work for someone else in order to get to a point where they are allowed to get to the next level. Those things can be brutal for anybody, and I think that if the group is smaller and it happens to be women, it can turn into a gender issue without really even meaning to be at some level. It's that kind of environment, it seems to me, that people need to pay some attention to and make sure that they've made those environments as neutral and as encouraging for all people who work within them as possible. As for the rest of the academy, it seems to me that we've got a very open book. There are a lot of monitors, there are a lot of foxes watching them—I guess it's not the chicken coop here—a lot of big chickens are watching the other chickens to make sure that people don't do things that are just plain stupid. That's not as easy to do when you've got this finely honed team in which everybody has a role. If somebody is really too good for the role, it's not easy to step out of it there. It is here. We can find good places for people who do things, whether they be women or younger people or older people, whatever their discipline. That's not as true in that much more stratified kind of environment, and it's interesting for us to watch because we can look across the street and see our colleagues in engineering and the sciences struggling with some of those same issues.

**SS** Yes, it's there that I think feminist analysis is perfect to dissect the social construction of scientific academia and figure out why women are having trouble. The whole issue of innate ability has been pretty well explored. I'm not quite sure what Larry Summers is talking about.

**EF** It's an interesting thing I think in light of teaching at UNH, too, after coming here from a private university. This is something that I thought about during this whole recent controversy: all of us stand in front of a class and are teaching a subject, and we know that there are going to be some people that are going to warm to it and do wonderfully, some that are hopefully going to get most of it, and some that are going to get some of it. [As a teacher] you're just an open book. You're standing there, and you're going to work with those students, and try to bring them where you want them to go. If you stood up there at the beginning and you said to yourself, 20 percent of these people aren't going to get what I'm doing, that would affect how you talk and the way you interact with the student. You have

to believe that every one of them can do it, that you have no idea who isn't going to or won't. I don't think of it as can't. It's more a matter of how you are going to spend the time and so forth. For the entire semester, you've got to act this way towards each one of these kids. That's what you are being paid to do. So if you come in with preconceptions about these students, thinking maybe that those with red hair and green eyes are not going to understand this subject, it is such a gross dereliction of duty and also an abandonment of the values of American higher education. You don't know, and so you have to act "as if." That's our job—to try to teach.

**SS** I think we've all had the experience—this was more common before standardized teaching evaluations—when we read the written comments: we see the student in the back of the room who was polishing her nails or who was listening to his Walkman or whatever and looked as bored as could be, and then the student wrote an evaluation that said this was the most exciting course that she or he ever took and that they were so intellectually engaged. I now, of course, tend to believe the latter, but you are right, you can not tell what's happening in people's minds. The mind is a beautiful thing, regardless of the demeanor, so you have to approach everyone in the same way.

**EF** I think the students at UNH are harder to figure than any students I've taught anywhere else. They look at you with an expression that is very hard, but the other side of this is that they are among the most forgiving students. When I think about it, I have read thousands, literally thousands of evaluations, and here I feel that every time I read evaluations I have landed on a feather bed. I often felt at other places like I'd been dropped from the top of a building onto concrete. It's so hard to tell here. I don't know if it's the weather or family or what, but they are hard to read, but they are generous on side two of the evaluation forms.

**JD** When I taught at Stanford, I could give a student a B+ and the student would come and argue that he knew he had not done very well but still really wanted an A because he was expected to go to med school or something. I've always felt that with students at UNH, when you gave them a lower grade that they deserved, they accepted the fact that they deserved that and they often would say, "Well, OK, yeah, I got this C-, and I'll do the work and try and come to class and do better."

But you know one of the things about Larry Summers: The president of Harvard University is almost by definition a public intellectual. When the president of Harvard speaks, the world is going to pay attention. But Ellen, I want to give you an opportunity to talk a bit about being a public intellectual. We are all faculty members, professors in liberal arts, and people outside of the academy sometimes say that what they dislike about academics is that when we talk about the most difficult questions out there, we always say, "Well, you know, it's complex." We resist simple-minded answers and solutions. Yet Ellen, you've been asked to function as a kind of public intellectual, serving as a commentator on the *NewsHour*, where millions of people hear you speak about the American political process. How do you look at that experience? Has it been a good one? Do you think it has encouraged your thinking about other kinds of things?

**EF** It's been a great experience. It was tremendously challenging to me. I'm invigorated by challenges. I just got a copy of the new American Historical Association statement of professional standards, and there's a section in it that addresses the question of historians going public, which I read with great interest. I felt happy that it acknowledged one of the central difficulties, which is to try to take very complex questions and issues that we debate as historians and scholars in a particular way and to reduce them into the kind of quick and succinct points that one can make in, let's say, a five-minute news slot. How you can do that without doing violence to the truth, to historical accuracy, to professional ethics, that has been—that is—an enormous challenge intellectually. It really involves taking the very big and complex questions and then trying to think about how I can say this in a way that doesn't totally abandon objectivity, that makes a worthwhile point, that advances the discussion, and that is understandable to a wider audience, people that aren't studying history. It was a wonderful experience. It has been a lot of fun to do something new and learn something new, and it's something that more scholars should do if they have the chance. There should not be this great divide between the academy and the rest of the world. God knows that knowledge and understanding are needed from wherever they come, and for us to sit together and talk is rewarding, but it is very rewarding to try to talk beyond the walls of the university as well.

**MH** I was struck when I was listening to you and others on the *NewsHour* that although our job is to investigate complexity, that's what we do, what we're best at it, sometimes it's all we do. There are things that emerge that are basic and simple and fundamental and striking. You more than any of the other commentators during that process did manage to pull some of those out. I thought that if ever people watching wanted to appreciate what academics can do, it is to make complicated things from time to time simple. That's a reverse of the malaise that we talked about because academics do in fact have that tendency to want to make sure they've taken consideration of every variable therefore elevating none of them to public importance. But you did do that in ways that I thought were striking, and if I were making a judgment as an academic, as an intellectual, the times require informed thematic analysis from time to time, and [presidential] campaigns certainly do, because there is so much detail, so much variation, so much verbiage, that striking out the essential themes and then examining them, it seems to me, is more important than ever before. I thank you and others who've taken on that role. I think it is one of the things that we probably do need to assume more responsibility for.

**SS** I would like to add one thing on that. I've never had a public stance like you've had, and as you were talking it made me think that the first day of each Chaucer class I feel like a public intellectual and may for several weeks into that course because the students are educated, but they know nothing, typically, nothing at all about what we are about to embark on. I, too, struggle with finding ways of reaching audiences, ways that are still honest to the field but related to the listener. I think any academic finally has to do that, and I would also add it's self-serving in my case because I think it made me better able to communicate in writing. I'm writing to a very different audience when I'm writing a Chaucer article, but some of the things

I've learned about approaching a nonprofessional or an amateur audience, in fact most of it, communicates just as well with a professional audience. Not every one of my colleagues knows the plot to the things I specialize in. There is something to be said for wrapping in the plot summary, and then you can move on. I think we are all in some ways public intellectuals on the first day of class.

**EF** I think it's a skill that most professors have that comes with the territory. We translate complex and difficult ideas of material and try to teach it to people who haven't studied it before. I think many people have the talent; it's just finding the opportunities to do it.

**SS** We teach people ways to think about things.

**JD** I think that one of the difficulties of being a public intellectual and doing something on a television series is that as academics, while we convey information, it is also incumbent upon us to be moral individuals, with moral stances. When I talk about the Holocaust, I'm not neutral about the Holocaust. There is currently a controversy about C-Span, which is going to do an interview with a person who has written about Holocaust deniers, and C-Span decided it wants to invite a denier for "balance." This has led to a big uproar. I think that it might be difficult on something like the *NewsHour* or where they're trying for a certain balance or mythical objectivity. Yet you must have felt compelled at times to take clear moral positions.

**EF** Sure, you have to have convictions or you've got nothing to say. You've got to have passion—your understanding of history in the past. You've got to have a belief, a set of beliefs. The good thing is that there are two other people on the *NewsHour* who have other passions and convictions and beliefs. The positive thing about it also is the fact that there is a great interest among people out there in the world. I think it's true of other fields, as well—in literature, in many things we study. Adults make their way in the world every day, go to a job, and don't have all these privileges that we have to read and think and write and teach students. But most people really enjoy engaging intellectual ideas with those who make their living this way. I've gotten a lot of letters, some positive, some negative, but obviously people respond, and so it's a good thing I think for all concerned. [As academics], we can try to expand our audiences.

**MH** No other profession in the world has as its job to think and explore and find things that are just plain interesting and not necessarily practical, aside from the engineers and the applied scientists, etc., in their fields. I think we have an obligation to share what we've found out, because we in fact can bring things to bear. Although sometimes we're not invited to the table to do that, all you need to do is look at governments around the world today and ask if they couldn't use some of that understanding of history or experience or relevance or understanding of cultural areas. It's important, as Jeff pointed out earlier, not to eschew those

opportunities because they may get you in many cases in great controversy. They will also bring you great satisfaction that you are doing something that is more important than even teaching the students that you teach. It's getting out and taking the stand that people can then spend some time trying to work through.

**JD** I think this is one of my favorite reactions to Ellen's appearances: I've probably had a dozen conversations with people around the country who saw you on television, thought you did a wonderful job, and then asked if I happened to know you. It makes me wonder--exactly how large do they think UNH and the history department are?--that they have to ask if I happen to know you.

**EF** My favorite reaction [to my *NewsHour* appearances] was at the toll booth entering New Hampshire. I reached out to hand my dollar over and the toll taker hesitated. I thought "Oh my god, the state police have called ahead, I was speeding . . ." He pointed his finger at me and said: "You teach at UNH, right?" I said "right." "You're a historian right?" "Right!" "And I saw you on television?" I nodded. Then he said: "Good work" and off I went.

**JD** When you look back on your careers, are there any regrets about paths not taken?

**MH** Just be thankful [the toll taker] didn't say, "I was a history major."

**EF** He didn't, he didn't.

**JD** That's great. Let me ask all of you, are there any regrets, when you look back on your careers, about paths not taken. I know every once in a while, especially since I started writing about cities, there have been moments when I wonder what my life would have been if, as an undergraduate, I had gone into architecture instead of becoming a historian. I may have built something, designed things, but instead I write about people who did these things. Any regrets for the three of you?

**SS** I'm really sorry my career as an opera star never got far. No, my regret, Jeff, is not that I followed this career path, but that I can't have another one. Some people get several careers, but it's taken me this long to get this act together. There literally are not another 35 years to do another one and that's my regret. I think it's so exciting the new fields that have opened up: museum studies wasn't around, ecology wasn't there; there are a lot of other exciting fields. But I don't regret this career. I just wish I could have one of those, too.

**EF** That's hard. Go ahead Marilyn.

**MH** I feel a little bit of sympathy about what Sue says. I think that on one level, though, we have had those careers—mini-versions of them. We take sabbaticals, travel, and do things we didn't expect to. We have aspects of other people's careers that become very close to ours, and we have the luxury of some time to explore those. Sometimes we're even rewarded for doing that. So there is some of that that says, "Oh well, we had the best of a lot of worlds," if not all the kinds of things that you might have thought of doing. When you talk to women in our age cohort, and especially women who are older, they often say they regret not taking more risks earlier. Rather than worry about whether the daycare was sufficient and just making sure you got the kids to school, why didn't you just go to Europe for a year and put them in another school? Why didn't you just spend the money to go on a fantastic trip where you'd be in the wilderness for eight days with your family or other people and those sorts of things? I think that all of us can look to things like that, but the important thing, in part, is that we just see them in retrospect. We would have done them. When you think of the places you've traveled and the universities you've visited, the exciting people from all over the world who've come to talk, it is an extraordinary opportunity that academics have to be able to interact in ways that keep their minds and experiences very active. I like to think that we've made good use of those, and as Jeff will point out, my vacation time every year looks increasingly exotic as I do those things. So I think the ability to continue to do those activities into adulthood seems to be a very strong motivator for this kind of life.

**EF** The only thing about my career that I regret is how much time I've spent on it. I feel that history is a fairly solitary undertaking. When you do research and you're writing books and so forth, you are in the archives and you are really alone—a lot. I feel as if just the amount of time it took me to move up the ranks and the amount of energy that went into producing the books that I wrote... I doubt if I would have done it any other way, but it would have been nice to have slept later and gardened more often and gone to the beach. Sometimes I wonder about the amount of time and energy that I devoted to academic achievement as opposed to any number of other ways of having an enriched life.

**JD** As academics, you see us all going home at the end of the day with a big satchel or briefcase or something that we schlep around, but we see people in other professions and jobs where at 4:30 or 5:00 they walk away from the job. They don't take it home on the weekend, burdened with guilt, feeling that there is always that thing to write, study, or read. Going on vacation, we can't resist taking work with us, though these days you have to take your computer with you or else stay away from e-mail. But I think it's interesting—I suspect our students look at us and believe that our lives have been planned out carefully. They see us as people

who began our undergraduate lives, went to graduate school, got jobs as faculty, moved up through the ranks to the top ranks that all of you are now in, and that it was all planned and laid out. But I think for all of us that's only the shell of what's happened. That we ended up here, worked on the projects that we worked on, enjoyed the travels that come with the job—most of that was not foreseen at all. This is something that evolves out of the job and makes it interesting for us. As long as we're excited about what we do, it's great.

**SS** I think the three of us took risks that we didn't recognize at the time. We took risks going on to higher education, then going into a system that maybe we didn't know a whole lot about. It seemed to us that we weren't making conscious choices, but we took risks that other women would not or could not. Both, I'm sure. When you take risks, dice roll, and things happen. If we hadn't taken the risks, we would not have been fulfilled people.

**EF** The year that I graduated from college in 1974, I think there was an initiative of the AHA, the American Historical Association, that was sent out. I got a letter when I was accepted by one graduate school. It came with a statement that was essentially a warning, saying that there were not going to be jobs, that the odds of being able to actually land a job in higher education with a Ph.D. in history were poor. It was incredibly discouraging. On the one hand was a letter saying "Congratulations, you've been admitted to the University of Pennsylvania," but on the other was a letter saying, "Go ahead and get a Ph.D., but don't count on ever working in the field." I remember—I was 21 at the time—going to one of my history professors and saying, "Well, I got into graduate school, but I'm not really sure about this letter." It was sort of like someone patting you on the head and slapping you across the face simultaneously. I asked, "What does it mean?" And this person said, "Don't worry about it. There will always be jobs for the best students." And that, it turns out, was not the case. There were wonderful people who got lost. In that whole cohort that I went to graduate school with there were a lot of very good people who had a terrible time of it. So in that sense, I'm not sure that I appreciated how foolish I was being, but, I went for it, nonetheless.

**SS** I was thinking about my graduating in 1966 and going to graduate school, and I think my scholarship was from the National Defense Act. The 60s thought of education as the national defense. As a public historian, please tell me you know where we've gone from there.

**EF** Well a lot of money has dried up, there's no doubt about that.

**MH** One of the interesting things that is partly a creation of patterns set by people in this cohort and people slightly younger is that students going through school now don't believe they are limited to these singular options. So if you get a Ph.D. in English, you could work in the International Monetary Fund. If you get a Ph.D. in history, who knows, you might end up in the film industry. We

were probably much more constrained in thinking about the world—the world as our oyster kind of thing—despite the fact of being children of the 60s and 70s. Now you can use your education for different things. I think that's a good thing because it means that a Ph.D.'s credential means at one level the higher standard of what the B.A. means. It means you are really smart, you can take on a lot of things, you've had a good wealth of experience, and you're a quick read—you can take on things and learn them. People don't feel that if they get the Ph.D. in history, it's a job at X college or out. I think that we are encouraging our students to try to think along those terms, as well, not just say to them, you can get your Ph.D. but we can't do much for you after that. It's not a good message to send and not a realistic one either.

**EF** I think part of that has been worked out through the experience of people that came out with these credentials and were not able to get employment in higher education and in creative ways took some of these skills into other settings. So that certainly has been the case. But it does make me realize what an incredible privilege it is to be paid to think and read and learn. It's just an incredible thing, and when you think about the whole picture, you really feel as if you got tapped on the head. [Being an academic] really is a wonderful way to have had a life and a career.

**JD** And being in a career where you're given time to do what you want. We're not only paid to do it, but we structure our own time. We have hours that we teach, hours that we are on committees and hold office hours, but for the rest of that week, including the time we take our briefcases home, we're really structuring our own lives. No one is doing it for us. Most successful academics find ways to do that.

**SS** Yes, I think there may be something about jobs in academia that's not like other jobs. I think many academics don't make a boundary between play and work. It's fun—it's fun to do this stuff. I can sit down and read and write and three hours has gone by. That's amazing. So I don't resent that by any means. Taking work home on the weekends, that's not work, that's my life.

**EF** The downside of it is, not to contradict previous comments, the more I learn the more overwhelmed I feel about all I don't know. One life just isn't long enough to learn it all or even some portion of it. This is why arrogance in academia is so out of place. It's really impossible not to be humbled by it. The more you learn, more and more opens up. It never gets less; it always grows. My parents gave me this book when I was a child about Bartholomew's hats, I think it was 1,000 Hats or something, and each time he took off one, another one appeared, and this is how it is. You know there is just always more to do.

**JD** That sounds like a good line for us to close on. It's been a fun conversation for me, and I think for all of us. I thank the three of you very much.