The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
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PAUL E. WHITE

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INTERVIEW

[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. White]

Q: This is a Foreign Affairs Oral History Program interview with Paul White. Today is May 30, 2006, and we are in the northern Virginia suburbs of Washington, DC. This interview is being conducted under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Paul, let's begin at the beginning. Could you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?

WHITE: I was born in August 1941 a small town in southwestern Indiana, Brazil, Indiana. When all you have in the state are hogs and corn, you have to find exotic names for towns to keep the people there. So, Brazil, Indiana.

Q: Okay, let's go on on your parents. What do you know about your father's side?

WHITE: My father was known as W.C. White, William Clarence White. He was a piano tuner and technician, organ repairer, and musician. He came up, he was born in the south, I think he was born in Kentucky. He played piano in silent movie theaters. He became a piano tuner because he was working in a German piano factory, a German-owned piano factory, as the stringer. His job was to put the big strings in the bottom and the little strings on the top. At one point the piano tuner was ill and my father tuned all the pianos in his absence and when the piano tuner came back he was surprised that my father had done a better job than he could do. And so he taught him the trade and then said, "If you'll just leave town so you're not in competition with me, then I'll be happy." So my father started from the south, heading north, tuning pianos and playing in silent movie theaters, getting enough money in one town to buy gas to get to another town, on his way, with my mother, to California but when they got as far as Indiana they found a lot of work and were happy to just stay there.

Q: Of course, too, there was an era which is a little different from today, when every house and we're talking about the smallest farmhouse, had a piano because, for one thing, there wasn't anything else and people would sit around the piano and they'd make somebody, usually a daughter but often all the kids took piano lessons and they played the piano, sat around and sang.

WHITE: That's right. My father was born in 1890. So we're talking about a time when, well before television and the kind of entertainment we have with movies. He also, of course, encountered a lot of prejudice. So in those days, when he started tuning pianos from town to town every church and every school had a piano and that was his domain for a long time. But, like you just said, he figured out that every home had a piano. His question was how he could get into those homes to tune pianos, being a black man and he figured out a way. He hired a man named Mr. Rowe, a white guy and Mr. Rowe became his front man. So they would drive up to a house, Rowe would knock on the door and say, "Excuse me, ma'am, do you have a piano?" "Yes." "Does it need tuning?" "Of course." "Well, I can tune it." They agreed on a price and everything and he would then say, "But there's just one thing. See, I'm not the piano tuner. That fellow out there in the car is the piano tuner. But you don't have to worry. I have a pistol right here at my side and you don't have to worry that he is going to do anything wrong." And that way he would get in and tune a piano.

Q: Indiana and the farm country had a reputation as the center of the Ku Klux Klan.

WHITE: The biggest KKK state outside of the solid south. Many Grand Dragons have come from Indiana.

Q: Yeah and it's hard to visualize today but this was big stuff. What do you know about your father's parentage?

WHITE: I don't know a lot because he was so old when I was born that my grandparents were already dead. So I know their names and I know where they were from. I know that his father worked in a coal mine, as he did as well, when he was young. The coal mine

collapsed on him and broke his back, my father but that's just about all I know about my grandparents on that side.

Q: How about on your mother's side, now.

WHITE: On my mother's side, that family grew up in Alabama. They were Creek Indians. They were sharecroppers. One of my joys as a kid was, we would take a pilgrimage in the summer down to Alabama and stay with these Creek Indians, who lived in houses up on stilts because the Tombigbee River flooded. And anytime the water was high the pigs and chickens and everyone would come up in the house with them. So that side of the family, they were very poor, sharecroppers and Indians. An amazing thing happened to them. When I started going down there in the Forties they barely spoke standard English. I couldn't understand what they said and their world was that little community that they lived in. Then they all got federal money for being Indians and that federal money brought with it trailers and electricity and within just a matter of years they were living in a world like I lived in and the kids were talking the same kind of language that I spoke. So that was an amazing transformation.

Q: Was this just an isolated group or were they part of a larger Indian community?

WHITE: Right. It was not a reservation or anything like that but they were isolated families who stayed in Alabama when people were moved to Oklahoma.

Q: In Andrew Jackson's time.

WHITE: Exactly. They essentially hid in the woods and stayed there and became sharecroppers. So there wasn't a broad sense of community but I understand a lot more about them now than I did at the time I was growing up, because working in Guatemala and Mexico with Mayan Indians out in the jungles there now, they live just like my family did in Alabama and I could see many more ties and Indian things in the way the lived now than I could when I was growing up.

Q: Now, back to your parents, did they stay in Brazil?

WHITE: They eventually stayed in Brazil, Indiana.

Q: Really, before your birth and all but what were they talking about being, I guess your mother was considered Indian?

WHITE: My mother was considered Indian and my father black and my mother brought her sister with her to Brazil, Indiana, from Alabama and her sister was as Caucasian as anyone you could ever see: white skin, blonde hair. Clearly, we were a family different from anyone else in Brazil, Indiana.

Q: Did you get, were there any stories from your family about settling there and being this unusual family, particularly in rural Indiana at the time?

WHITE: Yeah, I think probably the stories start with my father, who at a very young age saw his younger brother, his name was Romy, apparently Romy was coming home from school one day and looked at a white girl across the street, this was in Kentucky, looked at her the wrong way or something. And later a gang of white kids with baseball bats showed up at the house and beat him and actually he went into a coma and died. So in our family history there was this very ugly event that happened then, that I didn't hear about until maybe I was a teenager. My parents didn't talk about it until then.

So that was one thing. The other thing that loomed large was that on their trip from Alabama, town by town, heading for California, they stopped first at Vincennes, Indiana, which is right on the border with Kentucky, I think and my dad was doing very well there as a piano tuner and my mother was working as a maid in a wealthy house and they were trying to settle there. Apparently they were tired of traveling. And there was a blind piano tuner, a white man there, who had a cross burned on my father's yard to tell him that he was not welcome in Vincennes. So they moved to Brazil, Indiana.

So there's that kind of racial history in our family that I found particularly interesting as a teenager, because I was starting to feel rebellious and very angry at my father who would always say, "Yes sir" and "No ma'am" to everyone. When he went into a house to tune a piano he would say, "Excuse me, ma'am, do you mind if I smoke in your house?" at a time when no one asked that, they just did it. So I felt that he was so subservient and he had had so much in his history that I just couldn't understand it and I grew up being very angry because I thought that he was far too subservient to the people around him. His argument was, "What has happened has happened. These people here that I'm dealing with had nothing to do with it and I treat everyone, whether they're black, yellow, or green the same way. I say "Yes ma'am' and "No ma'am" and "Yes sir" and "No sir" to everyone. That's just my nature." But I couldn't understand that at the time.

Q: But how about growing up, as a kid? I take it that there was no, or maybe there was, a black community or whatever you want to call it in Brazil at the time? Or was there?

WHITE: There was a small black community there because Brazil, Indiana was the clay center of the world. It made architectural tile. Brazil is located in Clay County and the cities around there were Clay City, Coal City, Coalmont, Coal Bluff and I could go on for a long time. So there was a small black population that came there to work in the plant that made the architectural tile. They essentially lived in one part of town called Stringtown and we lived kind of on the border of Stringtown, right at the edge of Stringtown. So there was a small black community. We were, again, we not kind of only living on the margins of the two communities but on the margins of that community. We somehow bridged the gap, because my father, instead of working in the tile factory like all the other blacks did, was an independent businessman that had a, he was middle class. Everyone else was definitely not. So we were kind of on the margins of all of that.

In school, the one thing that was good about Brazil was that the school really had no prejudice in it. I was given every opportunity in school to do whatever I wanted and I did

a lot. I played in the band, I played football, I ran track, I was in the Thespian Club and I was a very good student. Outside of that, socially there was a lot of prejudice in Brazil. So you didn't see the black kids at school dances and proms and things like that. Inside of school was one thing, outside of school was a different set of values.

Q: Did you sort of inherit your father's musical ear?

WHITE: I didn't. I was ordered to take piano lessons when I was a kid, like many kids in those days but I preferred to play football. So I didn't really show any interest in music or any talent until I was in high school, when I joined a rock 'n roll band. After that, I spent more time learning the piano. I also played trombone in the school orchestra but I didn't really ever have the talent that he had. He was truly a musician's musician. He could play all the stringed instruments and while he played piano and really did that very well, the mandolin was what he was just a virtuoso at. He could make the mandolin, he could make people cry. He would do songs like *Listen to the Mockingbird* and he would make the mandolin sound just like a mockingbird. He was really, really a musician. So I wish now I had maybe paid more attention to him but at the time I was too angry.

Q: At home, what was life like in the family?

WHITE: Life was nice in one sense in that my parents, I think my father spent one night away from my mother in all of the years that they were married, because he was on a hung jury and didn't come home that night. He was very old fashioned, in that he didn't show emotion. So there was no lovey-dovey, hand holding, kissing. I don't think I ever heard my father say a word of praise to me about my school work or playing football or anything. He was not an emotional person but he was a very good person. Never saw him drink, never heard him swear. His one vice was that he was a chain smoker. Rolled his own with one hand, Prince Albert tobacco and Rizla papers and as he was finishing one he was rolling another. Other than that, he was a very good man but not emotional.

My mother, on the other hand, was, everyone loved her. She grew flowers, she painted pictures that people would come by the house to buy, oil paintings. She was very outgoing and social; he was very quiet and hardly said a word.

Q: Was your mother sort of the power behind the family, as far as pushing you towards school and education and all that?

WHITE: Yeah, up to a point. Certainly my father was not. My father felt that he had established a really good business and that as a son I should take over the family business. He knew that I did really well in school and that I was interested in going to college and he tried hard to persuade me to just spend a few years working with him and take over his business and then go to college if you want. My mother had always encouraged me to do well in school. In fact, she taught me to read before I went to first grade, reading me Zane Grey books and having me read them to her. But when it came time to go to college she was also reticent. They had had eight boys in a row before me, all stillborn, and I was number nine and an only child. My dad was in his fifties and she

was in her very late forties, maybe, when I was born. So going to college seemed to be okay until she learned that I wanted to go to California to go to college. As an only child I wanted to put some space between me and my parents and see if I could survive on the outside. So she was not happy that I was going to California but, yes, she was certainly the person who pushed me academically to excel.

Q: How about in the house? You sit around at the dinner table talking about politics or religion or anything like that?

WHITE: Probably not. I think we, around the family dinner table, for one thing the sister that she brought, my mother brought from Alabama, had seven kids, six or seven kids and they were dirt poor and they lived with us a lot of the time, a lot of the kids did. So at any time there were three or four almost brothers and sisters around the house and that livened things up and gave me someone to play with. It also meant that at the table we really did not talk current affairs or politics or religion. We talked more about natural things, about the garden. We had a fish pond, a goldfish pond. My mother loved to fish and tried to fish every day. So we talked about those kinds of things. Going in the woods, hunting berries and nuts. It was not until I went away to college that I started to understand that there was this broader world out there that people talked about.

Q: Where did the family fall, say religiously?

WHITE: That's a good question. My father was a Christian Scientist. Not a church-going person but he believed in Christian Science and he'd never, until he really got sick with both a heart attack and emphysema did he ever see a doctor for the first time, right at the end of his life. My mother, like many Indians, worshipped nature. She was not a church-going person. When I was four or five years old they decided that I should go to church and make up my own mind. And so they let me go with any of the neighbors. They insisted that I go to church every Sunday. I found the Nazarene Church to my liking. A lot of my friends my age were going to the Nazarene Church, so I went there for most of my younger life and actually was recruited really hard to go to Nazarene Church college to be a preacher at the time when I was thinking about college. So I had a very active religious life but my family was not a part of it.

Q: Politically, was there a political cast to your family?

WHITE: Well, I certainly heard my mother say over and over that she had never voted anything except the Democratic ticket and she would trace that back to, I guess to Roosevelt, to Truman to a certain extent. I don't remember the details but, yes, she was very clear that she was a Democrat. I never heard my father mention politics.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

WHITE: No, I was an avid reader. As I mentioned, I was reading Zane Grey novels before I went to the first grade.

Q: Zane Grey was a very popular writer of western stories.

WHITE: *The Riders of the Purple Sage*, I had read a lot of that out loud to my mother before I ever went to the first grade. We had a ten o'clock lights out policy in our house, so I often could be found under the covers with a flashlight. How do you justify getting all of those batteries all of the time? No, when you grow up in a place where you don't quite fit into the social structure, you don't quite fit anything and you're essentially an only child, although I did have all those cousins to play with, life was pretty lonely. I found very early on that I could travel around the world in books, so I read everything I could get my hands on.

Q: How about, you say that the school was, you didn't feel prejudice at the school. How did you find the school? It was part of the Indiana public school system, I assume.

WILSON: Well, I think, looking back on it now, it was a good place to go to school. I think I got a really solid education from a few teachers who were outstanding. I think of my science teacher, Mr. Mosher, who was just outstanding. He could have taught in any college anywhere. On the other hand, there were other teachers who were, the football coach or the basketball coach taught history or geography and didn't have a clue. I remember when I joined International Voluntary Services and I was going to Laos I saw my high school geography teacher who also worked at the swimming pool in the summers. I said, "Mr. Grant, I'm going to Laos as a volunteer" and he had no idea where Laos was. He was a geography teacher. So there were two sides to it but I could point to five or six teachers who were master teachers, who certainly guided my life.

Q: In school, were particularly white girls out of bounds, more or less?

WILSON: Oh, absolutely, there's just no, there was no socializing between whites and blacks that way. That was just something you didn't even think about growing up in those days, especially with our family history, with Romy, my father's younger brother who had been killed for that kind of thing.

Q: Well, how about, what was your impression of, since you were sort of on the periphery of two communities, what was your impression of the small black community?

WILSON: I guess, I haven't thought about but my sense was that they, that like any community there was a whole range of people. There was a guy named Bill Wilburne, who I think in World War II he drove an ambulance in the military and came back and he was a drunkard. When you saw Bill he was always staggering down the middle of the street or falling off the sidewalk, on his way to the Dew Drop Inn to buy a bottle of wine. So he was one extreme of that community and probably my father was at the other extreme of being totally conscientious, dedicated to his work and all of that. But most people fit more towards my father's side in that they were hard workers; working in the architectural tile plant is not an easy job. Almost all the women worked as maids in peoples' houses, so everybody had two jobs. Almost all of the families were two parent families. Most of them had a large number of kids and so they struggled. The kids were

always dressed, even if they all had hand-me-downs. So clearly there was poverty in that community but there was also a sense of community, since they were physically part of Stringtown.

I haven't lived in a community because I've been overseas so much, but there's a bit of a sense of community here. We know all of our neighbors, we have community parties. And certainly all of the blacks in Brazil, Indiana went to the same church. I think it was the Baptist or Methodist church. I didn't but the community went there and there were community events and there was a sense of community, there was a sense that if a kid was out doing something that he shouldn't do, someone would get on the telephone and call his mother and let her know. So there were strictures that kept the community together.

Q: You didn't have a problem being attracted to the pool house crowd or whatever?

WILSON: Yeah, in a small, rural town you didn't have the kind of vices that you have elsewhere. I don't think I ever heard a term like marijuana or anything like that until I was in college. Occasionally you'd see Tommy Grissom, who played on the football team, smoking a cigarette and that was really something, to see an athlete actually hiding behind a telephone pole smoking a cigarette. That was the kind of vice that existed in that place.

The benefits of a small town. We would go on vacation, we were lucky because my father was self-employed, so for a couple of months in the summer we would just get in the car and travel, primarily because my mother loved the Pacific Northwest. She loved the mountains and fishing and all that and my father loved Indiana, the flat plains there, because he had a good job. So the agreement that they reached was that for a couple of months every year we'd go out to where my mother enjoyed. So when we did that, we would leave the house open. We never locked our doors, even if we were gone for two months and never even thought that someone would come in the house and steal anything and of course no one ever did. So it was a different world in those days and part of it was rural Indiana. Rural Indiana, when I go back there now, it's still a lot like it was when I grew up.

Q: In school, what sort of courses grabbed you and what courses didn't grab you?

WHITE: Everything grabbed me. I loved school. For twelve years I had perfect attendance. Never missed a day of school. Sick, rain, shine, sleet, hail, I had to go to school. I loved it. I was in a post-Sputnik high school, so I had ripped away from me history and English and civics and all of those subjects, to be replaced by Russian and analytical geometry and calculus and all of that. [Ed: On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union sent into orbit Sputnik 1, the first artificial satellite in history. Sputnik's launch came as an unnerving surprise to the United States. The space age had dawned and America's Cold War rival suddenly appeared technologically superior. This event sparked considerable emphasis on education.] But I loved those and the high school science teacher was just a master teacher. So I left high school thinking that I was going

to probably major in astrophysics. And I did start my college career studying science and astrophysics, but I quickly moved away from that because there was just too many temptations out there, things to study. So I thought, I'll move away from science, where I had no electives for four years, one every year and I'll just take a year or so of psychology and art and social science and all the things I want to do and then I'll go back to science. But I never did.

Q: You graduated from high school what year?

WHITE: 1959.

Q: Did you feel part of the high school or again were you a separate unit?

WHITE: I kind of felt like I was a separate unit, with close ties, as I mentioned we had this small rock 'n roll band that I played in and those guys were my really close friends and then I was a captain on the football team and I ran track and our football team was undefeated our senior year. And so that was a big part of my life and some of the football players were fairly close to me but in general I felt that I was a lone wolf, partaking here and partaking there but not being a part of anything.

Q: Well then you said that you started looking at California. Where'd you go and what attracted you to where you went?

WHITE: I think probably when I was in junior high school I read a book by Lafcadio Hearn [27 June 1850 – 26 September 1904] about Japan and sort of not feeling a part of anything, when I read that book I really fell in love with Japan. I found a way to get Japanese pen pals and I had seven or eight pen pals that I wrote to and I loved things Japan. So I decided that when I said I was going to head towards Japan and the closest place to start was California. And so that's how I picked California. I actually had a four-year scholarship to the University of Michigan. I went up, I looked at the campus, I was really impressed, but it was just too close to home. We had a summer home in Michigan and had I gone there my parents would have probably moved to their summer home and then I would have been coming home every weekend. So I just decided California's where I want to go. I started at Berkeley. I hated Berkeley, it was far too big. My freshman English class was larger than my hometown. And so I moved to Sacramento State, which is a small school. I felt comfortable there. I spent a lot of time in California and thinking of things Japanese.

I spent two years at Sac State and my father started to get ill and I came back to Indiana and went to college, my final two years, at Valparaiso University in northern Indiana, a really good school, the largest Lutheran university so they're able to attract Lutheran professors from around the world. It was a small school. I was able to play football and run track there, which I enjoyed. I played in the band at university, in the symphony. And I majored in psychology and art and I had a minor in math, because I had taken all those science courses before, so I had a lot of math. I enjoyed Valparaiso and it was there that the dean of my school was a Nipponophile. He loved Japan. Every summer he went to

Japan. So when I was talking to him about graduate school he mentioned the East-West Center as maybe a possibility and I had not really thought about Hawaii but he made it sound very attractive. So I applied and I was accepted.

So then I went to Hawaii and from Hawaii I majored in Asian Studies and went to Asia. So I eventually got to where I was interested in.

Q: First, let's go back to Sacramento State. How did you find it? Did it have an Asiatic focus at all there or were you able to get much out of it?

WHITE: No, I don't think so. I think that Sac State, my memories of Sac State were just how hard I worked. I had a job I think at the Bureau of Motor Vehicles, purging old records of drivers' licenses. I worked as a cleaning person in the dormitories, running a buffing machine and I studied hard. So I was really struggling to have enough money to go to school and didn't do very much there. I remember one time I thought about playing flag football. I was really missing, I was an athlete and I determined I just didn't have time to do that. I didn't live on campus, I lived off campus in a boarding house and all of the people in the boarding house were construction guys working on the Donner Pass highway. So I wasn't very connected to Sac State and there was certainly not anything very Asian there, but I often went to San Francisco, where I spent a lot of time in Japan Town and Chinatown.

Q: Were you picking up any stories, 'although this is before sort of attention was focused on it, the wartime relocation of the Japanese from California. Were you getting any insight there?

WHITE: No, not really. I recall having a few close Japanese friends and I don't think that subject even came up at the time, although that was probably a hot topic. It just that it didn't come up with me. People might have preferred not to talk about it. What I did have, in Sacramento, there was an ice cream parlor close to the boarding house that I stayed in and I would often go there to study. And I met a guy, I don't remember his last name. His first name was Victor and he was a Jewish kid who clearly grew up like I did, sort of an outcast, he didn't have any friends. And we became friends because he played chess and I played chess. And I learned a lot from Victor, about other people view the world. For instance, how he and his family viewed black people. He was amazed that I had body hair. He had always thought that black people didn't have any body hair. And one day he looked at my arm and he said, "My God, you have hair!" That was a revelation to him. We went to his apartment and he said, "Mother, mother, come and look!" Again, I had grown up perhaps not spending any time,…in Brazil, Indiana you didn't go to peoples' houses, I didn't, as a black person and spend time and see how other families reacted. I had never really been in another family, other than my own family, until Sacramento, when I went to Victor's house and I saw how he lived and I started to learn some things that way. I didn't have any, say, Japanese friends that I was that close to, that I could've had conversations with. So, yeah, the subject of the wartime relocation did not come up.

What did come up, interestingly enough, was Mexican migrant workers. That came up because a guy at the boarding house I lived in named Harry Moss was an artist. He had no money at all. He was living in a closet in the boarding house because the boarding house lady liked him and let him just sleep and the closet was just big enough for him to just sleep in. But Harry was, he liked to get involved in his painting and he was painting Mexican workers with short handled hoes in hops fields and he would go down and work in the hops fields with them so he could really understand them so he could paint them better. That was the first time I had been exposed to Mexican migrant workers and through Harry I learned a lot about their trips to the hops fields and then to the black cherries in Michigan, the whole circuit that they followed in those days. So that was interesting.

Q: Well then, Valparaiso, what was it like? Was it different than Sacramento State?

WHITE: Yeah, it was very different, in that I lived on campus, I was in a fraternity, I played in the band, I played football, I ran track. So I was part of the university there, unlike Sac State where probably no one on campus even knew who I was. At Valpo everyone knew me because I was involved in so many activities. It was probably at Valpo that for the first time that I took a drink. Again, I was in a little band and one day someone in the band had blackberry brandy. And I had never had a beer, never had anything, I just had never been even interested in experimenting but for whatever reason that day in the bandstand he was passing around this blackberry brandy and I got drunk for the first time. So that happened at Valpo. More than that, I had probably never, throughout high school and my two years in California, I'd never had a date. That was just not a part of the social structure in Indiana and then at Sac State I was just too busy working and everything, didn't have that on my mind. When I got to Valpo I was more a part of the campus and the social life and all that. I did start dating. So that's really late in life, I think, a junior in college. I was at Valpo from 1962 to 1964.

Q: Did you, early on at all get caught up in sort of the election of 1960 and Kennedy and all that? Did that touch you at all?

WHITE: Barely at all. One of the things, in those days, that I prided myself in was being apolitical. The thing I stayed away from was all the student political organizations and all of that.

Q: Were you picking up anything about the Cold War, the Soviet Union and all that?

WHITE: Just on the margins. Clearly, I went to a post-Sputnik school and so there's the sense that there's a competition with Russia but that was not a part of my life at that time. It just wasn't part of what I thought about or dealt with. Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963. I was at Valpo then. I recall I was…I had moved out of the student dorm and we had an apartment right at the edge of the campus and I was cooking in the kitchen when I heard that Kennedy had died and I remember going to the campus and it was like everybody had there was wondering what would happen next. So that was a big

thing. But the whole of the Cuban Missile Crisis [October 1962], all of these things that happened about that time was not anything that I spent any time thinking about.

Q: Well, you graduated from Valpo in 1964 and went on to the East-West Center that fall. What was the attraction of the East-West Center?

WHITE: Well, it was a graduate school in East Asian Studies and most of the Americans majored in East Asian Studies, either China or Japan, although there were a few students that studied Southeast Asia or the South Pacific. It was basically putting American graduate students into those programs with peak funding from the Congress, probably because of the Vietnam War and you had an Asian roommate. Your Asian roommate generally was studying something else. My roommate was a Japanese guy. I was studying Japanese. It was a reasonable graduate school for East Asian Studies and maybe for oceanography and other things. Not a powerhouse, but the East-West Center itself, because it was very well funded, was able to attract visiting lecturers and important people from Asia and the United States and there was a lot of research going on. So it was an exciting place academically.

Q: While you were going there and Valparaiso also, did Vietnam and our involvement there raise much interest with you?

WHITE: Not really. Clearly there were people starting to protest. Again, that was the kind of thing I had no interest in and stayed away from. Hawaii became a training center for people going to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. So on the margins I heard more about Southeast Asia there and started to have a growing interest in Southeast Asia, but I was still really an East Asia person.

Q: How did you find, you were taking Japanese at this point. How did you find Japanese?

WHITE: It was really hard for me. Most of the kids in my beginning Japanese class were Nisei and Sansei and already had a smattering of the language. So I was starting from zero and they were not. So I found it very hard. I had a Japanese girlfriend, so I was able to learn a lot from her.

Q: Was she Japanese Japanese?

WHITE: Japanese Japanese, at the East-West Center, yeah. She was a Japanese student from Japan.

Q: You had to be careful that you didn't learn feminine Japanese.

WHITE: That's what I learned. I learned feminine Japanese from her and also in Hawaii of course they speak a very antiquated Japanese from the southern islands of Japan, like it was spoken 150 years ago. So between those two, when I got to Japan I had to relearn a lot of stuff.

Q: What was the view you were getting of Japan at this particular point?

WHITE: I think before I went to Japan the view I had was probably through rose-colored glasses, from Lafcadio Hearne on through just everything I read about Japan. I was getting a kind of maybe really nice view of Japan, but it all changed when I went there. As part of the East-West Center program I went to Japan and I quickly found that it was very hard being different in Japan, that everybody was the same and if you had a dark skin that really made you a *gaijin*, an outsider. If I told people my name was Mr. White, they'd say, "Oh, Mr. Black, it's very nice to meet you." Color was just on their minds and the difference was just far more than I could have ever thought of and being a poor university student made it even worse, because you had no status. So I was pretty disappointed in Japan.

Q: Well you went to Japan when?

WHITE: In 1965.

Q: And you were there for how long?

WHITE: I was there for a couple of months but I also went, on that same trip, as part of the East-West Center program I went to Southeast Asia. Our group went to Singapore. This was at the time that Singapore and Malaysia started to have the issue. We went to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, then to Bangkok and then up to Chiang Mai. And that was the first time I'd been exposed to Southeast Asian culture and having just been really whipped by Japan I couldn't believe how gracious the Thai were, especially the northeast Thai. That's when I decided that I'd spent enough time worrying about East Asia, I'm going to become a Southeast Asianist and when I graduate from the East-West Center I'm going to find a way to go work in Southeast Asia.

Q: Then, while you were at the East-West Center could you switch subjects or were you still focused on Japan?

WHITE: I was still focused on Japan but, yeah,

Q: Paul, looking at a letter you wrote to us, I don't believe you mentioned the role of Ralph Bunche. Is this a place to do it?

WHITE: Sure. I think this fits fine. The reason I was at the East-West Center is that the dean of my school, Valparaiso University, loved Japan, traveled there every summer and I was consulting with him about what I should do next with my life and he found out that I had this love of Japan. He suggested I go to the East-West Center. It required a couple of letters of reference and the dean suggested I find some prominent black person to write a letter for me and I didn't know anyone. The most prominent black person I knew was my father and he had a second grade education. So, we hit on the idea of writing to Ralph Bunche and just sending him my transcripts and

He was Undersecretary for Special Political affairs in the UN at that time. So we found the address and we sent a letter and he wrote a letter of reference for me, which was very helpful in getting me into the East-West Center. So that's how I got to the East-West Center to start with. There, at the Center, I had a choice or majoring in East Asian Studies, Japan or China, and I chose Japan because I loved Japan. As I look back now from my perspective, I wish I had studied Chinese instead of Japanese but that's water under the bridge, as they say. Anyway, I left the East-West Center in 1966.

Q: Whither?

WHITE: I came to Washington and applied for various jobs with anyone I could think of that worked in Southeast Asia. And I was not having very much luck and I ran into, just by accident on the street, someone from the East-West Center that I knew, Jack Parmetier, who had signed on with the International Voluntary Services to go to Laos. He talked to me about pursuing that, I did and I ended up joining IVS and went to Laos as a volunteer.

Q: Tell me about the IVS. What sort of organization was it in the Sixties?

WHITE: When I joined, it was a church-based group, a Quakers group that was essentially used…a lot of the IVSers were conscientious objectors who didn't mind going to Southeast Asia but didn't want to fight. It was, I assume, mostly funded by USAID in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. They also had people in Iran and Iraq, other places around the world but the largest number of people were in Southeast Asia. It was…when I joined it, the IVSers were essentially out on the front lines, in Laos anyway. They were out in the forward areas and were very dedicated to doing whatever it was that they did--agriculture, health, education. At some point during the Sixties IVS became more of a…started leaning towards being anti-government, anti-our mission in Southeast Asia and eventually rejected all U.S. government funding and automatically reduced down to a tiny, tiny group of people that continued to work and hung together as IVS but very small, just a shadow of its former self.

Q: Well when you were doing it it was

WHITE: Large, active, directly working under USAID supervision, under the area coordinators in Laos.

Q: What sort of training did you get before you went out?

WHITE: We had an interesting few weeks of training in Washington. The academic training, so to speak, was cross-cultural in nature. They had an anthropologist on staff who did a lot to talk about how you work in foreign cultures. We received intensive Lao language training. It was like ten hours a day at Berlitz or one of the contract schools, for just a week or ten days. It wasn't a long language-training program. They did language training in country. And that was essentially it.

Q: Then you went to Laos…

WHITE: I was in Laos from ’66 to ’73, more or less.

Q: Where did you go initially?

WHITE: Initially I went to Vientiane, where I was put on the education team for IVS and I worked at Dong Dok, which was the local university, I think teaching English. But my original agreement with IVS was that I would go up country to work with the Hmong and that’s what I was looking to do. When I got to Laos they said, “Well, you really don’t have much choice. There’s an education team and a rural development team and none of them work up in the area that you want to go to” up where the Hmong were. So it took me a number of months to negotiate to get up country to where I wanted to work. In that interim period, while they were working on that, I worked at the local university. I also was assigned for a while to work with the Asia Foundation.

Q: What was the situation in Laos in 1966 when you got there?

WHITE: It was a very confused country. You had neutralists, the rightists, the Pathet Lao and it was hard to tell at any given day what group of warlords were on what side. So there was active fighting in the countryside and very quiet in the cities at that point. The guerilla warfare there, which was associated with the Vietnam war, was essentially warfare out in the areas bordering Vietnam.

Q: Had the battles of, I think of Kong Le, between the generals, had that already happened?

WHITE: The Kong Le thing had already happened. The essential, the struggles for the Plain of Jars, the real struggles with the North Vietnamese, were yet to come. And that’s, of course, the area I worked in.

Q: Here you were an American working for a voluntary NGO (non-government organization). What was the official American presence there at that time?

WHITE: As I best understood it, the official American presence was a group called CORDS [Ed: Civil Operations and Revolutionary Support was a counter-insurgency program based in Vietnam, not Laos]. That was a coordinated government body that folded State and AID, CIA, the military attachés all into one group that was called CORDS. So a lot of people lost their designation while they were in Laos. It was a very large mission there, probably the second largest in the world, next to Vietnam would be my guess. There were a lot of Americans there, including groups like IVS that were essentially contractors to the government.

Q: What was your initial, you spent a considerable amount of time, seven years. What was your initial impression of the Laotians that you were making contact with?

WHITE: Before I went up country? Well, before I went up country my impression was that Laos was a very happy place. There was no evidence that I could see in and around Vientiane of the war, except you would see occasionally soldiers on the street. But working out at the university or working with the Asian Foundation, where I essentially worked with Buddhist monks, my impression, and this was with the lowland Lao, that they were extremely easy-going people, very friendly and open to me, which is something I was looking for after having gone to Japan, the place that I loved so much and found that there was a lot of prejudice there. I didn't find any of that in Laos, so I felt very comfortable there.

So, at Dong Dok University I taught English.

Q: How did you find the students, as students?

WHITE: Not very excited as students. They were not burning the house down to learn English. Laos was essentially a French colony and French was the language that was used in academia. So there were a smattering of students interested in English. But also I was there only part-time, knowing that I would soon leave there, soon as a got an assignment. So I never got fully attached or involved with the university. The people on the education team that worked there certainly formed a core of people that were very interested in English and the American way of life and have wonderful memories of that time there.

Q: Well then, you went up country, where'd you go?

WHITE: I went to Sam Thong, which was right at the southern edge of the Plain of Jars. It was the capital, Sam Thong and Muang Xaing are too adjacent towns that were kind of the seat of the secret army of General Vang Pao and where most of the activity in northern Laos took place.

Q: What were you doing there?

WHITE: I originally went there to teach in a teacher training school. The valley of Sam Thong was a seat of Zhou Quang, who was the local governor of that area and it also had a teacher training school that was for the Hmong people. So originally I taught, I started teaching English but I'm really not a teacher at heart, so I quickly changed my assignment to helping the teachers build school furniture and improve the school infrastructure and things like that. So I spent most of my time working on community projects.

Q: What was your impression at the time of the relationship between the lowland Lao and the Hmong?

WHITE: There were, clearly there were a lot of bad feelings in the lowland Lao about the Hmong. They felt the Hmong were dirty, uneducated. I learned a lot about that because as I learned Lao up country I learned Lao with a Hmong accent, so even when I would go down to Vientiane or other parts of Laos and speak Lao, people right away would detect

that I lived with the Hmong and I heard lots of negative comments about the Hmong. There also is not a lot of opportunity for interaction between the Hmong and the Lao, because they really did live in very different places and Laos was a country with no roads. The only way you could really get around is by airplane. So there wasn't the friction because there wasn't the social contact.

Q: Where you were, was this almost strictly Hmong, or were the lowland Lao sort of holding administrative positions?

WHITE: No, it was strictly Hmong. All the administrative positions, from the governor, the governor was a Lao, Chao Xicome, but almost all of the administrative positions were held by Hmong. The person I worked with was the director of the school system for northeast Laos. He was a Hmong. The governor, while he was a Lao, he wasn't a lowland Lao. He was from that area.

Q: I've heard since many Lao and many Hmong ended up in Minnesota and places like that, that there was a real problem because they didn't have an alphabet or whatever. In other words, that they really hadn't received much, their culture just did not prepare them to move easily into the Western world. Is that true?

WHITE: Yeah, the Hmong, certainly, were among the most primitive of the people in Laos. There were probably some hill tribes that were even more primitive but the Hmong basically lived in an area with no transportation, with no cash economy, with no written language other than written language that missionaries had developed for them that were only known by a few people. So that's why when they came here as refugees they were found in Golden Gate Park still hunting for squirrel with crossbows. The people that came here were rural people with no education. But that has changed so much. I went to a function for General Vang Pao a couple of years ago in Wisconsin, a tribute to him paid by the Hmong and you could look out across this large valley and see three kinds of people. You could see the old Lao or the Hmong in their Hmong costumes, the women with their parasols and still with their silver necklaces on. And then you could see the soldiers, 'cause the Hmong army still exists and they were wearing camouflage fatigues and all that. And then you could see these young Hmong who grew up in the United States, who've had a Western education and who were now doctors and lawyers and some local politicians, some airplane pilots. There were three groups out there, it was just incredible to see. And for me, having lived for that long with the Hmong, it was incredible to see these young kids who speak fluent English and are Americans.

Q: When you were there, in the area you were, what was the military situation and how were the Hmong being used?

WHITE: The military situation was pretty difficult. The U.S. policy was that the Hmong essentially were to hold defensive positions, not to be offensive. So there was a strong desire on the part of General Vang Pao and others, for instance, to take the Plain of Jars. And there were a couple of incursions where local commanders in fact overran North Vietnamese positions or Pathet Lao positions and were asked to retreat back by us

because we wouldn't supply them. So that was one aspect to the war, that there were a lot of rules of engagement that made it difficult for the Hmong.

The security in and around where we were was basically difficult as well. There were North Vietnamese troops in northeast Laos, not just Pathet Lao. Northeast Laos, where we worked with refugees, we would overfly enemy positions to work with refugees. So we were constantly being shot at as we flew around that area and a number of the officers, operations officers, in the area where I worked were killed in action. There were no U.S. military people there other than one official military advisor. So it was a bunch of civilians out in a very dicey area. I worked for Pop Buell, who is a quite famous AID (Agency for International Development) type that worked in northeast Laos for many, many years and did, essentially after I left the school I did refugee work. He had a number of Americans, five or six, who worked with refugees or worked in the health system in northeast Laos.

Q: Well, to begin with you were sort of working really in the school in what could be called I suppose the support/admin area. How long did that continue?

WHITE: I worked in the school for,…Pop Buell was a tough guy and he wanted his ops officers to speak the language and accept the conditions of flying out and working behind enemy lines and all of that. So he had a way of testing people and it was basically to throw them over to the school and not pay any attention to them and to check with the Hmong every once in a while to see how they were doing. So that's where I was and at one point one of the ops officers, Don Shustrom, was killed by the North Vietnamese and Pop came over and said, "Would you like to come up to the airstrip and work on refugee relief and rehabilitation replacing Don Shustrom?" So that took place maybe a year or so after I started working at the school. Around that same time a number of IVSers in these forward areas were killed in fights and IVS decided to withdraw all of its forward area people down to the capital. And at that time Pop Buell came to me and said, "Would you like to work here or would you like to go to the capital?" I said, "I'd like to work here" so Pop got on the singlesideband and called the AID director, Charlie Mann, said, "I've got a fellow here who's about to quit IVS and I want to put him on an AID contract" and that was the negotiation, the extent of it. So I became a contractor to AID and eventually became an AID direct hire while I was there.

Q: During the year you were working with the school you were working in which language, was it Lao or was it Hmong?

WHITE: Well, I chose Lao, because it had broader use and the school system was in Lao. I learned some Hmong but essentially the language that I used was Lao.

Q: Then after a year, that takes us to 1967, 1968, then you moved out to work with refugees?

WHITE: Then I moved out to become one of the refugee officers and our job was essentially to track civilian populations, especially populations that were in areas where

they might get caught in crossfire or caught in bombing and all that and to move them to safer areas. So essentially what we would do is fly out with helicopters and depopulate areas by removing the civilians populations, all of which was important because these civilians were, another way of looking at them is that they were the dependents of the military, the Hmong military that were fighting. It's very hard to have someone fighting in an area if their family itself was in danger. So while at the time I didn't look at it that way, as you look back on it a lot of what we were doing is moving military dependents, moving villages where there were large numbers of military dependents, to safer areas. Once we moved them, building schools and clinics and training doctors, not doctors actually, but medics and nurses and school teachers. Providing them with agricultural tools and helping them to get started again.

Q: Well was it hard to get the people to move?

WHITE: No, it was usually easy to get them to move. The longer you stayed the harder it was, because generally what happened is you wanted to keep them in areas, in highland areas. They're highland people. So you would move them and in a year or so the North Vietnamese would have moved that much further south and hit their camps again or hit the area again. Once you'd moved them a couple of times then it became more difficult, not to get them to move but to get them to do everything they needed to do to reestablish their life.

Q: Was this a period of increasing Pathet Lao taking over territory?

WHITE: Yeah, mainly in northeast Laos it was mainly the North Vietnamese regular army rather than Pathet Lao, but, yeah, this was an area where they were continually moving south, putting pressure on the government, in this area (pointing) right along the Ho Chi Minh trail.

Q: Did you get involved in military action?

WHITE: Only on the margins. There were times when I was out sleeping in a village and there were firefights and I had to walk out of the village and get on a trail to save myself. But for the most part, no. For the most part, we had pretty good intelligence about where people were, where the North Vietnamese were, where the Pathet Lao were and other than getting shot at as we flew back and forth to work we were pretty much protected. Other than the guy that I talked about that was killed, Don Shustrom, who worked in an area that was a hotly contested area. So he was in constant, every time he went to the area where he was working, he knew there would be firefights.

Q: Was the Laotian Government involved in these movements or…

WHITE: No, the Laotian government was hardly involved at all. Almost of all of this happened with the local government. Usually we worked with the local level leaders of the village heads, the *niban* and the next level up, the *tasangs* and all of them in this Hmong area were Hmong. There were a few lowland Lao villages in that area, but not

many. There were more kind of midlevel, because everything was geographic there, you had the lowland Lao and you had the Hmong at the top of the hills. You also had other ethnic minorities called the Lao Tung or the highland Lao. Those people we worked with. There were smatterings of them and they were also working with General Vang Pao and part of the minority army that was up there but they were a very small part of it. But, yeah, there were very few lowland Lao that we were working with, other than at very high levels. Souvanna Phouma clearly dealt with Vang Pao and that level but at the local level where we were working it was Hmong.

Q: I would have thought it would have been a bit disheartening to the Hmong to continually have to move. I assume it's all giving up territory, rather a feeling that we're on the wrong side.

WHITE: It's certainly disheartening in the sense that they were under continual pressure and they were continually moving the wrong way and they were never capturing territory and moving back. So, yeah, the longer that we were there, the more discouraging it got for everyone, including the refugee workers and the refugees.

Q: Well, was there any attempt to bring in some fancier military power, either new equipment or other, professional soldiers, or anything of that nature?

WHITE: There was really not a need for that because the Hmong were tremendous fighters and it's kind of, I was watching boxing last night on TV and the guy was saying in the corner, "You just have to let your hands go. You can beat this guy if you let your hands go." That was the way the Hmong felt: if we could only get air support from the U.S., we could do anything we want. But as long as we're instructed to hold defensive positions on the top of hills and not ever move forward, not ever be on the offense, we can't do anything. When they did conduct and operation, usually on their own, they were successful. But there were several key things that they were doing. Among other things, there was protection of TACAN (Tactical Air Navigation) that was used to guide our bombers to the Ho Chi Minh trail. So we had sophisticated equipment in a few places that needed to be protected.

So their roles were several. One was to hold defensive positions to keep the North Vietnamese from moving south. The other was to protect a few key areas. And there was no plan ever to be offensive or to take back area or to reestablish a Hmong area that was secure. That was not in our game plan.

Q: Do you know what was the reason for this, this game plan?

WHITE: I think the essential reason was as someone called Cambodia, Laos was a sideshow. The action was Vietnam. So what we were doing in Laos was essentially a holding action to, one, bomb the Ho Chi Minh trail and try to contain the North Vietnamese and try to not let them move through Laos to the Thai border. So it was more of us having a policy that did not look at what the needs of the Lao were as much as what our needs were to fight this war in Vietnam.

Q: Did you run across any of these troops Thai who were turned into Laotians for a short period of time?

WHITE: There were some Thai, they were called PARU, I don't know what that stands for anymore [Ed: Thai Police Aerial Resupply Units, essentially special forces units]. There were some of those Thai troops there but they weren't fighters. They were essentially there as reporters, watching the action and informing the Thai what was going on. They weren't Thai fighting units out there. All the fighting units were Hmong.

Q: How long were you doing this?

WHITE; Oh, for quite a while. I was in Sam Thong from 1966 to 1969 or 1970. Then I became a direct hire and in order to become a direct hire I became an international development intern. So I had to come back to Washington for some training and then I went to Korea for my internship in fall 1971. So I was there in Korea for a year and a half or so and I was in training for a year or so.

Q: What were you doing in Korea?

WHITE: In Korea I was an intern, so I rotated around all of the AID offices in the embassy but essentially I worked in the development loan shop of AID.

Q: How'd you find Korea? You'd already had a glimpse of Japan and now you experienced Korea. How did it compare?

WHITE: Fantastic. The first thing I found was that, very different from the Japanese, the Koreans were very open and they were very American-like. When you met a Korean you knew up front whether he liked you, didn't like you, very straightforward. Korean and Japanese language are similar. Grammatically they're exactly the same. So learning Korean was not difficult if you had Japanese as a base. And I loved Korea. I was there at a time when we were winding down our program. Korea was starting to graduate from our program. We were closing out the mission there. So there was a lot of kind of freedom to do evaluative kind of assignments and rather than developing new projects and all of that it was more looking at what we had done and where it all might go. So the short period I was in Korea I loved it. Great mission director, Michael Adler is one of the AID greats and Philip Habib [served from October 1971 to August 1974] was the ambassador there, also a really good guy. It was an exciting time. It was the time in Korea when the North Koreans for the first time were coming down to Seoul and there was a program called the New Village Movements that was designed to beautify Korea, to put chicken and pig pens in every back yard and new roofs on the houses and a countrywide program to make sure that the corridor the North Koreans would come down was beautified first. That was an interesting program.

AID was working in really high tech ways. I had not been involved in normal AID work before. And there I found university contractors like the University of Michigan

designing computerized agricultural models for Korea. We created something called the Korea Educational Development Institute, which was a big think tank for education. Just really exciting things. We created KIST, the Korean Institute of Science and Technology. At the start of it there were like two or three PhDs and we sent a bunch of people off to the States for PhD training and now there are four or five hundred PhDs at KIST. So it's gone from being a little tiny AID project of almost nothing to a really major institution.

So it was a good time to be there but I did yearn to get back to Southeast Asia. So when I left Korea I returned to Laos, this time to work in Vientiane, in the capital city. I stayed there for a year or so, maybe not quite a year and I saw a cable from Cambodia. They desperately needed someone in Cambodia. So I went from Laos to Cambodia, studied Cambodian for a few months and then went Cambodia. So I was in Cambodia 1974 until the spring of 1975.

Q: Well what were you doing back in Vientiane?

WHITE: I worked in the front office for rural development as a deputy director for rural development and that was a difficult job. After you've been out in the field, working in really exciting work, for me it was hard to sit behind a desk and really not do very much, other than tell other people what to do. And so I was there in the capital city, doing a desk job for a while.

Q: You'd been away for a little while. Was there a change in attitude about how the war was going and what was happening?

WHITE: It was…when I was in Vientiane I had a countrywide view, rather than just the Military Region II view of northeastern Laos and clearly things were continuing to disintegrate everywhere. So it was more, I think, that things were just going, just going in a difficult way and again our policy constrained us from doing anything about it. So the most you could do is sit and watch things deteriorate without having a good solution. Now what we didn't know about was the negotiations that were going on, the peace negotiations. That was something that, on the ground, I wasn't familiar with at all but was going on at the same time. So things were happening that we didn't know about.

Q: Did you find yourself, having been in the field, did you find it difficult sort of living in Vientiane at all?

WHITE: I did and that's essentially why I moved as quickly as I could to Cambodia. I didn't particularly like living in the capital city and commuting to work and sitting behind a desk with everything that needed to be done there in Laos. There's an interesting period there, as I mentioned, when the IVSers were withdrawn and everything. My closest friend was Fred Branfman, who was an IVSer in Laos who very quickly decided that we were on the wrong side of the issue and that the North Vietnamese and the communists were on the right side of the issue and he became a black pajama person who essentially believed in the North Vietnamese cause. We were really good friends and he was constantly after me because I was working up country in this kind of military operation

and we had tremendous arguments. When Fred left Laos, he came back to head up the antiwar movement back here in the States. He was one of the leading people because he had actually been out there and had lived it. I think he probably accompanied Jane Fonda to Hanoi when she went. We were very good friends and we could drink a lot of *lao lao* together and argue a lot but we really went two different ways.

Q: Did you see the stereotype of corrupt, discredited government versus the modern uncorrupt communists who could come in with a clean broom?

WHITE: Well, I think that certainly that is the kind of thing you heard a lot and there was corruption at all levels in the Lao government. But again I'm not sure how much the people thought about things like that. That's the kind of things that the politicians said or the media people said. It's not the kind of thing that you felt and heard when you were out in villages. I think probably more than anything else for me when I started in Sam Thong, when I started out going out and working in villages, is I learned that there was a political side to all of this. I had not ever looked at it or thought of it that way.

I had been teaching in a school, I had been working with villagers on various projects but when I started going out and sleeping in the villages, there's nothing to do there but sit around a fire and talk to the village headman and to the other elder people in the village. And one day I was in a Lao Tung, a highland Lao village and the guy said to me, "It's interesting that when the North Vietnamese are here talking to us or the Pathet Lao, they talk about what a bright shining future there's going to be when we get rid of the French and the Americans and all of these people, talking about the future. When you're here with us, you're asking us about our customs and our traditions and how we used to live. You're looking back this way and they're looking that way." And I never thought of that before.

So in the airplane going back to Sam Thong I did a lot of thinking and I realized I wasn't just there to teach English or to build a school or whatever. That was like a light that came on. I had never been a political person, never thought about these things before and in that one conversation I learned a lot about the world and grew up, so to speak.

Q: Well it sounds like in Laos that you might have had corruption and all but the whole system was so decentralized and lack of organization didn't make a lot of difference.

WHITE: Yeah, it was so decentralized, so village based. For instance when I went from village to village people would come up to me and hand me some local decree from the government to say, "Can you read that?" I was the only person that could read. So I would read it and it would say, "We've decided that five weeks ago the school's going to have vacation for two days because of the king's birthday." Of course no one had been able to read it so they hadn't been able to do anything about it, so then they would take that vacation anyway. But, yeah, there was no sense with the people that I worked with that there was a larger country called Laos with a king and all of that. Laos was a country of communities, still. It wasn't a nation.

Q: And also I take it that there really wasn't the resources, infrastructure, to rob it blind by the leaders.

WILSON: Only at the capital city level, where foreign aid is coming in and military aid is coming in. We were supplying everything that could be corrupted and it was happening in a very small circle of people. But once you left that there was none of that. What we were doing is flying in and dropping rice on a village. Everyone knows everyone and the rice would get divided up in whatever ways it needed to get divided. In a small community, how much corruption can there be? The only corruption that could happen out there is the North Vietnamese or Pathet Lao would say, "We need thirty per cent of the rice. If we get it, we won't hit your village." And so unbeknownst to us there was rice siphoning off to people that we didn't want to have it. But it was not the kind of corruption that we talk about in Mexico, where it affects every person in the society.

Q: You went to Cambodia from when to when, now? When you went out there in 1974, what was the situation?

WHITE: The situation was already getting pretty grim in Cambodia. There were a few cities that belonged to the Cambodian government. Most of the countryside did not belong to them at night for sure and even in the day the major road arteries were still mostly open when we got there but very quickly those were shut off. So within the first six months I was there they essentially had closed off the roads, closed off the river and Phnom Penh had essentially become an isolated city that had to be supported by air, a Berlin airlift kind of operation.

Q: How did you find the Cambodians vis-a-vis the Laotians?

WHITE: Cambodians were not nearly as friendly as the Laotian. The cultures are very similar, but you had a more difficult situation. They were more developed, more educated and so you weren't dealing with simple country people, you were dealing with people that understood more about what was going on around them. I liked the Cambodians but they were a little more difficult than the Lao. They were also very aware, from the time that I got there, that the Khmer Rouge were real butchers. This idea that no one knew that the Khmer Rouge was going to come in and commit the atrocities that they did is just not true. Whenever the Khmer Rouge came into a village they would cut off the head of the village headman and they were just really brutal. The Cambodians often would say, "They look like Cambodians, they speak Cambodian but they grew up in Vietnam controlled areas of our country and so they have Vietnamese hearts." So the popular sense was "We need to do whatever we can to prevent the Khmer Rouge from taking control of the country." And I guess no one was really listening to them.

Q: What were you doing?

WHITE: The same thing, I was working with refugees. We had a number of groups: the International Committee for the Red Cross, World Vision, Catholic Relief, CARE. Whenever there was a new group of refugees we would decided which voluntary agency,

which NGO, would work with them and we would give them the wherewithal to set up soup kitchens, build houses and all of that kind of stuff. We were based in the embassy in Phnom Penh, which was different because in Laos we were not in the embassy, we had a separate compound. So that was my first direct exposure to being in an embassy environment, rather than an AID environment.

Q: Well how did you find the embassy environment?

WHITE: Good. I found, I guess the kind of things that you heard often, that State Department people didn't speak the language and those kinds of things, certainly was not true in Cambodia. There were three or four really good Cambodian language officers in the embassy. I found that everyone was doing their maximum to try to seek a solution in Cambodia. The picture that you often got was that embassy people were there in their pinstriped suits writing their cables back to Washington, not contacting the local people and living in a false environment with the diplomatic community. That certainly wasn't the impression I got. I had heard this in Laos as well. I found people that were really hard working and really understanding of the Cambodian culture. The ambassador was John Dean [who served from April 1974 to April 1975]. John Gunther Dean, was an interesting…what I suspect, as I look back on it, is that he was probably looking far more for a negotiated settlement and trying to find ways to work towards a negotiated settlement, than perhaps he had authority to do. As I look on it now, those kind of negotiations happen at a different level and a different place than in an embassy. His stance from the beginning was more finding a way to make things work and negotiating

Q: The Khmer Rouge still was impossible to deal with, essentially.

WHITE: That's absolutely right. There's no way to deal with them. I was there when, February or March 1975, when a big congressional delegation came out. The concern of everyone was that funding was being cut off, at the very point where we had essentially tried to Vietnamize the Vietnamese Army and to work with the Cambodians to get them to take a larger role in everything, they depended on our support, at that point we were going to cut off the support as well. So it was Bella Abzug and Millicent Fenwick and all of these people came out to take a look at what was going on. I think they probably were not very helpful when they went back and you could almost see the beginning of the end.

Q: Did you find that, in a way, this resettlement, I would think as the Khmer Rouge encircled Phnom Penh, you begin to run out of room to resettle.

WHITE: Yes. I think, in Cambodia we weren't doing much resettlement. We were essentially moving people, we weren't moving people at all, people moved themselves. So essentially what we were doing there is just making sure that there were temporary shelters and medical care and soup kitchens. In some of the outlying provinces, like Battambang province, there were still refugees that had to be moved and resettled, but they were small numbers. The big problem was how to handle Phnom Penh that was under siege and increasingly what happened is everyone came into Phnom Penh.

Q: Well after Congress cut support, was this signal to everyone that this was the end?

WHITE: Certainly for people working there this was kind of the final nail in the coffin that things were going to end. We're talking about right at the end, now. We're talking about February or March of 1975 and the Khmer Rouge came in in April. So, yeah, I think people, probably that the embassy started an evacuation plan fairly early on, maybe in March of moving, originally dependents were asked to leave. There weren't a lot of dependents there, but there were some. And then gradually people were moved out, so that in the end it was not the massive evacuation that took place in Vietnam.

Q: When did you leave?

WHITE: I left just before the end. I was asked to go up to Battambang province and find all the Operation Brotherhood Philippine doctors and nurses that were working up there and get them to leave. The original idea was that after I did that I would just go up to the Thai border and cross over with a couple of Agency people who were also going to just close down their offices and cross over. When I got to the border I found I couldn't cross over because I didn't have any identification. When we went back and forth to Cambodia we did so on a U.S. operated airlift run and didn't go through immigration on either side. So I couldn't cross the border and eventually had to work my way back down to Phnom Penh, which I did and then I left maybe a week before the evacuation. And my assignment was to go and work in Utapao an air force bas in Thailand, where we set up a reception center to receive Vietnamese, Lao and Cambodians as they left to go wherever they were sent: some to the Philippines, some to France, a lot of them to this country.

Q: You were in Thailand, doing this, from when to when?

WHITE: I was in Thailand from the spring of 1975 for a few months. That was not a permanent assignment for me. That was while I was waiting my on-going, next assignment.

Q: What was your evaluation of how we were handling the people coming out of Cambodia and Laos and Vietnam?

WHITE: It was, there were a lot of people coming out and a lot of different levels of people. For instance, in Vietnam a lot of the Vietnamese Air Force people were flying out jets and landing them at Utapao, which gave the Thai heartburn, I'm sure. So those people were handled very differently than the people that were coming out that were essentially villagers. A lot of the people that came out were official, in one sense, in that they were somehow connected directly to the Americans, either government officials that worked closely with us or people that worked in our houses or other friends. So for those people, the processing was as good as it could be. It's difficult because what you were doing was sending some people off to foreign shores and other people were being assigned to refugee camps on the border and that was too much for me, to have worked in that area for ten years and seen people give so much to our country, the idea that we're going to send some people off to refugee camps along the border for a future

undetermined, I requested to be assigned to Africa or to Latin America. I didn't want to get stuck there on the Thai-Lao border, having worked with refugees for ten years and speaking Thai, Lao and Cambodian. My future could have been working right there with people who had given their lives that we were, I felt, mistreating by not letting them into our country. So I left. That's when I moved to Panama.

Q: So you went to Panama? You were in Panama from 1976 to 1979. *What were you doing in Panama?*

WHITE: That's a good question. First regular AID assignment. I was in the office of education, health, nutrition, not being sure why I was there, what I was doing, having worked for AID for almost ten years but not knowing any of the language, not knowing the documentation process. When we were in Southeast Asia we were working in a CORDS-like program that was broad U.S. government based, it was not a traditional AID program. So there I was in Panama, in a normal AID office, dealing with project papers and all kinds of stuff that I never heard of before. But fortunately the thing that saved me as my boss had also been my boss in Laos. We had worked as a chief and deputy for a year or so in Laos and there we were together again and very close friends. He had had a more normal AID career. So he became my mentor and allowed me to survive that shock, real culture shock.

Q: Also, I'm told that because oft our worldwide reach, AID could assign people anywhere in the world. I've talked to people who were African hands who were saying, "These guys who had been in Saigon or some place where they had three or four servants and everything else and all of a sudden they're in the middle of an African village. They didn't like it, they didn't like the Africans, they're no longer the little pashas that they'd been before." Was that part of your culture shock?

WHITE: Of course I didn't fit that mold because I had always worked out in the village situation with no running water, no electricity and all of that. So I quickly parlayed the Panama experience into something more like Southeast Asia and the way I did that is my mother is American Indian. One of the things I didn't mention, when I was in Korea my father died and I'm an only child. So we took my mother to live with us in Korea and then when I was assigned to Cambodia, well, she went to Laos with us but when I was assigned to Cambodia, my mother and my wife stayed in Bangkok, because I was actually, there was a rule there that John Gunther Dean could only have 200 Americans in country at nightfall. So there's a big shuttle. I was actually assigned to Thailand and did a permanent TDY in Cambodia. So my family lived in Thailand and there was a count everyday and if we were over 200, I got on a plane and went back to Bangkok. So at any rate then my mother went with us to Panama and she's American Indian and General Torrijos was having real issues with the three Indian tribes in Panama, the Chokó, the Kuna and the Guyami, trying to figure out how the government should deal with them. He asked the AID director, Tragen, if Tragen could assign someone to help him work with the Indian groups and figure out what they wanted and that kind of thing and I was assigned to do that. So that put me back out in the jungles, walking to Guyami villages or Chokó villages or sailing around the Kuna islands.

Q: I want to come back to this but you mentioned that you got married. Talk about your wife.

WHITE: I spent some time in Luang Prabang, Laos, the royal capital and at that time, for the first time I was living in an environment where I had a house. I'd never had a house before. I'd gone to college and ate in cafeterias and all this. All of a sudden I had this government provided house. I was still working with refugees but I found it difficult figuring out how to live in a house and what to do. One day I went out to a refugee village, attended a meeting of people, and I thought I understood everything that was going on. On the helicopter on the way back I was talking to this woman next to me who was working as a health worker with refugees and telling her what I understood from this meeting. She explained what was really going on, and who was related to who, and all of this. We became good friends and eventually got married to each other. She's Laotian Thai. So that was a big change in my life. I was a confirmed bachelor and all of a sudden I went down just like that and she's still my wife, after all of these years.

Q: Now when you were in Panama, what was the state of the Indians?

WHITE: The Indians, there were three tribes. The Guyami were up towards the Costa Rica border and they were very well organized, in the sense that they had things to be organized against, like the copper mines. There were things that were going on that helped them organize to be against something as a people. So they were fairly organized. And then there were the Kuna, who are probably the most organized people in the world. The Kuna lived in this series of islands. If you left your island to work on the mainland or to work on a boat or whatever, you're given a quota of money that you had to send back to support your island. So it's a really tight social system and the Kuna did very well. And then there were the Chokó, who lived down on the Colombian border in the Darien. They were totally disorganized.

So it depended on who you were dealing with. When you tried to get the three groups together to figure out what an Indian policy should be, you had three really different situations to deal with, which made it difficult as they were trying to decide, should we have reservations, or *comarcas* as they called them, or how should we help Indians integrate into our society or should we leave them alone. There were three different positions on everything.

So, again, my job was partly to get to know the situation there and to help the Indian tribes define what they wanted, both in terms of development but in the larger sense, the political sense of where they might want to go as an Indian nation.

Q: Did you find yourself acting more as an advocate of the Indians vis-à-vis *the Torrijos government? Was that what AID was doing or what?*

WHITE: No, I guess what I found was, I did find myself in some conflict but it was not with the Panamanian government. I guess what I found was the General Torrijos was

very open and sympathetic to the Indians and they really liked him and felt that he as a leader was trying to do the right thing for them, even if the bureaucracy was not, if it was moving too slowly or for whatever the reason wasn't getting them what they wanted it was not Torrijos' fault. Like many charismatic leaders he had an ability to separate himself from the workings of the government.

Where I got into a little bit of a problem was that I was often invited by Torrijos to go with him when he went out to the Indian areas to give speeches and all of that and that put me into some conflict with the embassy, who felt that there's no reason for this AID person down here from the bowels of AID to be out with someone like Torrijos. And I also worked with General Torrijos' sister, who worked in preschool education, we were doing preschool education projects. So I had some connections there that were sometimes not comfortable to the embassy.

AID's essential role in this, other than just kind of eyes and ears and figuring out what the Indians wanted was to do development, to do economic development in Indian communities. So I was doing things like helping the Kuna Indians buy generators from excess property so they could set up their own electrical systems in their islands. I actually started a really interesting project. AID had for a long time talked about participation and how important it is that people participate in the development of projects. I did a project that was called the Guyami Development Project that essentially put all of the project development in the hands of the Guyami Indians themselves and their meetings, rather than in the hands of AID, to take something that AID had talked a lot about but had never really done and tried to make it happen. So that gave me a lot to do and fights in the bureaucracy on how you let local people really participate in development and still meet all of AID's requirements for what you do when you develop a project.

Q: Well how did you find relations between the Indians and the Panamanian, I assume basically the Panamanian bureaucracy?

WHITE: Pretty bad. The common Latino phrase was *Indios y gatos animales ingratos*, "Indians and cats are ungrateful animals." So the bureaucracy felt no matter what you did for the Indians they still hated you. But they didn't do very much and maybe that's the reason. So, yeah, there was no good feeling at all between the Indians and the bureaucracy. Fortunately, the kinds of things that we were doing we were doing directly with the Indians, rather than as AID normally does, working through the Ministry of Agriculture to help install some project, we were doing projects directly with communities. So we didn't get involved in that interface but it was a bad interface between the bureaucracy and Indians.

Q: Did you ever run across that unique tribe the Zonians?

WHITE: A lot. I dealt a lot with the Zonians, not in my official capacity.

Q: This is the Americans who lived in the Panama Canal Zone.

WHITE: Right. No, my contact with them was not official but in Panama I had a motor home and I mentioned this before, my mother is American Indian and she loved to fish. So every Friday after work we'd get in the motor home and we'd drive out to the Canal Zone to Gamboa, which was right in the middle of the canal, halfway between Panama City and Balboa and we would park on the banks of the Chagres River and my mother could fish Friday evening, all day Saturday and all day Sunday and Monday we'd go back to work. So while I was out there in the Zone every weekend I met lots of Zonians, the good kind and the bad kind.

The good kind were…a lot of people had a lot of friends in the Zone, including the Canal Zone police and others. But there were certainly a number of Zonians who hated Panama, hated everything around them except the Zone and would let you know that. But in general I think that what they did was they developed a lot of good infrastructure in the Canal Zone that eventually during the Canal negotiations became one of the things that Panamanians looked forward to, not only just taking over the Canal but Canal Zone College and a lot of infrastructure there.

Q: I take it relations between Americans and the Panamanians were fairly good because ten years later they began to get nasty under Noriega.

WHITE: Well, I think Panamanians in general felt that the Americans were oppressive, that we were occupying their country. So wherever I went, when people first saw me they thought I might be Cuban until I opened my mouth and said three words of Spanish. Until they heard my Spanish they were really friendly and then when they knew I was an American and not a Cuban they were not nearly as friendly. I think relations…other than the people that depended on the Americans, if you ran hotels or restaurants or tourism facilities or worked with Americans you were friendly. But you would never guess from the rest of the Panamanians that at one point we were considering adding Panama as a state, because they were really not happy with us.

Q: Was the Panama Canal as overwhelming an issue as one assumes it was.

WHITE: Yeah, I think that was the big issue. The big issue was not only the Canal. It was Ancon Hill. Ancon Hill was in the Canal Zone and it was a place where all of the antennas were sticking up in the air and people would say, "That's where the CIA works and that's where they're manipulating our country and our leaders and buying off people." And it was this hill with all these antennas, so that became the magnet. So that became the issue, rather than the Canal itself, although the big issue was the Canal. Of course at that time, when we got there, I was there in '76, we were already moving towards negotiations on the Canal and at that point Carter actually came down and so we were moving in the right direction.

Q: You stayed there until when?

WHITE: I stayed there until mid-1979. Somoza was overthrown in July 1979, Carter wanted to work out a relationship with the Sandinistas, to show that, Nicaragua, to show that we could be friends with the Sandinistas and that government. So I was asked to go, right at the early stages of the Sandinista period, to negotiate a food aid program with the Sandinista government, as a part of our attempt to show that we were willing to work with them. So I was there in Nicaragua for three months or so, working on that.

Q: How did you find the situation and your reception in Nicaragua in this period?

WHITE: It was maybe the most difficult thing that I've ever done. We would sit around this huge table, maybe forty or fifty people sitting around a table and the honorable representative of the republic of, say, Albania would say, "In six months we're going to provide three cans of sardines for the revolution" and everyone would say "*Viva la Revolucion!*" And they would get around to me and I would say how many DC-6's or C-123's of rice we had loaded that day, absolute silence, as if we weren't doing anything. I was clearly the person who shouldn't be at that table, even though we were the only ones that were doing anything. So that was difficult. More difficult was the Sandinistas wanted us to turn all of our food aid over to their government to be distributed by, they were forming block groups, so that every block in the city had an organization so that they could report on each other and all of that. They said those are the people who know where the poverty is, so that's how the food should be distributed. And we were arguing that it should be done by the International Committee for the Red Cross or someone like that. So these just ongoing battles and the pressure was tremendous for us to work with the Sandinistas but not to give in to their system and to try to pull them to the international system. I had not, in all of these dealings that I've talked about so far, I had not been in this arena of dealing with a government and negotiating with a government. So that was difficult for me and fortunately it was short, only three months.

I had already been accepted for long term training at Stanford University and I looked like if I got a fulltime assignment to Nicaragua that my long term training would go out the window. So I fought pretty hard to do what I could do in Nicaragua and then get to Stanford University as soon as I could and I didn't get there at the beginning of the school year. I got there probably at the end of September 1980.

Q: By that time, what was your impression of Nicaragua and the Sandinista rule?

WHITE: Well, my impression came mainly from those difficult negotiations. They were not interested in anything that we had except for our food and our money. They were not willing to compromise one iota on anything. They had essentially come to power through the help of Cuba and revolutionaries around the world and they were going to be a sore in our side for a long time. That was my view going in and that was my view going out.

Q: Did you find that there was a sort of feeling of cynicism on the part of others like yourself, who were involved in this food program, sort of what the hell are we doing with these people? Why not let them stew in their own juice?

WHITE: Probably there was some of that, although there was some of the other, as well. As I recall, there was another AID person who had been involved in the seminary with one of these Sandinistas and had the opposite view, that all we need to do was work with them for a while and they'll eventually come around and find a compromise position that we can accommodate. But I think probably the people that I worked with most closely had the same impression that I had, that it was going to be a hard row to hoe, so to speak.

Q: Well, then, you're off to Stanford? What were you studying?

WHITE: Yes, I went to Stanford from 1980 to 1981. I took a course in Communication and Social Change in the Third World. There was supposedly a very famous professor, Shramm but when I got there I found that he was leaving that year so he wasn't professor. But it was a good course. I was in a course with people primarily from the Third World and a few Europeans. There were maybe 16 of us in the course and it was about how you use communications technology to bring about social and economic development in the Third World. So it was right along the lines of what I'd been doing. What I found interesting was that there was such a strong left bias to professors at Stanford. I remember taking a couple of education course because that's what I was doing was education and this guy, Martin Carnoy was his name, he had to be a card-carrying communist. He was just really awful. Even in the communications program that I was in the professors approached everything from a radical point of view. I was surprised at how left-leaning the university was.

Q: Because Stanford housed the Hoover Institute, which was a right wing

WHITE: Right under the shadow of the Hoover Institute were all of the guys who were very far off to the left.

Q: As a political-social phenomenon, you were probably the beneficiary, with the professors, of so many radical students ended up getting their PhDs to duck the Vietnam.

WHITE: I had not thought of that that way. That's an interesting comment. That's true but at least there was good debate. I remember getting in a lot of arguments, especially when professors would start talking about the Vietnam War itself or what we were doing there, I could put my hand up and say, "I was there and that's not the way it was." No one ever shut me down. So at least there was that. I appreciated the fact that I could do that. The interesting thing about that period at Stanford was that Alejandro Toledo was there and we became friends. He later became the president of Peru. In fact, when I left Stanford, I went to Peru as my next assignment.

Q: Paul, in 1981 you were off to Peru. What was your job?

WHITE: In Peru I was the deputy chief of an office that dealt with health, education, nutrition and primarily I worked in education. I had a preschool education project in Cuzco and Puno. I had a technical education project in several places, Chiclayo, Trujillo and I worked a bit also in the nutrition area.

Q: In 1981, what was the political situation in Peru?

WHITE: It was…the *Sendero Luminoso* was just starting to really get moving. When I went out to Cuzco and Puno to work in the schools, I would go into the schools and on the blackboard was stuff the *Sendero* had been doing the night before with the community. The teachers would always run up and erase everything off the board. So they were starting to form out in the hinterlands and they were tossing a grenade over the ambassador's wall in Lima and blowing up power lines and doing small things like that to get attention. When we got there it was right at the, the military government had ended and it was the beginning of the Belaúnde democracy (May 1980) and a terrible time. The military had devastated Peru.

Q: How had the military done that?

WHITE: Well I think they had just through bad practices they had essentially shut down the economy. So things were really bad. When we first got there there was a prohibition, you couldn't buy meat in the market, for instance, 15 days a month. You could only buy fish or chicken and the chicken had been fed on fishmeal, so everything you bought tasted like fish. It was just, the economy was really run down.

Q: You were in the health, education department. How did the bureaucrats respond? Did they talk to you about how the government had been?

WHITE: Not a lot. There's a new crew in, eager to do things better, rather than looking back at the past. And we did something in AID that was rather unique for AID, and that is, we negotiated our agreements with the state governments and regional entities rather than with Lima. So we didn't get tied up in the bureaucracy in Lima. So in the preschool education project there were direct agreements with the state governments of Cuzco and Puno. We had an educational planning project that was also out in that area and they were all decentralized projects and not many times that AID has tried that. It was quite successful because you get down to the level where people want to make a difference and they can see what they're doing, as opposed to the people in the capital city.

Q: Could you describe the government's approach to education. Was it highly centralized, every teacher was on the same page at the same hour, was it of that nature?

WHITE: Somewhat like that and the whole idea of decentralized planning was to move away from the kind of state controlled planning where the set the same curriculum for the Indian areas in Cuzco and Puno that they set for the Latino areas. The whole idea was to try to bring about some variation in the curriculum to reflect local needs. And it was reasonably successful but that's always a hard thing to do.

Q: This was your first time in that sort of area. How did you find the Indian population? Had they been overlooked or was there a cultural attitude towards education? What did you find?

WHITE: It was hard with the Indian population. You looked at Machu Picchu and you looked at the canals and all of the tremendous public works that had been done at some point in the past and then you look at these people who were out there who look like they couldn't build an outhouse and you wondered what happened. And there was never an answer for that. But, yeah, what you found is a people who had been marginalized, who were not that interested in education. They didn't have education as a burning theme, let our kids get an education so they could get ahead. They were living off the land, just barely surviving and with not a lot of ambition to have things change. So change was being forced from the top down rather than the bottom up, which doesn't work very well.

Q: Were you trying, you, was our program but specifically you, trying to break this … attitude?

WHITE:. I think the idea behind the decentralized educational planning was if you could make the education relevant for the area that you were teaching in, you could people more interested. So you're not teaching about the Moors in Spain but you're teaching about how to do better agriculture in the Cuzco valley, then not only the kids but the parents would see a benefit in that. So that was the broad scheme, to make education more relevant, therefore getting people to show more interest. But the problem is that's a long road and when you're dealing with AID projects that were three to five years in those days, it's hard to show results.

Q: You're fairly new to AID at this point.

WHITE: Well, I was not new to AID. I'd been with AID for quite a while. But I had been in Southeast Asia, not doing this kind of AID work. I'd been working with refugees and more political stuff.

Q: How did you find the AID with Latin American characteristics?

WHITE: Well, interesting, because when you looked at AID in those days, the Latin American bureau was touted as being the best of all the bureaus in terms of designing projects, in terms of speaking Spanish and understanding local customs and fitting the programs to the needs. So I can talk at several levels. At the mission level, out in Peru, I found a group of people who did speak the language, most of whom had Latina wives so they knew the language and the culture and were very dedicated. As you moved up the ladder and you got to Washington, you also found in the Latin America bureau people who had come out of the field and therefore understood it well. So I think that set Latin America apart from Asia or Africa, where you had lots of different languages, lots of different cultures and the kind of bureaucracy in Washington was formed from people and not really understanding the area. So Latin America had a natural advantage. So that was good. You really did feel that you were working in the elite bureau in AID and that what we were doing tended to make a difference.

The problem was always the kind of social unrest and upheaval in many of the countries and you would move ahead and then get set back again for various reasons. In Peru it was not quite so bad as a place like Bolivia. But even in Peru you would move forward a couple of steps and then you would have either the *Sendero* or you had some reason why everything just kind of stopped for six months. You couldn't get in the area for work or other reasons. It's my sense that development happens when you have a long period that you can work with and when you have stops and starts things don't happen, because people forget very fast.

Q: Well did you find Peru had sort of the traditional difference between the Indian population and the Spanish descent population? Was that pretty apparent or had changed?

WHITE: That hadn't changed at all. I worked with the Indian populations in Panama first and then my second place was Peru and then Guatemala, so I had a lot of activity working with the Indian populations and the Latino population in all those countries are the same: *Indios y gatos, animales ingratos*; "Indians and cats are ungrateful animals." And that was kind of the Latino attitude towards the Indians. And the Indian attitude towards the Latinos was that they were out to get whatever they could get. They were the tricksters and they might look like they were trying to work with you but there was always an ulterior motive, trying to get something of yours. Which is the exact same attitude that people in Latin America had towards the United States.

Q: Well how did they feel towards you, you and the people in AID?

WHITE: Probably the same way. If you're dealing with your direct counterparts in ministries, people were a bit more sophisticated, perhaps had been educated in the West and maybe had a more open attitude. But as you got down to people in the *campo*, in the field, there was always this sense of maybe mistrust. There's always a sense that there's something else behind whatever you were doing, rather than just the goodness of your heart.

Q: How about, the educational programs, kids going to school. Did they quite early and did they pay much attention to their work or…

WHITE: The problem was not so much the kids as the teachers. The teachers weren't very well prepared. So one of the things we were doing was working with teachers, trying to train them to work better. But as a result of that, having poor teachers, poor facilities and also having all of the pressure of an agricultural society and the work cycle, kids tended to drop out very early. Usually what happened is that girls dropped out first, after the second grade or so, third grade. By the fourth grade the boys were dropping out to work in the farm in rural areas. And also there are not very many schools out there, so once you got to the third grade or so then you're talking about going to a nearby town and spending all week in a boarding facility of some kind, which was pretty miserable. So everything was against the most rural populations in terms of getting a good education.

So when you had someone that came out of that area and they were able to get a good education, they had really fought for it.

Q: Prior to that, were there opportunities for Indians who were achievers to move into or did things sort of stop them from going anywhere?

WHITE: There were very few opportunities, certainly before the mid-Eighties. Where there were opportunities it was usually in a small religious school, either in a Catholic school or even Protestant schools, but, yeah, in the public system there was little opportunity. I think we will talk about this again when we get to my assignment in Washington where we were trying to make up opportunities for social and economically disadvantaged people. But even in those days in AID, while we were trying to work with the poorest of the poor our programs weren't designed to do that. So our scholarship programs were similar to the USIA (U.S. Information Agency) programs, the Fulbright Programs, for the elite, sending people off for masters and PhDs, rather than working with people at lower stages.

Q: It sounds like the teachers were the key. Did you get very far with the teachers? Who were they?

WHITE: Well, there were some teachers who'd come out of the rural areas but for the most part they were urban teachers who were assigned a one or two or three year stint somewhere out in a rural village, even though they came from Lima. So that was difficult for the teachers and difficult for the students as well. We certainly worked hard with teacher training, but that's a tough area and teachers are unionized everywhere and they're stubborn and resistant to change and they want to teach exactly what they learned. And the idea, for instance, of decentralized educational planning and going and working with a local team to develop a curriculum responsive to the needs of an area was pretty alien to most of the teachers. They were comfortable looking at their notes and teaching what they had been taught. So none of that is easy. And what you do in a situation like that is you try and find a few champions that you work with who really believe in what you're doing and hope that at some point they will overcome all of the resistance around them.

But what you can't do as an aid program, whether it's from the United States or any government, is you can't provide the wherewithal for those people to overcome. It's something that really has to be inside them somewhere. So you can facilitate, but you can't make it happen. You have to depend on others, so that's one of the frustrations, even when you have a team of really good people, who understand this all and are willing to make it happen. My direct counterpart was the Director General for pre-school education in Cuzco. That was a very good person who fully understood what we were trying to do and had the Ministry of Education in Lima, to the extent that she had influence, backing what we were doing. We had people in other places, like in the Ministry of Planning, there were people that understood what we were doing. Again, the problem was that they were a minority of people here and there, even though some had power, you could never get enough people aligned to really make large changes happen.

I guess that's where I've, I've long been a proponent of AID and State, all of the U.S. government agencies, working closer together than they have at times, because when you have the voice of the ambassador and the AID director and you have everybody pushing the same direction with the same interest you can get a lot more done than when you're out trying to do that on your own. I felt that over many of my assignments the embassy's got a certain set of things that they do and that occupies the ambassador's attention, the AID mission is doing another set of things and the military another set. What you have is, it hasn't come together very well in many places. The country team concept was, I don't know when it happened but that's a good concept and that helped a lot but in those early days that wasn't the case.

Frank Ortiz was the ambassador to Peru when I was there [Ed: served from November 1981 to October 1983] and I don't recall him being involved in AID affairs but again I was kind of down in the bowels of AID at that time.

Q: Well did you get out in the villages much?

WHITE: Quite a bit.

Q: Can you describe a village, what it was like when you'd get out there?

WHITE: If I went by myself it was one thing. If I went with the mission director or some other people it was more of a doggy show and tell. But when I went by myself usually what I would do is, I would be with some local officials from Cuzco, Puno or wherever and they would make contact and people knew that we were coming. We would go in, meet the village headman and usually have a discussion with him first about why we were there, what we wanted to do and he would usually accompany us to the school or to the health clinic. If you overnighted then there was a chance to spend time with the folk, go into houses and talk to people. If you were not spending the night then usually you got escorted around by the village headman and only saw a few people. So I tried to spend nights when I could, to get a better feel for what was going on. When that happened, people were pretty open to having you come in and sit down and talk to them or have an evening meal with them, sitting on a dirt floor around a fire, I'm not talking about anything really fancy out in the rural areas and speaking pretty frankly about things, including the *Sendero* and what was going on politically.

Q: How was the Sendero Luminoso*, how was it seen in these villages? What I gather, this was a bunch of Peruvian intellectuals coming out of extreme, almost like the Khmer Rouge type. How was this fitting in these villages?*

WHITE: I think people were trying to understand what was happening and this was almost a throwback to something I probably mentioned earlier, when I was in Laos, out in villages talking to people and at one point one of the villagers said, "Why are you so interested in our culture and our language and things like that? When the communists are here they're talking about what a bright future we're going to have when we overthrow

the French and the Americans and all these foreigners." It was the same there. What the *Sendero* was doing was out in every village having community classes at night, bringing everyone in and, as I said, using the blackboard to try to explain a new theory of government that was more of the people and encouraging them to rise up and overthrow the authorities because then there would be a better life at the end of that. So, yeah, it was very much something that again was not rising from the bottom up but, just like the AID program, people coming in with a theory of how you could have a better life and working with nothing to offer except their words. At least when we were going in we had agricultural tools and seeds and school books and we were offering a lot more, but we weren't dialoging with people. They were sitting down and dialoging with people. Big difference.

My sense is that there was a small group of people who were able to demonstrate that they could disrupt power lines and roads and cause a lot of trouble. I guess I didn't get the sense, although it would be hard for me to find this out, that they had convinced people intellectually or philosophically on anything. But they certainly were able to convince people that they could cause trouble if they wanted to cause trouble.

Q: One of the problems often has been these left wing movements come out of the universities and are heavily, sort of extreme Marxist, left wing students out of the university usually aren't brothers to the Indians. I would think that this was not a good fit?

WHITE: Yeah, I think that certainly has been a problem with those movements. It's very hard to go into those Indian villages, they're like the Thai, they will bend with the wind and they will sit and listen but it's pretty hard to convince them of things if you're not one of them. I remember once I was in an Indian village with an AID assignment to find out about women and development and what we could do for the women in that village. And you're sitting there with an Indian headman, the *cacique* and all of the elder men of the tribe are sitting around inside the big house and all of the women are outside, listening in the windows and you're talking about women in development to all these men. Finally at some point a woman yelled in the window, "If you really wanna find out what our life is like here, just come and live here for several years and you'll understand it." But just the scene of all these men sitting there and us talking about women and development is kind of the way things are, because if you're an outsider coming in, you're always an outsider, on both sides, from the left or from the right.

Q: How about the Catholic Church, or the Protestant Church? Did they play any particular role in Peru at that time?

WHITE: I didn't get a sense of the Protestant Church, but I did with the Catholic Church, because in technical education we worked with a group called *Fay Alegría*, which is one of the Catholic technical, vocational skills training groups. My sense was that the Church was in a lot of places trying to do vocational, technical education and practical things. They were strapped by not having a lot of wherewithal to do it and also by the traditional Church, which was out there saving souls and doing whatever Churches do, rather than

do education and nutrition. That was kind of a secondary interest of many in the Church. So these guys that were trying to do more on the practical side I thought were fighting an uphill battle within their own Church and also struggling to find the wherewithal to do more.

Q: Did you find that you, in education or in any programs, were going head to head with the church or were you on the same side?

WHITE: I think in Peru probably I didn't see that as much as I did earlier when I was in Panama. When I was in Panama we were, we decided in all of our wisdom to develop a Central America book program. The schoolbooks were atrocious everywhere, everybody spoke Spanish so why not work out of Mexico and develop primary school books for the whole region? And there we came into direct clash not only with the teachers but with the church. The church was also very satisfied with the traditional education system. Those were battles that you couldn't win, so even though AID produced teams with representatives of all of the countries, so all of the kind of things that were important got built into the books, those books never saw the light of day. They sat in warehouses 'til they rotted away, in all of the countries. That was essentially the teachers and the church aligned against any innovation there.

Q: Did the military play a role in Peru? Some militaries spend an awful lot of time putting their people out and doing rural development of one kind or another. How about the Peruvian military?

WHITE: The Peruvian military was working in areas that I didn't work in. So they were out in some places doing, building roads and doing those kinds of things as exercises, probably largely in areas such as Pichis or Palcazu, which is the area where a lot of drugs are produced. So you wonder, in the end, if they were doing it for community development or for other reasons. But they were working in those drug areas. They were also working in the Amazon area, where there's a lot of gold and everything and they were doing those kinds of exercises. That was at a time when I think AID was very suspicious of those kinds of programs. There's always been a dialogue within AID about whether we should align ourselves or use the military when we're trying to build farm to market roads in difficult areas, whether we should form an alliance with either our own military or domestic military. And AID has been generally against that, although I noted in recent years that has changed. But even in those days there was that dialogue and we stayed rather far apart from the military.

Q: Was the teachers' union sort of a nut you couldn't crack?

WHITE: Yeah, I think it was a nut that we didn't try very hard to crack because we knew we couldn't. They're just too large, too powerful. Yeah, so we really didn't try. We were doing innovative things. We were trying to introduce automation. Not computers, in those days. I'm trying to think of what the term was. For instance, we were trying to introduce microfiche into the system as a way to automate a bit. Some of those things the teachers' union had no problems with. We were also, in Peru, setting up a satellite system

to introduce master teachers, so that a master teacher in Lima, Peru could get on the satellite and talk to teachers in Tarapoto in the jungle and either help teach classes or to teach the teachers. Again, we didn't encounter any resistance on that kind of innovation. But when you get down to the really basic teacher training curriculum development, that's where there's a pretty difficult line to follow and if you stray off of it you knew it right away. So, yeah, we were trying to work in teacher training and curriculum development and usually it didn't rise to a point of us having a confrontation because our counterparts that we're working with would, if we were trying to push something that wouldn't fly, the battle would be between us and our counterparts. It was really hard because AID has a reputation for bringing in outside experts and developing something and putting it on the table for people to follow. That's generally not how we work. Generally we work with local counterparts. Even if we bring in a technical expert they have a local counterpart. And that's where we were kept in line and they'd just say, "You can't do that. There's no use struggling with it." And for the most part we didn't do the things that seemed to be too difficult.

Q: Were there Indian teachers, many?

WHITE: Not many. Most of them were from metropolitan Peru and they're doing a two or three year station out in the Indian area before they got a good assignment.

Q: Was this done with good will or not particularly good will?

WHITE: I think it was done with good intentions but it was just really difficult. So you would find teachers that got out and after a few weeks they just couldn't take any more so they would go back to Lima on Saturday, Sunday and Monday, and Tuesday they would start back to their school and they'd get there on Wednesday and teach Wednesday and Thursday and then leave and go back to Lima. So you got partial teaching.

Q: How about the universities? Were they doing anything about trying to reach out to the Indian population?

WHITE: They may have. In those days the universities were all extremely leftist and Americans could barely walk on campus. So other than a couple of small private or Catholic universities that we could work with, that was it. We couldn't work with the large public university. My sense was and this is just a guess, that they were very ideological. They had a lot of things to say but they weren't doing much.

Q: How did you view what you were doing in the time you were there? What would you point to as a success?

WHITE: I guess I viewed it differently then than I view it now. When I was there I guess I thought that we were really making inroads, that the kind of things we were doing were all going to stick because the counterparts were enthusiastic and when you went out you'd see teachers using what you were trying to promote. But as you look back on it in hindsight, as long as the program money was flowing then everybody was staying in line

doing things. The real acid test was when the money stops flowing does the program stop and in many cases it did.

Q: Given this exposure did you want to stay in Latin America after your time?

WHITE: That's a good question. I was an Asia hand, a born and bred Asia hand. I found Panama interesting because I was working with the Indians and I found Peru also interesting, although not nearly as interesting as Panama, because the Indian culture was much, much further away. In order to get to Puno and Cuzco I had to take a plane and spend several nights away from my family at a difficult time. So by the end of the assignment in Peru I was ready to say I'd done Latin America. For that reason I took my first Washington assignment. I'd never had a Washington assignment.

Q: How'd your wife find Latin society, particularly in Peru?

WHITE: Lima was tough. My mother was living with us also, so we had my wife and my mother. They were alone a lot because I traveled quite a bit. All of my projects were out in the hinterland. So I would probably be at home for a week or ten days and then be gone for a week. Neither my wife nor my mother spoke any Spanish, although they both learned market Spanish while they were in Latin America. We're not a very social family. They didn't go to embassy parties and things like that. So they felt very isolated. They were isolated enough in Peru that they did become, join the Women's Diplomatic Society and they became candy stripers and they'd done a few things just because I wasn't around. In general I think my wife was not overly comfortable in Latin America. Latin America's very different from Southeast Asia.

Q: You didn't find any similarities?

WHITE: Certainly when we went out to rural areas, when I took my wife with me, it felt like rural areas do anywhere. She felt kind of at home in the rural areas. What she didn't like was Latin society. She didn't like the kinds of artificial throwing arms around people and kissing them on the cheeks, the closeness that people stood when they talked. There are a lot of small things in Latin society that didn't fit well with her. She was happy, though, when we went out to rural areas. She always felt, especially the Indian areas, she felt that was almost like going home.

Q: So in 1983 you are off to a Washington assignment. What were you doing?

WHITE: I was in Washington from 1983 to 1986 and was the head of education and training, energy and the environment for Latin America within AID. That was an interesting move for me. I'd never dealt with energy and environment before but they were all packaged in that office. So that gave me an opportunity to work in fields that I had not worked in before. But somewhere along that time came the famous Kissinger Commission for Central America [Ed: The Commission was announced in July 1983 and submitted its report in January 1984].

What they did is they formed this commission and went to Central America to try to figure out what was going wrong and why Central America was going so far to the left. That impacted me tremendously, because one of the things that they did, John Silver from I think it's Boston University was on the Kissinger Commission for education and what they found is what I call an X curve. They found that training from the Soviet Union to Central Americans had gone from a few hundred a year up to almost ten thousand a year and training from the U.S. to Central America had gone from seven or eight thousand down to one or two thousand. So when you graph that it looked like an X, with Soviets increasingly working with the universities and providing training and specifically providing training for high school kids and for undergraduates where we of course were providing training for graduates. So the Kissinger Commission on education recommended that the U.S. do a new training program that would look at serving socially and economically disadvantaged people and Indians and I was asked to develop that program. So that became my major activity in the mid-Eighties, developing something called the Central American Peace Scholarships Project.

Q: Before we move to the Kissinger project, you said you had energy. What is this, how would energy and education and health fit?

WHITE: Well, they didn't necessarily fit. What they had was like a technical office that dealt with the technical sectors. So there was education and training and then on the other side of that I had some people in my office that were either energy officers or environmental officers. So I had a kind of bifurcated office, with two sets of technical people in my office.

Q: Did you find the energy people knew what they were doing and just went about it?

WHITE: Yeah, the energy people, especially the environment people, really knew what they wanted to do and they didn't necessarily want any supervision. So I was good at being able to do some of the bureaucratic things to defend their program, their budget and all of that, but they certainly didn't want me playing around very much with their technical stuff. Environment at that point was not huge. People were just starting to get involved in the environment, so even though there was talk about environment there was not a big program.

Energy, however, was a different story because the guy at the NSC, the admiral who was at the NSC {Ed: Rear Admiral John M. Poindexter?] had an idea that there was lots of thermal energy in Central America, with all these volcanoes and everything and he was bound and determined that AID should go in and develop thermal projects everywhere. The most that AID had been doing in energy was working with portable generators and cooperative electricity and things like that. So there was this kind of struggle between the NSC and AID over what we should be doing that occupied a lot of the political debate in the energy side. Other than that there was a little bit of experimentation with wind farms and things but it was all nothing big, so that the energy and environment side was an area that I got involved in on the margins, on the bureaucratic side and occasionally on the

political side in arguments, but the technicians are like all technicians, they don't want you to fiddle with what they really are interested in.

Q: Well on the educational side, did you find that the sort of the educational apparatus in Washington really understood the situation down in Central America?

WHITE: No, what I saw in the Kissinger Commission report was a tremendous opportunity to secure funding to do the kind of programs that I thought would make a difference there but I found almost immediately was that all of the education officers in the region rejected the idea of working with the socially and economically disadvantaged because AID has a mentality that you train people when they're already in a job, you train them to do their job better. You don't recruit people out of high school or undergraduates who've never been in the work market, marketplace and train them to come back and possibly do something. That's USIA's role. AID's role is to take people that are already working and help them do it better. So I found immediately, even though I could get millions and millions of dollars to do this training program that there was resistance. So after my first round of travel to Central America talking to people, I found that my allies were the ambassadors, not the AID mission directors, or the AID education people. So after that, when I traveled I would first go and talk to the ambassador and then go talk to the AID mission, because I knew I would get a friendly ear in the ambassador's office and that he would also use the idea of this programming in country team and elsewhere to bring about change. So it was hard, it was really hard to get this program going. We were going to train ten thousand people over five years at U.S. universities and almost all of them undergraduates, something AID had not done before.

Q: Was your eye sort of fixed on what the Soviets had done and this was something you had encountered?

WHITE: No, my eye was fixed on that as the argument that got the money and the program going but my sense was that we were not going in there trying to counter the Soviets on a one to one basis, that we were going to use that money to do what we thought needed to be done and part of that entailed training undergraduates and reaching high school students. So there was a running battle with the Congress, more than anyone else. There were staffers in the Congress who…staffers are funny. They're like me, they were opportunists. So they say in this opportunity to set aside money to Georgetown University to compete with AID as to who could do a better job in implementing the Kissinger Commission report. So one day I read in the Washington Post that there's going to be this huge set-aside to Georgetown University out of my budget to do a similar program and then after a couple of years implementation the Congress would compare how Georgetown did with how AID did to make decisions about further funding. So there was a lot of politics involved in this, not only between the AID missions and getting them to do a politically inspired program instead of a technically inspired one but at the federal level between AID and the Congress.

So all of that was tremendously interesting for me. It's something I had not, I had always been out in the field, dealing with Indians and all of that. I hadn't been dealing with the bureaucracy and the politicians and…

Q: One of the urban myths about AID over the years is that essentially it's a welfare program for the middle class American technicians. In other words, an awful lot of the money goes to Americans. The University of Michigan sends people out to Ethiopia to do law studies and this is great support for the University of Michigan. Were you seeing that?

WHITE: Certainly. There's two sides to every argument. Sometimes you go out and you make the argument that out of every dollar that AID spends, seventy or eighty per cent of it comes back to the U.S. to buy farm products or to technical people at universities and all of that. So that's one way to argue, to defend the program as well as a way to argue against the program if you don't like that. I fall into the category of saying the more money that we can spend in a country directly with the country, the better we are and the more that we rely on local technical capacity and local universities and build their capacity, that's what we should be doing rather than strengthening the U.S. universities or the U.S. NGO's or whoever. So there's a great camp there of people, the people who are out wanting to show results would like to bring in the Michigan states and the others and design a program that develops a computer simulation model for agriculture in Kenya and they can do all of that without even talking to a local if they want to and they can eventually show that they've done this product. If that's development that's fine and are were certainly lots of people who, that was their job. I wasn't one. I came from, the people that were in AID that came up through the Peace Corps, through other local kind of programs like that, formed a different kind of element that wanted to see development results in the country.

Q: During your time in AID, who was winning?

WHITE: During my time in AID, I would say that it's a tossup. The thing about AID that probably more than any other characteristic paints AID, is that it's tremendously decentralized. So every AID mission had its own character and its own nature and its own programming and that made it impossible for people in Washington to ever go to the Hill and describe what AID does, because every program's different. I spent seven years with the Japanese aid program later in my career and the Japanese aid program was a cookie cutter. No matter where you go in the world the program is the same, which makes it really easy to describe and to characterize and to put numbers on but it makes it very sterile. The thing about the AID program is that it's extremely rich and one place you go the guy in charge is the guy who wants to see local development happen and he's channeling all of his money to local NGO's and to local universities and local technical assistance. And you go right next door to the next country and they have Michigan State contracts. So it's kind of hard, six of one, half dozen of the other.

Q: I've had people say, you get an AID director who comes out of the cattle breeding business or something and develops a very significant cattle breeding thing in say

Uganda or something like that. He leaves, the cattle die and somebody else is in forestation or something like that.

WHITE: That's exactly what I was saying.

Q: In other words, there isn't much continuity in this, which means an awful lot of projects that just don't have a long life.

WHITE: In the, probably in the late Seventies and through the Eighties, AID developed a CDSS, a Country Development Strategy Statement. So every country that AID was working in had to have this base document that talked about what the country's needs were, usually based on rather elaborate, very expensive sector assessments in all the different sectors and out of all of that work which gave wonderful amounts of money to contractors and universities, you had this document that, the Bible, that said here's what the U.S. government's strategy should be for development in X country. And these theoretically were reviewed and approved with the embassy and the State Department and all of that. Now, the problem was that in fact AID, when you're a technical person the one thing you learn very early on is that if you load things up with so much technical stuff the politicians aren't going to read it. So the CDSS was a series of technical documents that no one would wade through, and so State didn't do due diligence. The CDSS was a wonderful opportunity that was probably designed so that there could be more order put into the foreign aid program but it didn't happen because AID people made it a very technical exercise that State didn't participate very much in. But that would have been part of the solution to what you're saying. That would have put some order and focus and concentration into every country program.

Now we've gone through lots of iterations of that. As I was leaving a few years ago they had come up now with the embassy plan, the embassy comes up with the development strategy for a country. It's a country statement that comes out of the country team where all of the elements of the country team contribute. The problem with that is that the sections on development…when this happened I was in Mexico as the AID director and it's the Drug Enforcement Agency and the people that are dealing with counterterrorism and all of these people that form the key element of a country strategy and development's considered, because we had a small program, fifty or sixty million dollars, not very much of anything contributing to this. So you're just an add-on, rather than looking at it as how can we use that sixty million dollars to best realize our other objectives. So it's still, even though it's more in State's hands than it is in AID's hands to develop that kind of a strategy document, it's still not bringing AID into the fold.

Of course that has been a major argument for a long time. How do you get AID more under the umbrella? (Senator) Jesse Helms, had he had his way, we would just have become a part of State. I was, on the AID side, saying that's probably more a good thing than a bad thing, but people that were close to it and most AID people were, felt that that would have you doing all kind of very short term objectives and forgetting about long term development, which is what many people feel we should do. We shouldn't be

worried about putting out the fires, we should be worried about planting the forests that are going to grow ten or 15 years from now.

Q: The trouble is administrations change. I think it was the Carter Administration was more short term and concerned about famine in the Sahel and trying to fix things quickly.

WHITE: Yeah, every administration has its own character as well. One of the things that I found is, in looking at administrations and how AID changes, is that in general the Republican administrations have been more on the side of foundations for long term development and Democratic administrations have been more on the side on putting fires out and Republican administrations have by far and away provided the bulk of the funding. Every time there's a big funding increase for foreign aid, you'd think it would come from the Democrats but it hasn't. It's come from Republican administrations. Now there might have been Democratic Congresses. I haven't tried to figure out how it happened. But it's usually when Republicans, the Reagan period was one, huge jump in our foreign aid. Another is right now, with the Bush Administration.

Q: AID was amalgamated into the ARA group wasn't it, at that time, or not, or was this just in name?

WHITE: Just in name. I think there was certainly, at some point AID was brought more into the umbrella at the highest level and all that meant was that the AID administrator both was his own man but he also went to the Secretary's meetings. But it didn't have any impact further down the agency, or very little impact. And that has been true all the way until very recently when the embassy has started doing its comprehensive country plan now. But, again, as I said AID is just a tail on that and so AID continues to do what it wants because State still is not, in my opinion, doing its due diligence and maybe being more demanding. Not in Washington, but out in the field. Out in the field is where you can do it, if you have an ambassador interested in AID. For instance, when I was in Guatemala, which was my next assignment, the ambassador there was so interested in AID that he could talk about what we were doing better than either I as the deputy director or the director could and in fact liked AID so much that he left State and came over to AID, Jim Michael and went out to the OECD's DAC (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee) in Paris as an AID guru. But that's highly unusual, where an ambassador has taken a tremendous interest in what AID is doing.

Q: How was this working? In their time the Soviets were taking large numbers of people. Were we able to bring a significant number of Central Americans to the United States for training?

WHITE: We brought over 15,000 Central Americans to the States in several programs. One was a junior college program that brought them for a couple of years. One was a four-year university program, or five years if you added English on. We also finally convinced the Congress and this was a huge battle on my part, that if we really wanted to start reaching the socially and economically disadvantaged, we couldn't bring them all

for university training. We had to bring people on short term training as well. So we started bringing tremendous numbers of highland Indians from Guatemala for two-month courses or three-month courses. We introduced several things that were new into the program. One was something called Experience America, that when you bring people for training it's fine to bring them and have them sit in their dorm for their entire time, studying and going to class, but the idea of getting them out to a Thanksgiving parade or to a football game or to someone's house for dinner or whatever should be, if you don't program that in as something that's important it happens in a few cases but in most cases it doesn't happen and so we made that part of the programming, Experience America.

Another thing that we did is to say that once you're trained the job's not over. The job's over when the trained person returns home and is actually using that training in some productive way in his or her country, that therefore you should provide resources in the country once people have come back to continue to work with them until they're being productive. So those were big changes in the way that we did, that AID did its training and it was only for Central America, it wasn't AID-wide.

Q: Central America at this time was, the war was on, wasn't it?

WHITE: El Salvador, the war was really hot and Nicaragua, the Sandinistas had taken control and it was difficult to work there. But there were some things that really turned around our relationship with, say, the leftist universities. For many years AID had had a program called RTAC, Regional Technical Assistance, what it did was it produced American textbooks in Spanish for Latin American universities and it was a very successful program that had gone on for ten or 15 years, in the Sixties and Seventies. AID doesn't like programs that don't have an end point and so at some point even though this was a tremendously successful program AID just said, "It's been going on 12 years or 15 years, we have to stop it." So when I came into this program I said, "If we really wanna impact on Latin American universities, we can bring all the people we want for training, but if we wanna do something more short term with those universities let's reintroduce the RTAC program." So it was a bureaucratic struggle to get AID to agree to reinstate the program but we did. We started working with McGraw Hill producing textbooks in Spanish. We opened bookstores in the public universities throughout Central America and those books were for sale there at cost. And all of a sudden we were able to go back onto the campuses whereas before literally we couldn't. I remember at the University of Panama the ambassador for some reason had to go to the university and as soon as he got in and got out to his meeting the students turned his car over and set it on fire. That was kind of the way all of those public universities were. By the end of the Eighties we were back in the universities. The bookstores were a tremendous success. The recruiting for long-term training, one of the places we focused on was the universities. All of that opened doors. This is the good part. It was not only that AID was doing that through the CAPS program, the Central American Peace Scholarships program, USIA developed a companion program called CAMPUS and the two programs worked together. In fact, in many countries when a person applied to a program the application came both to AID and to USIA. We had a committee to meet to decide which program it fit better into and in some countries, like Costa Rica, all of the program documentation was the same. So,

just tremendous cooperation between the two agencies, which had not happened in the past. So all of that started to change the way that the U.S. was able to deal with education in Central America.

Q: So you left Washington in 1986. What were you trying to do? Get back to Asia?

WHITE: No, when I worked in Laos, I worked with a guy, Tony (Anthony J.) Cauterucci, he was my boss and I was his deputy. When I went to Panama in the Seventies Tony was also the head of the office I worked in, I was his deputy. So Tony in 1986 went to Guatemala as the mission director and he asked me if I'd come and work with him again. So we'd worked together in the Sixties and Seventies, so here's the chance in the Eighties. We were very good friends. I decided, okay, I'll give Latin America another shot.

Q: So you're in Guatemala from 1986 to 1989. What was the situation in Guatemala at the time?

WHITE: Very tense. I think it was like the wild, wild West. The military was out of control. There was a lot of tension between the Indians and the government. It was just a dangerous place. People carried weapons. It was not a fun place to be.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

WHITE: Ambassador Alberto Piedra [Ed: served from August 1984 to August 1987] was an interesting guy. He was **a** member of Opus Dei. He wasn't very happy with our family planning program there.

Q: Opus Dei being a Catholic, very disciplined Catholic order of laymen.

WHITE: …laymen, and he was very supportive of AID, Ambassador Piedra was but he was nothing like Ambassador Michel, who followed him, who knew our program so well and was so supportive. During that period was also, the peace negotiations were starting in Guatemala. I was not involved in that at all but the big political scene was that there were discussions there.

Q: Who was negotiating with whom?

WHITE: Well that's a good question. Trying to get the combatants to lay down their arms and convincing them that they would not be imprisoned if they peacefully tried to put Guatemala back together again. A number of things were happening. Obviously the military, the Guatemalan military were heavily involved in that, as were the United Nations, involved as well. So that was kind of a backdrop for what was going on there.

The AID program itself was working in the highlands with Indians. We'd done a number of things that had not pleased the government. For instance, AID had a bilingual

education program with the Indians and that was extremely controversial. Bilingual education was always controversial.

Q: When you say bilingual, is this Indian language and…

WHITE: …and Spanish. The idea was that the dropout rates and retention rates were so high that if you offered the first grade entirely in Mayan language, second grade half in Mayan and half in Spanish and by the third grade have them integrated into Spanish, the theory was if you did it that way you would be able to retain people longer in the system. And it's probably true, that result was probably achieved but it was extremely controversial, even among Indian villages. You would have villagers who would say, "I don't want my kid to go to school to speak in Indian language. I want him to go to school to learn Spanish." The argument is that if you start in Mayan and move into Spanish you perform better over the long run but that wasn't very obvious to some villagers. So within villages and within the government this was extremely controversial and was one of those things where AID in a sense forced the hand, as we developed the project and found a few people who were willing to work with us to implement it, implementing it even though it was surrounded with controversy. Usually we don't get involved in those kinds of programs.

Q: Paul, what was your portfolio? What were you dealing with?

WHITE: In Guatemala I was the deputy director, so I was almost entirely dealing with internal AID bureaucratics and working with the bureaucratic structure of the various project officers in the mission, making sure that they had good projects designed, making sure that we could argue with Washington for budget for those projects and dealing with personnel matters.

Q: When you arrived there, did you find inappropriate or not well run programming? What did you find when you went there?

WHITE: No, I wouldn't characterize it that way. Certainly I found some project managers who I felt were not on top of their projects the way they should be, but for the most part that wasn't the case. I found some projects that did not fit the new spirit of AID, of working with the private sector and a lot of the things that we had changed over the years. A lot of the projects were more, especially in the agriculture sector, were more traditional projects that AID had moved away from in most of the world. So part of my job was to update the portfolio and get rid of the kind of agricultural extension projects and things that AID didn't do anymore and move the money into more private sector oriented activity.

Q: Did you see, in Guatemala, were we spending a significant amount of money actually on the country as opposed to bringing in experts?

WHITE: Yeah, we certainly were spending money in the country. We also brought in experts. While I've generally said I don't like that, one of the things that we did was, we

brought in a team of experts to look at a forty year retrospective study of what AID had done in assistance to the highlands of Guatemala, to go through all of the past records and look at projects and try to figure out from what we had done forty years ago up to the present, what had stuck and what had not. Which institutions that we created continued to function as institutions and in fact had grown and become Guatemalan institutions, which ones died the year after our money stopped. So that was an extremely useful study and it was done not entirely by expats, because there were some Guatemalans on the team. We insisted on having a Guatemalan anthropologist and a couple of others. But it was largely expat. But very useful in showing that projects that you think are extremely successful because everyone's toed the line and they've done everything they were supposed to do, two years after they're over noting remains.

Q: This has been one of the great complaints about our aid program. What was the assessment that you had? What kind of worked and what didn't work?

WHITE: Well, the other side of that story is that projects that really sputter along and that have difficult times and the project officers on the local side are really difficult to deal with often are the projects that are successful, because those are the people that have an idea they're fighting for and they're struggling for and they're willing to argue with you, instead of just toeing the line and getting the money they're really working to make an idea work. And they're dealing with other people and struggling to get money and dealing with the kind of change that happens in management. So at the end of the project you look at the AID evaluation, it looks like a series of fights and it hasn't gone anywhere, many of those projects are the ones that have, that were successful. So what I come out of that with is that it really depends on the leadership of a project. Success depends on leaders and it depends on leaders who are willing to take issue with AID, to stand up for their own principles. But we tend to like the people that work with us well.

Q: What type of projects seem to develop roots in that culture there?

WHITE: Well, the institutional development projects. When you're working within an institution to strengthen that institution, as opposed to working directly with farmers and you had a program that somehow was able to avoid the agricultural extension system or the university extension system and go in and set up demonstration projects directly with farmers and all of that, you might have benefited those few farmers that you were working directly with, but over the long run when the project's over there's no institution there to continue doing it. So the ones that really struggled with the hard job of institutional creation and strengthening were the ones that were more successful.

Q: Did we have like, farm agents, in other words, people who are out there to give help to a broad variety

WHITE: For instance, in Guatemala a lot of agricultural cooperatives were set up in certain projects and the cooperatives, working with the agricultural extension agents and the government is always difficult because that's usually a very weak institution and usually there's huge turnover. So you go in and you work with these guys and you train

them, you send them off to the States and they get a masters and they come back really ready go and they come back in the same situation, a weak institution. The next day they're gone and they're working for Ralston Purina or something. So a better way seems to have been to work with local institutions, local cooperatives, where you're actually not working with the farmers but creating a cooperative structure that is lower level than a government agency, that's part of the community and that possibly has a chance to stay on and sustain itself. So that was one of the things. Another is working with the local NGOs (non government organization). Where there's a local NGO who was there before our project and will be there after it and you work with them to strengthen what they're doing. And that's another secret, it seems, is to work within the structure of what someone else wants to do rather than what the outside expert thinks should be done.

Q: What sort of NGOs were you finding, because this is a fairly new phenomenon, isn't it?

WHITE: NGOs are not that new. Working with them as a government agency is fairly new. AID started working with NGOs in the late Sixties, early Seventies and we've been working with local NGOs over all of that time. Some of them are church-based. I mentioned *Fay Alegria*, with is a church-based, Catholic-based, religious vocational education group. But we've also worked with lots of others, lots of local NGOs. The problem that you have with local NGOs is a lot of them tend to be humanitarian. They exist to give food to someone or provide other kinds of help and AID generally doesn't like social welfare projects. We want to work in technical areas. So part of our job has been to identify local agencies who have all of the heart in the world and help them build the brains to go with that heart. So, helping them to develop the management structures that will ensure transition of leaders, helping them develop budgetary capacity, helping them to develop the ability to write good proposals so they can get funding from not just AID but from other donors. So we've tended to work with NGOs in those kinds of structures, not necessarily just in a project mode.

Q: I take it most of your work was with the Indians in the highlands. Well how did you find the central government, which I assume would be more Latino, dealt with the Indians?

WHITE: Again, we had the same problems that you have elsewhere, a lot of prejudice. For instance, a good example is in the Central American Peace Scholarships Project, which I developed in Washington and now I had a chance to implement it in Guatemala. We would send Guatemalans off for training. As I mentioned, we send a lot of Indians off for shorter-term training and some for long term training as well. But I recall this one incident where the local Latinos that we had sent to a place for training ended up staying in the hotel where some of the Guatemalan Indians from Guatemala who were there on another training program. The Latinos protested that they didn't want to stay at the same hotel the Indians were staying at! So that's the extent to which sometimes that feeling is still there. It's difficult. There was a person in the Ministry of Planning that we worked with, the head of planning, in fact, who had a really good sense for what we were doing and was very supportive. We worked with him to try to ensure that there were line items

put in the Guatemalan budget that would support continued work with NGOs and with Indian groups and were able to have a lot of influence because there's a lot of local currency.

In the old days, AID did a lot of projects that generated local currency. For instance, PL-480 commodities that were sold. Bring in wheat, you give the wheat to the bakers, they make the bread, sell it and some of the money goes back to the Ministry of Planning in a joint account that's jointly administered by USAID and the ministry. So there was all of this local currency and AID was getting out of the PL-480 business.

So we were able to negotiate, for instance, that that local currency would be put into specific line items in the Guatemalan budget that would support local NGOs, support local Indian activities and all of that. Now, I haven't looked recently to see if those line items have continued. But certainly over a period of time those line items existed and that was because the Ministry of Planning was strong enough and had the ear of the president and was able to make those kinds of changes. So I consider that a real achievement. Was it a lasting achievement? We have to look and see.

Q: Was there any reflection of, I know Guatemala has an extensive border with Mexico and all. Did this make any difference?

WHITE: In those days, the difference was that when the military was really killing Indians, the Indians found they could escape across the border to Mexico and escape the Guatemalan military, so it created a political problem along the border. That was the extent that I knew about when I was in Guatemala. When we get to my Mexico assignment I'll talk about some of the cross-border things between Mexico and Guatemala that we tried to do there.

Q: Why was the military going after the Indians?

WHITE: I think the sense was that they were subversive, that they were working to if not overthrow the government to cause trouble like the *Sendero*, all the way from local robberies to perhaps things that were more political in nature.

Q: Well did you have problems going into the highlands?

WHITE: No, but we worked the part of the highlands that was closest to Guatemala City. The further you got into the mountains, the more difficult it got. We had a couple of projects with sheep and other things in more distant places but for the most part we worked the area that was closest to the city.

Q: Was there a significant produce infrastructure in Guatemala, supplying fruits and berries or whatever?

WHITE: Yes, one of our projects then, it was just at a period when the U.S. market was starting these niche market kind of opportunities for winter crops from Latin America. So

we had a number of projects that produced strawberries for the U.S. market and produced cut flowers for the U.S. market, a whole series of, asparagus. And those kind of things really boomed and we did it all through a cooperative program, developing cooperatives that did this and we helped them with quality control, with packaging and all of that, with contact with the market in the U.S.

Q: What about women? Were we trying to empower women or not?

WHITE: We were, yes. Part of that Central American Peace Scholarships Project was that there was the "Experience America" and that was to continue to work with people after they returned home. Another element that was really different from what AID had done in the past is that I set a target that fifty per cent, I think actually it was forty per cent, of the trainees had to be women. And that was at a period when I looked at AID's program world-wide and it's something like 18 or 19 per cent of all of our trainees were women. We exceeded that. We did 55 or so per cent of all the trainees in that 15,000 were women. So that was a major step forward. People said, "You'll never be able to get highland Indian men to let their women go the States for training." So that was a challenge and we went up to the area and recruited people and found that that was not a problem at all. That was just an old wives tale. So we were able to send large groups of women, sometimes ten or 15 or 20 at a time, for training in the States but also in the undergraduate programs we recruited a lot of women.

Q: Well when, let's take women, came back from this shortish training, what would they do?

WHITE: Well, it's amazing the kinds of things that happen. We sent them up for very specific kind of training. For example if we found of village of candle makers and so we sent them up to learn how to do a better job of making candles and some of the training was more specifically on leadership development, the kind of thing that USIA used to do. But what we found was it was not necessarily the training that was given that made a difference in lives but things that they saw while they were in the States. So a lot of the Guatemalan women went to Florida for training and one of the things they did, as a part of their training they would have a chance to go to Disney World. They also had a chance to go to, in Miami, to a Miami flea market. And we found later that all over the highlands women had developed flea markets. One of the things that they learned from that trip was that you could get things together and market them and people would buy stuff that you'd never think they would buy. So all of a sudden there's this little development of things that no one had, that was not part of what we were looking at and I haven't seen any follow up studies recently. but I would really be interested and I keep talking to people about going down and looking at the people that we trained here all these years later to see what else they've done that we might trace back to things that they saw in the U.S. or things that they learned during in training, as well.

Q: You were there during the Reagan Administration, still. What about the family planning, birth control, which a Republican Administration usually was not supportive, but how did that…

WHITE: Well, I've seen those transitions several times and I guess I think the stink is usually raised in the U.S., with people that have strong political leanings. When you get out to the field, between the UN family planning program and all of the other donors that offer family planning, if the U.S. was not offering some specific activity like abortion there are twenty other ways that that program continues without us and it's not a big deal. Even though it's a big deal here.

Q: Did developments in Nicaragua, you didn't border on there but this was the one radical state in Central America. Did that play out? I mean, were there reflections in Guatemala?

WHITE: I don't know the answer to that. Certainly I didn't see anything there. One of the things we did, the lady that worked with me on all of the training, this happened largely after I left Guatemala was that the peace accords were finally negotiated and the dissidents laid down their arms and we developed a huge training program to reintroduce them into society, giving them new skills and all of that. The lady that worked with me on all of my training ran that program. She was really excited about the results, that the people she was working with were both eager to be trained and that the programs were good and people were going out and actually going into the marketplace with new skills. I didn't look at that program but I communicated a lot with her when she was doing it. But Nicaragua, I'm not sure that there was any impact there. I think people looked at Nicaragua as, Somoza was overthrown, that showed that the left could do some things but Nicaragua was a special case. It might have encouraged the leftists but it maybe also gave some encouragement to governments to work harder to try to not let that happen. That might have even pushed the peace process faster in El Salvador and Guatemala.

Q: Was there a military government when you were there?

WHITE: No, it was a civilian government when I was there.

Q: How did the military perform?

WHITE: I didn't have any dealings with them. My sense was that the military was largely autonomous and that they ran large areas of the country like up country in the highlands. It was like a warlord situation, where the military was running it, not the government.

Q: Well, did the military warlords impact on your programs?

WHITE: No, only to the extent that earlier, that program of bilingual education, I think the military really didn't like that program. That had shut down before I got there but I had a sense that the military was heavily involved in shutting that program down and in fact the guy that ran that program, the AID guy, went to Pakistan after Guatemala and during my time in Guatemala he came back to Guatemala on vacation and he had worked so closely with the Indians he went up country to visit some of the people that he worked with, many of whom had crossed over, become refugees in Mexico and he was killed up

there. His body was found floating in the ocean and we tried everything we could, we had every agency in the U.S. government that we could, try to trace it, because everyone felt that he was probably assassinated by the military because of his previous involvement. We could never find any smoking gun there but we certainly lost a good officer. Frank Fairchild was his name.

Q: You left there in 1989. Where'd you go then?

WHITE: I came back to Washington. I was offered a job as the director for Asia and South Asia in AID, which was where my heart had been for a long time and so I came back and took that job for a couple of years.

Q: Paul, you're the Director in AID's Office of East Asian and South Asian Affairs (ANE/ESA) in 1989. What were we doing in Asia, AID-wise?

WHITE: Well, those were big issues. On the AID side we had the Pressler Amendment implementation for Pakistan, which meant, the Pressler Amendment was, if a country was developing a nuclear device we could not provide them with aid. Pakistan was our largest traditional aid program. I think Egypt was larger in dollar sums but Pakistan was second. So we had to shut down the program. What that meant was looking at every project to determine the right end point for the project. If you're building a bridge over a canyon you couldn't stop halfway through the bridge so you had to go to the end, so every project

We tried to end everything at a rational stop point but there was also time pressure from the Congress to end things as soon as we could. So that was quite an exercise. So that was one major activity.

A second big activity were what I call the cross border programs. They were programs that probably traditionally had been run by the CIA but they had been turned over to AID to implement and that was support on the Thai-Cambodian border to the anti-communist group, the three groups that were working, sort of pro-democracy groups along the border, providing them with housing and shelter and food and the wherewithal to continue to exist. And then there was support for school teachers and medics and others within Afghanistan, working out of Pakistan. So those were in my portfolio.

Q: Okay, let's talk about Pakistan first. What were you hearing from your organization and from your Pakistani colleagues?

WHITE: Well, I think there was profound shock that we were cutting off a really large AID program that was quite successful, when, in Pakistani eyes, right next door India also had nuclear weapons and was not subject to the Pressler Amendment.

Q: Well India was subject because it wasn't receiving aid, is that it?

WHITE: Well, whatever they had done they had done it before the Pressler Amendment so they were exempt and your right, they were not receiving a lot of aid. They had a very small aid program at that time. So that was the one thing that we were hearing, what about India next door? And of course the other thing was, what about this girls education program that's training women teachers, because one of the problems of girls education is that girls wouldn't go to school with men teachers if they had to board. A project that was theoretically very successful in changing the way that Pakistan thinks about education was being cut off. So in each project you heard about the good that the project was doing and concern about how can you possibly think about cutting it off?

Q: Were you sort of doing all this sort of grudgingly? What was the attitude?

WHITE: No, I think the attitude was, it was the law and there was heavy pressure to do it and so I think everyone was involved in doing it to the best of our ability, but certainly had we had our druthers people would not have been doing that. But it wasn't that you were kind of grudgingly doing it or trying to slow it or delay it or hoping for a new decision at some future point. It was clear that there wasn't going to be any change in that policy.

Q: Were you feeling congressional oversight? Were staffers sort of looking over your desk or not or what

WHITE: Yeah, I think the staffers were very actively involved in making sure that things were moving forward and you were being called up to the Hill every week to explain where you were and why you aren't moving faster on that or what about this or what about that. So, yeah, that's how the pressure was largely exerted.

Q: What about girls' schools? How did that, how'd you find phasing that out?

WHITE: Well, it was difficult because that was an interesting project. That was a project that we were doing a policy-based project. So instead of being out in the provinces directly implementing this project we were giving the Pakistan government rewards for policy changes that it made. So if they made a policy change to institute teacher training for women in X province and they had so many people, so many women in the teacher training school they got a chunk of money for that policy change. So it was, in one way you're just dealing with the government bureaucrats in Islamabad, rather than having to deal with every school that closed or every teacher training program that was being shut down. That in some ways made it easier.

Q: While this program was going on were you, even before the Pressler Amendment came along, were you getting complaints you might say from the fundamentalists in Pakistan about doing things with women?

WHITE: No, I wasn't on the ground there so I'm not as aware of that but I think, yeah, there's always resistance to change but as far as I know that project was being implemented smoothly and again largely by the Pakistani government, rather than by us.

I'm sure had we been out more directly involved in that we would have gotten more flak from it but we were kind of the invisible actor in this. Which is a good way to go, by the way, in controversial programs.

Q: Within the Pakistani government there were people who really wanted to do this?

WHITE: Right.

Q: I was reading a book by Bernard Lewis [What Went Wrong?: The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East] about what went wrong, how come Islam has ended up at the bottom of the heap and he mentions the social consequences if a society has women who are ill-educated or uneducated.

WHITE: Of course the traditionalist would say, "But that's how the world has always been. The men have gone out hunting and they've gone to school and they've gotten educated and the women have run the household." But certainly that's true. If you ignore fifty per cent of the population and that fifty per cent are the women that take care of the kids that seems to make sense.

Q: Were you seeing any of the projects, for example the school project, was there any follow through on the part of the Pakistanis saying, "Well, okay, if you can't do it we can."

WHITE: Certainly in some of the projects there was a commitment by the government to continue the program. Since all of our activities require government counterpart funding anyway, some more than others, those that had substantial government counterpart funding and we were just adding to that some quality component the program would continue. In girls' education, for instance, I think that they were committed to continuing to move forward with that. The project was working in two of the most difficult states or provinces in Pakistan and there was a commitment to continue and I think they did continue the program.

Q: Were there sort of "no go" areas? I think of the tribal areas

WHITE: The Northwest Territories, yeah. There were certainly "no go" areas even in those days. You had the same problems you have now. You had tremendous poppy production in some areas. You had warlords in control in some areas of Pakistan, largely in that area around Afghanistan. And so, yeah, travel was difficult.

Q: How about Afghanistan? Afghanistan at this point was very much under the Taliban, wasn't it?

WHITE: By the time I arrived at the desk, the Soviets were in the process of withdrawing. Our commitment, AID's commitment, was to try to maintain the village school programs and the village medical programs and so basically what we were doing was providing medical supplies and school supplies, sending them in by mule train. We

were also occasionally having those people come out to Pakistan for training, some of them. And we were providing food. And food was one of the more difficult areas because the question was how did you get it to the remote areas in Afghanistan. We would truck it in Pakistan up to the border. It had to be then transloaded onto Afghan vehicles and as it transited Afghanistan every time the passed a different state, the state trucks would haul it, so it had to be offloaded and each time you offloaded it there was a big chance for problems. And then there were people like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and others who would intercept the food trains and take the food for their armies. So there were a lot of problems in our program because we couldn't go across the border to monitor what was going on.

Q: Was the Taliban in control or was it iffy?

WHITE: No, I think it was iffy at that point. There were just a lot of warlords. It was unclear who was in control in the capital but I think at that point it was not the Taliban, yet.

Q: Were we having problems with the Pakistanis to get the food in? Were they taking a certain percentage of this?

WHITE: I don't know that they were taking a certain percentage but certainly I'm sure on the shipping arrangements and all that they were making money. We were working with the agreement of the Pakistani intelligence authorities and the military, but yeah, I'm sure they were getting a cut of

Q: The Pakistani intelligence people were sort of the rulers up there, weren't they? They were in charge of certainly the border.

WHITE: Right, you couldn't do anything without their agreement.

Q: You have any problems with them?

WHITE: No, I think the only problem we had was whenever, I went out several times on TDYs and while I would have liked to have talked to the people in control and had a dialogue with them I think that was probably above my pay grade. So I ended up talking to lower level officials and had great trouble in accessing people at the top because they had other counterparts that they dealt with in the embassy. So for me that was a particular problem because I like going directly to the source and discussing things but in that case I didn't. But other than that, no problem. No security problems. You always went with a great deal of trepidation when you were there because things were different. There was an active insurgency going on. There was a lot of unrest with the refugees on the Pakistan side of the border.

Q: Well in Pakistan, as we shut down the program, was the program pretty much run by contractors rather than sort of AID permanent staff?

WHITE: Yeah, that's just the way of life with AID but AID is still involved. What happens of course is that the contractors provide contract staff who do a lot of the implementation but the programming and the planning and all that is still done by AID and any direct relationships with the government, for instance, those relationships are maintained by AID. So contractors are an implementation tier rather than a policy tier. If you're a long term AID person who remembers when we used to do it all ourselves, you certainly long for those days, because you have a lot more control and it's your own staff doing it, rather than a contract staff. But that was just the way of the world.

Q: What were the problems of dealing with contract staff?

WHITE: Well, a number of things. First of all, contract staff, they have their own agenda. If it's an NGO, the agenda, if it's Church World Services or Catholic Relief or some of those, they might have a religious agenda on top of everything that you're trying to do. If it's Harvard University or Michigan State, they have an agenda with their educational program, with the people they're trying to train or they have an issue with their own policy that might not be directly in line with what the U.S. government wants. When you have a powerhouse like a Harvard out there doing things for you and they're out of control it's hard to bring them under control. So those are the kinds of issues, the main issues that we had. Mainly how to manage the agenda that was set out by the U.S. government through AID and to keep people within those parameters.

Q: When we move over to Thailand and the cross border thing, you say you were sort of taking over from the CIA. Had the CIA actually essentially moved into AID territory and now were trying to get out or how would you describe the thing?

WHITE: Well, I think that the Agency has always had programs that were AID-like for people that they were working with and in this case the non-communist resistance, for whatever reason I think the Congress made a determination that that AID-like program should be run by AID. So, yeah, all of a sudden we were working with counterparts that we traditionally hadn't worked with. Instead of working with a government you were working with a series of political groups. And so the questions come up about what authority do you have, who do you sign agreements with, all of those kind of questions. But there's a wonderful, notwithstanding any other part of the law kind of phrase that certain programs like this get authorities that normally AID doesn't have. So both in the Afghan and the Cambodian cross border program there were special authorities that gave us a lot more flexibility than we would ordinarily have.

Q: Well this was because of it was essentially a military operation against communist movements. What could you do? First place, what was the sort of situation on the ground? Are we talking about, was it Laos?

WHITE: We're talking about working out of the Thai border area into Cambodia and you're talking about the extreme I guess it would be northwest part of Cambodia, bordering on Thailand and there was one province there where a small area of land was controlled by these several non-communist groups. So the situation on the ground, it was

not an active military zone. There wasn't fighting at that time. The Khmer Rouge were also up in that area, right adjacent to the non-communist resistance area was the Khmer Rouge stronghold and then there was the rest of Cambodia, governed by Hun Sen, who was a Vietnamese puppet.

The big issue in those days was, since the Khmer Rouge was fighting against the government and the non-communist resistance was also resisting the government, they had worked out on the ground some cooperation relationships with the Khmer Rouge, which was exceedingly sticky. The Congress was very concerned about what is the relationship between the non-communist resistance and the Khmer Rouge and is any of our assistance being given to the non-communist resistance and somehow then getting over to the Khmer Rouge? Those were the kind of policy issues that were being debated. The strong concern among some in the Congress, mainly staffers, I assume, could be members as well, was what about all the rest of Cambodia? What about the people? Shouldn't we be providing an AID program to Cambodia itself? And at one point Congress put into their legislation, to the bill, a requirement that AID conduct a needs assessment in the rest of Cambodia to determine what the humanitarian needs are, as a step towards forming a program there and the administration took the position that AID could not do that. They would not let us go into Cambodia, into the rest of Cambodia, to do this needs' assessment. So in a sense my office was right in the middle of that, with the law telling us that we had to do this and the administration saying that you couldn't do it. And we finally figured out a way to do it.

Q: You were saying that there were a lot of NGOs in Cambodia, even in the areas controlled by the Hun Sen government?

WHITE: In Hun Sen's control, yeah, through Phnom Penh and in that area that they directly controlled. So what we did was, we invited those NGOs, international NGOs, up to Thailand and had a meeting there and picked their brains, so to speak and developed our needs' assessment based on what they felt was going on inside of Cambodia. That was a way to satisfy the congressional requirement to do a needs' assessment and yet not put foot into Cambodia. That made everyone happy. That was a good solution to the problem. Of course, as you would guess, the needs' assessment showed there were tremendous needs in Cambodia, humanitarian needs but the problem still remained of how we could provide assistance to areas controlled by that communist state.

Q: And this was a period when we did not have relations with Vietnam.

WHITE: That's correct. So that was the big issue. Our assistance to the non-communist resistance was fairly minimal. We provided food and a few things but at that point there was not a large amount of assistance that we were providing to them.

Q: Was there sort of a residue of CIA influence, wanting to pick up intelligence and I would think they would want to continue to do that.

WHITE: Yeah, I think they certainly continued their military support and relationship with those people. They had plenty of people working on that. But of course we were dealing with different actors and there were…we coordinated carefully and closely with them. There wasn't any particular demand on us to provide reporting but through discussions and conversations and coordination certainly a lot of information was passed back and forth.

Q: Were you at all involved in immigration from, essentially Cambodia to the United States?

WHITE: Only on the margins. Certainly that happened more in the 1975-76 period, where there was huge AID involvement, both along the border and in the refugee camps, in Guam and the Philippines and also even back here in the States in helping to settle people. Certainly AID people very interested in making sure that the people that we directly worked with got resettled somehow. So there was a lot of informal attention given to this as well.

Q: What about up in Laos? Was there spillover, the Hmong and all that? Were we doing anything with them?

WHITE: Yeah, we were, we continued to work with the Hmong. A lot of the Hmong ended up on the border camps and we continued to supply the border camps. There were trickles of people over all of those years that left the camps and came to the States or to France or other places for resettlement. There were continually people escaping Laos and coming across and where those people had worked for the U.S. government or had other credentials like that, there was a continuing effort to resettle those people. But a lot of the refugees just remained stuck in the camps. So one of the things, when we were working with the non-communist resistance, most of their people were still in border camps on the Thai side of the border. I was trying to institute a program where we would…they were learning Thai or English and things like that.

I had hoped we would be able to run democracy programs there. We talked about the importance of voting, we gave people kind of decision points so if they were ever to return to Cambodia they would go back with perhaps a stronger sense of democracy than they had just sitting in the camps or studying language. Those kinds of programs were always hard to really get going, for a number of reasons. I think one reason is that NGOs, essentially NGOs ran a lot of the camps and those programs are not the kind of programs that NGOs traditionally think of doing. They were more on the food and humanitarian side. There were issues with the Thai not wanting to do too much in the camps, not wanting to get the camps too advanced, too attractive. So it was difficult, it sounds simple but it's very difficult to get programs going in the camps.

Q: What about East Asian bureau? Did they have much interest in the State Department or were you sort of on your own?

WHITE: No, I think we worked really closely with the East Asian bureau at State. In fact I probably spent as much time there as I did in my own offices. So we worked really closely on all of these issues. We worked like a team.

Q: Your geographic reach straddled a couple of State regional bureau; Near Eastern for Afghanistan, Pakistan and then over to Asia…

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WHITE: Yeah, although, no, the Cambodia, Afghan stuff was also somehow being dealt with I think by the East Asia office. But, yeah, mainly on the Cambodian stuff was where we did a lot of coordination with State. On the Afghan cross border program there was not as much. It was done at a different level. On the Cambodian side I basically, as the office head, did a lot of the coordination. On the Afghan program my boss did the coordination with State more than I did.

Q: Did we have anything going in Burma?

WHITE: We did. What we were trying to do in Burma was, there was a lot of, a lot of refugees on the Thai side of the border. So we intended and tried hard to start a university, in a sense, an education program, border education program, for those young Burmese who were out on that side of the border. We never got that going. There was some congressional support for that. There were a couple of staffers who were quite interested in that but it was, again, one of those politically difficult programs to get the Thai to agree to and to get State…to get everybody on board. So we worked hard on that but never got anything going.

Q: You mentioned the importance of congressional staffers. Often they were the ones who had an agenda and were driving it, weren't they?

WHITE: Yeah, I think so. On this particular case in Burma, for instance, I think that perhaps one of the staffers very interested in that had a Burmese wife. But for whatever reason, you're right. I think that a lot of times it was unclear where the strong interest came from, whether it was from the staff or from a member. Unless you were actually called to a member's office the assumption was generally that the staffer was the person pushing this. In some cases you had letters to the Secretary or to the AID Administrator from a member where it was clear the member was involved. But on many of the kind of issues that I dealt with it seemed to be staff driven, that the staffers had a lot of power on the Hill.

Q: You started in 1989. Of course, 1989 was the year of, the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Did any of that reflect itself in where you were?

WHITE: A bit, because the bureau that I worked in in AID had Eastern Europe, Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, the South Pacific, all in one big Bureau (for Asia, Near East and Europe – ANE) and I was the chief for East Asia, so we had another person working

the Middle East (Peter Benedict) and another person working in Eastern Europe (Richard Brown). So all of that, at the office level it all fit together well. I had a sense, from people I worked with out in the field, that they were hearing about and understanding that the communist world was collapsing and looking at their own situation and expecting that at some point Russian aid would dry up to Vietnam and Vietnamese aid would dry up to Hun Sen and that all of a sudden they would march back into Phnom Penh. I think they had unrealistic expectations, as those dominoes started to fall, how it would impact on them, because it was not ever as direct as they thought it might be.

Q: What about the Pacific islands? Did you get involved in anything there?

WHITE: Only very generally, because the other stuff was so big. What we haven't talked about is the Philippines base negotiations were going on and AID was an important part of that, because base conversion into free port zones or whatever became a part of the planning and so we had Pakistan, the Philippines, Afghanistan and Cambodia were the big players. There were some minor things going on in the South Pacific but they were relatively minor.

Q: What about the Philippine base negotiation? First, what was the situation and then what were you doing?

WHITE: Probably the big thing that AID was doing, we were helping fund a program with Elliott Richardson on the U.S. side and a Philippine counterpart to strengthen the private sector and its involvement in the Philippines. Of course, as the base negotiations were going on this kind of U.S.-Philippine private sector-driven thing became important because that would be one way to have these bases start to earn money for the Philippine economy and replace all the money that was going to evaporate when we left. So that was the main thing that we were doing and our relationship then was largely in the sense of planning for the future and how the various bases might be used. We weren't so much on the political side of that one.

Q: Did it seem in the cards that we're truly getting out? We'd gone through base negotiation after base negotiation, but this time, this is it?

WHITE: Yeah, I guess certainly at my level the sense was that, again, this was a decision that had been made and you tried to implement it as best you could.

Q: Mount Pinatubo, had it erupted?

WHITE: No, it had not erupted at the time of most of that planning but somewhere towards the end of that planning it did and there certainly was almost the sense among those people that were still very angry that we were leaving the Philippines that perhaps this was some kind of justice, 'cause it rendered that air force base largely unusable for a long time. But yeah, that happened towards the end of that period.

Q: What were you getting, sort of from your contacts on the Philippine side? Was there a feeling that, in a way, thank God you're leaving or were we the milk cow that they wanted to stay on or what?

WHITE: I think AID, to some extent, maybe not as much as the Embassy…we tend to deal with certain counterparts and those counterparts tend to be like-minded people. So your counterparts generally were very sad that we were leaving, felt that that was not the way that things should be, but that there was this force out here, the Philippine people, that were making this happen. And so you get locked into maybe thinking, "Well, maybe there's a chance we can stay. If people at this level are thinking those kind of things, maybe it's going to turn around." It clearly didn't.

Q: How did we view the Philippines? Did we feel that they were a mature enough country that they could take care of their own problems?

WHITE: I couldn't speak for the U.S. government. I think my view of the Philippines, after having dealt with them on a number of these issues, was that there are a lot of extremely talented people, very educated people, in the Philippines and of course that's always bolstered by the fact that a lot of people speak English. That alone makes it seem very different than most of the countries we worked in. But also a sense that even with all of that education and polish, at some level, upper levels in the society, that things just weren't together. That you had a very talented country, a lot of resources and yet things just didn't hang together well, for whatever reason, so that our leaving was perhaps premature, our backing out of that area. Again, that was my impression. I'm not sure how the government viewed that.

Q: During the Vietnam War, in the high point of AID, we were all over the place, then all of a sudden you're shrunk down to a few places, in a way, aren't you?

WHITE: Sort of. I think probably another way to look at that is that a lot of our money, a large percentage of our money, was going to very key, strategic places around the world. Those places were Egypt and Israel and at one point Vietnam and Pakistan and that there were crumbs out there for the rest of the world. So one way to look at it, if you weren't working on one of those key, strategic programs, is that aid was being sucked away from everywhere else to support strategic interests of the United States. If you were working on those strategic programs, it was a very different view because you could see how much that aid was needed and you kind of looked at the rest of the world and said, "Out of all these years of basic education, or primary health care, or whatever, you look at those countries, how far have they gone? They haven't gone very far. So perhaps, maybe more focused, concentrated efforts might pay off more than just trying to serve a lot of countries." So that's always the debate in foreign aid, as to what you should do.

Q: Getting to Pakistan and Afghanistan, did you see Islam as being a problem?

WHITE: I personally saw Islam as being a problem only because I didn't understand it and I recognized on my first trip to Pakistan, when I went up country and saw all of the

women shrouded in black from head to foot. I'd been to Islamic countries before. I'd been to Bangladesh and Indonesia. But this was a horse of a different color and I realized that there was a big chunk of the world that I had never served in and I did not understand at all. And so that was a problem. I felt that there I was, trying to run a program in a place where I had no understanding at all of the culture and all of the underlying things that were going on. We had people on the ground there responsible for doing that. But for me it's an uncomfortable feeling, working in an area where it's so clear that I don't understand it.

Yeah, I think, more generally people were starting to sense that something was going on in the Islamic world. When we were working on Afghanistan cross border stuff, for instance, at some point Osama bin Laden surfaced as a very wealthy man who was helping to support the school systems and the medical programs, just like we were and at that point he was looked on as "We don't know who he is or why he's doing this but here's some other, Islamic aid going to help the same kind of people we're working with." Certainly over time that view of him has changed a lot.

Q: You say you were doing this for a couple of years, we get up to 1991, 1992. Then what?

WHITE: Well, a couple of things happened. First of all, the person in AID who ran Asia, Near East, South Asia, Pacific Bureau [Assistant Administrator Carol Adelman] decided that was far too much for one person and so they split it up into an Asia bureau and a Middle East bureau and an Eastern Europe office. And the person I had been working for maintained, while the Asia bureau moved she made the argument within AID that the political programs should stay with her and that meant keeping the Philippines, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Cambodia with her, even though some of those programs should have moved to Asia. She maintained the Middle East and Eastern Europe. So there was a date set for when all of the programs in Asia would move to her and we talked about that and I decided that at that point, when those programs moved to the Asia bureau, I would move on. But before that happened AID decided that they wanted to put a person in Japan to help coordinate U.S. foreign assistance with the Japanese foreign aid program, that was now the world's largest program. And my name came out of the computer as having had some Japanese. So I was approached and asked if I would be interested in accepting that job. I said, "Yes" and so in 1991, as those Asia programs were leaving the bureau, I left and went to Japan from 1991 to 1998.

Q: Wow! What were you doing?

WHITE: That's a good question. When I got there the head of their aid program made it clear that I was there at Japan's request and they had had so much trouble trying to coordinate with AID because we're decentralized that he wanted someone close at hand in the Embassy who could help him, advise them on how they approach AID, who they worked with and all of that. So from Japan's perspective, that was why I was there.

From our perspective, I was there for several reasons. The Japanese aid program was largely infrastructure transfer to countries. They did almost nothing on policy. They did almost nothing, how should I say it, trying to use their aid as a lever for trying to achieve different kinds of policy in countries. They did nothing on the soft side, that is in democracy, women in development, environment, HIV/AIDS, population. That just was not a part of what they did in their aid program. They built buildings and supplied equipment. So my job was to try to move them towards a program that would look more like our program.

So those were the two big reasons why I was there. What I did is, I spent most of my day, I learned very quickly that JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) was not AID's counterpart, that JICA was more like a consultant. JICA was not part of the government of Japan, for instance. Their aid program was run by their Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So that became my key counterpart and I spent every day over at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, either trying to figure out what they were doing and why, or how I could influence them to do different things.

Q: What was your impression of the Japanese aid structure?

WHITE: Before I went there, my impression was that JICA, their grant aid group, was our counterpart. I quickly learned that their aid structure was very different than that, that what they had was a Ministry of Foreign Affairs that made all of the policy decisions and then a series of implementing bodies, JICA being one, but also their Ministry of Trade and Industry, their Ministry of Fisheries, they put their money out to various implementation organizations. So that was very different from anything I had confronted before and almost immediately I started thinking in terms of, if USAID ever were to become part of the State Department our program would probably start to look more like the Japanese program. While my job was to change them to look like us, what I saw down the pike was possibly us changing to look more like them.

Q: How about your counterparts? Would they have a different attitude than you did, did you find or

WHITE: Yeah, certainly they had a different attitude. I think the Japanese aid program started as war reparations in the Greater East Asia area where the Japanese had ravaged so many cultures and countries. So in a sense they were paying back the Koreans and the Thai and all of the East Asian countries. They saw aid as a concentric circle, where you put almost all of your money in your neighbors in East Asia and you trickled just a little bit off to Africa and South America and other places, largely because of international community pressure to cover the world, but that East Asia was the primary target. So they could never understand why the U.S. didn't have that same philosophy and why we didn't basically concentrate our aid program on South America and then a little bit elsewhere.

Another big difference that we had was over the issue of equipment and buildings. They built things, they equipped things. They had a lot of white elephants. They built things

that countries couldn't run. They couldn't understand how we could go in with soft assistance, curriculum reform and teacher training. To them those all seemed like interferences in the affairs that should have been of those countries, whereas they were just coming in and doing something that was apolitical and providing a wherewithal for someone to have a better building and perhaps have better research because they had better equipment but they weren't interfering in the structure of the country. So we had some pretty major differences.

Q: Did you make any difference, you feel, or did they make any difference with you?

WHITE: I think we made a huge difference on them. Their program now looks very similar to ours. When I first went there, it was the (George H.W.) Bush Administration and they had a program for working with the Japanese called the Global Partnership and under the Global Partnership what we tried to do was institute a few really large cooperation projects around the world. So we started…one way to get them to work in environment, for instance, we negotiated with them to do a joint environmental project in Indonesia, where we put in ten million dollars, the Japanese put in ten million dollars and the Indonesians put in ten million dollars, so a thirty million dollar project to do biodiversity in Indonesia. So we tried to use our money as leverage to get them to do things that they hadn't done before. That Global Partnership started several projects like that, large projects around the world and then all of a sudden the Bush Administration ended and the Clinton Administration came in and we were in the midst of this shift, so the question was what do we do? And we decided to continue with the program but change the name. So we changed the name to the U.S.-Japan Common Agenda and continued to work with the Japanese. We got them to commit a huge amount of money, nine billion dollars, to work on HIV/AIDS and population, in an up front kind of commitment that they would work with us around the world on those areas, because they were receiving a lot of pressure, not only from us, but from the international community to do more in areas like population and HIV/AIDS. They would say, "HIV/AIDS, we don't have that problem in Japan. We don't understand it. So we can't do it." But they were willing to fund it if they worked with us and we kind of developed the activities and they provided funding. So over time we were able to develop a lot of different projects around the world where we worked together and their aid program gradually started to shift to work on biodiversity and population and HIV/AIDS, a lot of the things that they hadn't done before, democracy, even. So at the end of that period of time I think, yes, they had changed their program substantially.

Q: Was the Japanese society, the universities, producing sort of committed do-gooders? I'm using the term in the best sense of the word. I mean people who really wanted to help, because it's such an enclosed society I think it would be hard to bring these people to the fore.

WHITE: Yeah, I think they had real trouble understanding the way that the U.S. has a sense of responsibility for the world. They're a much more inward-looking society. But a couple things happened. They had a really active Japanese Peace Corps and I think the universities started to change when many of these young Japanese Peace Corps people

came back from Africa or Bangladesh or wherever they had been, the South Pacific and enrolled in the university and started looking for ways to continue what they had started overseas. The Japanese government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also had a very enlightened look at how the could involve the Japanese people, local governments, local NGOs and the universities in their aid program. So from the top down they also started to involve these people, in really interesting ways that we don't involve groups. For instance, they would form a group of local community people, NGOs, universities, as an evaluation group. Get twenty or thirty people together from a cross section of their society, send them to Indonesia to look at the Indonesia biodiversity program and evaluate it. They would have maybe a movie star and a famous baseball player in this group as well. So these people would come back and talk about what they had seen and why. So the Japanese public, something like 80 or 85 per cent, is in support of their aid program, whereas our public was maybe 15 or 20 per cent, if that, because they did this. As a result of involving people like this, universities started developing programs, development programs that help people understand the importance of economic development in the Third World and it would start producing people that would become advisors to the foreign ministry. So they had a different relationship with society than we have. I think a much more positive relationship.

Q: As an observer, did the Japanese become involved with the South Koreans particularly and the Chinese? These are two rather dynamic societies but coming from obviously different backgrounds. How did this work out?

WHITE: Interesting. When the Japanese would ask me, "What do you think the biggest AID success story is in the world?" I would always say "Korea." They would say, "How can that be? Why isn't it somewhere in South America?" I would say, "Well, when we started working in Korea" and even I could say when I went to Korea in the late Sixties. "Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world. It was poorer than many of the African countries. It had been devastated by the Korean War. Now they're like the 12th or 14th leading economy in the world." And what AID was doing in those days was the old style programs of building cement factories, building the North-South Highway. Infrastructure, what Japan used to do. And so I would say, "With the investment that we made in Korea it's really turned around." They see Korea as their success story. I always used that because that got into a really rich argument about infrastructure and soft assistant and all of that.

They had a difficult time in Korea because they had changed Korean culture. They went in and required the Koreans to paint the Korean names off the grave markers of their ancestors and put Japanese names on the grave markers. So there's a lot of hatred of the Koreans towards Japan and there's the "comfort women" issue and all of that. So a discussion of Korea always brought out really interesting things in Japan. I guess they felt that they had poured a lot of money and they *had* poured a lot of money into Korea. They had not done that as much in China, where you also had tremendous hatred of the Japanese, but their main point in foreign aid to Korea and to China was to start to change the opinion of how people looked at Japan, to get them to forget comfort women and all of that. And they felt that they were making headway. In part they were making headway

because as older generations died out and they dealt with younger people that hatred was much less. But they certainly put a lot of money into those countries.

Q: What about North Korea?

WHITE: We had some conversations about North Korea, Iran, Iraq and other places like that because I often had talking points from State to go in and find out what the Japanese were doing and to try to convince them not to provide assistance to Iran or Iraq, specific kinds of assistance. North Korea was one of those as well where occasionally I had to go in and just see what they were doing. They weren't doing much in North Korea.

Mongolia…as the communist world started to disintegrate, there were opportunities to get the Japanese to take a leadership role. It's Asia, it's where they feel like they have a natural leadership role. Why don't we work with them to get them to be, hold the donor coordination group? Instead of holding it in Paris, France, where they've always been held, why don't we get them to hold the coordination group for Mongolia, which they did. Again, if you look now, Japan is taking a lead on a lot of that stuff. In those days, the first reaction was, "Of course we can't do that. It's Asia, we'd be interested in it but Paris is where that's done and we've never done that before." But they've really grown into that role well.

Q: You'd had that Japanese experience early on, which had turned you off. Did you feel that you were looking at a new Japanese person, in a way, or were you seeing one develop, or not?

WHITE: Yeah, I think I appreciated the chance to go back full circle and go back to my original love and to do it not as a poor university student eating noodles with no position in society but doing it as the number two or three person or four person in the embassy, where I commanded a lot of respect. So in part I saw not a new Japanese person but I was in a different position. Therefore I was treated very differently. But I also saw developing confidence in Japan, in terms of their ability to work with other donors. Before you'd talk to people, if I asked the aid people around the world, "What do you think of Japanese counterparts?" when I first went to Japan, they would say, "Oh, Hashimoto-san goes to the meetings but he sits over in a corner of the room and smokes a cigarette and keeps notes but never says anything." By the time I left Japan, not because of me but just because of the way things were changing, Hashimoto-san was an active participant in those meetings because he had something to say. They were doing the kinds of programs that other donors were doing. The Hashimotos that went out earlier and didn't speak English very well and all of that had been replaced by young Japanese who had good command of English. I must say their Foreign Service program is superb, in terms of producing high level people who speak languages.

They do something that I think we don't do and that is early on they identify the people who are going to be China hands or French hands or whatever. They send them to university for several years in the country that they're going to specialize in, the language they're going to specialize in. Then they give them several language assignments that

enable them to use their language skills. And so you find Japanese Foreign Service people now who, I think, are exceptional at the top layers.

Q: During the time you were there was a difficult time in terms of the Japanese bubble and Thai bubble, they all popped, burst. How did you find that?

WHITE: I found that it affected the Japanese tremendously, in the sense that they felt that they had a development model that worked, the West had a development model that was a failure. So they felt that their investment in infrastructure in East Asia and South Asia and Southeast Asia had led to the "tigers." They commissioned the World Bank and the IMF to do a study of the East Asian miracle, expecting it to say that Japan's development model led to this and this was right at the time the bubble was bursting and all this. The study eventually said that these countries made right decisions and it gave little or no credit to the Japanese aid program. So that was a crushing blow for them, because they had funded this study with the hopes that it would show something else.

In Japan it had two effects. One, it made people, the fact that they were experiencing financial difficulties, it made people question why Japan needed to be the leading donor in the world. They were at ten or twelve billion dollars a year, we were at eight. So they were way above us and then everybody else was way down below us. In Japan there's a saying that the tallest nail is the nail that gets hammered down. So everybody came to them to ask for money, instead of coming to us. So there was a lot of domestic pressure on them to reduce their aid program, which they eventually did. So it had that impact.

In terms of living in Japan, I guess one of the things that I continued to be amazed at was that every restaurant you went to you had to stand in line to get in. You literally did not see the impact in the way that people lived in Japan but certainly you read about it in the newspapers and there were big changes like reducing their aid program and other things, but daily living, you didn't notice it.

Q: How'd you find living in Japan and Japanese society?

WHITE: Well the second time around I loved it. The Japanese were very gracious. I traveled all over the country doing speeches, some for USIA and some just on my own. I taught at a Japanese university and I also went out to other universities as a visiting professor. The second time around I really loved it. I continued to find that the Japanese, they find it hard to accept a foreigner who understands their country and speaks their language a bit. They like to be kind of secretive and think that they have a special society unlike any other in the world. I remember during the rice negotiations, when we were trying to get more U.S. rice into Japan, they were making the argument that the Japanese intestine is not like foreign intestines and can't digest foreign rice. They really do have a view of the world that is unique.

When you went into a Baskin-Robbins, the American ice cream franchise, and said, "I'll have one scoop of vanilla and one scoop of chocolate" you see the clerk's hand starting to sweat, because that's not what you do. So they would go back and ask the manager, "Is it

okay that we put a scoop of chocolate and a scoop of vanilla together?" It's a society that lives by so many rules and that everything is a routine. If you go outside of that routine it's difficult for them. So once you understand that, it's wonderful, trying to figure out what little kind of things are going on in every situation you're in.

Q: Who was the ambassador during your tour?

WHITE: When I first went there it was Ambassador Armacost [Ed: served from May 1989 to July 1993], who was absolutely wonderful, received AID into the embassy with open arms and was very supportive and then Mondale came [Ed: served from September 1993 to December 1996] and he was even better. We got along really well together. Anytime I asked him to go out and give a speech or go visit, he always did it and very gracious. Then just as I was leaving Ambassador Foley [Ed: served from November 1997 to April 2001] came and I overlapped with him for a short period, several months. He was on a steep learning curve. Mondale, as far as I could tell, didn't have a learning curve. He was the kind of guy who was…he would just absorb everything and then go back in the right way. Foley struggled a little bit at the beginning, in just learning what it was to be an ambassador and how to do it. But all three ambassadors were wonderful.

Q: How'd you find the rest of the embassy? Japan is not a country where AID, since MacArthur's time, has had much of a presence. All of a sudden you're there?

WHITE: Yeah, but I was really well accepted. When I went there the big issue was should I have an independent office or should I be folded into one of the traditional embassy sections? So they decided to put me in the econ section, because the econ section had monitored Japan's aid program before I got there. Also an issue was would they continue to do that or would I take over those monitoring functions that the econ section had done? The other issue was should I go in with the rank of a minister/counselor, co-equal with the minister/counselor for econ, or not? They decided not to make me a minister/counselor for development but just a counselor for development and that was fine with me. I'm not interested in that. So I sat in the econ section and that was good.

I worked in partnership with the U.S. economists and also the local economists that had worked on Japan affairs. We became our own team of Japan ODA (Office of Development Assistance) or development experts. Had not problem within the econ section. Had no problem with the other, what I did, in a sense stepped on the toes of many different groups, the political section, the Foreign Commercial Service. The kind of things that I was working on were the kind of things that they had worked on traditionally with Japan. They quickly saw me as an aid expert, knowing what I was talking about, a lot of that stuff and all of those things came to me with no conflict within the embassy. So that went really, really well.

At some point, when the econ, that econ minister/counselor left, we did separate AID off and moved to another floor and became our own office [Ed: The State Department publication "Key officers of the Foreign Service lists Mr. White as a separate AID office

in its Fall 1994 and July 1995 booklets]. That was good and bad. That was not something that I instigated. It happened partially because of space and a lot of other things. For me the bad news was I no longer sat in the classified section of the embassy. So it was much more difficult to have access to all of the classified cables and I had no place to store them and all of that and I missed that part of it but that was the only part that I missed, having a separate AID office. But the embassy was wonderful. Never had any issues with the embassy, other than GSO issues that you have everywhere you go.

Q: General services office, those are housekeeping matters. You mentioned the Foreign Commercial Service. Did we get into any problems between Japanese aid and American aid, the difference between John Deere and Kubota or something, different types of tractors or anything like that?

WHITE: One of the other big things that I went to work on, my original mandate, was to work on Japanese tied aid, the fact that they not only built buildings and supplied equipment but that the equipment they supplied was all Japanese and the world community, through the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD, had tried to get all donors to untie their aid, saying that the fair thing for any country was to be able to pick the John Deere or Kubota or whatever tractor was most suited to their needs and the best price and if the Japanese were continuing to tie their aid that was something that we needed to work on. So I worked on that really hard with the Department of Commerce and over time we got the Japanese to gradually untie their loan aid. They do something that we don't do. They provide loans to countries. So the argument was if you're loaning India the money, that money in a sense is Indian money that they should be able to do with as they want, including procuring from whatever source they want to. Eventually we won that argument through a lot of hammering at all of the international meetings of the OECD and through my efforts. Every time there was a big Japanese loan program, say loan program for telecommunications in India, the telecom people would be out talking to us about how do we get the Japanese to open this for our market. Another one that the Japanese worked on a lot were railroads. They built a lot of railroads and bought a lot of engines and things like that, so General Electric and General Motors, they would be out immediately to Tokyo, to meet with me, to meet with Foreign Commercial Service, to make the rounds of all the procurement agents in Japan, to talk about opening the bid. So I spent a lot of time on that. That was maybe the most contentious area that I worked in but we were very successful in that area.

Q: Another thing that was happening during the time you were there was essentially the collapse of the Soviet Union, particularly in Asia. Were the Japanese involved there?

WHITE: What I saw was more on the margins of the issue. Japan had its own problems with Russia, the Northern Islands and so the relationship between Japan and Russia was a difficult relationship. While I was there a couple of interesting things happened. We talk about the U.S. diplomacy with China through ping-pong diplomacy. What I call wild bird diplomacy happened in Japan. A Japanese NGO, the Wild Bird Society, found that certain birds migrate from the Northern Islands in Russia down to Japan and then back and they were able to start a dialogue between Japan and Russia about wild birds that

eventually bloomed out into a more political discussion. But that was one difficult area. Another area that I worked on related to that was something I call trilateral projects. I found that if the U.S. and Japan were working together to support a project it neutralized a lot of the negative feelings, either towards the U.S. in certain places or towards Japan. So we were able to do some joint projects, the U.S., Japan, Russia, where it just cancelled out the Northern Islands issue and other things. So I was on the margins of that. What I did not see was the more political issues between Japan and Russia. A lot of things were playing out at that time on the political side, as the Soviet Union was disintegrating and everybody was trying to position themselves for what might come next, including Japan. Of course there were also the issues of the United Nations and what Japan's role would be in the United Nations, on the Security Council. There were a lot of those kinds of issues, as well as the trade issues that we all are familiar with.

Q: When the Soviet Union broke up and all the "sans" emerged, the Central Asian countries. Were the Japanese interested in this or not?

WHITE: Yeah, this was at a time after the Mongolia Consultative Group meeting was a big success, Japan had run it, that Japan decided to try to play a role in all of the stans. They tried to become the consultative group host instead of France for the stans and they did that successfully. As I said, every Japanese trading company interested in trade had specialists and they had specialists for each of the stans and they had lots of interests, oil pipelines and selling their Kubota tractors and all of that. So, yeah, Japan took a big interest in being actively involved in what went on there, politically and economically, after those countries became independent and took the lead in the consultative group meetings and took the lead in being the number one donor in dollar terms for many of those countries.

Q: Were the Japanese doing anything in Latin America; there was a large Japanese immigrant community in Brazil, and the president of Peru was Fujimori. Was there much going on there?

WHITE: Certainly, traditionally, in the Japanese aid program they had a category for overseas Japanese. So they provided a significant amount of assistance to Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, where there had been a lot of large migrations of Japanese in the past. They provided assistance to those communities, to be able to come back to Japan and get an education and that kind of stuff, more USIA kind of fellowships and grants and all of that. But they also provided bilateral assistance to Latin America, in fairly small terms. The old formula was seventy per cent of Japanese aid should go to East Asia and ten per cent should go to Africa, ten per cent to South America and ten per cent to South Asia. That was kind of their tradition, how they saw aid. But a lot of pressure was on them to do more in Africa and at certain points to do more in Latin America.

We had a State Department, the head of ARA, Latin America affairs bureau, came to Japan a number of times and developed a good working relationship with the Japanese and it was all around something called the Partnership for Development and Democracy in Latin America, which was a State Department initiative and they wanted Japan's aid

program to join in that, as a partner with AID, to support activities, mainly in democracy. So that became a major thing that I worked on and we got the Japanese to actually take a role as a leader in one of the working groups under this PDD and to up their assistance somewhat to Latin America and to try project areas that they hadn't tried before like environment and democracy. So the answer is, while they didn't up their program that much they responded to pressure and they inched their program up for Latin America and for Africa.

Q: You'd been with AID a long time, was there a growing international aid group, I mean were the individual donors coalescing, rather than everybody doing their thing and did you find yourself in a way part of this jointness as a representative in Japan?

WHITE: Yeah, I think there was at least some sense, there was more of a sense, that if donors cooperate together you can get more done than if everybody goes their own separate way and while philosophically people would agree to that, when it got down to the rubber meeting the road everyone still did their own thing, because the requirements for developing projects and the way that we fund them and the reporting we do is so different from one donor to another that it's very hard to cooperate. That of course is an argument, if it's difficult for us it's even more difficult for the host country, who has to keep different kinds of books and different reporting for every donor they deal with. So there's been a lot of attempts at the Development Assistance Committee level at the OECD to develop standard reporting formats and standard budget formats and all of that but it never goes anywhere because most donor programs are based on the politics of a situation and things other than the development itself. So those efforts haven't ever gone anywhere. So while theoretically I think people are much more willing to say, "When we work together things happen better than if we don't" practically they don't do it, even now. Certainly over time there's at least an awareness that is an issue.

Q: Well in 1998 you left.

WHITE: By 1998 I had planned to depart post and retire. Two things happened, I guess. I started getting pressure from the State Department to accept a nomination to be ambassador to Laos. I also had a strong invitation to go to the embassy in Mexico and run the foreign aid program at the embassy there, in a way similar to what I'd done in Japan. So I decided to do that and I went to Mexico. I was pressured a lot by State to take this position in Laos and I started the process with State and somewhere in the process I withdrew my name as ambassador to Laos. A very difficult decision, maybe the most difficult decision I've ever had to make and it was based on a whole series of factors some personal, some policy related. But anyway I was in Mexico at that point, so I stayed in Mexico from 1998 through I guess 2002 and I retired then.

Q: What were you doing in Mexico?

WHITE: In Mexico we had a very small aid program that was being closed out altogether. Aid has always been a difficult issue with Mexico, because Mexico is one of those very proud countries that doesn't like to admit that it receives aid. So we never, in

the history of aid to Mexico, we've never had a government to government program. Rather, we worked with NGOs and others to do specific things in very poor areas or in Chiapas or other places in Mexico, but we did not work through the government. So when I got there, an interesting thing had happened. The whole country was on fire and those fires were generating smoke all the way from Chiapas, if you looked in the satellite photos that smoke was coming up all the way up to Houston and Dallas and the Southwest.

Q: So this was real fire. What was the problem?

WHITE: After a number of very dry years, fires started, partially agricultural fires that got out of control but also storms and lightning and place that had never burned before, like the rain forest in Chiapas, that had always been so wet that it would never burn, had gone through a number of droughts and all of a sudden it was burning. It was causing cities in the United States to have environmental alerts and all of that, so the U.S. Congress started putting pressure on us to do something about it in Mexico. Now the Mexican government, in order to do disaster response you have to get an official request from the government and the government was unwilling to ask us for help. So we found a way. We went in and negotiated with them and got them to send us a letter agreeing to accept our assistance, because that wasn't a request. That letter came in and we were able to provide U.S. firefighters and the U.S. Forest Service. So my first few months there I was working on fires.

Out of that grew something very interesting. That is, the first agreement between us and the government, eventually we worked it in a way that our money didn't go directly to the Mexican government. We worked through a Mexican NGO but the agreement was between us and the government. So that was the first time we had actually come to a government to government agreement. So that was one large area I worked in.

The next area, that also came from congressional pressure, was tuberculosis. Mexico had a tremendous problem with tuberculosis and people were finding that they could cross the border and get treated in Texas or California, Arizona or New Mexico and so those costs weren't being passed on to the government of Mexico but were being passed on to our hospitals and we were starting to actually shut hospitals down that couldn't afford to continue to treat people on an unreimbursed basis. So the Congress wanted us to work in tuberculosis in Mexico, to strengthen Mexico's government responsibilities there so that people wouldn't cross the border to get treated. For that one we actually came up with a government to government agreement with the Ministry of Health of Mexico. So we worked on tuberculosis.

And we had a number of other programs. Democracy, the democracy program was a tremendous success in Mexico. We worked directly with the government on freedom of information, a new freedom of information law similar to ours. We worked with the Mexican Congress to strengthen their capacities.

So we had a vibrant program in Mexico. Rather than shutting the program down, as was originally intended, the program grew to around $30-35 million a year.

Q: Now, you talk about democracy programs. This is just about the time when the PRI (Spanish: Partido Revolucionario Institucional) lost a real election [July 2000]. Did we have our fingers in that pie?

WHITE: Yeah, we were involved in the elections by working with NGOs and others as election watchers and we funded President Carter and other election observers to come down and observe the election and of course the PRI was swept out of power after sixty or seventy years of being in power and President (Vicente)Fox came in with a real desire to work with us and to improve relations with the United States. And so there was a tremendous opening of possibilities there for doing things that got shut down after 9/11 a bit. But we were able to, I think, move to a new phase in our relationship with Mexico in our aid program.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Mexican government, the officials there?

WHITE; Yeah, officials, difficult. Mexico's a very proud place and so you had to be exceeding careful with the words you used and what you said. I remember once, a Mexican government official got a hold of the AID website, where we talked about providing assistance for areas of Mexico like Chiapas and that official edited the entire webpage and sent it to me and said, "Here's the kind of things you should be saying." He took out every mention of poverty or assistance or aid or anything like that. So it was a difficult working situation.

There's also a sense among government officials that the gringos are, that there's always an ulterior motive for something. So if you're going in to say, "Can we help you fight fires? We have U.S. firefighters and equipment and spray planes and satellite pictures and all of this" they will say, "Yes, but what do you really want? You wanna take pictures of the Chiapas forest with your planes so you can use it for military purposes." So no matter what it was, how simple or how complex, they would seek the ulterior motive and that's what you would talk about, rather than the real thing that was on the table. So that was, it was a challenge.

Q: How did you find the NGO organizations in Mexico? Was it evolving or was it relatively mature or

WHITE: That's a good question. There were a number of NGOs that AID had worked with over many years, because that's, we worked with the NGO community. Those NGOs were fairly strong but there were only a few of them, mainly in environment and population and we had worked with them through U.S. counterpart NGOs and so we had developed strong relationships between the Nature Conservancy U.S. and the Nature Conservancy Mexico or Conservation International U.S. and Conservation International Mexico. So those few NGOs were quite strong and then there were lots of other NGOs that were not very strong. The Mexican government policy towards NGOs was medieval.

Again, they felt that NGOs represented an unseen guiding hand that was trying to influence events in Mexico and the funding was coming from elsewhere, mainly from the North but to some extent from Europe. So they were seen as almost subversive in some ways. So part of what we were trying to do was work to strengthen the relationship between the Mexican government and NGOs, have them better understand what NGOs were about. So that was a major part of what I was doing was working on that relationship.

But I think NGOs in general were like NGOs anywhere: a lot of heart and not so much mind. They didn't have the practicalities down. How do you keep books, how do you write good information reports to donors? But they were out there as best they could to do good.

Q: One of the things about our relations with both Canada and Mexico is that you got government to government, Washington to Ottawa or Washington to Mexico City and then the practical relationship, which is cross borders and governors of states call governors of states or police chiefs call police chiefs or almost any little, did you find yourself and particularly NGO or AID things, that sort of thing happening?

WHITE: Yeah, we did, in our democracy program we funded a lot of exchanges of mayors, for instance, and we found ways that people working on similar problems were able to get together and discuss them. So in the Caribbean coastal area they were working on flood control, how do you keep the bay from invading the city? We would take them to Florida, those mayors and develop a relationship with a mayor who was working on a similar problem there. A lot of what we did in the democracy area in the early days were those kind of exchanges, with governors as well and other local officials. We did similar things with NGOs. But mainly we funded NGO counterparts to work on similar problems. I agree with you that those people to people things are important.

Now NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), this was before my time, but somewhere towards the negotiation of NAFTA someone recognized that NAFTA didn't deal with environmental issues and out of that, people were able to leverage a huge chunk of money, I forget how much it was, now, either thirty million or fifty million dollars, AID created a Mexican NGO, environmental NGO, that was able to receive that money in an endowment fund. So that grew directly out of someone's very quick interest and ability to take a NAFTA deficiency and turn it around. So the money went into an environmental endowment fund, managed by this group, who would then use it to work with local Mexican NGOs on environmental issues and that local NGO has been able to attract a lot more money into the endowment fund. It's now up to over a hundred million dollars.

So, again, those were the kinds of activities. We were working on a higher order of development issues in Mexico than we would have been working on in Nigeria or Bangladesh or something.

Q: Did you find yourself working against the entrenched power of the unions? I think of the teachers union or the petroleum workers union, I'm sure there are others, after all this is where PRI's power comes from

WHITE: I think that we did not, only because we weren't working in areas where we would come head to head and head clash with the unions. But, yeah, the unions were really, really strong in Mexico, just like they are here and they keep a lot of things from happening because they're very traditional and conservative and don't like change.

Q: Is there any other area we haven't talked about in Mexico?

WHITE: The population area, I guess, only because that was such an interesting area because you have the Catholic Church. AID had worked in the population area since its very beginnings in Mexico, all through NGOs and there had always been a very serious issue between the population NGOs and the government population program and the Church. But the way we worked through NGOs and the NGOs worked with the Mexican government, those issues largely were deflected away from AID and they had to be handled by the Mexican government. So we weren't battling directly with the Church but we were battling with the U.S. Congress because there were people in the U.S. Congress who don't like the population program and who would continually write congressional letters to the ambassador questioning five women that he had talked to from Chiapas who had had abortions and was AID money involved in this? So there was always a political issue on the table with population.

AID had worked in population from the beginning and the Mexican government had gotten really good and was doing a really good job and so we, as I was moving to Mexico, hoping to use the U.S.-Japan cooperation and the nine billion dollars I had developed for cooperation between the U.S. and the world and Japan, I was planning to implement that in Mexico. AID people were talking about phasing out of the population program in Mexico. So one of my first jobs there was to phase out of a program that we had supported forever and one that I wanted to continue. But we did it. We, in a sense, held a graduation ceremony for Mexico. The Mexican government was concerned about a couple of things. One, we had been a source for condoms and they were willing to provide the money to buy the condoms but they wanted to continue to use the supply channels and all of that. So there were some issues like that but in general it was one of those very happy circumstances where we gave the Mexican government a lot of face and credit and we were able to graduate an AID program.

As I guess a final comment on that, the one thing that I was able to do there that was unique, there were a lot of different players. There was the Mexican social security system, there was the Mexican Ministry of Health, there was a private sector social security system, all of these different health systems and we had worked with all of them in population but there was no overarching program where they all cooperated together. As a part of this graduation exercise we were able to get all of the different players together and go out and visit everybody's projects as a team and see what the strengths

and weaknesses of each program was. That set into place a kind of coordination committee that continues, that works on those issues. So I felt good about that.

Q: Then in 2002 you retired.

WHITE: I retired.

Q: That was a very fruitful career.

WHITE: Long career. I had hoped that when I retired I would have time to kind of go back and think about it and this, probably more than anything else, has led me along that trail and hopefully I'll be able to do a little more with that.

Q: Great! Well, thank you very much.

End of interview