

## Elizabeth Bjork Research Essay

The assignment was to research a figure from American history who does not have a Wikipedia page, and my submission consists of an obituary, paragraphs about three selected sources, a fictionalized letter from the historical figure, and an annotated bibliography. Although the original assignment also required a reflection on my research, I have reworked it to better fit the research methods essay required for the competition.

Since I was interested in researching a figure on the far left of American politics, I started with the Wikipedia page of the Socialist Party. Although most figures mentioned already had their own page, Robin Myers did not, and since she was a Socialist woman in 1950s America – when neither identity was prominent in political discourse – I decided to focus my research on her. I searched her name in World Cat, which yielded several longer documents she had written or co-authored, including “The Robot Revolution” and “America Arms the Schools.” I was able to obtain both through Interlibrary Loan, but the third document I found, sociologist Betty Yorburg’s 1965 interview with Robin Myers, was a non-circulating item in the Columbia University Library. Since the description indicated it focused on Myers’s reflections on her life, I thought it would be helpful, and fortunately, my friend goes to Columbia. For the price of an ice cream, I drafted her to be my research assistant, and she texted me pictures of all 40 pages of the interview transcript. The account it provided of Myers’s early life and drift toward left-wing activism made it an ice cream well spent, especially since most of the other sources I found were not as personal. Only from this source was I able to find Myers’s birthdate and hometown, but by typing this information into Ancestry.com, I learned she lived in New York City until her death in 1991.

Finding information about her political writings was easier. I used the One Search function and terms like “Socialist Party USA” and “1950s” and the names of some of Myers’s contemporaries to search the Fondren collection. All four of the books I used came from the Fondren, and World Cat helped me

located several Socialist Party Platforms, which I obtained through Interlibrary Loan. I used the microfilm readers to view them and loved reading an obscure mid-twentieth century political philosophy using mid-twentieth century technology. I also used the microfilm readers to view the personal papers of Darlington Hoopes, which Paul Henderson's biography of Hoopes cited. The papers were invaluable in my research because Hoopes and Myers corresponded multiple times per week, which helped me understand the inner workings of the party and the relationship between the people who ran it. I also used the *New York Times* archive to find articles that quoted Myers or discussed the Socialist Party in the 1950s.