

Unit 4: Ruth Sandwell: What are some key connections between the state and the household?

- A: Well, thinking about the family and thinking about children, if you're thinking about the 19th century, you'll be thinking less about the state and you'll be thinking more about households and communities. One of the biggest changes, again, when I think about history, I tend to think first about daily life, like what was life like for people as they went through the daily and weekly and seasonal rounds of what they did. And a huge difference occurred with urbanization, it occurred with industrialization, but it also occurred with the growth of the state or that organized collective inside a liberal democracy where people actually have elections and come to collective decisions, to a certain extent, about what happens. The 19th century was very unusual, historically speaking, in North America and in Europe and other places as well, for the growth of the state, for something that was separate from families or a group of families. Separate from, different from, usually just a particular elite inside a community. So the state was something that was elected by a wide swath of people and that who got to elect people changed over the course of the 19th century in Canada as elsewhere with the trend generally being to have more people and more kinds of people be allowed to vote and to elect people who were a part of the state. Of course, in Canada, we had some changes in the late 19th century that removed people's right to vote in the case of First Nations people, people from Asia, and I think those are the two groups that were the most disenfranchised. But women began to get the vote starting in the late 19th century at the municipal level. And I was going to talk about, yes, children. Okay. So one of the big changes in the late 19th century was the growth of that state inside the liberal democracy. So people found themselves, again, often living in closer urban quarters. There needed to be more-- a lot of people felt that there should be more regulations, more laws, more state because there was much more room for conflict when you have 100 people living in a building as opposed to nine or seven. So the involvement of the state became more and more intense. So the growth of the educational state was an important element in the growth of the state inside Canada. Compulsory schooling was brought in in most provinces across the country in the 1870's and it created a lot of trouble for people. We know from the work that historians do that most people were, in fact, sending their children to school, even though it wasn't compulsory, but compulsory education really cut into some of the earlier patterns and ways of

life that families had. So for example, in Canada, we have really, really long summer holidays for schools, and that comes directly out of Canada's agricultural nature at the time when compulsory schooling was brought in. Because the families said, "There's no way that we can have our kids in school during the summer. They've got to be there. They've got to be helping us do the work of the household," because children were a really hugely significant part of the labour force inside any household. It wasn't just one or two adults who went out to work to earn money to support the family. Children were just absolutely crucial workers in rural parts of Canada. So, for example, children would work-- really starting from the time they were three or four, they might start working in rural areas by sitting in a field. And their job would be to hit as many birds who were trying to eat the seeds as possible, out of a little pile of stones that they would be working from. There were quite big gender divisions in what girls and boys did in terms of daily work. Girls tended to do work closer to the farm itself or the rural household itself, working on all of those tasks, most of which are now automated. So for example, simply getting water occupied a large part of each day. Disposing of dirty water was easier, but still an important part of the task. Getting wood, all of the things that were involved in simply getting wood to heat a house and to cook people's food, it's estimated that about one-fifth of all waking hours of certainly of men who were mainly responsible for getting wood, was spent just in working with the wood. Going out, finding the trees, cutting the trees down, hauling them back to a place where the woods would be first cut and then stored in cords, stored to be dried. It had to be dried for several months. Then there was another stage that involved cutting it into stove lengths that would fit into the stove and stacking that close to the house. And then there was another layer of work which usually happened quite close to the kitchen door, which would just be cutting the wood, cutting it in quarters so that it could burn more easily. And then they also cut kindling, which was yet another stage. And then bringing the wood into the house to be burned. I interviewed a woman once who was raised just with a wood stove, no electricity, in rural Canada. And she had raised her own family as well as being a child in the family. And she said to me-- when I was talking to her, she said, "I don't know how people can raise boys without a wood stove." And I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "Well, how can you discipline your sons. It's so easy with a wood stove. You just say, no work, that means we have no wood and there's no food. And they learned really early that that was the work that they needed to do." So yeah, those kinds of activities very much involved everybody in the family. Everything from cooking, most rural families grew some of their own produce, had some of their own fruit trees, if

they were in an area where they could have that. But almost everybody not only grew some of what they needed to eat and got their own fuel in the form of wood, but they also had to preserve the food. Because in our climate, you can't have gardens 10, 11 or, far less, 12 months of the year. Food has to be preserved, and that work was done mainly by women and girls by canning, which was really putting food in bottles. This was from the late 19th century, well into the 20th, into the 1940's, most Canadian households were still cooking with wood in 1941, we know, thanks to the census. And an awful lot of people were still preserving their own food.