

CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Amy Gutmann

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Amy Gutmann conducted by Michael T. Ryan on June 6, 2013. This interview is part of the Carnegie Corporation of New York Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

3PM

Session #1 (video)

Interviewee: Amy Gutmann

Location: New York, NY

Interviewer: Michael T. Ryan

Date: June 6, 2013

Q: Dr. Gutmann, you have spoken publicly and you've written about the importance of your family and your upbringing in your life. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about the ways in which your family, your upbringing has shaped who you are today?

Gutmann: Well, just as the United States is a country of immigrants, I am a child of a German-Jewish refugee, my father, and my mother was a child of the [Great] Depression in New York. They met when my father came from India, his first time to the United States, and they met right here in New York at a dance at the [J. W. Marriott] Essex [House] hotel. My father immigrated to the United States. He'd gotten his whole family—he was the youngest of five children—out of Nazi Germany to India and then to the United States. And I was born here and was very conscious my whole life of being the child of immigrants and also having the opportunity to be the first in my family to graduate from college. That kind of opportunity—plus the heroism of my father of really being farsighted enough to see what was happening in Germany and get out—that combination of farsightedness, courage and opportunity have always motivated me.

Q: And did these lead you into the Academy ultimately?

Gutmann: Yes, ultimately, although one would never have been able to predict it from the start. But my mother always wanted to be a teacher and her family couldn't afford to send her to

college. And my father, while he worked with his hands, he was very intellectual. Both of them believed that education was more important than anything else—that the most important gift you could give to a child, other than love, was education. And although I didn't know it at the time, when I was a child, I think I really took it to both heart and mind, and teaching became a calling and scholarship became a calling for me.

Q: And at what point, once you entered the Academy, did you discover this niche in political science, political theory, that then led you to this remarkable career—talking about, writing about what you call deliberative democracy?

Gutmann: When I was a child, it was the height of the civil rights era and I was already then interested in issues of civil rights and justice. And when I got to college, I had the good fortune of taking a great political theory course with Michael Walzer. I was a math major at the time and I thought I would go on in mathematics, and I just was seized by the social importance of political philosophy—in contrast to math, which was, you could prove a theorem in math but it wouldn't necessarily change the world. I got very interested in issues of justice. The Vietnam War was raging when I was in college. And I found the combination of thinking both analytically and broadly about issues of justice and politics and those issues having a directly relevant effect on people's lives. I found that captivating, intellectually and emotionally, I think. And I headed, instead of to math as a scholarly profession, to political theory.

Q: Was Michael Walzer's influence on you decisive that way?

Gutmann: I think it was. He was a terrific teacher. He took a direct interest in his students.

So was the influence of John Rawls. I was there at Harvard [University] when John Rawls was working on his pathbreaking book, *A Theory of Justice*, and he accepted me into his graduate seminar when I was an undergraduate. Michael Walzer and John Rawls both had a great influence on me. But I also was receptive to that influence too because the issues really resonated in the world, not just in my life.

Q: What did you get from Rawls?

Gutmann: I think “Justice as Fairness” is a good summary: the idea that, from the time children are very young, the first ethical idea they have is fairness. And to be able to elevate the idea of fairness into something that is as important as justice for society and the world is both obvious and profound at the same time, and so it intellectually resonated. I’ve never found any of the great philosophers I’ve read or those I’ve worked with—and I count John Rawls as a great philosopher—as having the whole truth. They have great insights and those I find really important to build on.

Q: What’s interesting about what you’ve been saying is that you’ve always been able to find a practical base for your theoretical positions. That is to say, what’s compelling about the theory is the fact that it has consequences.

Gutmann: I always look for theoretical insights that can have practical consequences. That's the kind of political philosopher that I am. And it's very different from Plato's *Republic*, an ideal that would require nothing less than exiling all adults from society! I don't look to create a system for a group of people who don't exist, but rather look to how we can think about education, democracy, justice—in the most recent case, political campaigns—

Q: In your most recent book, yes.

Gutmann: —and governance in a way that, actually, there's some way of getting from where we are now to a better place.

Q: So it sounds like some of this must stand behind—and maybe you could tell us a bit about it—your decision to add administration to all of that academic leadership.

Gutmann: So the great thing about being a scholar and teacher is you have a great deal of independence. All the mistakes you make are your own. When you become a leader of an institution, the great thing is you can facilitate. You can help so many very talented people, you can bring together very talented people who can accomplish so much more than you can on your own, and the flip side of that is you have to clean up a lot of other people's [laughs] mistakes. What captivated me about doing administration, starting with creating a University Center for Human Values [UCHV] at Princeton [University] and then coming to [University of Pennsylvania] Penn and being Penn's president, is how much more I could accomplish than I can alone as a scholar. And if I can continue to do some scholarship, that's icing on the cake.

Q: You did something—and I was at Penn at the time so I remember this—but you did something rather unusual when you began. And that is, in your inauguration address, you laid out what you called the Penn Compact, which became your signature piece and really the brand, if you will, of your administration. Do you want to tell us, for people who won't know about the Penn Compact who'll be watching this, a little bit about what it is, why you did it, where it is?

Gutmann: So I decided, instead of giving what one might say is a typical inauguration speech, I would actually use the speech as a leadership opportunity, after having done a listening tour on campus, to lay out a vision of what I had hoped Penn could be moving forward, based on its potential. This became the Penn Compact. And its three pillars are increasing access, integrating knowledge across disciplines, and engaging locally and globally to put that knowledge to work in the world. It's our Penn Compact now, not mine. And we've been able to do things because of the unity around it that Penn has never been able to do before and that other universities resonate to and also seek to do, such as dramatically increasing financial aid more than ever before in Penn's history. We're the largest university to have an all-grant, no-loan policy for all undergraduates with financial need.

Q: So the Penn Compact, you would say, is what sets Penn apart from other schools?

Gutmann: I would say the Penn Compact enables us to focus keenly on our highest priorities, which also are the highest priorities of many other higher education institutions. It's our hope that we can be something of a model or a beacon for higher education in showing how much a

twenty-first century university can do to make a difference in individual lives and in the life of our society and betterment of the world.

Q: So in a sense, the Penn Compact is really the administrative fulfillment, if you will, of your vision of your work as a scholar and as a quiet activist.

Gutmann: Yes—

Q: Would that be fair?

Gutmann: —I think that's a fair statement. I didn't think of it that way as I was doing it, but just as I didn't think of becoming Penn's president when I was apparently on that very path—yes, I think it is a fair statement.

Q: Let me ask you this. Why did you accept the Penn offer? I'm sure there were lots of other universities that probably were looking at you or lots of other opportunities. Why Penn?

Gutmann: So when I accepted the offer, it dawned on me, as I said publicly, that this was a dream I never had, come true. I didn't seek to be a university president but I really did want to be the president of Penn. I think that's because the Penn Compact is the right vision not only for Penn, but for me as a president of a university because it takes the ideas that are produced in a university, the opportunity that's given in a university, and raises it to the next level. And it enabled me, as president, to move an institution forward in directions that the members of the

institution resonated with. So that's a long way of saying it's a really good fit. [Laughs] There was just a good fit between what was going to enable me to fulfill the dream I did have, which is making a difference in the world, and enabling a great university to become even greater.

Q: This is a good segue to—why did you accept the invitation to join the board of the Carnegie [Corporation of New York]?

Gutmann: So when Vartan [Gregorian] called me and asked me to join the board, there were two reasons I accepted. One is that Vartan asked me [laughs] and it's very hard to say no to Vartan. But the second reason was that Carnegie has a mission, historically, that's absolutely key to what a great foundation can do to make a difference in the world, and part of that mission is education. And there's nothing I care about more, other than family and friends, than education. So, again, it was a great fit.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about how you see the Carnegie Corporation and its history, its mission over time?

Gutmann: So only in America can there be a corporation like the Carnegie Corporation because its founder was a model American philanthropist, someone who made a fortune and then looked to apply it to doing good in the world. Carnegie has built on that. It continues to fund those wonderful libraries that Andrew Carnegie—his insight was how important libraries are to educational opportunity. And over the history of Carnegie, it's done more and more, both domestically and internationally. The two parts of the focused program that Carnegie now moves

forward that I think are just incredibly critical are, one, its educational programs and its having not just programs but really an idea for how to change American education, and the other is its international programs, including international security. And then there's a link between the two in Carnegie's focus on immigration and how important immigration reform can be to bring the world, in a really important way, to this country, to the United States, because we are a country of immigrants.

Q: Have there been particular programs that you've championed on the board?

Gutmann: Well, the program that I have the most expertise in and have championed—only in the sense that I've been very strongly supportive of the direction that it's going in, and I ask critical questions but I'm just tremendously supportive of what it's doing—is the theory of change [education strategy] and the Opportunity Equation program. Michele Cahill, who has come to Carnegie—back to Carnegie from a stint with Joel [I.] Klein in New York City public schools—I think is a brilliant leader of these programs. She'll probably be the first to tell you that I ask really hard questions but I do it because I'm just so supportive of the seed money and the ideas that Carnegie is injecting into how to make the American K-12 public school system work better.

Q: So you have a working relationship with her?

Gutmann: Yes.

Q: And what do you admire most about what it is she's done and doing?

Gutmann: What I admire most is that she focuses on what the evidence suggests will make a difference in K-12 public education. She uses Carnegie resources, both the human resources and the financial resources, to partner with really important other players in the educational field and brings together coalitions that move K-12 education forward and are very promising in that regard. So to fuel STEM education, science, technology, engineering and math education, at the K-12 level, Carnegie has a big program to do that. The theory of change is how you get public schools into constructive change, system-wide reform. Again, coalitions of players—you can't do anything in K-12 education that scales to size without having coalitions of people who move in the same direction.

Q: Have you anything to say about or been involved with some of the Corporation's international education initiative, say in Russia, in Eastern Europe, or in Africa?

Gutmann: I support them as a board member but I've been less involved with those.

Q: So it's really been domestic K-12 education?

Gutmann: Yes.

Q: Now, when you talked about your reasons for joining the board, the first thing you said was "Because it was Vartan." So tell us a little bit about Vartan and why a call from Vartan makes a difference.

Gutmann: Vartan knows how to get things done. He cares passionately about education and the public good. He is a maven for talent and he's just fun to be with.

Q: Had you worked with him before?

Gutmann: I think the other reason is I hadn't actually worked with Vartan before. I knew him and he and I knew each other—we have the Penn connection and I admired him from afar and the moment I was named as president, he reached out to me and welcomed me into the Penn family. So we knew each other but not closely. It was, for me, an opportunity to work more closely with Vartan in an enterprise, again, that puts theory into practice. And I also had a deep both knowledge and interest and, frankly, a concern about how foundations use their resources, and I thought that the foundation that is doing it best is Carnegie under Vartan's leadership. It's focused and it isn't trying simply to throw out seed money and then move on to the next project, which a lot of foundations, at least at their worst, wind up doing. I think a lot have learned their lesson but I think Vartan got this from the start: that it's really important for a foundation to focus its energies on things that can make a difference and not just seed new projects and then move on to the next new thing.

Q: So it's Carnegie's commitment to sustained involvement with an idea and an area.

Gutmann: Its enduring commitment. I really believe that institutions have to focus their energies in doing things that they can do well and really show that they can make a difference. It's just too

easy to waste money. [Laughs] As I like to say, sprinkling fairy dust around the world is not a recipe for making a difference. It makes you feel good because you're giving a little bit to a lot of different things, but it ends up being just about nothing, whereas Vartan really understands that we've got to make a difference.

Q: When Vartan recruited you, did he talk to you about a particular role he wanted you to play on the board? Was there a niche he wanted you to fill?

Gutmann: No. He basically said he wanted me to do on the board whatever I was interested in and he knew I was avidly interested in education. I also am very interested in international affairs and the issues of global justice and I'm married to someone, Michael [W.] Doyle, who's a scholar of international relations at Columbia University. And so being on the board also enables me to help support the role of American institutions in such "small" issues as global peace and nuclear disarmament [laughs] and a host of issues that are truly important in the twenty-first century.

Q: Do you have in mind projects that you would want to bring to Carnegie?

Gutmann: The projects that I have had in mind are actually being undertaken at Carnegie, and in the spirit of focus, I wouldn't want to dilute the energies. And those are reforming K-12 education, incredibly important; immigration reform—I've been a champion of that as president of Penn and Carnegie has a platform to do that more and more; and then helping the developing world build its capacity, which Carnegie does with libraries and other things; and finally, the role

that the U.S. relations with Eurasia can play in creating a more peaceful world. Those are ample priorities for the foundation and they overlap greatly with my own sense of what a foundation like Carnegie can do to make a difference. I wouldn't want to dilute them.

Q: The one element that you mentioned that would have been new to me as somebody who's looked at Carnegie would be immigration.

Gutmann: Yes.

Q: And do you want to talk a little bit about sort of how you see a foundation like Carnegie having a positive impact on the immigration debate and outcomes?

Gutmann: I think this is a passion that Vartan and I share, Vartan being—

Q: —an immigrant, yes.

Gutmann: —an immigrant himself, I being the child of immigrants. And I think that the role that Carnegie can play is of a convener and also as a nonpartisan publicist, if you will, of how important immigration has been to this country. So I think it's great that Carnegie is in this for the long haul. Now we all hope that we may get immigration reform through Congress, although it's still dicey. But Carnegie was bringing together groups who were studying this issue and who were also active in this issue for a long time when it was thought that immigration reform was dead in the water. And that's what a really excellent foundation will do. It will stick to it. That's

what institutions of higher education do. We're in it for the long haul, and then when the opportunity arises, we actually have the knowledge base and we have the coalitions of people who know, who build on that knowledge to make a difference.

Q: Let me shift slightly—

Gutmann: Yes, sure.

Q: —to the ways in which Vartan works with the board. There's been a lot of press coverage given recently to the relationships between CEOs [chief executive officers] and their boards and boards and their CEOs. How does Vartan work with his board?

Gutmann: Vartan is as open as a president can be and should be with his board. So he works very collaboratively with the board. He is the leader of the staff at Carnegie, but when it comes to board meetings, in between board meetings, Vartan doesn't hesitate to get on the phone and tell board members what's happening, ask their advice, take their advice on things. So in an era where there's a lot of publicity about these divisions between the board and the CEO, that just doesn't exist at Carnegie.

Q: So is there a vigorous give and take of ideas in meetings?

Gutmann: There is. The meetings—we ask hard questions of the presenters and Vartan is totally non-defensive. He pushes just as hard as we push, all in the spirit of that's how you do things well. You'd much rather have your critics inside, making you better, than on the outside.

Q: So I take it that the board, as you see it, the board feels an equal partner, that it's an equal—

Gutmann: Absolutely.

Q: —partner with Vartan?

Gutmann: Absolutely.

Q: And how would you compare this board to other boards you serve on?

Gutmann: I serve on a limited number of boards because I have a pretty demanding job as president. And every board I serve on, and there are only a few, I really feel that board members have an important role. Otherwise, I wouldn't spend my time doing this. I'm on the Vanguard [Group, Inc.] corporation board. It's a very small board and we oversee hundreds of mutual funds and, basically, two trillion dollars of investors' money, and I think Vanguard also does a great job in a totally different space.

The Carnegie board is a real ideas board. We're always batting ideas around, and I think that's what makes it distinctive. And it's to Vartan's credit that he brings together people from an

incredibly diverse range of occupations and geographies too, and so it's a fabulous board to brainstorm with.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q¹: Dr. Gutmann, I wanted to go back to something you said earlier about your interactions with Michele Cahill during the board meetings. You said that she knows you as someone who asks hard-hitting questions and I wondered if you can think of any of the particular programs that were presented and the ways that you interrogated those ideas.

Gutmann: A few board meetings ago, we had a set of presentations by some software companies on what they could do to move K-12 education forward. And listening to those presentations, I felt that if you believed these PowerPoints, you would think that by adopting this set of technologies, K-12 education would just go to heaven. I mean, it was presented as the panacea. And I said that. I said, "As a listener, you're giving us a sales pitch that if we believe, we shouldn't be sitting on the board because it's just hype, it's a sales pitch. And that doesn't help. I want to know what, realistically, this can do for K-12 education. If we're going to support funding these technologies, let's be realistic because K-12 education—the history is littered with claims of panaceas." And Michele took that to heart. Fast-forward to our board meeting today and we had a much more realistic presentation of what the technology needs are, what it can do, what it can't do, what we need from teachers far beyond technology. Just total change, and I credit Michele with that. She's the one who leads this forward and she gets it. She really does get it.

¹ Question asked by Sarah E. Dziedzic.

Q: But you asked the question.

Gutmann: Yes. It's just a question. Board members at their best are, I think, constructive provocateurs. And what we provoke is just better work from really, really talented staff people.

Q: So it sounds like the board, the current board of the Carnegie Corporation that Vartan has put together is a collection of provocateurs.

Gutmann: True.

Q: Okay. I want to switch now to the relationship between Carnegie the corporation and Penn and, specifically, the 2009 [Academic] Leadership [Award] Grant that you won from the Corporation. Can you tell us a little bit about what that meant to you and how you used the funds?

Gutmann: When I got a call from Vartan saying that Carnegie had voted for me and Penn to get the Leadership Award—because it really is an award for the institution and I'm privileged to be the president who gets the award—I was really bowled over because the award is recognizing universities that are making a difference in their community and that are integrating knowledge across boundaries and providing access to students who otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity. And that's just what the Penn Compact is about. And Vartan said, "This is in recognition of what the Penn Compact has done for the University of Pennsylvania and our

community and society.” That was such an important endorsement of what I’ve been doing with a great team at Penn. And then, on top of that, it comes with a monetary award that the university can use to further what we’ve been doing. I immediately saw it as a challenge of putting those resources to the kind of use for which Carnegie Corporation could be proud and we’ve really been able to do that.

Q: Tell us a little bit about how you’re using the money.

Gutmann: The first thing I thought about was, how could we make the biggest difference moving forward? And the answer is, use these resources to enable students, undergraduate and graduate students, to put their knowledge to maximum use. So we set out on two programs for undergraduates and graduate students to do interdisciplinary, integrated knowledge research projects that would potentially show how you could improve society, and we’ve had a whole variety of those projects because of the Carnegie Corporation funding. For example, one student has a project doing robotic haptic technology, trying to figure out by using a variety of knowledge bases how you can get robots to be able to have a sense of touch, which is really important to be able to move certain medical technologies forward. And then we also had students who do great projects in the humanities that are connected to looking at the history of arts and culture in West Philadelphia, our local community. And then at the graduate level, we have seeded funding for graduate students who really have excellent interdisciplinary research projects to present those projects at conferences so they can launch themselves in their careers and we can fund the next generation of great integrated knowledge scholars and teachers.

Q: Do you follow up with any of the students?

Gutmann: Yes.

Q: Do you follow their careers?

Gutmann: Yes. It's one of my great pleasures as president. And I always tell people if you're at all depressed about the world, come to Penn and meet our students because it's the best antidepressant you can have and you don't need a doctor's prescription for it. So I spend a lot of time every week meeting with students and finding out what they're doing, and I write letters of recommendation for them and I take an interest in their work.

Q: And I would imagine some of their work also connects them to the community in West Philadelphia?

Gutmann: We have at Penn over sixty service learning courses a year and a quarter of our undergraduate student body does academically based service learning. It's a really distinctive feature of the Penn education, and I don't think there's any other Ivy League institution that's as culturally and educationally invested in showing our undergraduates how their education connects them to their community.

Q: Has your work at Penn been influenced otherwise by your service on the board at Carnegie, in addition to this award and implementing the award?

Gutmann: Yes. I think that by being a board member at Carnegie, I go back with more insights about how important and in what ways Penn can be a more locally and globally engaged university. It's important that Carnegie aligns with the mission of socially engaged universities. That just gives me ideas but also just more confidence that it is extremely important that Penn and other major research universities show that by breaking out of silos, by integrating knowledge across disciplines, we can maximize our social impact. And I get ideas all the time from Carnegie board meetings about how we can do that. But more important than the how is that, yes, it makes sense to do this. It isn't a dilution of the idea that we're pursuing knowledge for its own sake—knowledge for its own sake is incredibly important. But an important part of why it's so important is if you don't pursue knowledge for its own sake, you're going to be very short-term and short-sighted. You have to see that the pursuit of knowledge has great social impact, and you have to see it in specific ways. And so I've gotten more avid in my focus on the way in which our best faculty make a difference in the world, not just a difference in the Academy.

Q: You've spoken quite a bit during this interview about endurance, focus, persistence. When you look at the Corporation, where would you like to see it in five or ten years?

Gutmann: It's a great question but let me add to your list. Endurance, persistence, all of that's important, but so is enthusiasm. I love the Emerson line, "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm." I mean, persistence without enthusiasm is dull and dead. If you will, there's a lot of pleasure to be gotten from showing what a great foundation can do in the world, and I

think that kind of pleasure is embodied in Vartan's spirit and, I think, the spirit of the board. But now to answer your question. I'd like to see some of the major ideas and projects that Carnegie is now pursuing actually evidenced, that the world and our society has changed in the direction of those ideas and projects, whether it be immigration reform, reform of K-12 education, more nuclear disarmament, a better sense of how the developing world's potential has been realized. Ten years from now, if on those four things there's discernible change in the world that can be traced to some of the ideas and programs that Carnegie has avidly pursued, that would be enormous success.

Q: Touché. Now I'm going to ask you the most difficult question—

Gutmann: [Laughs]

Q: —of this entire interview. Your husband teaches at the Columbia Law School. Your daughter is on the faculty at Princeton. Do you ever go to sporting contests together as a family?

Gutmann: [Laughs]

Q: And if you do, which side do you sit on?

Gutmann: We do, occasionally. I go a lot. I always root for Penn. My husband comes with me to various basketball and football games but he avoids the Penn-Columbia games for that very reason.

[Laughter]

Gutmann: So I have no divided loyalty.

Q: Okay.

Gutmann: But my family, it's fair to say, is not united in who they root for. On the other hand, my family is united in rooting for higher education, and that's the most important cause of all.

Q: Touché. Good. Thank you. Thank you very much. That was fun.

Gutmann: That was fun.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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