

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

**LEONARD H. ROBINSON, JR.**

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy*

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## INTERVIEW

*Q: Today is April 29, 2003. This is an interview with Leonard Robinson Jr. Do you have a middle initial?*

ROBINSON: H for Harrison.

*Q: What name do you prefer? Leonard or Leo?*

ROBINSON: Always Leonard. In the State Department or the Foreign Service I was called Len. I used to have the nickname Lenny. Some people still call me Lenny. It depends on how long they have known me.

*Q: I have the same issue. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. I use the whole name because most people know me as Stu, but I do have a first name. Otherwise they miss out on who this guy is.*

*Let's start at the beginning. Could you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?*

ROBINSON: I was born April 21, 1943; that means that I just had a birthday, a big birthday.

*Q: 60.*

ROBINSON: Sixty. Everybody says I don't look it, but I am 60. Chronologically speaking the number is the number. I was born in Winston Salem, North Carolina, where my mom's family had its "anchor." I grew up in Greensboro which is the second largest city in North Carolina. Both of my parents were educators -- college university level -- although my mother also taught high school. In fact she was my 12<sup>th</sup> grade history teacher. She said, "I don't know if you have got homework in other classes, but you certainly have homework in my class." I used to ask her "Do I call you mom or do I call you Mrs. Robinson in class?" I had a very nice childhood.

*Q: Let's talk about your parents. Can you tell me about your father and what you know about your father's background?*

ROBINSON: My father was from Fort Smith, Arkansas. His mother was half African-American and half Choctaw. I don't know much about my father's father except that he left the house. My father was an only child. He left the house when my dad was around five or six and went off to Kansas City to be a detective and was essentially never heard of again. My father's mother died when my father was a freshman in college at Wilberforce College in Ohio which is the same college that President Banda of Malawi attended. He got his bachelor degree from Wilberforce College. He got his master's degree in sociology from Atlanta University. There he met my mother. He got his Ph.D. degree at Ohio State in the mid-1950s. He was a brilliant man -- very affable, very outgoing, had a lot of vision and the ability to look into life's crystal ball and see things coming.

For example, I remember one Sunday, when we were at the family beach house off the coast of North Carolina, my dad called me into the living room--"the great room" he called it -- Reverend Jerry Falwell was preaching. He said, "Governor."--he always called me "governor". He said, "Governor, have you ever heard of this guy?" I think this was probably in the mid-1970s when we had this conversation. "Have you ever heard of this guy before?" I said "No." "Listen to him." So I listened to about ten minutes of Falwell speaking. Then he said, "This guy is going to become a force in our society" and of course Jerry Falwell did become that.

*Q: Could you explain a bit who Jerry Falwell was?*

ROBINSON: Yes. Jerry Falwell is a conservative minister. I think he is from the Charlottesville/Lynchburg area of Virginia.

*Q: His group has a college there.*

ROBINSON: That's right. Falwell has conservative views about American family life, social life, etc. At one point maybe five or ten years ago, he was a very strong moral force in our society -- very politically connected

My father was a hunter. He fished. He did a little bit of everything. He was a great cook, I should say a gourmet cook, and just an all around good guy. My brother and I loved him dearly.

*Q: How about your mother's background.*

ROBINSON: My mom was one of seven children born to the Reverend G.J. Thomas and Winnie Cornelia Thomas. My grandparents were originally from a place called Hartwell, Georgia. I think they had some roots in Alabama as well. My grandfather was 6'6". He had a very strong commanding voice. He was a Congregationalist minister as well as an educator. He built a church in Winston-Salem known as the Wints Memorial Congregational Church. My grandmother was the antithesis of my grandfather. My grandfather was strong, commanding -- a military officer type. My grandmother was sweet, very congenial, loved everybody. My mother was the third of five sisters and two brothers. The family were all professionals -- educators, doctors or lawyers. I had an uncle who was a physician in New Orleans. He is dead now. An Aunt Portia in Chicago was an educator, and Aunt Lottie in Milwaukee was also an educator, and I had an aunt who was a psychiatrist. She has passed away. I had an uncle in Atlanta who was a state official in the State of Georgia and an aunt who is still lives in Atlanta who is an educator. I guess that is about seven.

My mom, who is an educator, got her masters degree from Atlanta University where she met my father -- in a history class. She was a professor at A&T (Agricultural and Technical University) in Greensboro, North Carolina where my father was Dean. When I was in graduate school, my father and mother moved to Durham, North Carolina -- around 1966-1967. My father became the vice chancellor for academic affairs at North Carolina Central University, and my mother became a professor of History. I should point out that my mother was dean of women at A&T when she was 15. She finished college when she was 15 years old. She is almost 90 now; she is quite extraordinary. My father has passed away.

*Q: When push came to shove, who was dominant as far as the kids were concerned, in the family?*

ROBINSON: You know, that is a very interesting question. My parents had a fear of failing for that era--the generation egalitarian relationship. Both were professionals. My

mother was strong willed. I think that she took some of her personality from my grandfather. I never felt that either one of them was dominant. Mother was, in addition to being a professional, the housewife; she was the mother. She did it all quite quietly. She didn't "wear the pants" so to speak. Nor did my dad command her every move; so it really was a partnership. One of the things I like about the socialization process that I went through growing up was that I learned to have a healthy respect for women -- as a consequence of my mother's presence.

*Q: Also you mentioned your mother's sisters who also were professionals.*

ROBINSON: Absolutely.

*Q: You grew up in an interesting time as an African-American coming from a very strong professional family. Can you talk about this era and your views of the world as you were growing up?*

ROBINSON: Greensboro was the center for a significant part of the civil rights movement.

*Q: The lunch counters which are at the Smithsonian now.*

ROBINSON: That's right. Three of the four freshmen who integrated that lunch counter were students at A&T and had been one year ahead of me in high school -- the James B. Dudley high school. I was very much a part of the equality movement in Greensboro at that time. Greensboro was, in many ways, kind of idyllic. I went to an all black high school, junior high school, elementary school; in fact, my entire education until the time I went to Ohio State was in predominantly black institutions. However, in 1954, my father moved us into an all white neighborhood in Greensboro. We lived on Julian Street which was close to Ashboro Street, a main residential thoroughfare. There was only one other black family in the neighborhood when we moved in. I can remember that my parents bought this house from a middle aged white couple. He was a Buick salesman. My parents and this fellow's family developed a very close relationship. They moved to Sanford, North Carolina.

Within a couple of years, two or three years, the neighborhood clearly changed. I would say that half of my playmates in that neighborhood from 1954 to 1957 were white. I remember one kid particularly, Ricky. Ricky was very much part of our little gang of guys who had wholesome fun. During the time I was in junior high school and high school, I played in the band. I was very active in the band. James B. Dudley had a great history as a high school, with an outstanding principal, Dr. John Tomlin.

I got a driver learner's permit at 15; the license was awarded when you were 16. There was a place called the Guilford County dairy, which was out Guilford County road -- outside of Greensboro towards the airport. It was kind of an ice cream dairy bar where all of us congregated regardless of ethnic background. There was never a problem; never any issues there.

When we went to the movies, we had to sit upstairs. We couldn't sit anywhere we wanted to. Segregation was clearly the order of the day. I remember the "white only" and "colored only" drinking signs for the fountains and the rest rooms. But my father again was quite extraordinary. In the summer time he would take us up to the Blue Ridge Parkway which was about a two to three hour drive from Greensboro, because he knew it was federal property and we could go into the restrooms, stay in the log cabins and motels like everyone else in the 1950s and 1960s. We did that in the summertime practically every summer. We were the only African-Americans up there. People loved our dad. First of all, he was the gregarious and outgoing. My mother could walk in the woods and tell you every plant that was growing -- rhododendron, mountain laurel, flame azalea. The park police soon learned that she was the lady digging up the flowers and the shrubs off the parkway. It got to the point where they didn't bother. "Oh, Mrs. Robinson, we know it is you. We know you are going to take these things home and plant them in your yard." So my parents were unique in a very kind of different setting in Greensboro. There was segregation to be sure, but there were lots of grey areas, and because my parents were professionals, I think they took advantage of those grey areas to our benefit as we were growing up.

*Q: Did they prepare you or explain to you the "segregated world." I mean how did they have you approach this? How did they explain this?*

ROBINSON: If you sit down and talk to any middle class black family who lived through the 1940s and 1950s and 1960s, and even today, you will find families that were closely knit and cohesive; you will find them all over the country. The clarion call -- the thing that would take place over and over in my head, hearing it from both my mom and my dad -- was: "Governor you just have to be ten times better." Always remember "you have to be ten times better." My mother had lots of sayings. She used to say: "Read, read, read, and when you read, read with understanding. Comprehend what you are reading. Speak in complete sentences. Don't skip verbs." These injunctions were always being imparted to us, but the sort of central theme was, "Look you are living in a segregated society and you have to adjust." My parents were professionals; my father officiated football games and basketball games. They had a lot of contact with the other side so to speak -- the majority community. My father was very much involved with the recreational department of the city of Greensboro. He had a lot of contacts with the city council. He sat on commissions and boards for the city as well as the state. My mom did the same thing. When my father worked on his Ph.D. at Ohio State, he had a very good friend who was white. They would always come to stay with us in the summertime because I remember they would bring me chocolate cigarettes. I used to love it when they would come to bring me chocolate cigarettes. My mom at one time was the librarian at Fort Bragg which is right outside of Fayetteville, North Carolina; we lived in Fayetteville for about two or three years when I was real small. My mother had white friends who were also professional associates and colleagues. So it wasn't like "these people don't exactly have the same skin color as I have and have different hair texture etc." They were not strangers. There were plenty of contacts with white people.

*Q: This of course, is the south.*

ROBINSON: Absolutely.

*Q: One of the attributes of a southern black or white is a sense of family, One knows the extended family. Did everybody know who the third cousin was?*

ROBINSON: Yes, everybody knew that. Aside from real aunts and uncles, all of your parent's close friends were called "uncle" or "aunt" something or Mister or Missus -- not this first name business like you have today. They were a closely knit group. Because you couldn't go to a restaurant or you couldn't stay in a hotel when you went into town for a basketball game or an adult dance, people stayed at each other's homes. My parents always had people coming and going in the house. Because my father was a gourmet cook, as I said, and he was a great barbecuer, in the spring or summer he was always cooking, always barbecuing in the back yard. We always had a barbecue pit everywhere we lived. My father would build his signature barbecue pit which was modeled after the barbecue pits one would find on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The extended family system was also driven by the fact that because you couldn't socialize outside of your homes comfortably in any institution, that tended to force a level of social cohesiveness that quite frankly we don't have today. Families are not socially quite as close today as they were in the 1950s because today society is more open. When we traveled -- and we always took a family summer vacation -- my mother would pack a picnic lunch. I still remember the fried chicken and the deviled eggs. We would stop at roadside picnic tables up and down the highway. There were not signs that said colored folks could not stop along the highway and use the tables. So I have fond memories of a lot of picnics on the roadside. If we had to go to the bathroom, my dad tended to encourage us, except for my mother, to do our business in the woods, because he didn't want to deal with the signs at the filling stations.

My father had a presence. He was affable, as I said. I can remember going to a store where segregation was being strictly enforced. I could tell from my father's face. His face would tense, and he would try to engage the person on the other side of the counter in some kind of discussion about this. Sometimes we got to use facilities that were not designated "colored only." But essentially he didn't like to do that. He overcame some of the prejudice because he was articulate and he had this great personality. Once when I was 11, we drove from Greensboro to Atlanta. I can remember stopping in Athens, Georgia at a pretty broken down filling station. We both had to go to the bathroom and we had to use the "colored only" facility. We did it. It wasn't a traumatic experience, but it is one that I certainly remember. But my father dealt with those issues with a great deal of dignity--that is the word that I would use. He confronted the prejudice. He never accepted the system, but he did not press the envelope to the point where he jeopardized the safety and security of the family. As I said earlier, because of segregation, extended families and friends were a very close knit bunch of people.



*Q: Let's talk about some of your personal education. Obviously you came from a family that was deeply committed to education. What sorts of things were you reading and what were you interested in?*

ROBINSON: My mother taught me and my brother how to read and how to write before we were five. I remember very clearly in Fayetteville, North Carolina, we lived on the college campus of Fayetteville State Teachers College -- now Fayetteville State University. I went to New Bow Training School when I was five years old, fully expecting to go into the first grade. This was during an era when people would let you skip grades. You would skip grades. So I am sitting there waiting for my name to be called to go into the first grade, when I was called to go into the second grade. I skipped first grade because I could read and write. I could do a little math. I just thought that was just great. Even at five, I was going into the second grade. So I started out in second grade.

There were books in the house. We had a little library in the den. I was crazy about anthropology, paleontology, big on dinosaurs like most kids now. My brother used to read political books, not just the pictures. My brother is a physician still this day. There is almost a five year difference between my brother and me, but we are very close.

*Q: Who is older?*

ROBINSON: I am older. At the early stage of life, there is a big difference between six and eleven. I had my group of friends and he had his group. He would always want to be a part of my group. But when we were reading and trading comic books, Mike was thumbing through the medical books of a guy that my father grew up with. He was a pediatrician and our family physician and was like an uncle. I had a couple of real uncles who also were physicians. So Mike was into the medical stuff. He was into insects; he was into all kinds of things that embraced the sciences. I played a lot with chemistry sets when I was a kid -- erector sets. All kids played with trains in those days. But I recall most vividly that I was very much fascinated by dinosaurs. I was fascinated by early humanoids, anthropoid apes and others that gave rise to homo-sapiens.

*Q: Can you think of any books up through even through grade school or even earlier that sort of opened up things for you?*

ROBINSON: I can think of some books that impacted on me. My father gave me a copy of Tarzan by Edgar Rice Burroughs. I still have it; I got it when I was seven or eight. He gave me that book because he was a little "tongue and cheek" about this. He said, "Look I want you to read this because in part this book characterizes what European and American majority society thinks about Africa."

*Q: You might explain Tarzan to somebody who might not be aware.*

ROBINSON: Tarzan was a fictitious character created by Edgar Rice Burroughs. He is a European boy who was lost in the jungle bush in Africa. He is raised by apes and

becomes a very powerful friend of not only the wild animals in Africa but also of the various native tribal and ethnic groups that were oppressed. He tended to be on their side. But more importantly, he had rather extraordinary strength with considerable physical and athletic prowess. He could swim upriver against the stream, swing through the vines with the greatest of ease and always tended, even though he was only one person, to overcome terrific odds. Quite often when I make speeches I refer to the “Tarzan and Jane” syndrome when we think about with our perceptions of Africa. That was one book.

There was a set of encyclopedia in the house that I started with the letter “A” and went all the way to “Z” several times just to familiarize myself with what was contained in that set of books which I still have. When the old family home was dismantled, I brought those old encyclopedias back to Washington, DC.

I remember very clearly an incident that happened when I probably was nine or ten. We had two wide tall bookcases that went from floor to ceiling on either side of the doorway into the den. On the left side at the bottom I saw these two burgundy colored books entitled “Who’s Who in America.” I instinctively pulled out the “R” volume first, and I saw my father’s name in there. I was very impressed with the fact that my father was listed in “Who’s Who.” The reality of growing up, of being in a segregated society, all of those issues converged in my head at the same time, and I said, “Wow, this is quite an accomplishment for my father.” I said, “One of these days, I am going to be in this book.” I am in that book. That was sort of a marker that I set for myself.

My parents, although they talked constantly about achievement, about the importance of education, were never dictatorial. My father did not demand that we do certain things. He was very clever. He said, “Look, these are the possibilities. These are the parameters. This is right, and this is wrong. Now that you know these things, it is up to you to use your good judgment to make the best decisions for you.” He always found ways to engender a sense of responsibility and the ability for us to think for ourselves.

People around my parents were constantly telling my brother and me that our parents were really quite extraordinary, especially our father. They noted that we were going to have to work hard to reach his standards. So the pressure to succeed, the pressure to excel didn’t necessarily come directly from our parents. It came from those around our parents. I remember that quite acutely. It was very strong. I was constantly hearing from them. I was in an environment where at that time in that socioeconomic strata, either you were a doctor or a lawyer or a Ph.D. or close to a Ph.D. That brought you a certain amount of status and a certain amount of access into the majority community in a segregated world. So that pressure to do something extraordinary with one’s life was there.

I am not very religious. I went through the Episcopal experience -- the altar boy, the acolyte syndrome. When I was 15, I noticed my robe was a little short on me. I asked my mom not to have any more made. I was finished with that experience. But I am very spiritual. It is my strong view that human life is exceedingly precious, and every human being is put on this earth for some specific purpose or a series of things. The difficulty is that most of us don’t figure out what that is. I think I figured it out probably without

knowing it. When I was in college at Ohio State, my mom always knew that I would be involved in international affairs. She talked about that; she talked about me being a diplomat. When I was a Peace Corps volunteer in India, that goal became mine as well. I don't want to get ahead of myself, but it all came together at that point. I really do believe that everybody who is given a precious human life was put here to do something other than just floating through every day. You just have got to figure out what that is and do it.

*Q: It seems to me that today so many of the young, particularly young black young men, are faced by an environment in which people around them are trying to bring them down. "Don't get out there, have a free ride, and do things that really aren't socially very progressive. " I take it there was none of that in your youth.*

ROBINSON: You talk about peer pressures! I have two daughters, One of them graduated from Marymount University on Mother's Day. I looked where she had been in high school in Florida and in college now. The peer pressures that young kids have to deal with today are much more potent and powerful than anything that we experienced. It never occurred to me that I could be shot or accosted with a gun in high school or in junior high school. With knives perhaps; knives were around. Drinking wine and beer, that was around in high school in my days. Occasionally you might hear of one or two guys who were older and were very "street wise" dabbling in what we called "pot" at the time, but that was rare.

There are video tapes in my head of kids fighting after football games and stuff like that. There was an era in Greensboro in high school when we had some gang warfare, but nothing like we have today. I think today kids in middle school and high school are subjected to a tremendous number of challenges that were not in existence during my time. It has a lot to do with movies, television, what you see in magazines, the breakdown of discipline in the home and breakdown of discipline in the schools. In the late 1960s and 1970s we became a very liberal society; e.g. kids being able to sue their parents, to sue their teachers. When I was going to school, if you talked back to a teacher, not only were you disciplined by the teachers, but also by the principal, and you knew you were going to catch hell when you get home. That doesn't happen any more. I have friends who are teachers or principals in high school who can't wait until they retire, or couldn't wait until they did retire because the authority -- i.e. the ability to discipline their students -- has been taken away.

We all know that the nuclear family as we knew it up through the 1960s just doesn't exist anymore. My mother to this day talks about the day she bought, just on the spur of the moment, four TV trays. You remember the old TV trays. Before she bought those TV trays, we would all come home from our respective schools. Mom would come home from the university or school, and my dad would come in probably around six o'clock. After he chilled out with a drink and read a little bit, we would all sit around the table and have dinner. We had dinner together. Then my mom bought those TV trays. The TVs were still pretty small then. My parents bought a Zenith. That, coupled with the TV trays, began the disappearance of the family dinner. My mom fought hard to hold onto that. But when I came home from after school activities--e.g. basketball -- rather than waiting until

all got home, I would buy the dinner from a “take out” place and sit down in front of the TV with the TV tray. My dad wasn’t there, so we all got pulled away from the family dinner.

It became universal in the 1970s that you had two people in the family working—the adults, the parents. Societal practices over time have evolved to the point where the nucleus of the family isn’t cohesive like it used to be. We have a breakdown of authority, of discipline in the homes and in the schools, combined with all of the images that are included in video games, movies and magazines and music. Music is much more explicit in terms of language today than it was when I was growing up. I can recall Ray Charles had a song in 1957 or 1959 entitled “What I Say” during which he is moaning suggestively. It was banned on radio stations around the country. Today you don’t have to imagine this idea. It is readily available; there is no censor. Legally, you can’t buy certain hip hop music or whatever if you are not 18, but Tower Records and these other record companies don’t enforce it.

So some of the attitudes in our society today are such that peer pressures are more challenging and in many ways more deadly than they were when I was growing up. When my daughter graduated from high school, I hugged her and I said, “I know what you had to go through to come out of high school as wholesome and as positive and as secure as you are. “ She is managing to do the same thing in college. It seems that kids get to college a lot more mature than they used to be in our time. So many of the problems you have in high school seem to dissipate somewhat once they go to college. But it is tough. It is tough raising kids in today’s society.

*Q: What was happening politically in North Carolina when you were growing up? Was your family involved in politics?*

ROBINSON: That is a fascinating question. My dad certainly was. I remember that in elementary school we had a lot of discussion about Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson.

*Q: That was the 1952 and the 1956 elections.*

ROBINSON: That’s right. I think in one election I was for Adlai Stevenson and then probably in the second election I was for Eisenhower because of the stance he took at Little Rock. My father was definitely involved in municipal politics. Luther Hodges was governor of North Carolina and later the commerce secretary under Lyndon Johnson. My father was very much involved with Luther Hodges’ campaign to become governor.

Other than that, in terms of national or state politics, there wasn’t a lot of involvement. There wasn’t a heavy presence of politics in the Robinson household -- politics with respect to changing society. Certainly in the late 1950s and early 1960s with sit-in demonstrations and marches there was obviously political expression. As a senior in high school and then as a freshman and sophomore at Ohio State, when I would come home in the summertime and during the holidays, I was very much involved with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). In fact I was on its negotiating committee during the summer of

1960 and the summer of 1961. At home, I was very much involved in social politics. I did a lot of knocking on doors to register people to vote as part of what we did at CORE. But I don't remember my father or my mother being heavily involved in politics per-se.

My entire family were Democrats. My brother, like me, was an independent. I became politically active in Montgomery County back in 1980. I am a registered Republican; have been since 1980. I think that Mike is still an independent. In thinking back, I think I can say that I was always somewhat conservative in my perspective.

My father was Jesse Jackson's advisor when Jesse went to A&T. Jesse called my dad "Pop" and my mother "Mom." Jesse practically lived in our house. Of course, Jesse is a dyed in the wool Democrat. But my father never had a problem with my own political views because, as I said before, he always said, "Here are the facts. Here is the reality. You decide." He never said, "I want you to be this; I want you to be that." He said, "You decide what you want to be. As for going to college, here are the options. Here is what we can afford. Here is what we can't afford". He did say, when I was looking at colleges, -- UCLA, Harvard, Tufts, Antioch, Ohio State -- "Harvard is a good school, but we can't afford to send you there. UCLA is also a good school, but that is too far from home. It will cost a lot of money to send you out there -- transportation-wise. You probably will get home once a year."

Then I thought about A&T or another historically black college. My father in one of a number of a handful of very specific times when he sat me down, said, "Look, this is what I think. This is what I recommend that you do." When I considered a historically black college, he dissuaded me from that. He said, "Given the era that you are evolving in, and given the fact that you have been in segregated schools all the way through high school, I really think, Governor, that you should go to a white university." He said, "I know that you have a focus. There are some things that you want to do. You need to be prepared to compete in the white man's world. They are in power; they are in control. Their institutions are predominant. At some point in time in our society, you are going to be a part of an integrated environment, an integrated society. To get ready for that, to get prepared for that, I strongly encourage you to go to a majority white university where you can learn how they think, be exposed to things that you haven't been exposed to through us and through your educational experiences." He was very clear about that. In the final analysis, of all the colleges that admitted me, I chose Ohio State.

*Q: You were at Ohio State from 1960 to 1964. What was Ohio State like when you got there in 1960?*

ROBINSON: I had been familiar with the campus because my dad took me there when I was 13. He also had taken me to Michigan State and some others. Ohio State was big. Columbus was a very segregated city, believe it or not, but subtly so. There was overt integration and mixing of ethnic groups, but if you wanted to go to the ice skating rink you couldn't go until after 8:00 at night which was not good.

I think during my first quarter at Ohio State I shook uncontrollably, which I found interesting because I said, "I wonder what is wrong with me." I don't know if it was because I was away from home for the first time really for an extended period of time or some other reason. I was living in a dormitory. You could count the number of African-American students on one hand. I was always the only person of color in the class. I lived in Weber Hall, which was a co-ed dorm -- girls in one wing, boys in the other wing. There was none of the stuff you have today. I lived on campus for four years. It was a great experience. There were a number of African-American graduate and undergraduate students in various fraternities and sororities who sort of gave me support. I had an aunt and uncle (one of my aunt's first husband was a judge in Columbus, Ohio) who lived in Columbus, Ohio, with his second wife. I had two cousins. So there was some family support in Columbus that I tapped into from time to time.

The community around the campus was mixed. Some African-American graduate students lived on campus. I can remember having a classmate my freshman year whose name was Doug -- a tall white guy, very handsome. Doug lived off campus. When Doug wanted to take me to his apartment so we could study together, initially the landlady didn't like that. She finally adjusted to this situation, but I can recall that even in my brother's time -- he went to Ohio State after I did -- there was still some segregation and hostility in the off campus student housing-the apartments and flats that people rented privately. It was difficult to find a place to get your hair cut in Columbus. I had to take a bus and go way over to the eastern part of town to get my hair cut.

So my freshman year was a period of adjustment. There is no question about that. Adjustment in terms of being away from home, adjustment in terms of being in a new environment; it was like flipping a switch from being in a predominately African-American environment to a predominately white environment. Learning a different language, being amazed at what I saw my classmates' hobbies were. For example, I had never seen anyone build the old Heathkit radios.

*Q: You would build radios and you had to go out and solder everything.*

ROBINSON: I saw that for the first time. I graduated with honors from Ohio State, but I wasn't a brain. I wasn't an intellectual academic nerd type. I was gregarious and was into a lot of things. Played in the band, played basketball, broke my arm playing football, ran track. I did a little bit of everything. I liked the girls too. As I said, I graduated with honors; I was in the honor society. I probably graduated from high school with an A-minus. I was used to A's and B's. At Ohio State I got some A's and I got some B's but I got some C's. I had never seen a C before. I can recall after getting a C in a chemistry class I became very frustrated because they graded on a curve at Ohio State. I walked across campus, called my dad and said, "Get me out of this university. Get me out of here. I want to go." This was my second run at him in terms of going to an historically black college. He gave the same speech all over again. "Look, I told you, that you would be going to go through a period of adjustment. You know you haven't been exposed to the same level of academic skill and input that your white classmates have had, so there

is going to be a gap for awhile until you learn how to study differently. You have just got to try a little harder.” He cooled me down.

Eventually I did conquer a lot of my apprehension. I could always write well. Even in junior high school and high school I could write well. I had great confidence in my writing ability. I took advanced courses in English and English composition at Ohio State.

There were 7000 freshmen in my class. There were 30,000 students on the whole campus. I decided that I was not going to be just a number. So I started branching out and undertook a variety of activities. I became quite visible at Ohio State during the time I was there; so I am glad my dad told me not to transfer.

*Q: That first year is always the hardest. That was 1960. It was a period that engaged an awful lot of people from your generation; that was the Kennedy-Nixon campaign and all this. Did you get involved at all or engaged by this or not?*

ROBINSON: Everybody knew about Kennedy, but I was not engaged in national politics. I followed campus politics. We all knew who Kennedy was and when Kennedy was assassinated, that was a very traumatic time. But, as I said, I wasn’t involved in party politics.

*Q: You mentioned girls. Did you go out with black women?*

ROBINSON: I went out with black girls. That was all to which we were exposed. My best friend was Bert Carr, whose father was a professor at A&T. Bert lived a half a block up the street. He and I were the same height; we looked a little bit alike. We did everything together.

For example, we caddied together. I had learned to play golf when I was eight. We would go out to caddy and make a little money so we could go out and buy whatever we wanted. That was money above and beyond the allowance we got from our families. Bert and I started shining shoes together. I used to shine shoes in a little commercial area just on the fringe of downtown Greensboro in a block of stores. There was Abe Blumenthal’s which was a low rate clothing store for men and boys. Then there was a pool hall, a billiard hall. Then there was a barber shop. Then there was a railroad track. Across the railroad track, was downtown Greensboro. When I was 11, Bert and I went downtown without telling our parents and we got a job shining shoes in the billiard hall. My mother freaked out. She said, “You don’t need to do that.” My mother came from a solid middle class black bourgeoisie background. My father grew up dirt poor. There was a very interesting dynamic between the two of them in that sense.

I was aware of that difference throughout my socialization process because my mother was always a little concerned -- conscious about our image including where we lived and what we wore as kids. While growing up, we were not allowed to wear dungarees to school—until we went to college. I have dungarees, but I don’t wear them. My dad was

very much an egalitarian. He believed that you should get along with everybody. So when I came home and announced that I was going to shine shoes in a billiard hall, my mother said, "You don't need to do that; we give you an allowance. What are the neighbors going to say?" My father said, "Look, if he wants to learn a sense of responsibility, and Bert is going to be there with him, let him go to shine shoes." So Bert and I started shining shoes in the billiard hall. Later, Bert stopped doing that. He went to do something else, and I left the billiard hall and started shining shoes in the barber shop. I did that for a long period of time.

So I learned a sense of responsibility. I began to develop a sense of responsibility when I was about 10 years old. I graduated from high school when I had just turned 17. Bert and I played in the band and we were basketball players and we got some hype being juniors and seniors. We were popular guys; so we had lots of girl friends. Nothing serious. I do recall there were a lot of my classmates who paired up when they were in junior high, and all the way through high school they dated the same girl and same guy. Then when they got to college or right after college, they got married. Some of those marriages are still in force, and some broke up, unfortunately.

At Ohio State, I had girl friends -- particularly one -- Fran Kramen -- from Toledo, Ohio, whom I met when I was a junior and she was a freshman. When I graduated from college, I went to India in the Peace Corps. All the relationships I had with girl friends, even those I was dating seriously at the time I graduated and with others ceased when I went to India, except for one or two people. A whole new life began when I got back from India.

*Q: Let's talk a bit about CORE and SNCC.*

ROBINSON: SNCC, SCLC, CORE, NAACP were all engaged at the time.

*Q: Where did CORE fit into the spectrum?*

ROBINSON: CORE was powerful. It had James Foreman as its head. The Congress of Racial Equality was pretty effective. The NAACP at that time was frowned upon because we all thought that NAACP hadn't done enough -- hadn't been aggressive enough. This was the one time when I had a difference of opinion with my father. I remember that we were frustrated, but at the same time to some extent feeling our "cheerios" because we were having some success. I can remember saying to my dad one day, "Why didn't you all do this when you were younger. Why did you leave it to us to confront them?" He sat me down and said in a tone that was very sobering to me, "We would have been shot down, lynched, brutalized in some way." "You know," he said, "the beauty of what Martin Luther King instituted is that it is non violent. People opposed the sit-ins and marches and the picketing and all of that in Greensboro and other places, but by and large they have been not violent." Bear in mind that my demonstrations were in North Carolina. I did it in Greensboro and Raleigh. We never went to a place called Monroe in North Carolina because that was the scene of some serious violence and confrontation.



None of us went to Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi. I have never been in Mississippi and quite frankly I have no intention of going to Mississippi. There is just something about the deep south that was seared in our psyche. A lot of African-Americans in the 1960s obviously went and were confronted with beatings and dogs and were killed. But that did not happen a lot in Greensboro, North Carolina.

In 1961-1962, I personally began to withdraw from the movement somewhat for two reasons. One, I began to see that some of the people involved in CORE and other civil rights organizations were more interested in seeking the limelight -- more interested in being in front of a reporter, in front of a TV camera, in front of a photographer to get themselves in the news. They lost sight of the objective, and that bothered me. Personal egos were emerging and substance was being pushed to the background. That frustrated me.

Secondly, as some of the opposition to the civil rights movement began to move toward a more violent posture, I was concerned my brother might be caught up in this. I began to think less of non-violence and more in terms of retaliation; so I thought it best for me to back off. I was about 18 or 19 years old at the time. I didn't have much of a temper growing up. I think I sort of held it under control for lots of reasons. But in the summer when I was 18 -- I had just finished my sophomore year in college -- I took a job as playground director in the city of Greensboro. I was responsible for a playground in a neighborhood. We had lots of teenagers and older guys who were discipline problems. They would smoke in the park around the kids. They would sit on top of the picnic tables. They were disruptive. I had to be very strong and firm in dealing with them. This is when I began to express myself. I remember very clearly having a change in temperament when I was around 18. I became less passive, less tolerant, less inclined to "turn the other cheek." So I thought it best to remove myself from that whole desegregation scene, and I did so. I was not in the march on Washington in 1963, primarily because at the same time I attended a leadership training conference that was sponsored by my national fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi which was held in Bloomington, Indiana, on the campus of Indiana University. That is not to say that my fellow conferees and I did not lament the fact that we were not here in Washington, DC. We watched it on television, and we wished that we had been there, but I was not. I was torn about being at a leadership conference as opposed to being in Washington, DC.

*Q: The march on Washington is where Martin Luther king made his famous speech.*

ROBINSON: Exactly right. "I have a dream." I was at a leadership training conference. The ramifications of my attendance have been positive for most of my professional career, but I still have this regret that I did not go to Washington despite the fact that I began to direct my energies in other ways outside the Congress of Racial Equality.

*Q: I can imagine somebody growing up in your generation being conflicted. I mean, one there is the broader world. In other words I am going out and I am going to make a living. I want to do something. The other one is I ought to be spending all my time*

*promoting racial equality, you know promoting my race and its position. You know it is a matter of time and concentration. This must have been a real conflict for you.*

ROBINSON: It was a conflict. It was a conflict because the leadership conference had been scheduled for a long time. We were all hand picked from around the country, long before the march on Washington was scheduled. It did represent a difficult decision.

*Q: At that university, since you eventually were going to get involved with international affairs, how much were you learning about America's position in the world. This was the middle of the cold war. Was that affecting you?*

ROBINSON: Very much. My parents got the New York Times and the Washington Post every Sunday. That was a ritual. We went to church, and from church to the drug store to get the Washington Post and the New York Times. The newspapers were always around every day, and we were encouraged to read them. We read the daily newspaper. We were aware of events. My dad always watched the evening news. I remember seeing Walter Cronkite and Douglas Edwards on CBS.

I was very conscious of the impact of the Sputnik launch by the USSR. We were made aware of the possibilities of war by the sirens that would go off every Saturday. We would have drills. There was constant talk about the threat from the Soviet Union. The Cuban missile crisis took place when I was at Ohio State. So we were very much conscious of the international situation. We were very conscious of the emerging independent countries in Africa with Ghana being the first sub-Saharan country to achieve independence. Egypt was the first on the African continent and then came Ghana. Kwame Nkrumah went to Lincoln University in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The international situation was very much a part of my world view at that time.

*Q: What were you majoring in?*

ROBINSON: In college, I majored in physical anthropology. I had an interest in medicine and dentistry. Dentistry because I wore braces for six years. I said, "Why throw all that experience away? I want to be an orthodontist." My interest in medicine stemmed from all the doctors in and around the family. But physical anthropology was clearly the tie to my childhood interests -- fascination with dinosaurs and the evolution of mankind. We had to declare a major at Ohio State in our second quarter of the junior year. We had a quarter system at Ohio State -- four quarters per year. I chose physical anthropology as my major. I had two minors, archeology and anatomy. The anatomy was tied to my possible interest in the medical profession. In my sophomore year, I took a class in gross anatomy. We dissected dogface shark, a pig, a frog, and then one day the professor took the class up to the second floor of a building at Ohio State known as H and F -- hogs and frogs as we called it.

*Q: Horticulture and forestry.*

ROBINSON: He took us up to the second floor. I can remember this clearly. He walked across this classroom and in the distance one could see something laying on a slab. We got to the slab and it was a cadaver. I couldn't deal with it. I discovered that I was queasy. So any interest that I had in medicine ended there.

Quite frankly, chemistry proved to be difficult for me which was a surprise because Bert Carr and I thought we were chemists. When I was young I thought I could be a chemist or a chemical engineer.

*Q: You had a Gilbert chemistry set.*

ROBINSON: Absolutely; had two or three of them. We would mix up stuff on Christmas Day and all through the spring and summer. But in fact I never quite mastered chemistry. I took two or three courses in chemistry. The best I ever got out of chemistry was a B in organic chemistry. I knew that I couldn't be a great dentist or physician unless I could master chemistry.

My real love was anthropology. So when it came time to really declare my major I chose anthropology and archeology. I had two or three professors at Ohio State in anthropology. Dr. Bavi was one. He was my archeology professor. I had a female professor in anthropology who was brilliant. I don't remember her name for some reason. I had another anthropology professor, Dr. Bunyon. I had some brilliant professors at Ohio State. They made anthropology real for me, particularly physical anthropology. We took classes in osteometry and anthropometry where we learned to measure skulls and all of these things.

Then I had to take a special course in archeology in the summer that I graduated because all physical anthropology and archeology majors had to do a dig. So we excavated an old Indian burial ground. The whole Ohio valley is just replete with these old native American Indian burial grounds. We dissected a whole Indian burial ground in the summer of 1964. That led to the decision on my part and on my classmate's part to see if we could go to Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania and Kenya and dig with the late, great Louis B. Leakey, the famous paleontologist. But I am getting ahead of myself. I will get into that later.

At one point, I became so enamored with Greek and Roman classical literature, that I said to my dad in my sophomore year, "You know, I think I might major in Greek and Roman classic literature." I had a professor who was so good that he could transport you to an imaginary battlefield. It was incredible the way he taught the class on The Iliad and Homer. My dad looked at me, smiled and said, "What are you going to do? You can't make any money with that, you know." That is all he said. So I didn't get hung up on that. The four years that I had at Ohio State were just fabulous.

*Q: Well, as anthropologist, what were you thinking of doing?*

ROBINSON: Being a professor and becoming a real expert in a subject that still fascinates me today -- the evolution of human beings. We have made some powerful assumptions based on the analysis of essentially a couple of trunks full of bones. But one day when we can peel back a lot of Africa, the Middle East, up through the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys on into southeast Asia and into China, we are going to be able to find more skeletal remains. I think that homo-sapiens or those various iterations of early humanoids that led to homo-sapiens, are much older than we currently believe. We now think, based on carbon dating, that we are looking at about four million years, but I think we have been around much longer. I just have an intuition about that. But when we get to the point when we can take technology and hold an instrument or device and scan caves and grounds and find where skeletal remains are buried we will have a much better grasp of the time frame. Now we just get lucky from time to time in finding traces here and there. We see something that is exposed by erosion or dug up by a wild dog or whatever. But if we can develop the technology where we can just go and actually scan in certain areas and find these skeletal remains, I think we are going to be in a better position to tell how long we have been on this earth. Paleontologists and archeologists will be in a better position to determine how we evolved more definitively. That has always fascinated me, and that is what I wanted to do. I wanted to teach and do research, if possible.

*Q: Did the theory, now pretty widely accepted,, that everybody on earth is of African descent, intrigue you or make you feel that everyone around you in the university was African American basically.*

ROBINSON: It did later in life. That view was not with me so much early on. It was certainly a part of what was driving me, but I wasn't obsessed with it. Later in life, after living in India and particularly after living in Africa, that view had a larger impact. In 1968, I flew through Cairo on the way from India to Washington on official business for the Peace Corps. I stopped in Cairo, and I took a car out to Giza, and I stood in front of the Sphinx. A very powerful feeling came over me which I have never forgotten and that was that the Sphinx was clearly carved in bas relief in the image of an African, a Nubian. Napoleon knew that at the time that he invaded Egypt; he used the Sphinx for cannon fire practice. I could see that the features of the Sphinx were carved in the image of an African. There has always been this debate about whether Egyptians are really Africans. Looking at the Sphinx, there was no doubt. I looked at it and I said to myself, "Robinson, you come from someplace. The image of the Sphinx is important because African-Americans are the only people on the face of the earth who cannot definitively trace their ancestry, their history, their culture, at least to the extent that everybody else can."

Alex Haley was lucky. I believe that my dad's ancestors came from the area of Senegal, This is just intuition. There is no scientific basis for this assumption. In December 1991, I said to Senegalese President Abdou Diouf, "You know, you and my father could have been brothers. The same color, height, facial looks." I subsequently showed him a picture of my father. He was stunned. Can I prove a relationship? No. I can't prove that.

Because of slavery, many African Americans do not know what their lineage is. Their knowledge ends at the water's edge. I think that, psychologically, there is a big gap in the

experience of African-Americans, which no other people have. So when I stood there and looked at that Sphinx. I felt that power. I said, "We come from something." That was very important to me.

Later on, because of that 1968 experience and due to my spending time in Africa -- almost six years in Ghana and Kenya and visiting almost every country in Africa except Libya -- I developed this interest in paleontology from a different perspective. Can we prove that all human beings spring from mother Africa? There is no doubt about that; from the skeletal remains that we have, we know that human life began in Africa. "The Real Eve" which premiered last year showed that.

*Q: This was a program on the Discovery channel. You might want to explain what "The Real Eve" was.*

ROBINSON: "The Real Eve" was produced by the Discovery channel last year. It scientifically proves through DNA that all human life evolved from one woman who was an African woman. It is a landmark production because it traces scientifically the migration of Africans across the Red Sea at the time when the sea level was 150 feet lower than what it is today. So they could get across to what is now Yemen. The program showed how these people evolved and migrated. It is a powerful show. The program included white scientists and paleontologists and all kinds of human beings from many countries talking about our commonality. It is kind of neat that we are all cousins. It really is. I mean the differences that exist between human beings are to a very great extent manufactured by politics and by social class and economic strata and other non-genetic issues.

*Q: We are now in 1964. What happened to you then?*

ROBINSON: I was a senior in college at Ohio State. It was a wonderful year for me; I made a lot of friends among my classmates.

*Q: There is a lot of talk these days about how the universities and colleges are moving into self segregation. Did that happen at Ohio State?*

ROBINSON: If by "self segregation" you mean did African-Americans congregate among themselves? Yes -- definitely. There were times when we did that, but I can recall that at Ohio State we had a lot of lot of inter-mingling, socially and otherwise, both on and off campus. I lived in Baker Hall which was a coed dormitory -- one of the oldest dormitories on campus. It was coeducational in the sense that we were all in the same building, but the girls had their own wing and we had our wing and in between was the cafeteria and some of the administration offices.

On occasion, the African-Americans would get together for lunch or dinner, but many times we sat with white kids. In the student union, there was some congregation of black students, but not necessarily separate and apart from white students. Obviously you tend to gravitate toward your friends, but "self-segregation" was not an issue at Ohio State.

This was the era of the civil rights movement, but I can recall going to white fraternity houses and white sorority houses as part of the singing group that I had called “The Ambassadors”. We would sing. We did the same thing at the student union. I would characterize it as not trying to be idealistic, but to paint it in the way it really was; I would say that it was a fluid situation. We did what we wanted to do. I didn’t feel any barriers to socializing with white students. A lot of my friends and a lot of friends of the African-American students were white Jewish students. I had a lot of friends from Parma, Ohio, and Shaker Heights (Cleveland) and Clifton, New Jersey. In fact I can remember some of their names to this day. My roommates at Ohio State were black and white. I introduced one of my white roommates to his wife. So it was not a rigid situation.

*Q: I take it today there seems to be in some places a more deliberate social pressure to gather together. If true, it is unfortunate.*

ROBINSON: My daughter just graduated from Marymount University, and we were constantly talking about this issue, which I find interesting. She graduated in 2003; I graduated from college in 1964, and here we are still talking about it. There has been some retrogression. I would say that at Marymount University, my daughter Lonni and her classmates who were African-American did tend to congregate among themselves. I would talk to her a lot about that. There is tension on college campuses today. I am not totally aware of the dynamics of why.

*Q: Go on about 1964.*

ROBINSON: In 1963, I had applied to the Peace Corps. Why did I apply to the Peace Corps? I had always been interested in international affairs. I think that came out in our earlier conversation. I was very interested in India in particular starting when I was seven or eight years old, I had this fascination with India in part because of a television program that came on Saturday morning called Gunga Din. Then there was the Jungle Book. I had a fascination for Kipling’s writings.

So I applied for the Peace Corps. I can recall an impromptu conversation that I had in 1963 on our front porch with my dad and the then president of North Carolina A&T University, Samuel DeWitt Procto. We talked about the Peace Corps and whether I should join. I can remember both of them chiming in at the same time saying, “Governor, the Peace Corps experience would be worth the equivalent of two Ph.D.s because of the exposure to the culture and the language and the history of another country. This would be an in-depth immersion for two years.” They were encouraging me strongly to join the Peace Corps.

*Q: The Peace Corps also was quite new and on everyone’s mind at this time, wasn’t it?*

ROBINSON: It was the era of the Kennedys and Shriver. He was Jack Kennedy’s brother-in-law and was appointed as the first head of the Peace Corps. There was an aura about the Kennedy administration, and there was something very exciting and

adventurous about the Peace Corps. So I applied, and interestingly enough the first invitation I got to train for the Peace Corps was for Iran, It wasn't India. In those days, in the early 1960s, the Peace Corps application form allowed one to indicate one's top three preferences in terms of country assignments. India was probably the only country I listed. But I was invited to train for a Peace Corps program in Iran.

Believe it or not, I think on the day that Nehru died (Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of an independent India who was very much involved in the independence movement with Mahatma Gandhi), I got a letter from the Peace Corps re-assigning me to a training program for India. That was kind of extraordinary because I really believed, and it certainly was proven to me after I got into the Peace Corps, that there has always been sort of a spiritual connection between me and India.

I accepted the invitation to go to India. I had intended to go to law school. I had applied to Duke University among other law schools. But when it came time to make the choice between the Peace Corps in India and law school, I did not hesitate. Interestingly enough, outside of my immediate family -- my mom, my father--and maybe some close friends with whom I grew up, a lot of my friends and classmates did not understand why I was going to Oregon State. Oregon State University is where the Peace Corps trained its volunteers for India. I can remember saying to a lot of people, "Well you know, I have always done things differently. I have always had an interest in international affairs. Beyond the fact that I really do want to help people to serve people from a humanitarian standpoint, it is difficult for me to say to you what is really motivating me to do this. This is my own personal calling if you will. This is something that I am feeling inside very powerfully."

So two days after I graduated from Ohio State, I was on a plane to Corvallis, Oregon. I flew from Greensboro to Chicago, Chicago to Portland, and then took a DC-3 to Corvallis, Oregon. I have to mention that in Portland I met a guy who was also on his way to Corvallis, Oregon, to train for the Peace Corps. I mention this because he and I are still best friends to this very day. His name is Artie Miller. Artie had graduated from Penn State. He grew up in Pittsburgh in a Jewish family -- not well to do, comfortably lower middle class, I would say. But Artie was a brilliant mathematician, just a brilliant mathematician.

There were 66 of us in the India training program. We lived on the Oregon State campus, and we trained there. There were four things that were notable about this group. First, we were all men. Secondly, the vast majority of us came from the east coast. Thirdly, most of us had gone to pretty good schools. Fourth, I was the only person of color. On our first night at Corvallis, six of us decided to walk down to the town to go to a bar and have a beer. It was Artie and I, a guy named Chip Wall, and some others. We walked into this bar, where there were two lumberjacks sitting at the bar. They both turned around, I am 6'4" and was pretty muscular at the time. Artie was to my left, with a couple of other guys. One of the lumberjacks said, "Well I'll be damned. This really must be America, because in walks this black guy." He didn't say "black guy." He didn't use the "N" word, fortunately. But in the way he said it, it was threatening. Artie immediately put his hands

out like “let’s go get them”, which endeared me to Artie Miller from that moment. He just immediately became very protective.

Oregon State University was a very interesting experience because we were there to train to go to India. India “Eight” and “Nine” -- there were two groups. India “Eight” was a group to be trained in swine cultivation. India “Nine”, of which I was a part, were to be trained in poultry management, rearing practices, diseases, etc. With the exception of perhaps eight guys out of 66 who had grown up on a farm, we didn’t know anything about chickens or about pigs. But in three months, we learned a lot. It was a very rigid, intense training program that included the history and the politics of India, the caste system, the culture, etc. We clearly had to understand that. We had to learn a totally foreign language. Hindi is, in terms of sentence construction, the use of verbs, etc. is totally opposite to English.

We had to take all kinds of psychological tests. We had individual sessions with a psychiatrist once a week. We had group sessions with a psychologist every week because the management really wanted to see how tough we were. You have to realize that India in 1964 was quite different from American culture. Furthermore, we were all essentially just out of college, going away from the U.S. for the first time and didn’t know anything about any other cultures or any other regions of the world with the exceptions of what we might have studied in college or read about. Going to India in 1964 was like landing on the other side of the moon. So our training program focused on all the various cultural aspects including the caste system, and on learning the language.

The training program ran from early morning until night every day for three months. At the halfway mark, six weeks, came the first selection process. In the early days of the Peace Corps, the selection process was pretty intense -- very pervasive in terms of the daily awareness that just because you were invited to train for a Peace Corps program did not necessarily mean that you were going to be selected in the final analysis. So after six weeks we had a selection process. As I said earlier, our training was primarily in poultry management and disease control. We had to learn how to recognize diseases and treat them, how to dissect birds, how to sex them -- males and females -- how to determine whether eggs were appropriate for market to sell, etc. We were evaluated by our trainers on the basis of our language competency in Hindi, our ability to read and write Hindi, our knowledge of Indian history and culture, and on our technical knowledge, plus the psychological profiles that we had all undergone individually and in group therapy sessions.

The first selection process took place in an evening. When the results were read, out of 66 guys, I think about 19 were selected out. It was a very traumatic event; grown men were crying. Those who were selected out were crying, and those of us who were left behind were crying because they got selected out and we were still in the program. There appeared to be no rhyme or reason for the decisions. There was no common thread that ran through those who were selected out. It was a very intimidating process.



At the end of the training program in December of 1964, 35 of us were selected to go on to India. Fortunately I was among those 35. We had a graduation ceremony. The president of Oregon State University gave us diplomas which I still display at home, indicating that we had graduated from this Peace Corps program at Oregon State University. We then flew back to our respective homes for about a week, met again at John F. Kennedy at the airport in New York on December 3, 1964, and took the Pan Am-1 flight to India via London.

*Q: That was the flight that circled the globe. Let me ask a question or two about the training. In the first place, were you under rather strict injunction not to mess around with the caste system?*

ROBINSON: That is a fascinating question. A lot of the teachers and trainers that we had at Oregon State were Indian. I think that they represented two or maybe three of the major castes. There are four major castes and maybe sub-castes. What I remember about that aspect of the instructions was that we were told that as Americans, as foreigners, as outsiders, we would have the opportunity to run the gamut, to intermingle and have contact with Indians from all castes. We were not warned to stay away from the so called "untouchables" -- the lower caste Indians. We were frankly encouraged to demonstrate that one could have contact socially and professionally with Indians across the spectrum, across the social and religious structure without fear of being reprimanded. We certainly were told to avoid situations that would be embarrassing to our hosts. "Don't commit any social faux pas. Don't try to force contact between a Brahmin and an "untouchable". Don't go out of your way to do anything like that. Don't try any social experiments." But we were certainly encouraged to have contact with people from all castes and we did that consciously. We didn't do it with arrogance. We had lots of conversations with Indians while in India as a Peace Corps volunteer about the caste system or about arranged marriages.

Obviously there were a lot of views that immediately clashed with our Americanism. But one of the things you learned real quick was to shift your focus from an American view to an Indian view. That is the only way to some extent that you can survive in that environment. You had to understand their way of doing things. Understanding the caste system however did not mean we accepted it. We always railed against it. We always talked in social settings about the disadvantages that the caste system brought to India. We would point out that there were people in India who are downtrodden; if they were educated or exposed to many of the educational opportunities that people of a higher caste enjoyed, perhaps the "untouchables" could make a stronger contribution to the development of India.

I became friends with an Indian woman whom I call my "Indian mother". She was a tribal member. So she was even outside the caste system. She was even lower than the lowest caste. The so-called "tribals" were Indians who, historically and biologically speaking, came from a different ethnic group and who evolved differently over time. They weren't Muslims; they weren't Hindus. They were known as "tribals" -- a lot like native Americans in this country. One of the first tribal females to attain a medical degree

was a woman named Dr. Tiriki. Dr. Tiriki lived and practiced medicine in the village of Paravur where I was assigned as a Peace Corps volunteer. Paravur had a population of 40,000 people. She was quite an extraordinary lady. I would say she was in her mid-60s when I met her. She had silver hair. She was extremely nice, very friendly. Practically every afternoon when I was in Paravur, Dr. Tiriki came out with her nieces and nephews and we would sit around and have tea together. She was able to get a medical degree because the government of India had reserved a certain percentage of seats for the “tribals”. It was a quota system -- a certain percentage of seats in the medical college, in the engineering schools, were reserved for lower caste and tribal people. She was fortunate enough to get one of those seats. She was known to be a very good doctor and was a prime example of what I kept telling Indians in conversation about the advantages of providing opportunities to lower caste people who could achieve and contribute to the growth and development of India. The caste system in India even to this day is extremely pervasive. It is difficult concept for most people to understand. It is rooted in Hinduism. It is a culture unlike the west and was similar to our understanding today of Islam, and the impact of Islam on the Middle East and parts of Africa. Religion is the way of life. The religious tenets of Hinduism are part of the fabric of the culture of India. It is very difficult to separate the social structure, cultural mores and folkways from religious tenets. They are all intermingled. Religion drives everything including a lot that happens in government. That is Hinduism. Islam works the same way.

*Q: One can make the same argument about Christianity, although we are so close to it that we don't see it.*

ROBINSON: But we do have, comparatively speaking, a pretty clear separation of church and state.

*Q: I am talking about mind-set. In a way, I am lumping in the Jewish one, since both Christianity and Judaism come out of the same box.*

ROBINSON: Hinduism is a very profound religion, but its dictates, including the caste system, are so imbued in the Indian psyche, in the Indian ethos, that nothing is done in their daily lives without Hinduism driving it. For example, if you have a conversation with an upper caste Hindu about the evils of the caste system as they impact on lower caste members, they will turn around and say to you, “But Hinduism preaches in part that you are an untouchable on this earth and in this life because during your first dimension, you were not a very good person.” (Hindis believe that there are three dimensions in each of our lives. There is one before you are born. Your life in earth is the second one, and the afterlife is the third dimension.) So if you were not a good person in your first dimension, you came into your second as an untouchable. You deserve to be treated the way you are. You deserve to live the way you live. However, if you are a “good” untouchable, if you are a good *sudra*, then you will be rewarded in your third dimension.

One of the aspects of Indian belief that used to boggle our minds is how Indians tended not to question anything. I used to liken it to your mother giving you castor oil. You know that when you were a kid, if something ailed you, your mother would say, “Take

this; it is good for you. Don't ask any questions. Don't resist." A lot of times Indians would do things according to practice and according to the dictates of the religion, according to the dictates of their caste system, and not question their actions at all. You would look at them and say, "Why don't they challenge that?" But the caste system is so prescriptive in terms of how they would lead their daily lives that it dictated their every move.

*Q: Did moving into the field of chicken culture put you into any particular caste set or something?*

ROBINSON: If it did, we didn't notice it. Being Americans, we were viewed as upper class people. We were status symbols. We got invitations to weddings. We got invitations to everything. We were not shunned. No one didn't want to have contact with us. Absolutely no one. It did put us on a higher plane.

Artie and I and Chip Wall, another Peace Corps volunteer, got a monthly allowance from the Peace Corps headquarters in New Delhi. We took that check, which was in rupees, to the bank and cashed it and paid our cook. We all had cooks because cooking was an all day affair. You had to buy everything fresh everyday. Then it had to be prepared. That was a long drawn out process. So we couldn't be tied down by doing our own cooking. We never would have gotten any work done. So Peace Corps paid for a cook. The money was for a cook, to buy food, and to pay for incidentals; e.g. travel and things like that. Housing was provided by the government of India. Our allowance was meager and we had to travel on a third class train or a bus, for example. For the most part, most volunteers did not have a jeep or a motorcycle. But we had access to a jeep and a motorbike. We had bicycles, which were provided to us by the Peace Corps. But if you wanted to go any distance, you had to take a train—for example from Bahawalpur, where I lived, to the state capital, Patna. We had just enough money for third class train travel. There are three classes of train travel in India -- first class, second class, and third class. Third class is what we used to call "cattle" car. If you wanted to travel second class, that meant you might get a reserved seat. If you were lucky, you might even get a reserved seat and a little bunk on top to sleep on overnight. Arnie and I got to the point where we learned how to cajole; we learned how to maneuver. Sometimes we would appeal to the conductor to let us ride second class even though we had third class tickets. That would not have happened had we been Indian, but because we were Americans and Peace Corps volunteers, we were treated differently.

There were a lot of what I used to call "world travelers". They were hippies but we called them "world travelers." There was a lot of concern for those of us assigned to India in the 1960s that we not be identified as hippies because hippies were disheveled. They had long hair; they looked scruffy. For the most part they were white, either Americans or Europeans. Indians looked upon them with a certain amount of disdain because they were so scruffy looking. They had money, but looked scruffy. That was just part of that hippie movement. Indians didn't like that look; so we as Peace Corps volunteers tended to dress differently. We were neat and clean shaven. Some of us wore sandals, but we didn't look

like hippies. We consciously did it that way because we did not want to do anything that would diminish our ability to relate to Indians up and down the social spectrum.

As I said, we were treated differently. We were invited into homes and had access to practically anybody we wanted to see. From time to time, in the course of conducting our business, we would have to go to see high ranking government officials. We had access to them. We didn't abuse that privilege. But to get things done in India, you had to constantly push, push, push. There was a certain amount of inertia that you had to overcome. The importance of time which is a western attribute. For example, how to get from point A to point B was always a challenge. In India, if you ask for directions from a shopkeeper or somebody on the street, you would be told, "Sir. Go straight".

"What do you mean go straight?"

"Sir, just go straight."

"How long will it take? "

"You will get there sometime today."

There is an imprecision about things in India. One of the first things I learned was take my watch off. After about six months I did without my watch. There was a lot of waiting, but you had to adjust to their ways of doing things. But being a foreigner, and particularly a Peace Corps volunteer, if you were respectful, you could get some things done that they couldn't do or couldn't do as quickly or as efficiently. However, that posed a problem because from my perspective, one of the reasons why I wanted to be a Peace Corps volunteer was so that I could work with my Indian counterparts to try to get them to consider different ways of doing things within the confines of their own reality. Working with them closely to influence them over time is what I call the intangible impact of a cross cultural in depth experience which you gain as a volunteer. If you didn't learn that, you ran the risk of operating in a vacuum. The Indians could have said, "OK, we are going to tolerate you as the volunteer for two years because we know you are going to leave. So we will let you do your thing. But after two years, everything that you do may collapse. We may not retain it." I recognized that possibility right away; so my partner and I worked very hard to work with our Indian counterparts so that they didn't view us as being outsiders who would be gone soon enough. We wanted them to view us as being their partners, their counterparts. We were going to do these things together, so that, long after Artie and I had left the scene, the new approaches to which they took a liking, those new patterns that fit within their milieu, those activities which they could do without us, would continue to be done because somehow over the course of a year or two they grew to respect and accept a different way of doing things. I don't think anybody learned to tell time or to pay attention to time because I was an American, but certainly because of the style and manner with which we worked with our Indian counterparts and friends, some of our Americanisms, some of our way of doing things rubbed off on them.

Later I moved to the state capital from the town in which I had worked. We had some new volunteers that came in. One group of volunteers came as mechanics to work on UNICEF jeeps and other things in and around Patna. One of these volunteers got frustrated one day in the mechanic shop and struck an Indian because the Indian wouldn't do what he was being told to do. The volunteer was overheard to say, "You know, I am an American. I come from the most powerful country in the world, and if you do things the way I am telling you, one day you too can become powerful." That is not the way to get Indians to do things differently -- by being arrogant, by saying, "I am an American; do it my way because we know best." We sent that volunteer home in a strait jacket because he could not make the adjustment. He did not understand; he never learned how to work with the Indians to bring them along. He was busy dictating to the Indians. My Peace Corps experience taught me after two years that I had to motivate and influence people of a different culture. I figured that if I could do that in a different culture, certainly I could do some of that back in the United States.

*Q: Could you talk a bit about both the town or the city, I take this to be a town, where you were, and how you went about, what were you contributing to the chicken business.*

ROBINSON: Bahawalpur was on the Ganges River. It is in Bihar State which is sandwiched between West Bengal to the east and Uttar Pradesh to the west. It took an overnight train ride to get to Calcutta. Calcutta was where we went for rest and relaxation. Bahawalpur had about 40,000 inhabitants. The streets were dirt with the exception of maybe two or three paved roads. The Indians referred to one road as a "trunk" road -- what we call an express highway. There was a trunk road leading into Bahawalpur from West Bengal. There was a trunk road leading out that went from Bahawalpur to Patna, the capital of Bihar. Bahawalpur had two engineering colleges. It had a hospital, but it wasn't a very good one. It had a train station -- every town in India practically had a train station, thanks to the British who constructed an incredibly extensive network of railroads throughout India. This was something that aided India's development tremendously. I can recall the Anglican church. We lived in a little compound called Bose Park. We had a lean-to -- what I would call a lean-to which was attached to the back of a house. The government of India and the state government had to agree to provide housing and transportation for the Peace Corps volunteers. The government poultry farm was maybe four miles outside of Bahawalpur. We got there everyday either by bicycle or by jeep.

My Indian counterpart was a Muslim named Mister Jamal. Jamal was an extraordinarily progressive Indian -- very dynamic, full of energy, lots of good ideas. He was a Muslim which meant he had no hang-up about working with animals. There are lots of Hindu Indians who won't eat meat. A large percentage of Indians who are Hindus are vegetarian. They won't eat eggs. They are pure vegetarians. They will wear a mask so they don't breathe any microbes or have any flies come around them. They will be careful where they walk because they don't want to kill anything. But Muslims did not have any social or religious prohibitions about working with animals. Jamal was well trained as an expert in animal husbandry including chickens. When we first got to Bahawalpur, my partner was Chip Wall from Seattle. Chip was in piggery and I was in

poultry. Our housing was not ready, so we were taken to what was called a bungalow -- a guest house -- about 12 miles outside of Bahawalpur, in the middle of nowhere. We were deposited there with a cook named Jalil who remained as my cook for two years. Jalil was also a Muslim.

Most of us had Muslim cooks because they could handle meat without any social or religious prohibitions. They knew that we Americans ate meat. The Muslims knew where the meat was. That didn't mean we could get beef readily because cows are sacred in India. He could get beef from time to time. He would come back and say, "Sahib, I have got some beef for today." He knew that would bring a smile to our faces. Most of the time we had chicken or fish.

I tell the story about being in this guest house-bungalow because it was our first experience in India. This was mid December. In addition to waiting for our permanent housing, we were also waiting for our assignments. Each of us had an Indian supervisor, known as the block development officer, the BDO. My BDO's name was Mr. Yadav. Mr. Yadav's office was in Bahawalpur. He was to give assignments for both piggery and poultry work. But for two or three weeks, we sat out there in the bungalow and we never heard from the BDO. So one day I looked at Chip and said, "You know what, they are going to let us sit here. They don't know what to do with us." In our stateside training program, we had been taught that we had two options as Peace Corps volunteers. Option number one was to work with the BDO, and to find out what he needed. We have been trained to be an expert consultant to the Indian government in poultry or in piggery, to help them with every aspect of their program. You can either get yourself involved in the government apparatus as far as piggery or poultry are concerned, or you could work with individual farmers to help them to improve their ability or capacity to grow either herds of pigs or chickens for the purpose of selling the eggs and using the meat for marketing purposes. But we are sitting for two or three weeks, doing nothing. Chip had a very different kind of temperament from me. Chip was very intellectual, very smart guy, but he wasn't a pusher. I was very energetic, very dynamic, and probably a bit brash in those days. I said to Chip. "You know, we have come 12,000 miles from home. We are just sitting here all day long cooling our heels."

One day I persuaded him to jump on our bikes and go to Bahawalpur. We rode 12 miles into Bahawalpur. It was hot as hell because Bahawalpur is on the Ganges Plain. It was late December and therefore the so-called "cool" season. It was very warm during the daytime because the sun is was directly overhead. We went to see the BDO. I will never forget walking into the BDO's office. He was chewing beetle nuts. This is sort of a stimulant that a lot of Indian men chew. It causes the saliva to turn red. In every government office there was a spittoon. The walls were splattered with red residue. The Indians would chew this stuff and try to talk at the same time. It was really funny. Yardav had a mouthful of this stuff. He was sitting looking very relaxed -- sort of blasé, very casual--when we walked in. We kind of burst into his office. It was an unpleasant confrontation because by the time we got to his office we were tired and it was hot. We said, "Look we have been here for almost a month. You haven't come out to see us. We didn't come all the way to India just to sit and do nothing. We came here to help you, and

to work.” I think we certainly showed our impatience. I can remember Yardav looking up at us and saying, “Your housing is not ready yet, so we thought we would just leave you out there until the housing is ready.”

“When is it going to be ready?” we asked.

“We don’t know when it is going to be ready,”

We went back and forth. We made our point that we were not going to sit for another two weeks and just cool our heels; we came to work. Yardav is the one who put us in touch with Jamal who became our ace in the hole.

Bahawalpur had a lot of farmers. We ran into some difficulties in part because there were tensions between the Muslims and the Hindus. You find this all over India even today, perhaps even more pronounced today than ever before. We came to the conclusion that the Peace Corps had made a mistake in participating in a piggery program. In essence, Chip really didn’t have a job. He didn’t have a job because it was socially almost impossible to do anything in piggery. So Chip was confronted with decisions. “Should I stay? Can I become a poultry expert?” I told Chip that I would teach him about poultry farming. He had another option and that was to participate in a teaching program because he had majored in education in college. He chose to do the latter. He chose to retool himself and become involved in education.

I just did my poultry thing with Jamal. As I mentioned earlier, I made friends with Dr. Tiriki, the Indian doctor who became my sort of Indian mother. I worked very closely with Jamal to upgrade and improve poultry management within the government poultry farm system in and around Bahawalpur. During the time I was there we built a whole new block of poultry houses. We probably built at least eight new poultry houses, and we upgraded the facilities to sex chickens and to grade the eggs. I must say that I had a pretty rewarding experience in Bahawalpur.

Maybe almost a year after I got to Bahawalpur -- late 1965 -- I got sick -- probably a heat stroke. In those days we didn’t have American physicians in the Peace Corps. What Peace Corps did was to visit the doctors who practiced where the volunteers were being assigned. They interviewed Indian doctors to evaluate whether they would be suitable. Real medical care was only available in the big cities like Calcutta, Delhi -- large cities like that. The local physicians were to provide some coverage in the event of an emergency.

I went to the doctor that had been assigned to us. He didn’t touch me. He didn’t take my temperature; he didn’t take my pulse; he just looked at me. He made his diagnosis on the basis of just looking at me. He said, “Well, maybe you have had too much sun, maybe a little delirium. Let me give you some medicine,” and he prescribed codeine. I had a reaction to codeine. I broke out in hives; I was sick as a dog. I called around; there was no place in Bahawalpur that could detox me. Of course, I didn’t know what was happening. I learned all this after the fact. I sent a telex, either a telex or a telegram,

probably a telegram because that was a reliable telegram service in India. I sent a telegram to Artie who was in Patna. Patna was an overnight train ride to the west. I told Artie that I was coming to Patna. There was a big Catholic hospital in Patna -- the Holy Family Hospital. Patna was a city in 1965 of maybe 200,000 people with a big airport.

I crawled onto a train that night and got into Patna the next morning. Artie met me there and took me to the hospital. By this time I was in semi delirious condition. I spent a week in the Holy Family Hospital. Corgi was a little community outside of Patna, and I stayed there for five days while they detoxed me from the codeine.

Right after this episode, the Peace Corps office in New Delhi and I made the decision to move me from Bahawalpur to Patna because Jamal had been reassigned. We had done a lot of good work in Bahawalpur, but it was a good time to stop. Furthermore, Artie did not have a partner in what he was doing. He was setting up egg marketing centers all over the city of Patna. He and I were much closer friends than I was with Chip, my first partner.

There are two kinds of chickens that were being bred in India. We used leghorns which were the white birds, for egg laying purposes, and Rhode Island reds for broilers or meat. Artie and I came up with a scheme to grow Rhode Island reds which could be processed after three months. They would grow for from six weeks to three months and then they would process them, ice them down and ship them to Calcutta to all of those incredible restaurants and hotels. Calcutta was an overnight train in an express train. We managed to convince a number of farmers to grow Rhode Island reds. We said, "Look, we can make you some money. We'll process these birds anywhere from six weeks to three months depending on how big they are and send them to Calcutta in iced boxes. They will be received by merchants in Calcutta, and in the morning we will come back and give you the money."

So we set up very lucrative egg and meat marketing schemes for farmers in the capital area of Patna which really brought much welcomed additional income to the farmers.

The egg marketing scheme was interesting because we ran into a lot of problems with eggs in India. For one, a lot of Indians had religious superstitions about eating eggs -- it made the consumers oversexed they thought and therefore out of control. Secondly, strict vegetarians did not want to eat eggs. Three, when refrigeration is lacking, eggs will spoil quickly. You could cool them, but you couldn't always refrigerate them. If you had a lot of eggs coming in for processing or a lot of hens coming into production at one time, that meant we had a flood of eggs, and had to figure out how to process them quickly.

That is one reason we had egg marketing kiosks all over. We came up with this idea to sort of saturate the capital with kiosks, so we could spread out the distribution of the eggs and sell them quicker instead of throwing them away. In 1965-1966 there was a drought in India. Food became scarce. Therefore getting feed for chickens became difficult. We wrote a letter to Lyndon Johnson and appealed for maize because maize was the staple of the poultry feed formula that we used. We learned how to make poultry feed. Yellow



corn (maize) was one of the ingredients that you had to have in order for the yolk to come out yellow, or deep orange. Without the maize, the eggs tasted horrible. In 1965-1966 the "cold war" was an active ingredient of politics in many parts of the world including India. The Indians were playing the United States off against the Soviet Union, and there was a real rift between the Johnson administration and the Indian administration headed by Shastri who later died in a taxicab in Tashkent. In light of the U.S.-India political situation and the drought, we couldn't get maize. We learned how to cut up red chilies and put them in the feed. That caused the egg to return to the yellow color.

We had lots of other problems, which we overcame one way or another. The egg marketing distribution program that we installed throughout Patna and the meat program that we had with Calcutta were huge successes. Artie and I became Peace Corps volunteer leaders, meaning that we helped to train the new volunteers as they arrived in India. We helped to select sites where volunteers could be assigned throughout the eastern region. By this time the Peace Corps had opened up an office in Calcutta, and we did a lot of administrative and programming work for the Peace Corps. It was an altogether very satisfying experience for me.

*Q: You left there in 1966?*

ROBINSON: August of 1966. Artie and I and four other guys, left India. I have to tell you, upon departure we treated ourselves. We had saved enough money to take a first class air conditioned train from Patna to New Delhi to attend the end-of-tour service conference. I could write a book about train travel in India. Artie and I had worked ourselves right into the cab of the locomotive of many trains. We actually drove some trains down the track. We decided to treat ourselves before leaving India to a first class air conditioned train ride, which we did from Patna to New Delhi. Then we flew from New Delhi to Calcutta and met the other fellows. There were six of us, and we flew from Calcutta to Rangoon. We spent a couple of days in Rangoon and then we flew to Bangkok, Thailand which was quite an extraordinary experience.

This was 1966. The war in Vietnam was escalating; American involvement was increasing. Bangkok was the rest and relaxation place for American GI's. So this was my first immersion in a westernized, really westernized city, Bangkok, after two years. This was the first time I could really speak English—my English after two years. This was the first time that we realized that we would encounter a significant cultural change -- the music, the night life—after two years in India. I had to stop and think about what I wanted to say in English. Then we flew from Bangkok to Hong Kong. Hong Kong in the 1960s was just an incredible place. Then from Hong Kong to Tokyo, where we ran into the extraordinary expense of being in a city like Tokyo. From Tokyo to Hawaii, Hawaii to Los Angeles.

In Los Angeles we stayed with the Gallus family. D.B. Gallus and his family were among the first physicians to be brought into the Peace Corps to provide medical and health care to the volunteers at the sites where they worked. Their doctors' assignments were for one year, not the two years, and they were paid a much higher rate. They weren't really Peace

Corps volunteers; they were professionals. We had become very close with D.B. Gallus and his family. They had been assigned to Patna. They left six months before we did. They went back to the States having been in India for a year. We promised that upon arriving in the United States, we would visit with them. So Artie and I decided to visit the Gallus family in Los Angeles. We stayed with them for about four or five days. This was really my first point of entry back into the United States. By now it was September. We took about two weeks to travel back to the States.

Within hours of arriving in Los Angeles and getting settled in the Gallus home, I did a number of things. I called a number of people -- a number of students at Oregon State University when we had trained and who had become friends of ours. I also called my parents. I had not talked to my parents in two years. I had lived for two years in a society where Hindi was predominant, and when you did speak English or were in an English speaking environment, it was British English. In order to be understood, you really had to adopt to that sort of British brogue that Indians had adopted for themselves. All telecommunications were done in English. So if I wanted to place a trunk call (long distance) to Calcutta or New Delhi, I had to speak the British English very forcefully and very distinctly. So I called my parents who were in North Carolina. I remember putting the phone back on my ear, because the southern accent, which I had not heard in two years, shocked me back into the reality of being in the States and brought me to the realization that I had been away from my parents for such a long period of time without ever having heard their voices. Most of us had been told during the Peace Corps training program that we would probably not be able to talk to anyone in the States, because the telephone system in India was archaic, unreliable, and expensive and that therefore we most likely would not talk to our parents for two years. We didn't have telephones in India. So they couldn't call us. We wrote to each other frequently, but their voices really shocked me.

I then spent four or five days at the Gallus' and at the end of that period of time, I jumped on an airplane and flew to Portland, Oregon, and rented a car and drove to Oregon State. I walked the campus. I took a deep breath from time to time. I wanted to smell the Douglas fir trees. The training program at Oregon State was so good, so incredible good. We got so many incredible people from there, and the experience that we had in and around the State of Oregon and Washington State was so extraordinary that a lot of us were drawn back to that part of the country. So that was my immersion back into the United States.

*Q: Then what did you do?*

ROBINSON: Two things. The Peace Corps had offered me two positions before I left India. They offered me a position to recruit college students to join the Peace Corps, and they offered me a position in a training program at the University of Missouri at Columbia, Missouri, to teach the politics, the history and the culture of India.

While in India, beginning in 1965, I started to think about what I was going to do after the Peace Corps. I took the graduate record exam. I thought about going to law school again, but one of my classmates at Ohio State with whom I had worked closely in African

archeology, wrote me. We had always talked about going to Kenya and Tanzania to dig in Olduvai Gorge with the late Dr. Louis B. Leakey. She wrote to me during the time I was in India, "Why don't we contact Dr. Leakey and see if he will extend an invitation as graduate students to work with him on the Olduvai Gorge." It was a long shot -- a real long shot. But I told her to go ahead which she did. Dr. Leakey responded affirmatively. "Of course. You get here; we will take care of everything else. We will let you work with us for one year." That is like a dream come true. As I said, I minored in African archeology.

But my draft board said "no." They would not give me a deferment to go to Kenya and Tanzania. This was 1966 when we were building up in Vietnam. At the same time I got turned down by my draft board, I received a graduate assistantship at the State University of New York in Binghamton, New York. They had set up a department of anthropology at SUNY Binghamton -- a special graduate program at the master's level. But it was cultural anthropology; it wasn't physical anthropology. You could take courses in physical anthropology and archeology, but the focus of this department was cultural anthropology. It was only available to returning Peace Corps volunteers. There were slots for 20 returning volunteers.

I was offered a graduate assistantship. The students were former P.C. volunteers who had served in virtually every region of the world where the Peace Corps worked. So I went to Binghamton University. I had to look for the city on a map. Where was Binghamton U? I don't know anything about the school. I found out that it was close to Rochester and Syracuse because it snowed all the time. It was cold.

So after I finished the Peace Corps training program at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri, I went back to Greensboro, North Carolina, with the money that I had gotten from my Peace Corps experience -- my allowance had been about \$1600, plus the money that I made at the Peace Corps training program in Missouri. With this new found wealth I bought myself a Corvair Monza. You remember the Chevrolet Corvair Monza, with its engine in the back? I bought one of those cash for, I think, about \$2300. I drove to Binghamton, New York, and started school for a master's degree. In December of 1966, I went home like everybody does for Christmas. I got back to Binghamton ten days later, and during the time that I was home for Christmas, my draft board had reclassified me from 2-S which was a student deferment to 1-A which meant that I was going to be drafted. I remember calling my Selective Service Board agent who was a lady named Mrs. Copeland. I had returned to Binghamton on January 2 or 3 where I found the notice from the draft board. It was snowing like hell outside. I will never forget it. I called her, and I said, "Mrs. Copeland, this is Leonard Robinson. I am calling from Binghamton, New York. I have just returned from ten days in Greensboro. I understand that in the rare reclassified cases, you are given ten days to appeal the board's action. That is what the card says. That is what your letter also says. Now, I, like every other college student, have been home for Christmas away from my mailing address. I am calling to ask if I can be given an extension on the ten day appeal." She said, "Oh no, we can't do that. We can't give you an extension on the appeal. When is your birthday?" I said, "April 21."

She said, "Oh, Mr. Robinson, we are going to get you. We are going to draft you." I remember hanging up the phone saying, "Like hell you will."

That event changed my life because I did not want to go to Vietnam. When I lived in India, which was closer to Vietnam than Greensboro, NC, the "domino" theory was being espoused. When you are in the environment where these things are happening, you have a different perspective. But we all bought into the "domino" theory which assumed that if we didn't check the "Commies" in Vietnam, they were going to be into Malaysia and then Burma, and then other countries in South Asia. That is how we were thinking. But once I got back to the States and to that graduate school atmosphere of SUNY Binghamton known locally as Harper College, I read newspapers and listened to those who were pro and con about the war in Vietnam. I came to realize that to a very great extent Vietnam was a political war, not a war that the Commies were using for expansion purposes. I changed my attitude about the war in Vietnam. Immediately I began to consider what my options were. Was I going to cross the border into Canada like a lot of college students, including graduate schools ones, were doing. Or should I join the Navy and go into an officer training program? What the hell was I going to do?

At that time the selective service was giving an exam if you were in graduate school. If you scored 80 or above, then they would reinstate your student deferment. If you scored below 80, they would draft you. They wouldn't let you finish graduate school in those days. I decided to go and see if I could fight being drafted. So I took the exam and I scored above 80. I don't remember exactly what I scored, but although I might have won another deferment, I knew that after graduate school I was still going to be drafted.

Then something very miraculous happened. I was in Washington during spring break of 1967. In March of 1967 I had come to Washington to see some friends, in particular a white guy named Fred Madison who worked for the Peace Corps in Washington and his wife. Fred had come to India two or three times on Peace Corps assignments, and he was a really neat, cool guy. He loved Jazz, and he, Artie and I developed a great relationship. He invited me to come down and spend spring break with him. One very cold day in March 1967 he said "Let's go down to Peace Corps headquarters. I want to introduce you to some people." He wanted to introduce me to Sepoy Lewis, the founder of Africare, who was a legend in the Peace Corps at the time. I was 22 years old. I turned 23 that April. So he took me down to the Peace Corps office. I ran into all these people whom I had known in India in the Peace Corps who were now officers in the Peace Corps in Washington. "Great to see you, Lenny. We need people like you to go back overseas and be associate directors or directors." I said, "I am in graduate school." But then it came to me: if I were selected to go back overseas, Peace Corps was an automatic deferment during your tour in the agency. It did not mean that you could not be drafted after you got back from your experience either as a volunteer or a Peace Corps professional. But it would provide a deferment during your service with the Peace Corps; it would have bought me some time. I did a quick calculation. If I took a position as a Peace Corps professional, by the time I got back -- it would have been a three or four year assignment- I would be 26. Once you turned 26, you were no longer of draftable age. I couldn't be conscripted. So I went through a series of interviews that week. I had opportunities to go

to South Korea, Micronesia, or back to India as an associate Peace Corps director. I said, "This is pretty neat."

In those days, the final staffing decisions were made by the deputy Peace Corps director. At this time, the deputy Peace Corps director was a guy named Brent Ashenbrenner who had been my director in India when I was a volunteer. He and I worked closely together, particularly during the time when I was trying to get President Johnson to shift special PL-480 food grains to maize, in order to help me out with my poultry farming demonstrations. Brent and I had become close. I had established a rapport with him.

I walked into his office Friday evening at 6:30 in March of 1967. Brent said, "Lenny, it is good to see you again. You have gone through this Washington headquarters here and everybody wants you. But the decision I have made is that if you want to come back to the Peace Corps, we want you to go back to India." It was a miracle. A dream come true.

*Q: Back in the brier patch in a way.*

ROBINSON: It did put me back in the brier patch, but I was going back as a Peace Corps professional. More importantly it was my ticket out of Vietnam. Yes, I had to go back to SUNY Binghamton and negotiate a leave of absence from graduate school. What I did there was to say, "Look, I am going to work on my master's thesis," because it was on an aspect of the Indian caste system. So the India assignment fit very neatly. SUNY Binghamton gave me a three or four year leave of absence.

So I accepted the Peace Corps position as associate program director for India, for South India. I was 23 years old at the time. I went back to SUNY Binghamton, negotiated the leave of absence and my academic work towards my credentials. I came back to Washington in June, 1967 to undergo Peace Corps training for a three month period before going to India. That is how I dealt with Vietnam and the draft situation. As I said, it changed my life.

*Q: You are off to India. Tell us about the program in 1967?*

ROBINSON: The Peace Corps had been growing exponentially by this point. There were a little over a thousand Peace Corps volunteers in India in 1967 and it peaked to about 2500 during my time. I had 600 volunteers in my region alone.

*Q: Were you married in 1967?*

ROBINSON: I was married on October 31, 1966, to someone I had known in college. What we both hadn't realized was that I had changed -- dramatically. In retrospect, I think my marriage in part was due to a feeling of being lonely and distanced from American society. When I got back from India, I mentioned that it was difficult for me to speak English without thinking about what I wanted to say because I had become so immersed in India and its language style. I felt out of touch socially. My wife-to-be was someone that I could communicate with, that I could relate to. I think that I

unconsciously clung to her for emotional and psychological support during this difficult period of re-adjustment. She was a familiar person, a familiar voice. We married in October of 1966. But shortly after we got to Binghamton it became very clear that I wasn't the same Leonard Robinson that either of us had known before my stay in India. We had difficulty relating to each other and so that marriage ended rather quickly.

*Q: When you returned to India, how were U.S.-India relations?*

ROBINSON: As I said earlier, during the time of the Johnson administration, there were great ideological struggles between India and the United States, primarily because of the Cold War. "Games" were being played between India, the Soviet Union and the United States. For example the PL-480 "food for peace" program was highly controversial, despite the fact that there had been a drought-created famine in India in 1965-1966. Indira Gandhi was the prime minister. She and Lyndon Johnson had their issues. So there were some degrees of tension between the United States and India. The Peace Corps was more often than not criticized by various elements in Indian society as being a spy network for the CIA. We were not welcomed in all strata of Indian society Yet at the same time the Peace Corps was growing in India by leaps and bounds. In fact, in retrospect, I think we got too big.

*Q: Was there an attempt at Peace Corps headquarters before you went out to India, to keep a distance from the State Department? Did you talk to people at the State Department or was this sort of a no-no?*

ROBINSON: There was a veil that came from the Foreign Service side, not from the Peace Corps side. We had been oriented by the Peace Corps -- first during my training as a volunteer, and then a staff member when I went back the second time -- to believe that the Peace Corps was different. The Peace Corps openly, consciously embraced the people in the society where we worked. It was a people-to-people program. The Foreign Service was portrayed as elitist, standoffish. They lived in their own enclaves and compounds behind mud walls, so to speak. Very few of them could speak the native language. So there were cultural and stylistic difference in mode of operation between the Foreign Service officers and the Peace Corps members.

AID officials or AID *per se* were viewed differently. We looked upon the embassy as being THE Foreign Service. AID officials were American Government officials working on an international basis. There was an affinity as well, because AID officials cast themselves as being expert technicians as opposed to new Peace Corps volunteers who were lay people with three months' training. We really didn't know that much. Peace Corps volunteers in India and elsewhere around the world felt a little like second class American citizens. In India, Chester Bowles was just leaving as ambassador when I got there to be followed by Kenneth Galbraith.

Chester Bowles and his wife, Sally Bowles, broke the mold. They were infinitely famous. They were famous in New Delhi and India because they reached out to the Indian community. Sally was responsible for helping sweeper women. These were people who

kept the streets and alleyways clean all around Indian communities. They were the lower caste people. Because of being bent over all their lives sweeping, a lot of them developed serious chronic back problems. Sally introduced the long handled broom in and around Old Delhi, and got these women to change from the small broom that forced them to stoop over to a “stand up” broom. That was a small but very significant innovation on her part. She wore a Sari.

Chester Bowles encouraged Foreign Service officers to learn Hindi or Urdu, and to reach out to the community after working hours. “Get out from behind the desk; get out from the embassy compound.” Chester Bowles refused to live in the official ambassador’s residence in New Delhi, but he did give permission to the Peace Corps to allow volunteers to use the swimming pool which was behind the ambassador’s residence. When I went to New Delhi, that was one of the places where we could go and have some fun. So we could use the ambassador’s pool, but the commissary and its swimming pool were off limits.

During my first tour, there was an American consulate in Calcutta. Both in Delhi and sometimes in Calcutta there were movies shown one or twice a week, I think, at one of the U.S. government buildings. In Delhi, it might have been at the old USIS (United States Information Service Agency) building. But the movies were only for Foreign Service officers and their wives and dependents. If you had your identification card as a Peace Corps volunteer, you could also attend. We took advantage of that. That was the one little perk that we did have. Otherwise we had to go see Hindi movies. Sometimes they had subtitles, but most of the time they did not. It that was a great way to learn Hindi.

By the time I returned in July of 1967, the relationship between the Peace Corps and the embassy had evolved. It was a more mature relationship. There was interaction at the professional level between Peace Corps directors, associate Peace Corps directors and their families and Foreign Service officers. From the ambassador on down, there was interaction. By policy, Peace Corps still did not use the commissary. We were encouraged to purchase on the local market. You could order, in the case of India, goods from Singapore, or from Kuala Lumpur. A lot of us did that.

Initially I was based in Bangalore. Bangalore was the regional headquarters for the Peace Corps in southern India. After a year we got so big that I moved my office to Madras to really concentrate on the states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. We had an American consulate in Madras. I developed a very close relationship with all of the officials from the consul general on down as well as with the Public Affairs officer (PAO).

*Q: The Public Affairs officer was the head of the USIA at the post.*

ROBINSON: That’s right. In Madras, I played tennis with consulate officials. We socialized a lot with American officials and businessmen, such as the Bank of America people who had an office in Madras. We socialized with Indians; we socialized with everybody.

I had a membership in the Madras Club which was an old British club, that had admitted Americans over the years. My membership in the Madras Club was sponsored by two consulate officials. I remember one of them in particular whose name was Bill Keough. Bill Keough was the executive officer of the American consulate. He and his family were extremely nice to me. I think he may have even helped me identify the house and office when we set up our Peace Corps operation in Madras. The American consulate was in a brand new consulate building, built in a prominent spot right in downtown Madras -- Mount Road to be exact. One afternoon, I think this was probably mid-1968, I was having a conversation one afternoon with the political officer who was my tennis partner. We were sitting in his office. I remember very vividly that he had his blinds almost closed, but there were rays of sun coming in. Out of the blue he said, "You know, Lenny, we could use people like you." I did a double take, and I leaned forward in my seat and I said,

"What did you say?"

"We could use people like you. You know I work for the agency, and we could really use people like you." In fact, that is when I learned that he was the station chief for the consulate in Madras. Even though I had some sense of the agency while I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Bahawalpur, I had not focused on learning about intelligence gathering when I was a Peace Corps director in south India. So this exchange shocked me for several reasons. For one, the Peace Corps, as written in its basic authorizing legislation, could not have any contact whatsoever with intelligence organizations. There was a strict rule about that. As I mentioned earlier, there was a newspaper that was published every two weeks in Bombay which incessantly criticized and castigated the Peace Corps for being a spy ring of the United States government. I did know that our intelligence officers had an Indian counterpart who shadowed them. They knew who were our intelligence officers and we knew who they were. That was by agreement.

So I became a little concerned because he was a tennis partner of mine, and we spent a lot of time together during my first year and a half in Madras. I was concerned that the Indian intelligence apparatus might come to the conclusion that Leonard Robinson, the Peace Corps director, was passing on information to somebody inside the consulate general's office in Madras. So I stood up and said, "I think you have compromised me, and I won't have anything else to do with you. I did not know that you were who you now have revealed that you are." So with that I walked out of his office, and I never saw him socially again. I didn't play tennis with him. I wanted the break to be abrupt because I did not want whoever might be watching from the other side to continue to have an impression that I was in bed with American intelligence agents.

That did not stop me, however, from socializing with other officers from the consulate. We had very good relationships. The Peace Corps had an excellent relationship in south India not only with the American Consulate but also with all Indian government officials. I also had a very good relationship with the PAO, which I developed over the 1968-1970



period. He is the one who encouraged me to take the Foreign Service exam and to join the Foreign Service.

During this period, Peace Corps executives did carry an official passport, and were classified as Foreign Service Reserve officers. So I already had one foot in the Foreign Service. One day, the PAO said, "We would really like to have someone of your talent working for the United States Information Agency." When I returned to Washington in 1970 to be the Peace Corps director for minority recruiting under Joseph Blatchford, who was the Peace Corps director then, I had the option at the time of joining USIS because of the PAO in Madras, and I'll get to that in a few moments.

*Q: I would like to talk a little bit about what the Peace Corps was doing in southern India. What were the activities and where did you fit in?*

ROBINSON: The Peace Corps in south India was innovative. It was dynamic. We had a group of professionals who were committed to the Peace Corps. Paul Zimmerman was the regional director. Paul Zimmerman was really my first professional supervisor. He and his wife, Margo, were terrific. He was very innovative. His managerial style was good. I think he was an attorney by training. On the staff, we had a guy named Tom Carter who is now with AID, and Tom Ariens, John Croney and myself. As I said, Paul Zimmerman was the regional director and he had four associate directors. They were experts in one field or another. Our Peace Corps volunteers were involved in community development and intensive agricultural production, particularly in rice and maize cultivation. We had volunteers in poultry farming, which was my field of expertise. We had Peace Corps volunteers who were working in commercial markets, particularly in "supermarkets". That was one of the projects that Tom and I supervised. We had Peace Corps volunteers working in well construction which was very important in terms of having sufficient water for human consumption as well as for irrigation of agricultural fields. Southern India produced a lot of food for the entire subcontinent.

We had Peace Corps volunteers in teacher training. We had Peace Corps volunteers who were teaching English as a second language.

I said that the Peace Corps in south India was innovative; I think we were probably the first program anywhere in the world to conduct a training program totally in country. Usually Peace Corps volunteers were trained somewhere in and around the United States or in Hawaii and then brought to the country. I first proposed this to a Peace Corps meeting for all Peace Corps directors when it was held in New Delhi, "You know, we need to establish a Peace Corps training capability in India, because India is a tough country to understand from far away." India was culturally so different from the United States. A lot of our volunteers had a tough time adjusting. We also decided to assign volunteers to towns and villages in clusters, so that they could to learn the language. We had come to recognize that when we had more than two volunteers stationed in the town, or in close same proximity, they tended to gravitate towards each other and they wouldn't learn the local language. They didn't feel comfortable integrating into local society.

So we set up a Peace Corps training program whereby trainees were brought to south India. They had been trained in a large city like Madras or Bangalore in groups. But we changed that so that rather than staying in a hotel, we assigned each trainee to an Indian family for the entire three month training period. We believed that with an immediate immersion through living with an Indian family right from the beginning, the volunteers would get through the initial cultural shock successfully. The immersion also made acclimation to village living easier. They would learn the language faster. They would learn the cultural mores and folkways and the nuances and idiosyncrasies quicker. They would adjust and adapt quicker. So that is what we did in south India, and it worked.

That is not to say we didn't have any problems. We did assign volunteers to work on their own in various locations, but we put them within the proximity of probably six miles of each other. We would concentrate volunteers in an area so that we could have an impact particularly in terms of agricultural projects. We wanted to see an early impact. We also assigned a counterpart to each of our volunteers, so that they could work together as a pair. So we did a lot of innovative things that made the Peace Corps more popular and more acceptable.

If a volunteer decided to leave for whatever reason, it created a problem because we had worked so hard to make sure that the Peace Corps was understood prior to a volunteer's assignment. When my volunteer partners and I got to India during my first assignment, the local people didn't quite understand what this Peace Corps concept was all about. The concept of volunteerism simply did not exist in Indian society. The Indians didn't reach out and help each other because of the caste system. So they didn't understand what the Peace Corps' basic philosophy was all about. They were suspicious of us. "You will come and help us? What do you mean you will come and help us? You know, we don't have people in our own society to do that for the most part; so why would you come from 12,000 miles away to help total stranger?"

But in south India, we made sure that there was a demand for the Peace Corps volunteers. We said that "He or she is coming to work with you, to help you get some problems solved, to move in a certain direction in terms of technology and expertise, etc." We did such a good job of that, that when a Peace Corps volunteer decided to terminate his or her tour early, an Indian official would usually call me or send me a letter or telegram and ask, "So and so is leaving, what are we going to do? We need to have somebody come and replace this Peace Corps volunteer." That was the kind of problem to have.

We also tried to initiate a domestic Indian Peace Corps by encouraging government officials to develop Peace Corps-like programs that would be staffed by Indians themselves utilizing the American model. We did have some volunteers, both male and female, who could not handle the loneliness. It was a small number, but in two or three cases we did get to the point where we had to make the decision to send them back to the United States because they were not adjusting well; they were not coping well with their circumstances.

*Q: Could you have brought them back to a city and let them work in a city where they would have more companionship?*

ROBINSON: It would have been difficult because no jobs had been identified for them. The assignment of Peace Corps volunteers was really tied to the identification of a very specific task or series of tasks which required the training they had received. When someone decided abruptly to leave, because they were lonely or whatever, it was difficult to get them transferred to another town or a city or even in Madras where Peace Corps headquarters is located.

I had one Peace Corps volunteer who came from Seattle. Stuart was his name. He came to me out of the blue one Friday and said, "I have gotten this telegram from my girlfriend, and she is feeling lonely. She says she has found somebody else. If I can just get on a plane and fly back to Seattle for the weekend, I am sure I can fix this up and I will come back." I said, "Stuart, you can't get to Seattle in a weekend, and come back to south India." He clearly had flipped out. So we send him back permanently.

I had a very attractive woman from Akron, Ohio. It is amazing how you can remember some people's names. Her name was Adrian. She was just lonely. She just couldn't adjust. I had her based in Mudhol which is a big city in the middle of Karnataka. It was culturally very rich, but she couldn't make it there. She asked to go home, so we sent her back to the States. I think that the Peace Corps in India had impact in general, but in south India, we had a tremendous impact. The issues and problems that we encountered were not insurmountable.

*Q: How did you deal with the local politicians? Did your program appear to be like patronage for the local bosses and that in a way involve you in the political process. How did this work?*

ROBINSON: That is a very astute question. My answer will draw both on my experiences as a volunteer and as a director. Peace Corps volunteers became status symbols. We were invited to all the weddings. Everybody wanted to have an American in their social settings. Since we were outsiders to a very structured society based on an interpretation of Hinduism including the caste system, we had access to all levels of that society. We consciously encouraged that opportunity by reaching out as Peace Corps volunteers to all the people across the spectrum of Indian society. The idea of having an Indian counterpart assigned to each volunteer was designed to cushion the potential political impact of having a foreigner in their midst. If the Peace Corps volunteer was successful in establishing a good working relationship with his or her Indian counterpart, a lot of the potential political tension dissipated over time. Yes, we were agents of change. We were agents of action. We were agents of information. Change obviously connotes bringing new ideas to the table. "What do you mean the block development officer won't bring in the seeds and fertilizers and pesticides that he promised you? Let's get on our bike and ride into town and see what the hell is going on." Without the Peace Corps volunteer's presence, the Indian farmers or the Indian Ag extension officers stationed in that village wouldn't have gone to town to raise those questions. So the

volunteer brought an element of activism. Sometimes that backfired. I think I mentioned to you that my block development officer, Mr. Yardov, was perfectly content to let me and my first partner in the Peace Corps just sit there and vegetate for weeks until we jumped on our bikes and ran into town and said, "We came here to help, not to sit here and eat all day and sip tea." We had to confront him. That was unheard of in Indian society. "The Americans have confronted the block development officer." He was a power at that level, but we were able to penetrate that aura. The Peace Corps volunteers did help to stir the pot. There may have been a number, but I cannot recall any instance where we had to pull a Peace Corps volunteer out of a village because he or she raised so much hell politically in terms of trying to get things done that it caused the local authorities to want to expel them from the community. Because of the sensitivities conveyed to Peace Corps trainees during their training programs, most volunteers had some sense of how to handle these situations without causing undue damage. They knew that they were outsiders, visitors, guests. They understood that they could not go in and change things immediately.

We did have an instance in Patna, the capital of Bihar, in a Peace Corps program to train mechanics who worked in the maintenance garages of UNICEF and UNESCO vehicles. We trained Indian mechanics on how to do maintain that fleet differently or more efficiently. We had one volunteer, from Utah, who did not adjust very well to his new cultural environment. He was so frustrated by his inability to persuade, to influence his Indian coworkers to adopt certain measures that he started kicking them. The word got back to us. I was a Peace Corps volunteer leader at this point—not a Peace Corps director. But there were quite a large number of Peace Corps volunteers living around Patna -- almost ten of us and we heard about this incident. We were the older group. We heard about what was going on, and so we talked to this guy. "You can't kick them to try to get them to do what you want to do. That is ridiculous. Work with them." But we eventually had to recommend to the Peace Corps office in Calcutta to get him out of the country. He was almost taken out in a strait jacket. He had just flipped out.

I think that we were successful in India. We generally succeeded in having Peace Corps volunteers who worked well with their co-workers and their counterparts which allowed them, when they left, not to create a vacuum in terms of their expertise. They were able to influence subtly that intangible that we all strive for—e.g. the ability and willingness to adopt certain traits that the Peace Corps volunteer had brought with him or her, so that once he or she departed the scene, the Indians would continue to conduct themselves in a way that was a little bit better because of their expertise they had acquired from the volunteer. We always asked the Peace Corps volunteers to look at the intrinsic. You can't measure it. You might see it, but you might also not see it. But it was part of the subtle evaluation of the influence that a Peace Corps volunteer might have had over two years. But we also used to tell them, "If you come back a year from now, will you see that some of the things you did as a Peace Corps volunteer that really rubbed off on the local people? If you are not able to do that, then that means you worked in a vacuum. You spent two years in India; you spent two years in a village; you did your thing, but what did you leave behind in terms of physical evidence that if you return in a year or two you can say that you helped initiate that?"

*Q: Of course, this Peace Corps international volunteerism was a new thing for us. It was part of the 1960s and its youth activism. Did you find that while you were in India, that a counterpart action was developing within the educated class in India. In other words were Indian young people taking a look at your program and saying that they didn't want to do things the same old way; they wanted to get involved.*

ROBINSON: Some, but minimally. As a volunteer I met perhaps maybe eight Indian men that might have taken on some of our attitudes. There were no women in my group. In Indian society you just did not have much contact with single women. But we did have these eight guys who hung around us. Victor Benny who was an Anglo-Indian; he was a hotel manager—well educated, very smart. Another Indian worked for USIS. He was probably the highest ranking Indian in USIS, Patna. Then there were a group of guys who came from the upper class, or upper middle class. Tharseen was one of them, and there were others. They watched us and observed. Relationships with them evolved beyond just a status symbol. They were seen as hanging out with the Americans. They could claim that they knew us. We became friends with their families. My partner Arnie and I knew an Indian family in Lucknow quite well; we used to spend much time with them, as well as another two or three Indian families in the Dargeen area. In Calcutta, we became friendly with some middle class Indian families. So, I would say that we did have a positive influence on certain Indians in terms of their attitude towards their own society. We used to have great intellectual conversations all the time, about Indian culture and mores, especially the caste system, and Hinduism and how people were treated etc.

*Q: Were you getting any commentaries from you volunteers in south India? The Vietnam war was at its height and protests were at their height. Just by definition Peace Corps volunteers were not enthusiastic supporters of the war, to say the least. Did you have problems keeping your group under control?*

ROBINSON: We didn't have any protests among the Peace Corps volunteers. That is a very interesting question because I have a number of reactions. One, the "domino" effect was a theory that was espoused a great deal among our politicians in the 1960s; it was their rationale about why we needed to be in Vietnam; e.g. to check the spread of communism. Bihar is not too far from China and the Soviet Union. You could sort of see the possibility of "dominos" falling right in front of your face. So being in South-East Asia generated a different kind of feeling about Vietnam than when I was back in the United States. We knew that Peace Corps volunteers were completing their tours as volunteers, returning to the States and being drafted and in many cases being killed on active duty; that was a reality that impacted all of us. When we flew from Bangkok to Hong Kong in August of 1966, we flew over Da Nang. I remember that clearly. We flew on a Pan Am flight on a clear day with some puffy white clouds. The captain came on the broadcasting system and said, "We are flying over Da Nang, and we are at 35,000 feet." We all said, "God, we don't want to come back to this place. We don't want to be down on the ground there." There was a clear dichotomy between those men who served in the Peace Corps in the early to mid-1960s as opposed to those who served in the late 1960s.

In the early 1960s, people joined the Peace Corps because they were committed to a spirit exemplified by the Peace Corps. Vietnam was not an issue at the time. But in the late 1960s, men were coming to the Peace Corps who were not as committed to its idealism as was my generation. They were in the Peace Corps because it was a way to escape the draft that would most likely have them end in Vietnam. So there was a different attitude that we had to deal with. The volunteers were smart, savvy. They were concerned about the war.

As I said, we didn't have problems in India with Peace Corps volunteers demonstrating in front of consulates or the embassy in Delhi. Quite frankly, outside of my social interactions with Indians and Americans in and around Bangalore and Madras, there wasn't a lot of intense discussion about Vietnam. I don't ever recall the threat of volunteers protesting or anything like that. The real problem that we had, relative to Vietnam, was the fact that the male volunteers were hard to keep engaged in their jobs. A lot of them were biding their time. Just hanging out, killing time. I would say that once every six weeks, I was in my Jeep Cherokee riding all over south India, checking on the Peace Corps volunteers; I would guess that maybe 20% of the male volunteers were not pulling their weight. They were not as engaged as Peace Corps volunteers as their predecessors had been during my time, because, as I said, they didn't have that intensive commitment and loyalty to the Peace Corps precepts. That was due to Vietnam. The volunteers of the late 1960s were overseas just biding their time.

*Q: Your area of southern India included Kerala? It was a Marxist state that everybody in the Foreign Service knew because it was the one Marxist state in India, and we all sort of looked at that crosswise. Did we do anything there? How did that work out?*

ROBINSON: We had Peace Corps volunteers in Kerala. I remember a trip that Tom Carter and I took to Kerala to check on the Peace Corps volunteers throughout the state. There was an Indian official in Kerala who was very well educated, very intelligent, with tremendous vision. He and Tom Carter had an incredible relationship which continues to this day. He understood Americans and their zest for volunteerism. He was the champion supporter for the Peace Corps in Kerala. We didn't have any political problems because the Peace Corps was apolitical and so recognized. We were not tied to U.S. foreign policy per-se, not to the U.S. intelligence apparatus. At our headquarters in Bangalore, we made sure that we maintained philosophically and in terms of our operating policy that separation between U.S. foreign policy and the Peace Corps. We tenaciously clung to our Congressional mandate to put Peace Corps volunteers in India without regard to ideology. So I think that this Indian official saw this commitment and staked his political reputation and obviously his career on encouraging Peace Corps volunteers to serve in Kerala. Because of his trusted relationship with Tom Carter we got along well in Kerala. We didn't have any political problems.

*Q: When you left south India in 1970, what was the state of the Peace Corps operation?*

ROBINSON: The state of the Peace Corps operation in southern India in 1970 was excellent. Joe Blatchford and his wife, Winnie, visited southern India in the early 1970s.

He and his wife stayed with me in Madras. We toured a number of Peace Corps volunteer sites together. The whole program in south India was deemed successful for all the reasons I have conveyed to you. When I left south India in May of 1970, I think my primary concern was that the Peace Corps program had gotten too big. I could routinely get on a plane to fly from Madras to Bangalore or from Bangalore to Delhi or elsewhere, and I would see a Peace Corps volunteer on the same plane. Same on any train; I would run into a Peace Corps volunteer. We went from less than a hundred volunteers when I was a Peace Corps volunteer in 1964-1965, to about 400 volunteers when I left my first tour in India. By the time I left India in 1970 we had an estimated 2500 volunteers throughout India. That was too many volunteers, too many Americans. Many of the volunteers were mistaken for what we used to call "world travelers" as opposed to hippies. As I mentioned earlier, a lot of hippies came to India in the 1960s. Peace Corps volunteers were by and large clean cut, well mannered, but there were a lot of Americans who were traveling through India who were hippies, but became identified as Peace Corps volunteers. Who were these scruffy Americans showing up all over our country? That became a major public relations problem for us and may well have contributed to the government of India asking the Peace Corps to leave India in the mid-1970s. "We no longer need you; we have grown out of the need for the Peace Corps." I think in part that view was reinforced because we had become too visible.

*Q: Then when you left in 1970, where did you go?*

ROBINSON: I came back to Washington. Joe Blatchford, when he visited south India, said to me, "Lenny, I would like for you to come back to the States when your tour is over here and head up our minority recruitment division at headquarters. We don't have enough Peace Corps volunteers who represent the mosaic of America. We need to be more diversified. I think that you can come back and lead the effort to have the Peace Corps revitalized, re-energized by recruiting more African-Americans, Hispanics and native Americans etc."

So that is what I did. I came back and headed up the minority recruitment effort of the Peace Corps. I was 26 years old when I arrived back in the United States in May of 1970. As I said, Joe Blatchford had offered me the position of director of minority recruitment; he made lots of promises about new resources. I had some definite ideas about how to go about diversifying. I really thought it was important for the Peace Corps to look like America.

Bill Dial was the Peace Corps' regional director for North Africa, the Near East and Southeast Asia; he became my mentor. Bill Dial said, "John Howser who is the deputy Peace Corps director thinks that you are too young to be director of minority recruitment. So he is trying to negate Joe Blatchford's promise to you to make you the director." He said, "Now I have told John Howser that he is wrong, that you are very mature, very bright, etc, etc. So Howser has agreed to see you before making the final decision about whether or not you are going to get this Peace Corps position." I was sitting in Bill Dial's office and he picked up the telephone and he called John Howser and said, "John, Lenny Robinson is sitting right here. I am going to send him upstairs to you." So I went right

upstairs and sat down with John Howser. I said, "Mr. Howser, I understand that you think I am too young to be the director for minority recruitment. I'm here to try to dispel all of your misgivings." That is the way I opened up the conversation. After ten minutes John Howser looked at me and said, "I was wrong. I am approving you as the Peace Corps director for minority recruitment." I accepted the position and got settled in Washington DC.

I became the director of minority recruiting for the Peace Corps. I had lots of ideas and a tremendous amount of energy. I felt a tremendous amount of pressure. I was just 26 when I had my first encounter with an ulcer. I felt a tremendous amount of pressure to succeed in the Washington milieu. I did not have the pressure of Vietnam service because I was 26 and therefore no longer eligible for the draft. I could not be drafted. But I was always a hard charging guy who wanted to succeed and to make a difference.

I inherited a minority recruiting operation that was in a state of inaction -- not disarray, but inaction. I had a wonderful staff of recruiters around the country and I had a wonderful staff in Washington. I wanted to have what I call an immediate impact. That drive took its toll on me in terms of the ulcer.

Ultimately we came up with some creative programs to strengthen minority recruitment. But I was frustrated by the lack of support that I got from Joe Blatchford, which was reflected in the lack of resources, despite his promises. So after being in that position for a year and a half I resigned as director of minority recruitment in late 1971. I walked in to Joe Blatchford's office and I said, "Joe, you have not lived up to your promises." I was cocky, admittedly. By this time I was 27. I said to Joe in sort of a flip way, "Look, you have not given me any of the resources or any of the political support that you promised me when you offered me this job. Quite frankly, I have other things to do. I want to join the Foreign Service and therefore I resign from the Peace Corps" He was shocked. He said, "I know that you want to be in the Foreign Service. I will pick up the telephone and call Secretary of State Rogers, and make sure that you get into the Foreign Service." I said, "No, don't make any more promises because I know you won't follow through." I turned around and I picked up my briefcase and I walked out. Now I walked out in part because I had two other job offers, one of which was to be director of minority affairs for USIA. That came about thanks to the PAO in Madras with whom I had become friends while serving in south India.

*Q: Before we end the discussion about your Peace Corps service, let me ask what were some of the challenges you encountered in getting minority recruitment. I would think this would be a big problem because particularly at that time, most of the minorities were focused on domestic issues and not on overseas service to help others.*

ROBINSON: There are a lot of things I could say about that. First of all, you recall in the 1960s there was a great deal of political change in America from John F. Kennedy's assassination to Martin Luther King's to Robert Kennedy's. The whole civil rights movement really took off in the mid to late 1960s. There was tremendous volatility in American society. All of that impacted people of color and African-Americans in



particular. So I think that there was clearly a suspicion about being in any international program or in any program administered by the U.S. government. Secondly, a lot of African-Americans were more interested in getting an education as opposed to volunteering for two years. Peace Corps paid almost nothing. When I returned from India as a Peace Corps volunteer, I collected a check for about \$2000; after I paid taxes on it, it was probably about \$1800, leaving maybe \$1600 to buy my first car. There were no immediate incentives. You could gain a modicum of vision if you could look positively to the potential multiplier effect of having served as a Peace Corps volunteer. But what did that mean to your career, for your earning power? What did it mean for your ability to understand how people live in cultures other than your own? When I was a Peace Corps volunteer in India in 1965, I was the only African-American in my program. There had been one before me in 1962-1963 whose name was Nominy Robinson. Then there was one other who joined the Peace Corps whom I met behind the American embassy at the swimming pool in early 1966. I recall when we met each other. He said, "Oh you must be the one in the south," and I said, "Oh, you must be the one in the north."

During the time that I was a Peace Corps director, I had maybe three working on my projects; maybe in the entire country there were no more than four or five. So in India we had very few African-Americans or people of color serving in the Peace Corps. There is no question that the Peace Corps was bereft of people of color. The idea of living overseas, the pressures to get an education, to begin to earn money and to help out their parents economically, all of these factors were of tremendous cultural, political importance in the United States at the time.

Just from the advertising, one could have easily reached the conclusion that the Peace Corps was for whites only. I took a look at that in 1970. One of the first things I did was to look at all of the Peace Corps advertising, the brochures, the commercials we had on television. There was one subject on color among all of that media stuff we had, so the perception was, the image was the Peace Corps was lily white. We changed all of that. We developed ads and commercials and brochures that reflected more of the diversity, more of the mosaic of America in the Peace Corps. My father and mother and my parent's best friend who was the president of A&T University. said to me in unison, "Oh, man, you are interested in joining the Peace Corps and going to India. That is worth two Ph.D.s. That kind of exposure, that sort of immersion." So I had encouragement to join the Peace Corps. I had this tremendous family support to join the Peace Corps. They clearly understood the potential impact of such a move. Interestingly enough, during the time Sergeant Shriver was the first Peace Corps director, we had a large number of prominent, well-educated African-Americans like C. Payne Lucas and Joseph Kennedy, Ambassador Williams who had been our ambassador to Ghana, all had been Peace Corps directors. Samuel DeWitt Proctor was the president of A&T University where my father taught. He later became the Peace Corps director in Nigeria. So there were lots of very prominent African-Americans in the Peace Corps at the administrative level.

That didn't necessarily help to bring volunteers in. We had a few, but not nearly as many as I would have hoped for. The Peace Corps today is still struggling today with this diversity issue. Obviously more people of color have joined in the past ten or fifteen

years. One of the things we did was to clearly try to tie service in the Peace Corps with furthering the volunteer's education. I initiated a master's degree program with Texas Southern University in Texas and with Atlanta University in Atlanta. We created a master's degree program in international affairs in order to allow the Peace Corps volunteers to get not only a master's degree, but also two years of Peace Corps service. That worked very well in terms of increasing the numbers for Peace Corps volunteers. But with all the things happening in our society, plus the economic pressures that so many African-Americans and people of color faced, there was a lot of competition for volunteers. A lot of them went to college on scholarships or student loans, and they felt tremendous pressure to make money after graduating. Because of the impact of the civil rights movement, a lot of the corporations were reaching out to African-Americans, and they were being recruited. So the graduating minority student was being offered lots of opportunities to make money in corporate America as opposed to volunteerism in the Peace Corps; most of them went with corporate America.

*Q: When you left the Peace Corps in 1972, what did you do? You said that you had several offers.*

ROBINSON: I turned down the position with USIA. It was offered to me in a letter that I found extremely disturbing. The letter was written in such a way that it sounded like they were doing me a favor offering me the position.

*Q: Patronizing.*

ROBINSON: Patronizing; that is the word. My father was my real advisor and confidante. He was a sociologist, and I called him and said, "I am going to read this letter to you. What do you think?" The first thing he said, was, "Well, Governor, why would you want to become an expert on minority affairs?" He said, "You know, that is not going anywhere. Quite frankly I think that the whole issue of affirmative action will one day become a real political football." My father had an amazing ability to see into the future. He said, "I have always told you that these are your decision. But my advice to you is that this is going to become a dead end. You don't want to become an expert on people of color. So take that for what it is worth."

His advice and counsel had a major impact on me. I turned the position down. The PAO who was the friend who helped me get the position was absolutely blown away by my decision not to join USIA. Instead, I joined an American technical assistance corporation run by a guy named Sol Chapman. Sol Chapman was one of Kennedy's whiz kids along with McGeorge Bundy and McNamara, etc. Sol Chapman was a New Yorker who stayed in Washington after the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. He had a technical assistance consulting firm. Among other things, he had a major contract with OEO (Office of Employment Opportunities) to provide management and technical planning assistance to community action agencies and programs all over the United States.

I did that for about a year. It was very frustrating. For example, I went to a place called Powhatan in western Virginia -- maybe 100 miles west of Richmond in a rural area,

poverty stricken, populated by blacks and whites and native Americans. Large sums of money had been allocated to the area as part of the war on poverty, but the local folks didn't know what to do with it.

Another one of my accounts was Cumberland, Maryland. That experience was an eye opener for me because I saw the despair of rural America which had limited resources and even less experience with how to analyze and plan projects that would have a positive impact on it. Unfortunately, the technical assistance was provided late in the war on poverty. As you know, one of the reasons the war on poverty ended was because of the well documented reality that a lot of the money was either wasted or returned unspent because the recipients didn't know what to do with it. The technical assistance that our organization provided should have been provided at the beginning of the program. The recipients of the assistance should have been taught to analyze the challenges facing them and how do you bring in resources to solve their problems. They needed a vision to help them create a sense of what their requirements were as well as a sense of ownership so that they would not feel that the solutions were being brought in from the outside.

I worked as an assistant director for Chapman's organization for a year. Then I ran into one of my friends and colleagues from my early years in the India Peace Corps program. His name was Hal Crow. Hal Crow had been a volunteer in West Bengal where Calcutta is located. He was in the India "7" program and I was in the India "9" program. Hal said, "You know, I have just joined the management team of something called the Family Planning International Assistance in New York." The deputy director is Brent Ashenbrenner who had been my Peace Corps director, and a guy named John Palmer Smith who was a Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic. Also Dick Durman was a staff member; he had been the Peace Corps physician in south India when I was in there. All of a sudden, my Peace Corps experience came full circle. These guys were encouraging me to leave Washington and move to New York to accept the position of director for management for this new entity created by and funded by AID to provide family planning, maternal and health care services to people in developing countries. After somewhat lengthy negotiations and my decision whether to leave the comfort of Washington DC and going to New York, I accepted the position, and moved to New York in late 1972.

My decision was partially based on my India experience. You can't live in India as long as I did and not come away without a real deep feeling about population explosion.

So I went to New York in the fall of 1972 as special assistant to the director for family planning international assistance and director of management. It was an interesting mix of functions and authority. John Palmer Smith was the director. Hal Crow was director of field operations. The whole staff were graduates of the Peace Corps..

*Q: What was this organization called?*

ROBINSON: It was the "Family Planning International Assistance"(FPIA) organization. It was a newly created entity of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, funded

by a grant from the Agency for International Development. The FPIA was designed to provide family planning services including contraceptives and contraceptive services through indigenous maternal and child health care family planning programs and organizations, both private and governmental, throughout the developing world. It was a global program.

*Q: Who got this organization going?*

ROBINSON: It was the Planned Parenthood headed by John Robbins. John Robbins was a very enterprising guy. Planned Parenthood was a highly political organization. I surmised that John saw an opportunity to create an international wing of Planned Parenthood. He knew there was some money associated with it. I think the initial grant was \$2,000,000. That mushroomed into a multi million dollar operation funded exclusively by AID.

There was an International Planned Parenthood Federation organization based in London -- on St. James or St. Regis Street. I later came to know it quite well because I spent a lot of time there. Initially IPPF was not happy with the establishment of this international wing of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America because they saw it as a potential competitor. It took a few years to work out the relationship between FPIA and IPPF, but we did so in the final analysis. One of my great friends and colleagues was a British guy named James Grey who handled the Africa programs for IPPF out of London. He was initially very standoffish and very unpleasant, but we became good friends. But the availability of funds was the driving factor in the establishment of FPIA.

*Q: What were the politics in the United States about planned parenthood. Was the Catholic Church and anti abortions groups making a lot of waves about your efforts. How was this handled?*

ROBINSON: We were somewhat insulated, for a while, from what was happening domestically because we were focused on issues in other countries. To be sure, there were difficulties in implementing programs in Africa, in Asia, and in Latin America. A lot of governments in those areas were opposed to family planning programs, regardless whether they were privately administered or administered by their respective governments. So, we had our issues around the world.

We held an annual convention in 1974 or 1975, which I remember was somewhat tumultuous because there were anti abortion demonstrations outside the hotel where the convention was held. In my first year I was at Planned Parenthood, the convention was held in San Antonio. I don't recall that there were any demonstrations then. In 1973, I think the annual convention was held at the Washington Hilton Hotel. Then there were lots of demonstrations. There were people who attended the convention who had voiced their opposition to family planning programs in general and abortion programs specifically. But domestic politics didn't really impact on our international program with the exception of those who argued in Congress that there should be no abortion services provided through the Agency for International Development. They maintained that such

programs should not be funded directly through AID or through subsidiaries or affiliates like FPIA. Sterilization services and anti-abortion services were offered through AID's official population programs around the world. There is no question that there is a political lightning rod in the United States that often buffeted the AID population program. Because FPPI was funded by AID, we were acutely aware of many of the political issues impacting AID's annual congressional appropriations. In 1972, it should be noted, AID had a separate bureau, not a division, not an office, but a Bureau of Population Affairs. Dr. Raymond Holt was the director of that Bureau. Joe Spidel was the deputy director. Both of them were medical doctors by trade.

But by the time 1977 rolled around, when the Jimmy Carter administration came into power, the domestic politics were really swirling around. Opposition to population and family planning matters was so intense that the bureau was reduced to an office. Its budget was slashed significantly. Raymond Holt, who had been a very powerful dominant figure in AID, was greatly diminished in power and reach. So domestic politics did have ripple effects.

*Q: You were there from 1972 to when?*

ROBINSON: 1972 to 1977. In my first year in New York, I was asked by the director to negotiate an agreement with the government of Ghana to establish our first Africa regional office in Accra, Ghana. I jumped on a plane in October of 1972 and flew from New York to Accra on the old Pan Am flight to west Africa. That was my first trip to sub-Saharan Africa; my first trip to Africa had been to Egypt. My second trip to Africa and my first trip to sub-Sahara Africa was in the fall-winter of 1972 when I went to Ghana. We selected Ghana because Ghana was the second country in Africa after Tunisia to adopt and implement a national population program. So we knew that the governmental authorities would be receptive and would be helpful in establishing ourselves. After about a year of negotiations, sometime in 1973, the government of Ghana and FPIA successfully concluded an agreement allowing FPIA to establish an office in Accra which would serve all of Africa.

John Palmer Smith appointed me as the first regional director of FPIA in Africa. So in late 1973 or early 1974, my then wife Joy and I moved to Accra. From there, I developed projects to provide funding assistance, service delivery, and contraceptive supply delivery to at least half of the countries on the African continent. Accra was the regional base, but this was during a difficult time politically in Ghana. It was an era of great food shortages -- no food in the city itself. We spent a lot of time driving to Lome, Togo which was about five hours away, to get supplies. In 1975, after reaching an agreement with our New York headquarters office, I started negotiations for a new regional headquarters for FPIA Africa, which turned out to be in Nairobi. Nairobi had a progressive population policy and program which were adopted around 1975.

*Q: To put this into perspective, this was prior to the AIDS epidemic, wasn't it?*

ROBINSON: Yes, way prior.

*Q: When you say contraceptives, what are you talking about? Are you talking about prophylactics, the pills or...*

ROBINSON: FPIA would enter into discussions with private organizations and with governments -- the ministries of health -- to ascertain how we could be of assistance to strengthening or expanding their family planning programs. This offer has to be viewed in an African context, where children are highly valued and where the average woman has at least six live births. Those statistics still hold true, even 30 years later. So, you could not talk about family planning *per se*. Africans were very suspicious of population control plans or family planning programs. They would say to me, "Look at this plan and look at this country. We have all of this land out here and nobody is living on it; nobody is cultivating it." You could not approach family planning from the standpoint of limiting the total number of children a family should have. It is very reminiscent of America in the 1940s and 1950s where you had large families in rural areas. Farmers had five, six, seven children. It was commonplace because this is how they were able to cultivate their farms. They grew their own labor. Male attitudes toward family planning, male attitudes towards sexual practices in particular were such that it made it very difficult to discuss family size.

*Q: Did you run across problems particularly in the Muslim parts of Nigeria or was this pretty much across the board?*

ROBINSON: I never ran into any problems that were driven primarily by religion except in communities in places like Rwanda where Catholicism was predominant. The strategy that my staff and I adopted was to first of all insure that the health of the mother was protected at all times. That meant spacing between children. During traditional times, African women had ways, depending on the way their society was organized, of spacing children's births -- two to three years. Polygamy was part of that tradition. The husband would not sleep with his primary wife after she gave birth to a child. He had two or three other wives depending on whether this was a Muslim family or one that practiced polygamy *per se*. There were traditional ways to insure that the children were spaced over a two, three, four year period of time until they were weaned away from their mother's breasts. A lot of that broke down as families moved away from the rural areas to the cities. As more modernity began to creep into African society after independence, all of those traditional ways of child spacing broke down. So one of the strategies the local organizations employed was to encourage women to practice family planning by emphasizing the health benefits to mother and child to be gained through the spacing of children's births. We never talked about population control. It wasn't about limiting the number of children that African families had *per se*. The emphasis was placed on maternal and child health care.

We offered the whole array of family planning services with oral contraceptives and condoms being the most prevalent. Inter uterine devices like the Dalkon Shield, the copper tee and others were not very popular in Africa because they were seen as invasive -- not natural. Sterilizations or laparoscopies were not encouraged either. I think this was

one of the reasons that the AID program in Africa ran into trouble, AID mission directors and population officers assigned to each of the AID missions around the continent were actively encouraged by Dr. Ray Raymond and his staff to aggressively push sterilization and laparoscopies. But this was something that we in the private sector frowned upon. We did not push that because we knew that in the African context that was not acceptable.

My African experience, as well as living in India for all those years, made me realize the impact of the sheer numbers of people on a society and the consequences of having congested, crowded living conditions in one's environment. Within the setting of Africa, I also felt that from time to time I was kind of a buffer between what I perceived as AID's aggressive population control policy as opposed to the private organizations' more culturally sensitive maternal and child health care approach.

I also learned the necessity to work with men to change their attitudes. Men didn't want to use condoms because men all over the world don't want to use condoms. It reduces the sensation and all these types of things. Pointing out that condom use was one method to control sexually transmitted diseases was a way of persuading people that they should use condoms. The packaging of messages that were culturally based came out of the kinds of assistance we provided through grants to the local entities.

*Q: Were you in touch with people working in India? I was wondering whether there would be a different approach because in India the population problem is so prevalent that the African view would be different from the Indian view.*

ROBINSON: Later in the 1970s when I worked with the Battelle Memorial Institute, I came in contact with the Indian population program, but while at FPIA and working in Africa, I had no communication with people working in India. There was no cross fertilization.

*Q: Looking at it at the time, where did you see successes or failures of your program within the African context?*

ROBINSON: Successes. That is a tough word. I am thinking about the time in 1975 when I went down to South Africa at the invitation of IPPA to ascertain whether there might be receptivity to our programs in an *apartheid* situation. This was my first trip -- August, 1975 -- to South Africa. It is very interesting because I felt that I was viewed as a "honorary white American". That is how African-Americans who were officials of high rank -- whether governmental or private -- could move around in that society and get around the territory of South Africa during the years of *apartheid*.

That is when I first went to Soweto. That was a very difficult assignment, a very challenging anxiety-driven assignment. I came away from that two week immersion in South Africa, Botswana and Lesotho with a different appreciation of the necessity from the African perspective for having access to family planning services. Many women wanted to have relief from having babies every year and a half when the other traditional

methods of child spacing had broken down. They oftentimes felt oppressed; that is the word that came up when dealing with their husbands. They saw contraceptive services as a way to better control their own fertility and to some extent their husband's or their boyfriend's access to them. The politics of family planning in Africa were challenging. In Ethiopia we dealt with the Haile Selassie One Foundation. Women were very much involved. I can't really point out any stark examples of failures. We did not run the programs ourselves. The programs were run by the Africans themselves. We simply provided the technical assistance. We provided them with seed money and we provided them with contraceptive supplies. The actual operations activities of these programs were in the hands of the local authorities.

*Q: In so many countries around the world, corruption is a major problem. As a supplier of funds and contraceptive supplies to officials, were you approached by any of them for activities not covered by contracts?*

ROBINSON: I had some experiences with corruption in Africa when I was with the African Development Foundation, but during the time I was the Africa director for FPIA, we fortunately didn't have any problems with over-invoicing and contraceptive supplies being sold on the open market.

*Q: How about Tanzania with Nyerere who had his own particular brand of socialism and all that? How receptive was Tanzania, or how receptive was Nyerere I almost have to say?*

ROBINSON: We had some family planning programs in Tanzania. I think the key element in FPIA's success in Africa was directly tied to the fact that we did not have any free standing clinics or hospitals that had the FPIA label. It was the Family Planning Association of Kenya or the Family Planning Association of Ghana or the Ghana council of Churches. Always the local or regional or national entity that was involved in providing the maternal or child health care services. Those programs weren't seen as an American operation. People, and particularly governments, viewed them as indigenous operations. From time to time we provided the assistance directly to governments as well -- the ministries of health. But as far as the public was concerned, it was always their government or one of their institutions providing technical assistance and services, not us. I think that was one of the primary reasons why the programs were as successful as they were, including Tanzania.

*Q: When did you leave Africa, what did you do?*

ROBINSON: In 1975, while I was still in Ghana, Congressman James Scheuer from New York came through Accra on a trip that he was taking through about half a dozen African countries. Scheuer was a very prominent, wealthy member of the House of Representatives from New York. I think he represented King County. Scheuer was a proponent of family planning programs services around the world. He was very supportive of the AID program. He also had a very strong degree of respect for the NGO community -- the non governmental infrastructure around the world dealing with health



issues and family planning issues. He came to Ghana because Ghana had a national population program. He came to my office because he wanted to see what was happening in the private sector. I think he spent three or four days in Ghana. During his last visit to my office as we were walking to his car to drive him to the airport, he turned to me and said, "Robinson, you know, I heard about you before I came to Ghana on this trip. I have been very impressed with the way you are managing your operation around the continent, especially here in Ghana. One of the things I want to do is to establish a House Select Committee on population so that Congress can see what works around the world in our bilateral population programs through AID, and as well as through our private NGO family planning maternal and child health care programs around the world." He said, "If I can get this select committee established, I want you to head up my international side, because it is going to be both domestic and international. I would like for you to head up the international side." I expressed my support for his efforts. He said, "I am serious." He got in his car and drove off, and I just sort of brushed aside his comments as being something a typical politician would say, always promising something to his or her constituents.

After I had moved my office to Kenya, I was sitting there one evening. I had just come back from a trip to Addis Abba where I had reviewed our programs in Ethiopia. The phone rang. I picked it up. I was the only one in the office. It was Congressman Scheuer. He said there is about an eight hour time difference. "What are you doing up in the middle of the night?" Then he said, "Do you remember who I am?" I said, "Well, of course I remember." He said, "I am calling to tell you two things. One, the House Select Committee on Population has been established. Two, you have 24 hours to accept or reject the position I promised you a year and a half ago."

I was stunned and barely answered, "Okay". I went home and told my wife, "You won't believe the telephone call I just got." I then called a friend of mine, Kurt Smothers, who was at the time working on the Hill as a counsel for a Senate committee. I said, "Look. I want you to look into this House Select Committee on Population. Tell me whether or not it is really real. I have been offered this position. I have got 24 hours to make a decision. I have just moved a year ago from Accra to Nairobi. All our stuff was flown out here. I have a brand new car coming from Germany. I have to see if I can negotiate a leave of absence from Planned Parenthood. So I have lots to think about and would appreciate your help."

The Congressman had called in November of 1976. November 18, to be exact. Kurt Smothers called me back. He said, "You should take this position, and here is the salary. I think you should go for it given what their pay scale is." I negotiated the salary. Within 24 hours, I obtained preliminary approval from the FPIA headquarters in New York to take a two year leave of absence, because select committees have an initial two year life.

I called Congressman Scheuer and told him I would take his position for two years. He then proceeded to tell me on the telephone, "I am really happy that you are going to do this. I have already talked to Sandy Levin (the brother of Senator Carl Levin)". This was in 1976. Sander Levin had become one of the AID assistant administrators. He had

decided to disband the Bureau of Population Affairs and bring it within his Bureau of Scientific Affairs and Technology as an office of population. Sander Levin and Congressman Scheuer had always talked about the House Select Committee on Population. Sander Levin had said to Congressman Scheuer, "If Robinson takes this position, after the House Select Committee is over, we want him to come over to AID to be director of population for Africa within my bureau." That is how far they had gone with planning my career! So I chuckled at that and said, "Well, it seems like you guys are planning the next three or four years of my life." Then Scheuer said, "Now look, there is a catch to all this. You have to be back here before the end of the year to sign the employment papers. Then you have to arrange to be back here no later than the end of January to start working on the House Select Committee."

As you can well imagine, this timetable sent my whole life into a tizzy. I did fly back to Washington. I signed the papers. I saw where my office was going to be -- I think it was near 4<sup>th</sup> Street, SW, across from the Rayburn Building. Then I flew back to Nairobi. We had everything packed up. There was just the two of us at the time -- no children,. By January 4, 1977, I was back in Washington DC living with my friend, Kurt Smothers and his lady, and working for the House Select Committee on Population. That is what brought me back to Washington, DC and that is what took me into the House of Representatives.

One of the reasons I was interested in taking the position was that having been on the ground where the action was taking place, I thought that I could have an even greater impact by influencing legislation that flowed from the House Select Committee on Population in Washington DC. Paul Simon was on that committee; Gephardt was on that committee. David Stockman was on that committee. There were 16 people on that committee. It was a very strong committee, a very powerful committee at that time. It was an extraordinary committee.

*Q: You worked for this committee for two years? Two years are when to when?*

ROBINSON: Roughly the beginning of 1977 through 1978. The House Select Committee on Population, much to the surprise and chagrin of Congressman Scheuer, was not re-authorized. A lot of domestic politics came into play. I remember a lot of the right-to-lifers testified. They were somewhat fanatical. The whole issue of female circumcision arose during that time, particularly on the domestic side -- as opposed to the international side. There was a lot of controversy around the issue of population control. A lot of the members of the House felt very unnerved by the presence of this select committee. We were on the same floor as the House Select Committee on Assassinations which was investigating the Kennedys' assassinations and Martin Luther King's assassination. Annex 2 of the House office buildings was a hotbed of activity and intrigue. At any rate, the life of the House Select Committee on Population was not extended. Its re-authorization was defeated on the floor of the House much to Scheuer's surprise. So in late 1978, I went to AID as director of population.

*Q: While you were on the select committee, what did you do? I mean what were your major assignments?*

ROBINSON: We held a series of hearings to discuss population issues both on the domestic and the international side. We had a large staff. Michael Teitelbaum who had come down from the Ford Foundation, was our overall staff director. We had a deputy director. There were people on the domestic side -- staff, writers, family planning experts -- and international family planning experts. Vivian Garret was one of my colleagues. Molly Williamson who is presently a deputy assistant secretary of state in international affairs (IO) was a member of my staff. We had to decide on what issues we wanted to hold hearings. Those hearings were arranged by topical clusters. We then had to decide whom we wanted to have testify. We had to obtain Congressman Scheuer's--as well as that of other members -- approval to bring non Americans to testify before Congress. This was a first.

After identifying whom we wanted for testimony, we would contact them, arrange for their travel, and make sure that their testimony focused on the issues in which we were interested. We had to lay out a series of questions to be asked by members of the House Select Committee as each witness testified. Then after the hearings were over, we had to write reports. Seven reports came out of the House Select Committee on Population, four on the domestic side, and three on the international side. Scheuer was a very good writer. He was a stickler for brevity; he used to say to me, "Robinson, I don't need this longer than two pages. If you can't say it in two pages, it is not worth saying. If it is longer than two pages, it is automatically going into the trash can."

I knew I could write well before I got into Congress, but he taught me to be brief. You have to be succinct. You have to be punchy. He gave me a book on how to write in that style. He was a stickler for detail. So it was very intensive.

Working on the Hill was an eye opener from a number of standpoints. First of all, a tremendous number of very intelligent, hard working dedicated people work for Congress, both for the House and for the Senate. We used to work all night long at least two or three times each week. Going to the office on Saturdays and Sundays was commonplace. Secondly, I found the House side of Congress to be extremely disorganized and chaotic in the 1970s. Everybody was running around trying to make decisions. Members of the House are in for a two year term; they are so busy raising money to run for re-election that they have very little time to really focus on legislation. That was my observation in the 1970s and I believe is still true today.

The real power on the Hill on a day-to-day basis for the most part lies with the staff, not with the member. The Senate side is a little bit more laid back, more calm, more organized. The House side had its own environment and the Senate side its own. If you work on the Hill longer than four years, you can become very enamored with the power that you seem to have. Everybody is calling you. Everybody knows that the way to get to a congressman or a senator is through a staffer. So your phone rings off the hook. You

become bigger than life. When you leave the Hill, all of that dissipates immediately, not in a week but immediately. That is an eye opener. It was an extraordinary experience.

*Q: How about legislation? Did anything come out of that?*

ROBINSON: I don't recall. I am sure that on the international side, which was my focus, the way family planning programs administered overseas through AID was modified in some ways. This was to back away from the image that AID had created by pushing population control as if this were the official policy of the U.S. government -- to contain, to limit, to restrain the growth of African society, Latin American society or Asia for that matter. That was modified tremendously. Sander Levin, whom I mentioned earlier, went into the Carter Administration as the head of the Bureau of Science and Technology to reduce sharply the power and the reach of what had been the Bureau of Population. He reduced it to an office of population. Subsequently Raymond Holt was pushed out completely. He just decided that he couldn't stay there any longer.

The special committee raised the sensitivity of population issues. I think that many of the anti-abortion restrictions that have been fairly predominant in our foreign assistance program since the late 1970s came about as a consequence of the disclosures made by the House Select Committee on Population. Our reports were lauded as being very thorough, very analytical, precise, and contributed significantly to the body of knowledge, both domestically and internationally, of how family planning programs were being administered in the United States and around the world. But I don't remember any specific landmark legislation that resulted from the committee's efforts.

*Q: One can understand the right to life -- no abortion type position. On the other side there are proponents of population control -- not to terminate life, but to control the birth rate through use of pills or contraceptives. What was the role of the Catholic Church at that time? I mean was it important as far as stopping the family planning per se by using the rhythm method?*

ROBINSON: The FPIA respected and provided assistance to indigenous African NGO groups that were Catholic. This is how I was introduced to Mauritius. When I first went to Mauritius in 1973, there was with a Jesuit priest, Father Conrad, who played an important role in a society with a strong Catholic overlay. The Catholics had one organization that practiced the rhythm method and another that practiced what is known as the Billings method. In that method, you test the consistency or the properties of the cervical mucus and determine by the viscosity whether you are at the onset of ovulation. FPIA provided assistance to that organization.

There were a number of groups around the continent that wanted to offer the whole range of family planning services whether their members or patients were Catholic or not. So we did wrap our arms around methods that were acceptable to the Catholic Church. I mentioned that the House Select Committee on Population held hearings on domestic issues to which Catholic Church officials were invited to testify. Also some fanatical types testified; they were utterly opposed to abortion, sterilization or anything like that.

No one was barred from testifying. I do recall that some of the hearings were contentious. But it is my recollection that the House Select Committee on Population went out of business well before the issue of abortion and sterilization became “hot” topics, with the exception perhaps of 1973 Supreme Court decision. It took awhile for the “pro-life” groups to organize and to galvanize into the powerful political force in the United States that we have seen in the past 20 years. They were not there yet at the time the House Select Committee on Population ended.

I can recall saying to a colleague of mine in Planned Parenthood during a 1974 convention, “These people right now are speaking like a lone voice in the wilderness. But fanatics will not be held back. I predict that at some point, they are going to become exceedingly powerful in the United States politically. They will continue to push this anti- abortion thing because they do not want to be denied.”

When I was making the transition from the House Select Committee on Population to AID, I ran into an interesting situation. As I said, Sander Levin had been appointed as the new assistant administrator for the Bureau of Science and Technology. AID also had Gola Butcher, who had been a professor at Howard University, and who had been appointed by Jimmy Carter to be his assistant administrator for the AID Africa bureau. A debate ensued between Sander Levin and Gola Butcher as to who was going to get Leonard Robinson. As part of the decision making process, Gola Butcher insisted that I interviewed with her, even though the position for which I was being considered was a GS-15. At the time I was a registered independent, but Butcher viewed it as a position to be filled by a political appointee. So she insisted that she had to interview me. It was perhaps one of the toughest, most unnerving interviews I have ever had. Gola Butcher was an African-American. She had a legal background. She was very articulate. She was very forceful, very dynamic, all of that. When I walked into her office for the interview, the first thing that came out of her mouth was, “Why in the hell should the U.S. government be running around the world, particularly in Africa, telling Africans that they should be controlling their birth rate, controlling their population numbers? What are you in this population planning business for?” So she immediately attempted to put me on the defensive. But by the time the one hour discussion was over, I really felt I had to convince her first of all why I was involved and what I was going to do. She was concerned about sterilization. She said, “Dr. Raymond Holt is running around pushing that.”

Her attitude was indicative in my opinion of the intensity in the United States in 1976 -- early 1977 -- of the issue of family planning in general and abortion services in particular. It was having a political effect on how the Agency for International Development was going to conduct its population and family planning affairs because otherwise Raymond Holt’s bureau would not have been reduced to an office. Gola Butcher would not have paid any attention to having a Leonard Robinson on her staff as director of population. At the end of that hour she was persuaded that I was the right person to be in AID. She said, “You shouldn’t be going to the Bureau of Science and Technology; you should be coming here.” I ended up going to Sander Levin’s bureau, but after one year I transferred over to the AID Africa bureau as director of population planning.

*Q: I think that one idea going around the African American community at that time was that population control programs in Africa was a way for the white man to keep the black man down. Even though the program was on a world wide basis, the focus was on that. How did you respond to that allegation?*

ROBINSON: I think at the time there was only one other African-American and me involved in population and family planning. His name was Jim Crawford and he worked for the Pathfinder Fund out of Boston. After having been in Africa, in India and much of the underdeveloped world, I could say to these critics, "Look. African women don't want to be overburdened by more children than they can take care of. Perhaps even more importantly, they are concerned about their own health. We are not talking about limiting family size. They can have 12 children if they wish as long as they are spaced out over time. The emphasis is on making sure their bodies have time to rebuild themselves. We are dealing with a society where malnutrition is an issue. We are dealing with societies where infertility is a problem because of sexually transmitted diseases."

So we simply answered the criticism from a maternal health and a child health standpoint. We said, "Look, we are making sure that no one is being forcibly sterilized or forced into an abortion. We are making sure that the clinics to which we provide assistance are not using any coercive methods." I sort of cast myself as a watchdog. There was a perception in the public's eye that AID was trying to limit births of people in the developing world; no question about it. But here was a man of color, Leonard Robinson, who was attuned to local or traditional practices of family planning and the locals' desire to have more modern practices of family planning. We were simply making available through the country's own indigenous organizations the resources necessary to make those services available.

*Q: Were you finding, as is often pointed out here in the United States, that a woman who does not have too many children, can achieve much more of her potential other than as a mother -- in getting more education and moving up the economic and social ladder.*

ROBINSON: We talked about that a lot, but that was difficult because in African society -- with rare exceptions in those days -- the wishes of the man of the house -- the husband -- were over arching. I will never forget a Ghanaian woman -- she was my secretary's mother -- smiling at me once and saying "You know, my husband might come at any time and say that he needed to demonstrate that his virility was still intact. Even though I am almost in my mid-40s, I am still menstruating and he may want to come and have another child. That is perfectly within his rights as my husband. Obviously I would be concerned about my own health, and I would be concerned about the health of the infant. But as my husband, that would be his right."

So male attitudes were really a check on the aspirations of women who may have wished to limit their family size so that it would not interfere with their professional careers. It is true, however, that as you went up the socio-economic ladder, the well educated women--the more urban based -- were more likely to have a small number of children.

In the rural areas the infant mortality in many of these countries was close to 50% -- if a woman gave birth to six live children over her reproductive cycle, half of them were going to die before they reached the age of five. Having a large number of children in the rural areas where food scarcities were fairly common, a farmer was looking at not only how many of his children were going to die, but how many will survive beyond the age of five, so they could help him cultivate his land.

*Q: Also farming was a “social security” If you have children they will take care of you. \ in your old age. Nobody else is going to take care of you.*

ROBINSON: Absolutely. That’s right.

*Q: You were with AID from when to when?*

ROBINSON: I was with AID for almost two years. Let me make, at the outset, two observations. One, it was probably the second most frustrating position I held professionally because I went from the Hill, where despite my description of it being chaotic and disorganized, people made decisions. People were energized; they made decisions; they were empowered to make decisions. That environment was electric. In AID, everything was studied to death. Everything was discussed to death. There were meetings all day long -- inconclusive meetings. No one ever made a decision. People were afraid to make decisions. After a year and a half, out of sheer frustration on the one hand, and feeling like I was treading water and not having a lot of impact on the other hand, I decided to go back into the private sector.

*Q: One of the things I have heard about AID, is that money essentially goes to studies which are usually a good form of support for universities who are putting their graduate students out doing things and places. A lot of the money allocated to a country ends up in the coffers of Americans. Is this something you were...*

ROBINSON: I wouldn’t generalize it to that extent. AID certainly has done some good things around the world. For example, from personal observations, I saw in the 1960s, AID playing a major role in the so called “green revolution” in India. That certainly would not fall into your categorization. On the other hand, during my two years in AID, I would say that a lot of the funds were sucked up by contracts with American entities. That may have changed in the last twenty years, but during my days in AID, we had to procure American-manufactured equipment and supplies for shipment overseas for our programs. Often-times the equipment or supplies may not have been appropriate for the country to which they were being shipped. The equipment could not be maintained, spare parts weren’t readily available, etc. You are absolutely right that many AID resources ended up in American firms, universities, think tanks, etc.

I do believe that AID has had some very positive impact in many countries. As I said earlier, I thought that AID’s main problem was that it was too large with too many people unwilling to make tough decisions. Furthermore, I used to characterize our foreign

assistance program as an AID official running into a minister's office and saying, "Minister, I have a check for two million dollars in my left hand. In my right hand is your country strategy. We have decided how we want you to spend this two million dollars." The U.S. gave the two million dollars and the plans how it was supposed to be spent. The problem was that the host country didn't have any input. It had no sense of ownership. The American plans may have been entirely inappropriate. But that is the way AID used to be. I think that AID has probably changed somewhat -- maybe not dramatically, maybe not enough. Today, many, if not most, decisions are made by AID officials in the field whereas in my days all decisions were made in Washington DC and then passed down to the people in the missions for implementation. Today I think there is more of a partnership between AID in the field and the host governments. There is certainly less decision making in Washington than there used to be. I think a lot of the decisions are reached in the field and then Washington is requested to provide the resources so the project or program can be implemented. AID has learned a lot from its past practices. Foreign assistance has not been terribly popular in the United States, and I think largely because of the perception that funds have been wasted. I don't think that is the case universally.

*Q: When did you leave AID?*

ROBINSON: I left AID in the winter of 1979 to go to the Battelle Memorial Institute to work on their population policy program. I was based here in Washington.

*Q: What was the program?*

ROBINSON: It was the population policy program. It was funded by AID out of the office of population. The Battelle Memorial Institute was the largest research corporation in the world, headquartered in Columbus, Ohio. At the time, it had a Washington office called the Human Affairs Resource Center which reported to a division headquarters based in Seattle, Washington. AID funded a big contract through Battelle to work with governments and indigenous think tanks to formulate population policies and programs.

I was essentially recruited by Battelle. They made me an offer. My frustration with AID was such that I took the new job at the same compensation that I had in AID. Battelle was led primarily by scientists, people with Ph.D.s in science. My father was very suspicious and skeptical about why Battelle was coming after me. I said, "They obviously have a population program. They have a big grant from AID, and they want to expand into Africa and beyond. I am the director for population for Africa within AID. I would think that they believe that by having me on their staff as director of their population policy program, it will enhance their chances of holding onto their contracts. Quite frankly it is convenient for me because I am frustrated with AID. I want to leave. They don't make decisions, etc".

I was taken out to Seattle, Washington, wined and dined, and shown around. The Battelle people asked me, "How much money is it going to take to get you out of AID?" In order to not convey the impression that I was leaving AID just to make more money, I insisted



on accepting only my current compensation. In retrospect, that was foolish on my part. The day I resigned from AID, a guy named Larry Heilman who was one of my colleagues in the Africa bureau, ran into my office and said, "What is this I hear about you leaving AID to go to Battelle?" I said, "Yes, I am frustrated with AID." He said, "Man, I don't understand you. You are a GS-15. You get a paycheck every two weeks, and you are unhappy." I said to him, "I am unhappy because I am not getting anything done. The bureaucracy is stifling. I am too young to be around here and sort of tread water. I really want to spend my professional life having impact and getting some things done." He was dismayed. He said, "I can't believe that anyone who is a GS-15, when not even 40 years old, would leave the government." But I did that. I walked away, went to Battelle where I stayed for almost four years until I was appointed by President Reagan as a deputy assistant secretary of state.

*Q: How did you find working in Battelle?*

ROBINSON: Battelle was great. It was prestigious. You know, I have two or three honorary Ph.D.s, My father was a Ph.D. My mother was damn near a Ph.D. I came out of an academic background, and I really relished that sort of environment. The Battelle headquarters was just off the campus of Ohio State. The dome of the building looks like a planetarium. It always looked mysterious when I was an undergraduate at Ohio State. I used to think that some day I was going to find out what that institution was all about. The opportunity to work for Battelle was like a dream come true.

I took the Battelle position. I was on the management council which meant that once a month I would have to fly to Seattle for a meeting. Both of my Peace Corps partners lived in Seattle, so it was great to hang out with them every month. The Battelle population policy program gave me an opportunity to do some extraordinary things. We had programs in Egypt, in Jordan -- all over the world. There was almost an intellectual connection with what I had done with the House. I was very energized and intellectually stimulated, and I enjoyed it, despite the fact that there were a lot of politics inside Battelle.

There were three pressures at Battelle. One of the pressure was to continually write proposals to bring money into our division. Secondly, Battelle hired a professor from American University to take over the Washington office because Battelle thought that would bring in more money. Headquarters wanted to market Battelle better. The professor saw that Battelle's only cash cow was the population policy program, So through one political maneuver after another, the professor seized control of the population policy program, and that created a clash between the two of us. Thirdly, I didn't have a Ph.D. Everybody else had a Ph.D. Although I was bringing in the money and had this great reputation, after being there for a year and a half, they thought they could pass me by, much to my chagrin and that of some of my collaborators from other firms who had subcontracts with Battelle.

We are now in 1981. I had been courted by the Republican Party in Montgomery County, Maryland, to run for public office. I was very interested in the school board because my

daughter, Lonnie, was three then and getting ready for school. We lived in the Rollingwood section of Chevy Chase. I thought that the county had to open a school around the corner from us—it was already planned -- so by the time Lonnie turned five or six, she could go to that primary school through a park. I was beginning to think in political terms. The internal politics at Battelle were also intensifying around control of the cash cow, i.e. the population policy program. We had differences of opinion about whom we should contract with and who should be our partners. I could see the handwriting on the wall. I could see the squeeze play that was being put on. So first of all, I got Battelle to agree to send me to American University to work on a Ph.D. in the school of international studies. Battelle paid for it. I also decided to run for the Montgomery County Council. I was still doing my job nine to five or nine to nine probably more accurately. The head of the Washington office said to me one day, “How are you able to go to school in the evening, run a political campaign, and continue to manage your office at the same time?” I said, “Watch me. I can do all three.” I did all three well until November of 1982.

During the summer of 1982, I filed to run for the county council in Montgomery County on the Republican ticket. Sometime in June or July, I got a call from the Reagan White House saying that they wanted me to work in the Department of State’s Africa Bureau, headed at the time by Chet Crocker who apparently had heard of me. I said, “I am sorry, but I am running a political campaign. There is no way I can start in the Department in the middle of a political campaign.” The answer was “Well, let’s see what happens after the primary if you win”. I kind of brushed them off, quite frankly, when I think about it.

To make a long story short, I won the primary. I was endorsed by the Washington Post, but I lost in the general election. The day after the general election results were posted in the Washington Post, I got another call from the White House. “Okay, you lost, but we are still interested in having you go to the State Department.” So in February or March of 1983, I resigned from Battelle. I continued my Ph.D. studies at American University, and I accepted the appointment as a deputy assistant secretary of state.

*Q: While you were at Battelle, what were you doing?*

ROBINSON: Managing the program. I had a staff of about 30 scientists. We were working with governments around the world helping them plan population programs and developing national population policies. We were working with governments for the most part. We worked with the government of India. I made two trips to India to evaluate the Indian population control program under the auspices of AID. We did it as part of the grant we had for population policy programs. In 1980-1981, I made the first of two trips to New Delhi to assess the effectiveness of the government of India’s population program. Gary Merrit was the population officer in the AID mission in New Delhi. We had extensive contacts with a private foundation in India that was a think tank on population issues. This is the first of two trips I made to India. Typically of what we did all over the world, we worked with very prestigious ministries of health. Ministries of health for the most part were the ministries responsible for maternal and child health care

and family planning related issues. These prestigious think tanks were involved in social development as it impacted on population growth.

We had a staff of 30 research scientists who had various levels of expertise in population, family planning, maternal and child health care policies as well as practices. What we did was to act in an advisory role to various governments on how to formulate family planning policies and programs and how to implement them, and then to evaluate their effectiveness. The program that we conducted in India I led myself. It was one of the first and was noteworthy because I think it is the stimulus that led to the politics swirling around me and Battelle in population policy programs.

AID put a tremendous amount of money into its population program. When I went to India as a Peace Corps volunteer in 1964, the population was around 420 million people. Today it is over a billion people. The population just exploded in India. The name of my evaluation report was, "Is the Red Triangle Fading?" AID was outraged. Not outraged; that is too strong. They were upset that my assessment of the family planning program was based on extensive interviews and contacts with Indians across the spectrum -- those who worked as practitioners, those who delivered the services, those who thought about the issue. I still speak Hindi fluently, so I had information coming to me that the Americans in the AID mission didn't have because they couldn't speak the language. As I said, the name of my report was "Is the Red Triangle Fading?"

*Q: When you say the "Red Triangle", what do you mean?*

ROBINSON: That was the symbol of India's family planning program. It was a red triangle which meant subliminally mother, father, one child. It was a softer way to describe what the Chinese policy was. I essentially said that the AID program had failed in India. AID started working actively to get me out of Battelle and to get me away from the population policy programs.

*Q: Was communist China a factor at all or was that....*

ROBINSON: Not in India. But it was a factor in the U.S.; it played in some of the domestic political game in Washington and in the country. It had a ripple effect on AID because China's population policies were so draconian. There was an IPP affiliate in Beijing that because IPPF (the International Planned Parenthood Federation) and the United Nations family planning program both operated in China. Both of those organizations received funding through the U.S. foreign assistance program. So the anti-abortion American faction did raise this issue because of China's draconian population policies.

*Q: By the time you arrived at the State Department, there must have been a major growth in population "expertise"; i.e. people who were involved. Were you seeing any trends in these population expert types?*

ROBINSON: I would say that when I think back over the number of personalities who were involved in population, maternal and child health care and family planning programs, the level of expertise did expand. But more importantly, the experts became increasingly sensitive to cultural idiosyncrasies and the need to take them into serious consideration in planning policies, in providing advice and counsel on how population policies should be crafted, how they should be implemented, and what services should be provided. Tunisia comes to mind; Egypt comes to mind. Again Jordan and India. There was a maturity in the American views on how to do these things. However, America was viewed as rushing into these foreign countries and telling them what should be done. We had population crisis committees—the population crisis council in New York, the population crisis committee based in Washington DC. All of these organizations were run by people who had lots of money and were very powerful and prestigious. They were running around predicting that the world is coming to an end. Marshall Green, the former assistant secretary of state, was one of them. “We are going to have so many people on the planet!!! We can’t function!!! We can’t feed ourselves”. Their projections were full of gloom and doom. They had a program called a “ladder program”. It was run by a good friend of mine, Robert Smith. He had these computerized models showing how this country was going to go off the deep end and that country was going to go off the deep end.

*Q: It was the era when the computer was God. Historians and social scientists were looking at a computer to find answers.*

ROBINSON: That’s right. We resisted that kind of analysis. Some of it may have been true. We could introduce data as a way of saying to the minister of planning or the minister of economic development, “Mr. Minister, (or Mrs. Minister), we have looked at the projections of your population growth. You are growing at a rate of 3.1 percent per annum and in 20 years this is how many jobs you are going to need to create.” All of that was part of the mix. But we tended to be a bit softer in our approach. I think that the Battelle population policy program as well as the FPIA and some of the other entities like the Pathfinder Fund, were run by men and women who were much more attuned to the foreign cultural aspects and therefore did not charge in and say “this is the way your programs should be run.” We ended up being far more appreciated and far more respected than the others.

*Q: How about Egypt? Egypt had a population problem and Mrs. Sadat and others gained popularity leading birth control programs, but yet it seemed like an almost impossible situation.*

ROBINSON: Egypt is a vivid illustration of what can happen when things get out of control. I saw some horrific things in Egypt. Egypt in many respects used to remind me of India, maybe Calcutta. I was all over Egypt from upper Egypt to lower Egypt. Egypt had the Nile running right down its middle. There was cultivation on either side of the Nile for maybe one or two miles. So there is a green swath that runs through the middle of the country. There were seven or eight million people in Cairo back in the 1970s when I worked extensively on Egypt. The whole country had about 40 million people.

Everybody wanted to be in Cairo but there was no housing. People were living in, on, and among burial grounds. I went to a Christian community. They were the garbage collectors and the flies in the community were unbelievable.

I saw some things in Egypt that really blew me away. I have a pretty tough constitution, but those sights really shook me. There were people working in the private sector for foundations and in government think tanks who said that it was essential to have effective family planning and population programs in Egypt if the country were to survive at all. I agreed that family planning programs were absolutely necessary including maternal and child health care services and better health care facilities in general. If children lived beyond the age of five, then there were real prospects for families limiting themselves to fewer children than they used to have because they become confident that if a child became ill, health care was there to help him or her survive. So if my child got a bad cold, he would not die of pneumonia or whooping cough or whatever. As health care services became more available, confidence would rise that kids were going to survive a sickness.

Furthermore, as income rises through better opportunities based on better education, then there would also be impact on the number of children people have. As income rose, the size of families decreased. All of these factors have to kick in, not necessarily simultaneously, but there have to be educational opportunities for women and girls, men and boys as well as health care facilities and greater job opportunities. All these things have to come.

*Q: Today the European population is decreasing and aging; it is the inflow of people particularly from Africa and in our case, from Central America and from Mexico which provide the labor force that is needed to keep the economies going. Is this anything we were looking at when you were working on population issues?*

ROBINSON: We were looking at the issue of illegal immigration. There were two or three scientists on my staff who were specifically looking at this issue. One was Bill McGreevy; he and two or three of his associates were looking at the problem of illegal immigration. That was an aspect of the program. While I worked for the House Select Committee on Population, we held two or three hearings on the issue of illegal immigration. I can remember conversations that took place between members of the House Select Committee on Population about what could be done to stem the tide coming in from south of the border. They were talking about building a fence in those days. I don't know if that would work, but illegal immigration has been a part of the discussion about population control and related matters in the United States for some time. Of course, there has been a dynamic in the U.S. for its whole history—at least prior to 9/11. It always has had a significant numbers of immigrants, people coming in from developing nations. The border is still a problem. But 9/11 has put a check on the numbers of people officially coming in as immigrants to the United States. We have stiffened our resolve to stem the tide coming in from south of the border. It is too soon to say what the impact of all of this is going to be in terms of the overall numbers. Hispanics have now become the second largest minority in the United States. Not by a lot, but statistically they have surged forward. The greater majority of Americans are still of European stock. While

there is the aging of America, on the one hand, I do think the statistics will bear me out in there has been a slight up tick in the number of European-descent population. At one point I think the European population was at zero replacement. Now there has been sort of an upturn, as Americans of European stock are beginning to have more children.

*Q: Europe is still in a population decline as is Japan.*

ROBINSON: Definitely.

*Q: Len, what was the job you took in the State Department?*

ROBINSON: Deputy assistant secretary of state for African affairs. Chester Crocker was the long standing assistant secretary of state for African affairs in the Reagan administration. He served in both terms of the Reagan administration. I believe that I was sworn in either March or April of 1983.

*Q: How long did you do that particular job?*

ROBINSON: I was in that position for two years.

*Q: 1983 to 1985?*

ROBINSON: That is correct. I was responsible principally for economic and commercial affairs in Africa. I also had quite a bit of involvement on the political side, making official visits to Somalia, Cameroon, and Congo (Brazzaville).

*Q: This was at the beginning of the Crocker regime?*

ROBINSON: About a year after he was sworn in.

*Q: So Crocker's policies, particularly vis-a-vis South Africa, were pretty much in place.*

ROBINSON: The policy was in place. Chet Crocker had written about his concept of constructive engagement long before he got to the State Department. I think that his policy approach had been articulated in an article that appeared in Foreign Policy Magazine. It got a lot of play within Africanist circles and councils of foreign relations and other organizations in the Washington-New York corridor that tend to follow foreign affairs in the U.S. The Crocker article came out was during the 1980-81 presidential campaign. After that, Crocker, as far as I know, became the front runner for the assistant secretaryship. He may have been an advisor to Reagan during the campaign.

When Reagan won the election against Jimmy Carter, Chet Crocker was appointed assistant secretary of state. The policy of constructive engagement was highly controversial, as you know, particularly in the African-American community in this country. It was attacked by Randall Robinson of Trans-Africa and many others as being a

policy of U.S. complicity with the *apartheid* regime in South Africa. It became a political football.

*Q: When you arrived, what were the major things on your plate?*

ROBINSON: The major thing on my plate was to work with my colleagues, such as Chet Crocker, Princeton Lyman, Jim Bishop, Frank Wisner and others in the bureau, as well as the personnel in the bureau of private enterprise in the Agency for International Development. I also had to deal with the various agencies and departments of the U.S. government that dealt with trade issues, investment issues, commercial issues, to see if we could stimulate interest in the U.S. private business world to invest in Africa, to look at Africa as a potential market. Conversely I had to work with African officials to get them to look at ways in which they could develop investment policies that would be more favorable to U.S. companies in order to encourage U.S. companies to do business in Africa. We encouraged the development of good business practices, good business policies, and various incentives designed to attract Americans to Africa. It was a two-way street focused primarily on private enterprise.

*Q: Did you run into personal dictatorships of the sort of original founding fathers of African independence, mostly wedded to socialism and highly controlled economies?*

ROBINSON: Some countries still had such dictatorships. But there was a mixed bag in the early 1980s in Africa. There were some were military dictatorships. There were some Marxist-Leninist socialists. I visited Liberia a couple of times during my initial tenure in the State Department. I also traveled also to the Ivory Coast and Kenya. These countries were very pro-western and had pro-free market economies.

Cameroon had a free market economy and did not have a military dictatorship. It had a one party system under President Ahidjo at the time and later President Paul Biya. But as I said, the continent was a mixed bag. In those countries where we knew it was difficult because of their ideology, we simply didn't press our case. I do recall that during the couple of times I went to Congo, Brazzaville, and even to Zaire during the time of Mobutu, I did engage officials in discussions about how U.S. companies could ratchet up their investments and their visibility in those countries. In Congo, Brazzaville, we talked about the acquisition by the Congo of GE manufactured locomotives for their railway system. We talked about a building a pulp paper factory in Congo, Brazzaville. In fact, they even planted a tree in my honor -- one of these fast growing trees, I think a eucalyptus tree, which eventually could be cut down and processed into paper. I think that one of the curious things about Africa during the 1970s and the 1980s, was that even though there were a lot of so-called "socialist" governments, many were very much supportive of private enterprise.

*Q: This was still a Soviet Union was in existence at the time. Was this much of a competitor or an impedance at the time, or were they fading from the scene?*

ROBINSON: In southern Africa, the Soviet Union was a key factor in our overall foreign policy agenda. The Soviet Union was very much involved with Angola which had a Cuban troop presence. Then there were Libyan, Mozambique and Cuban forces probably in northern Namibia. So the Soviet Union was clearly a factor. There were wars of liberation in the early 1980s which were complicated by the presence of Cuban troops and technicians. Even in Ethiopia the Soviet Union had a prominent role. The Soviet Union and the United States were on opposite sides in the tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia. I did go to Somalia for a meeting with Siad Barre in August 1983. The Soviet Union was definitely a key critical factor in how we were pursuing our foreign policy and diplomatic efforts throughout the continent.

*Q: What were you trying to get from Barre?*

ROBINSON: I met with Siad Barre at 4:00 o'clock in the morning. The purposes of the meeting were twofold: a) to improve our diplomatic ties with the government of Somalia, and b) to talk about ways in which Somalia and the United States could cooperate in the fields of trade and investment. We were looking at Somalia at that time as a possibility for a bilateral investment treaty. We used to call them BITS (bilateral investment treaties); they were mechanisms for strengthening our private sector commercial investment ties with a number of African countries. Robert Oakley was our ambassador to Mogadishu at the time. We talked to him about the possibility of strengthening the presence of the Peace Corps in Somalia. So we covered a wide range of bilateral issues of trade, investment, Peace Corps, democracy (which was always on the agenda), and ways in which we could pursue mutually to strengthen bilateral relationships.

*Q: On promotion of American business, I can imagine you were not exactly received with open arms by the French in their former colonies. Can you talk about relations with the French in the francophone part of Africa?*

ROBINSON: The French were very up tight about what they perceived to be Reagan administration policy; namely, to really support business in Africa, by bringing about a visible American corporate focus on the continent. This was a first. Paris was one of the places where I stopped off frequently, en route to and from Africa. USIS and the African section of the American embassy in Paris monitored what we did and what the French did throughout Francophone Africa. They were very instrumental in facilitating a number of activities for me in Paris. For one, they arranged interviews with the French press. I think it is fair and accurate to say the French press monitored what I was doing in Africa with respect to private enterprise, trade and investment. So interviews were often arranged with the French media, with Jeune Afrique, and with a number of French societies that exist in and around Paris for the sole purpose of facilitating and maintaining business ties between France and their compatriots throughout francophone Africa as well as with the francophone Africans involved in business. It was during one of my stops in Paris that I met Jean Claude Vilgrain. The Vilgrain family is roughly comparable to the Ralston Purina family. He ran VD France.



*Q: VD France is a café or coffee shops which are ubiquitous back here particularly in the Washington Area.*

ROBINSON: That is right. VD France is owned by the Vilgrain family. I was introduced to Jean Claude Vilgrain. We became very close friends at one time. We would have lunch from time to time in Paris. So the French were very much concerned, not enamored, but certainly concerned about the interest shown by the United States in Congo, Brazzaville, in Cote D'Ivoire and other countries. We were trying to facilitate business efforts in both of those countries and in Cameroon where I think we were successfully checked by French interests. This is when I first heard the phrase *chasse garde* which means "it is the preserve of the French."

*Q: This is a phrase that people who have been in Africa particularly since the 1960s always seem to mention. It is sort of a private hunting preserve.*

ROBINSON: *Chasse Garde* is a euphemism for "this is a French preserve and Americans and others are not welcome here. " The francophone Africans themselves were very sensitive about *chasse garde* because it was clear to me that francophone Africans wanted to break away from this stranglehold that the French had. It is important for people to understand it because it governed the relationship between the French government and the French private sector. Each greased the other.

*Q: Quite different from how we operate.*

ROBINSON: Exactly. We have a fairly rigid separation of the state and private enterprise in this country. Not so for most European countries, and certainly not in the case of the Japanese. This really has always been a serious obstacle to the expansion of U.S. investments in a number of countries in Africa. I think that has changed dramatically in the past ten years, but certainly in the 1980s, *chasse garde* was a serious obstacle to the advancement of our commercial interests.

*Q: Did you get American firms complaining that they were trying to start something in Cote d'Ivoire, for example, but were having a lot of trouble because we are up against Elf or one of the big French firms who were using everything they could. How did you respond?*

ROBINSON: They were knocking on my door. They were asking for meetings with Crocker and myself. We would often meet with French officials in Paris to try and get the French to be a bit more accommodating and more cooperative. This is one reason why I reached out to the French private sector and French organizations to see if there were any possibilities for joint ventures.

*Q: What inducements did we have to offer to the French government and to French business?*

ROBINSON: We didn't have a lot to offer other than persuasion and cajoling. We had no leverage. We did offer the possibility of African businesses exporting to the U.S. facilitating through their quasi governmental agencies. We did offer them the possibility of free trade, of lower tariffs which would have increased their exports their products, particularly their produce, to the United States.

The bilateral investment treaty was the most comprehensive policy that we had. It was a policy instrument that we had designed to make it easier for African companies to do business with the United States and vice versa. Tax incentives were involved. There were incentives involved in the bilateral investment treaty for the American side as well as the African side. I established at my level, an interagency task force that was really the first of its kind, designed to involve Commerce, the Ex-Im Bank, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), AID, the Private Enterprise Bureau, and the U.S. Trade Representative's office in our African trade and investment program. All of these agencies and departments and divisions were brought under this inter-agency task force on private investment in Africa. It was really designed to see what we could do on the American side to encourage and to provide incentives to American business, by initiating feasibility studies by OPIC and by encouraging the Ex-Im Bank to make loans to American companies to do business in Africa.

This interagency effort was also designed to see if we could get Congress to consider some sort of legislation which would facilitate trade and investment between the United States and Africa. Former Congressman Howard Wolpe was one of the first members of Congress in my memory to hold a series of hearings on this subject.

*Q: Where was he from?*

ROBINSON: He was from Michigan. He was the chairman of the subcommittee on Africa of the House's Foreign Affairs Committee. He held a series of hearings in 1984 on the development of a trade policy leading to trade agreements between the United States and a number of African countries. This would have been a precursor to the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act that was passed in 2000. Wolpe was ahead of the game. We were ahead of the game. In looking back, there is no question that we were up against very difficult circumstances.

David Miller, our former ambassador to Tanzania and later on Zimbabwe, worked very closely together along with Princeton Lyman to try to find ways, strategies, policies, to really get American business interested. We were trying to influence American business to look at Africa as a direct investment opportunity as opposed of going through their European subsidiaries. At the same time, we in the U.S. government looked for ways to get Africans to realize that we were serious in trying to facilitate the strengthening of trade and investment ties. We had to get all of the interested parts of the U.S. government in sync, singing from the same policy script in terms of what we should be doing. Furthermore, we had to get our embassies up to speed, making sure that our commercial and economic attaches were talking up U.S. business as well. It was difficult with the exception of Union Carbide and Alcoa Aluminum in Guinea and Alcoa Aluminum

through Valco and the Heinz Company in Zimbabwe. They went into Zimbabwe right after independence with an investment of \$7 million. We had General Motors in Kenya, as well as Dole Pineapple and Del Monte. We had Firestone in Liberia. In Zaire there were a number of companies.

One of the things I did during my travels around Africa was to look at the American companies that had investments and to talk to plant managers of the manufacturing companies to ask, "What can we do to strengthen your presence in X (whatever the country was)? What can we do to facilitate more American businesses to join you? What is your advice and counsel?" We really tried to develop a concerted effort with a whole series of new programs designed to strengthen U.S. commercial presence in Africa. The French did not like it.

*Q: What was your feeling about the administration's policy? Was our work in Africa motivated by it being a good place to make money or did it stem from a concern for Africa which wanted to see Africa develop into a democratic, trouble free area?*

ROBINSON: I think it was all of the above. We are speaking of a period of the cold war - the early to mid-1980s. When I think about what was happening in Angola and Namibia, or when I think about what Chet and Frank Wisner were doing with the front line states on the policy of constructive engagement and other efforts, it clearly appears to me to have been the zenith of the ideological struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union in Africa. The amount of development assistance and foreign aid in general coming from the United States at the time was not great. Many of the countries like Benin—a small, Marxist state -- were getting annually maybe two or three million dollars at the most from the United States. Although Togo President Eyadema was very pro-America and pro-western, he was still a military dictator. This was at a time when even if you were a dictator, if you supported the United States against the communists, you were held in some favorable regard.

But the push for private enterprise was seen by us in the administration as a better way to facilitate Africa's development, as opposed to straight bilateral foreign aid which essentially amounted to a handout. The Reagan administration in its first term pressed very hard for private enterprise. This is why a bureau for private enterprise development was established in AID -- to influence the thinking of AID officials, not only in Africa but around the developing world, on how economic development should be pursued. Do you want to rely on foreign assistance or do you want to find ways to get a private sector up and running? There was emphasis on transforming quasi-governmental entities in the developing countries around the world into private industries or businesses, so that they would be less of a drag on the governments. After independence, governments decided it was unrealistic for them to do everything. They were going to educate everybody, try to house everybody, try to provide basic health care for everybody, and keep everybody employed. Some political analysts viewed this approach as a way for heads of state and the political parties in power to keep a lid on social and political unrest. Governmental institutions had been very much part of their domestic policies. It was a way of keeping people off the streets by keeping people employed. But the Reagan administration held

the very strong view that by turning on the engine of private enterprise in many of these countries in Africa, it would help them move them forward in economic development and growth.

*Q: During the two years you were doing this, where would you point to as an illustration of the best things happening? Where from your point of view did we have the greatest success of this approach.*

ROBINSON: Bilateral investment treaties were negotiated with Cote d'Ivoire, with Somalia and if I recall correctly the treaty with the Cameroon was on the table. Even the Congo (Brazzaville) and Zaire were engaged in very serious negotiations with us about signing a bilateral investment treaty. We wanted to send the signal to the French as well as to the American business community that the Africans were serious.

I made a lot of speeches around the country about the multi billion dollar market potential for Americans in Africa. We had at the time a system known as the Generalized System of Preferences for Products (GSPP). There were some 4,000 products listed under the GSPP system in the commerce department and in the U.S. Trade Representative's office, that were eligible to be exported to the United States from a number of African countries, absolutely tariff free. We looked at GSPP. We noticed that very few of the African countries that were eligible for the GSPP system were actually taking advantage of it. They weren't aware of the opportunity. Our commercial and economic attaches weren't talking about it. We turned that situation around. The fact that we got an inter-agency task force for private enterprise development up and running came from the same script. I considered that a success.

Getting the embassies throughout Africa to actively promote stronger trade and investment ties between governments and those companies working in those countries and linking them through joint ventures was also a very positive accomplishment. We even got the OPIC to set up a computerized program that matched American companies - their products and their interests -- with countries and business partners in Africa. One of the things that we were touting was joint ventures between American companies and African counterparts. The fact that for the first time there was a person at my level in the department of state actively and aggressively touting American industrial expertise and technology around the continent was new. Ron Brown did it when he was secretary of commerce with great brilliance.

*Q: This was in the Clinton administration.*

ROBINSON: This was in the Clinton administration. Maybe we were a precursor to Ron Brown because he also sent a signal to the world and to the Africans that we saw Africa as a market and that we were coming. Then he put the French on notice as only Ron Brown could. One of the things we also did during my tenure at the State Department was that we made trade and investment missions from the U.S. to the Africa and from the Africa to the U.S. much more meaningful in terms of their impact and their composition and structure. The investment and trade delegations that went to Africa from the United

States were usually useless -- lots of social functions, a lot of hand shaking, cocktail parties; they got very little business got done because they were not structured properly. We made sure that before an American delegation of businessmen went to Africa, business opportunities in the countries they were going to visit had already been established. One of the first delegations that was supported in this way was a business delegation from Los Angeles under former and now deceased mayor Tom Bradley. They went to west Africa, I think in 1984. We facilitated that trade mission from Los Angeles to west Africa. One of the things that I accomplished when I was in Somalia for the first time was to issue an invitation to the Somali Chamber of Commerce to bring a business delegation to the United States that was composed of business men who had specific business opportunities that they wanted to pursue for U.S. investment in Somalia. So I think that six months after my first trip to Somalia, a delegation of 26-30 Somali businessmen -- no women unfortunately -- traveled from Mogadishu to Washington, DC. We took them all around the country. Seminars were held for the group at various stops. The Somalis had a very specific, well planned trade and investment mission to the United States which allowed them to sit down with Americans private industry representatives to negotiate business agreements. We really transformed trade delegations into some very serious exercises for advancing stronger ties between the United States and Africa.

*Q: You were part of Chet Crocker's team. The major thrust of our African policy was "constructive engagement." There was a lot of opposition to this policy in the United States. Those groups really wanted to enforce absolute embargoes and boycotts. You know, that is sort of the American way. Don't stand there, do something! This seemed to allow people to at least vent their rage on apartheid. How did you feel about this at the time as an African American? I suspect the Black Caucus in the Congress was not wild about constructive engagement. How did it work with you?*

ROBINSON: It was a very sensitive policy, and as I said earlier, a very controversial policy in the United States among many people, especially African-Americans. I do not believe the policy was well understood. "Constructive engagement" was developed by Chet Crocker to provide an entrée or dialog between high ranking senior officials in the administration. Later on, David Poindexter and one or two others in the White House in the National Security Council almost superceded Chet Crocker in terms of reach and authority to access South Africans in an attempt to take over the policy.

But in the final analysis, it failed due to a political coup inside the Reagan administration. It is significant to note that the policy of constructive engagement, controversial as it was, in retrospect, forced the South Africans to face many tough and difficult issues. In South Africa, both the prime minister and foreign minister had the name of Botha. Chet Crocker, Frank Wisner, and Jeff Davidow to a lesser extent, confronted them with the very tough questions. They forced a lot of discussions about how untenable it was to try to continue this policy of *apartheid*.

At the time, some wild things were happening in Southern Africa. Chet Crocker's book "High Noon in Southern Africa," is a very detailed accounting of the complexities that were evident in South Africa. On the one hand, the South Africans were playing

dangerous games in Namibia and in Angola—e.g. South Africans led incursions into Angola from the Namibia side. There were indiscriminate and wanton bombing of many of the front line states because the South Africans suspected that the ANC had a number of training camps in Botswana, Zambia and Malawi and other places. Many of these countries bordered on South Africa. You had Samora Michel in Mozambique who was unfortunately killed in a plane crash largely attributed to the South African *apartheid* regime. Southern Africa was in many ways just aflame during this time.

“Constructive engagement” was an attempt to create a point of entry for discussion led by Crocker with the South Africans to work through some of these very difficult issues and policies. There is no question the Reagan administration was seen as being in bed with the *apartheid* regime. Demonstrations began to be held in front of the South African embassy on Massachusetts Avenue, led by Randall Robinson and scores of others. It just so happened that when the first demonstration was held, we were having a chiefs of mission conference here in Washington; i.e. all of our ambassadors appointed to African states came back to Washington for consultations. I think on the first or second day of this meeting, the first demonstration was held in front of the South African embassy. I said in front of all of the ambassadors, “Look, the policy of constructive engagement has not been clearly articulated, or clearly understood by the American people. We are talking to the Botha regime about steps that could be taken in terms of opening up the parliament to people of color and the issue of voting rights.” I can remember a conversation I had with Frank Wisner in which I said, “You know, we can not be seen as backing away from one man-one vote, as opposed to voting blocs representing various communities within South Africa. We have to be squarely behind one man-one vote, because that is the essence of our democracy in the United States.”

To be sure, there were intense discussions within Crocker’s staff in the State Department as to various elements and various aspects of the policy of constructive engagement. I never felt shy about advancing my own philosophy or my own recommendations as to how we should proceed. But there was a lot of pressure on the Reagan administration and on us at the department, particularly from the African-American community on the policy of “constructive engagement.” One of the things I tried to do was to try to facilitate a private meeting between Chet Crocker and Randall Robinson, face to face, so that they could talk about their respective positions. I was trying to reach some common ground -- some level of understanding. Unfortunately, that meeting never took place. Randall on several occasions just backed away. I think on one or two occasions a meeting time and a place were established, but he never showed up.. On two or three occasions, Crocker and Randall were on the same television program together. I remember one at Howard University where Randall and Chet debated the policy of “constructive engagement.” Randall, being very articulate, very forceful, very intelligent, held forth on his condemnation of the policy and his criticisms of the policy. Chet Crocker was a bit low key in his style, but also very intelligent and very cerebral. I saw it characterized this way. Randall would give five minutes of impassioned diatribe, and Chet would come back with one minute of very profound statement; the audience remembered the five minutes and forgot the one minute. I advised Chet that he had to match Randall word for word. There is no question that the “free South Africa” movement led by Trans-Africa

forced modifications of the policy of “constructive engagement” and thereby changed the Reagan’s administration’s approach to South Africa. It defeated the Reagan administration on the issue of sanctions. The Reagan administration was opposed to imposing sanctions on South Africa. That was overturned thanks primarily to the power and the influence of the “free South Africa” movement, led by Trans-Africa. Reverend Leon Sullivan, who was friendly with the Reagan administration and who had access to it, would come and meet with Chet Crocker and Frank Wisner and the rest of us. He would rail against the policy of “constructive engagement.” We did not do a good job of explaining or selling the policy of “constructive engagement”. Chet Crocker survived.

I left the department of state officially in April of 1985 in order to run the African Development Foundation as an appointee of the Reagan administration, but I maintained close ties with the department. I monitored what was happening to the policy of “constructive engagement”. As I mentioned before, during the mid to late 1980s, David Poindexter and Patrick Buchanan, of the White House staff, tried to seize control of “constructive engagement” and the whole South African policy; they dealt directly with the Bothas at the expense of Chet Crocker. Chet was able to overcome that.

It was an unusual time in the Department of State. Lots of things were happening. Liberia was unstable because of the presidency of Samuel Doe. I went to Liberia on two or three occasions to review our engagement with that country. To say that the first Reagan administration, as far as the African bureau was concerned, focused on southern Africa, and the presence of Cuban troops and technicians in Angola, Namibia would be an understatement.

*Q: What about Zaire during this time? Zaire as run by Mobutu was corrupt as all hell and also it seemed to be almost a fiefdom of the CIA. How did you find this in your perspective dealing with Zaire and business and all that?*

ROBINSON: I went to Zaire and Congo (Brazzaville) in May of 1984. I flew to Kinshasa first and met with Mobutu. On that trip, I wore two “hats.” My brief covered both business issues as well as a political agenda. Mobutu was seen by our government at that time as a staunch ally, a bulwark of that part of central Africa against the Soviet Union. He was viewed as an interlocutor vis a vis Angola and Namibia. Zaire was the staging ground for a lot of activities, particularly the trans shipment of materiel and equipment to a number of southern African states intended to bolster their capacities and capabilities to prevent the take over by local communist fronts through the use of the Cuban troops who were clearly seen as the proxy for the Soviet Union. There were Soviet advisors on the ground in Angola and in northern Namibia, but they were strictly advisors. They were not, to my knowledge, combatants.

*Q: Let’s move on to your service with the African Development Foundation. Tell us something about that organization?*

ROBINSON: Let me give you a little bit of history that led up to the creation of the African Development Foundation. Back in the late 1960s there was a movement on the

Hill to create the Inter-American foundation as a U.S. public corporation to provide grass roots development assistance to community-based urban organizations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. That led to Congress to establish the Inter-American Foundation in 1969. Bill Dial was the first president of the Inter-American Foundation. As I think I mentioned earlier, Bill Dial was a really my mentor in the Peace Corps back in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Several years later, there ensued a long debate in Congress about the creation of an African Development Foundation similar to the Inter-American Foundation. Many people were involved in this; e.g. Ted Kennedy on the Senate side, Don Barker, the former Congressman from the State of Washington and a large number of Congressmen. But it wasn't until the late 1970s or early 1980s that two unlikely members of Congress, Jack Kemp and Bill Gray, both now retired from Congress, combined forces and talents to push through the legislation that actually created the African Development Foundation. It was one of the last bills signed by the outgoing President Jimmy Carter in 1981. This foundation was to provide grass roots development assistance directly to community based organizations throughout the continent, unlike AID which is a bilateral country-to-country program. The foundations provide assistance from the people of America to the people of Africa by passing the bureaucracy and the bottlenecks created by working in a bilateral arrangement with various African governments. But it wasn't until 1983-1984 that the African Development Foundation was became operational. It had remained in a period of dormancy after the legislation had been signed into law by Carter. The Reagan administration came into power, and it initially did not make any funds available for this new African Development Foundation.

So Kemp and Gray went to David Stockman who at the time was the director of OMB and who had been member of Congress himself. They put pressure on Stockman to put money in the budget for fiscal year 1984. So in fiscal year 1984 the African Development Foundation, after the board of directors had been appointed by the Reagan White House, finally opened up for business with an appropriation of \$1 million for the entire continent of Africa which was, to say at the least, laughable. But Stockman had acquiesced to pressure from Jack Kemp and Bill Gray, especially Bill Gray and had put a million dollars in the budget. Monies had been held in escrow in the meantime in an AID account for the African Development Foundation, so I think there was a cumulative amount of about three or four million dollars available to provide development assistance to grass roots organizations in a very short period of time. For some reason, the opponents of the creation of the African Development Foundation started causing great difficulties. In part I think it happened because of the way the board of directors was appointed. The board of directors was appointed by the White House. The five private board members were all Republicans. They were all African-American Republicans. The two public sector board members were Chet Crocker who was assistant secretary of state for Africa, and Frank Rennig who at the time was the assistant administrator for the Africa Bureau in AID. These two positions on the board of a seven member board were mandated by the legislation. The word got out in political circles that the African Development Foundation was going to be controlled by Republicans. There were no Democrats on the board whatsoever; all the appointees were African-Americans Republicans. Newspaper articles



started to appear saying that the ADF was an all African-American agency -- the first federal agency to be African-American. There was a lot of that kind of criticisms. The board, to its credit, mounted a wide open recruitment process to pick a first president of the African Development Foundation. Then, lo and behold, other political forces began to intervene, particularly the late Senator Tower. Senator Tower had a favorite staffer who worked for him, a woman named Constance Hilliet. Constance Hilliet was a Ph.D. in African studies, but had never been to Africa -- certainly not in the context of economic and community based development. But she was very close to Senator Tower. Senator Tower insisted in telephone calls with the White House, that Connie Hilliet, who was obviously a Republican, be appointed as the first president of the Africa Development Foundation. The White House imposed Connie Hilliet on the board of directors.

In trying to make up for her lack of experience in development, her real lack of grounding in Africa per se, outside of Angola which was her special field of concentration, the board made an egregious mistake. After interviewing him, the board hired Reginald Petty, an old friend of mine, as the vice president of the ADF. We served in the Peace Corps together back in the early 1970s. Reginald Petty had an impeccable record; he was well experienced in economic development in Africa. The board's action did not have Constance Hilliard's approval; she may have never even been consulted. So in effect, Constance Hilliard was imposed on the board of the African Development Foundation by the White House. Reginald Petty was the board's reaction in response. Unfortunately, this "arranged marriage" did not work out; they did not get along. To make a very long story short. Reginald Petty and Constance Hilliet lasted four weeks. Reginald Petty resigned from the African Development Foundation after one month, and Constance Hilliet in an emergency board meeting one afternoon was fired by the board for being incompetent; i.e. not knowing what she was doing, etc. I think that sometime in May of 1984, while I was in my office, Chet Crocker who had just come from the board meeting came in and said, "Len, we have got a crisis on our hands. We have just fired Connie Hilliard. We have no president. We have no vice president. We have got a handful of consultants sitting over in our offices on Massachusetts Avenue. The board has asked me to find out if you, with your considerable knowledge of African development, would please put your finger in the dyke for 30 days." I refused. I refused initially because I was intimately aware of the politics swirling around the African Development Foundation. I didn't want to have any part of it. It looked to me like a real blueprint for failure. But Chet persuaded me that it was only for 30 days, during which I could continue work in my office at the State Department. In essence I was being asked to serve as a fireman. I agreed. I had a great respect for Crocker, and I did not want to see the African Development Foundation fail after it had taken so long to get it authorized and running.

There were two guys, the Hellinger brothers, who were very instrumental in getting the African Development Foundation started, at least from the standpoint of private influence and support. They rallied to my support. They offered all kinds of help from the outside, trying to get through this difficult political crisis. But on the second day in my role at the African Development Foundation, I got a letter, hand delivered, from Senator Robert Kasten's office. Kasten was chair of a Senate subcommittee on foreign relations. He had

a very powerful legislative aide by the name of James Bond -- not to be confused with "The James Bond, 007." James Bond was one of those classic Hill staffers who was very aggressive, very smart, hard charging and powerful, and not shy about letting you know that he wielded considerable influence. Kasten and others had vested a lot of influence on him. As I later learned, the Senator and Bond and others had been very supportive of Constance Hilliet. This letter from Senator Kasten announced that he was very concerned about the management practices and policies of the African Development Foundation. This letter was written five weeks after the Foundation had been officially opened. It is very hard to pass judgment on the management of an organization after only five weeks. Kasten announced in this letter to the chairman of the board, which I opened, that he was calling for an investigation by the General Accounting Office of the management practices and policies of the African Development Foundation. When I saw this, I recognized immediately that this was an effort on the part of the senator and others to shut down the African Development Foundation. I jumped in a taxi, went back to the State Department, told Chet Crocker, showed him the letter, and sought his advice and counsel on what to do. He said, "Well, this is not surprising. You know these people are supporters of Constance Hilliet. Let's just hang in there and see how we can forestall the takeover or the shutdown of the African Development Foundation." I also realized that as deputy assistant secretary of state, I had a tremendous amount of authority and tremendous amount of power. I began to use that authority and power, that influence, all the tools available to me to begin to build a wall around the African Development Foundation.

Since I was wearing only a "temporary" hat, I made some decisions. I hired a vice president, who was a Democrat and walked his papers through the Reagan White House. I hired a director for finance and accounting who was an ex attorney for the Peace Corps, a woman by the name of Ann Richardson. I made some other key appointments to begin to give the African Development Foundation a feeling of permanency if you will. By the time the auditors did arrive, and they did arrive about two weeks later, they were confronted with a different sort of organization than that that had been described by Bond in his letter to the chairman of the board. That is kind of the quick version of the African Development Foundation's political birthing process.

*Q: You were with the ADF from when to when?*

ROBINSON: I ended up being with the African Development Foundation officially from April of 1985 until September-October 1990. Because after the GAO came in and we saw the handwriting on the wall, it was determined by the board and by Chet Crocker as my immediate supervisor in the State Department that I needed to stay; I agreed. So I wore two hats for about a year, shuttling back and forth between the State Department and the African Development Foundation. I think that period of time when I wore both "hats" really contributed significantly to the "saving" of the African Development Foundation.

There are a couple of stories that I need to tell which will demonstrate this point. One has to do with OMB and AID, and one has to do with my style if you will. It was very clear that the GAO had come in to shut down the Foundation. GAO sent two auditors. The first

day they were there they started interviewing some of the staff; e.g. Percy Wilson, the vice president designate, and Ann Richardson, who happened to be a Caucasian female. Ann Richardson came to me after she had her interview, and she closed my door and she said, "You need to know that this is a hostile attempt really to shut down the African Development Foundation. This is a hostile attempt on the part of Senator Kasten and his committee to shut down the Foundation."

I said, "Well, I have sensed this all along. What additional insight do you have?"

"One of the first questions they asked was, "How does it feel to be a Caucasian woman taking orders from, instructions from an acting president who happens to be African American?" Ann was outraged by that. The GAO's inappropriate question certainly cemented her loyalty to me and vice versa as you can well imagine. I was determined to use the weight of my office to make sure, to the extent that we could, that the African Development Foundation was not buried under by this hostile audit.

The second example I wanted to convey is that, from the beginning, our annual appropriation process was so structured that we had to go through the State Department to get its approval. I was dealing with the undersecretary of state for management in the department of state to negotiate my budget. The legislation that created the African Development Foundation was very clear, just like the Inter American Development Foundation, that it was to be an independent public corporation, not included in the AID budget or the State Department's, but a separate line item in the federal budget. We were to negotiate with OMB and with the relevant committees in the House and in the Senate what our annual budget was to be. There was an attempt by the State Department to control the budgeting process. After a period of time I was able to break away from the department and deal directly with the office of management and budget. In other words, we asserted our independence and it stuck.

The GAO auditors made some serious mistakes. The audit took place from May 1984 to September of that year. The draft report was issued in September. It, among other findings, indicated that we had made some funding decisions that had not been reviewed by a general counsel. That was just one example of outright misstatement of which there were many. In the federal government, if you don't spend all of your money in one fiscal year, it is taken from you or you have to go to Congress to ask that the money be re-authorized. I was mindful of that, but I was also mindful of the fact that there was no way we could spend all of our appropriations between May and September 30, 1984. We could not spend a million dollars. Secondly, we could not spend money without having people look at the projects in the field. There were a lot of proposals on our plate. Thirdly, I was not going to spend that money just to say we had obligated all the money without thoroughly checking out the efficacy of the proposals and projects that were being proposed. So, in order to make sure that we had some kind of a review process within the African Development Foundation, the staff and I quickly devised, based on our considerable experience, a very thorough review process. We called it the PRC (the project review committee). We set up a committee of senior people. I called Lorete Ruppe, who at the time was the Peace Corps director, and asked her "Lorete, could you

second to us a general counsel? We need a lawyer who can come here, sit in the Foundation and review everything that we are doing for a brief period of time. We need him or her especially to review the project proposals.” She said, “Yes.” Fortunately there was an exchange in writing about my request. There was documentation in the files which indicated that I had made the call to Lorete Ruppe and had made the request for general counsel secondment. She complied by sending me Paul Majid, who ended up staying in the ADF longer than I did. Paul Majid sat on the project review committee. By the end of the fiscal year, because we had set this process up, we approved \$849,000 worth of projects. I remember the number very well. They had all been approved by Paul Majid. In the draft of the GAO report, it was stated that we had allocated all of this money with no peer review, no project review, and no legal counsel review. I said, “I have got you guys.” So one Saturday, I went to the office about 8:30 in the morning, and I started working on my Wang computer. I crafted a rebuttal to the GAO draft report. I was right on the money. It was very legalistic in its content and tone. I refuted every allegation made.

Finally, after my draft rebuttal percolated its way through the system to the Hill, a hearing was held in April. I was called to testify before Senator Kasten and his committee on the preliminary report of the GAO on the management practices of the African Development Foundation. I can recall Senator Kasten opening up, smiling at me saying, “Mr. Robinson, we have read your rebuttal to the GAO report and we know that you are very direct, very frank in refuting some of the allegations and charges made in the GAO report. Would you care to comment on this?” So I again cited two or three examples including the one about the general counsel not being around to review and sign off on these projects. The two auditors were sitting in the back of the hearing room. I was equally as forceful and equally as dynamic and emphatic about what the African Development Foundation had and had not done. That hearing was over in 15 minutes because I knocked down everything that GAO alleged and Kasten was not hostile. He ended up by saying, “Mr. Robinson, the improvement in the African Development Foundation in the months that you have been there as the acting president has been significant. My committee and I have studied your response. We have noted the content of your rebuttal to the preliminary findings in the GAO report. We are satisfied that you are headed in the right direction. We understand that you have been offered the presidency of the African Development Foundation, and we strongly encourage you to take this position because we think that, under your leadership, the African Development Foundation will go far.” With that, he banged his gavel and said this hearing was over. From that time on, we essentially had Senator Kasten and James Bond off our backs.

To be sure, other issues surfaced with respect to funding, and other matters that we will probably get into later on, but that concluded attempts to shut down the African Development Foundation. It also resulted in me being offered the presidency by the board of directors of the African Development Foundation, which entailed me leaving the State Department a year and a half after I got there. This was in April-May of 1985, and as I said, I returned to the State Department under the Bush I administration in the fall of 1990.

*Q: Was the ADF a distinct parallel to the Latin American one?*

ROBINSON: There was a distinct parallel as I indicated before. The only difference was the fact the Inter America Foundation operated in Latin America and we operated in Africa. One of the first things I did when I became the ADF acting president was to call Bill Dial who had been the first president of the Inter American Foundation. I said, "What are the do's and don'ts of running this kind of a foundation? What is your advice and counsel?" One of the first things he said to me was, "Don't allow the foundation to become a dumping ground for members of Congress who are seeking ways to find employment for various constituents." I really took that to heart. "Don't allow," he said, further, "the foundation to be controlled by the administration or by Congress. You have got to maintain your independence. You have got to demonstrate the fact that the foundation is not tied to short term U.S. foreign policy. It is just like the Peace Corps in that sense." I took all of that to heart and that is how I ran the Africa Development Foundation—politically neutral and independent. There was an attempt at one point by AID to wield its influence on how we did things. For example, we made a decision early on to hire Africans to be our representatives in the various countries as opposed to sending Americans to represent the Foundation. That made AID real nervous, because we had figured the cost of maintaining an American and his or her family in the AID mission for a year, and it was about \$250,000. We could perform a similar operation using an African -- a Senegalese or a Somali or whatever the case may have been -- for about \$60,000. That included salary, office, vehicle—the whole nine yards. That was a considerable saving.

The African Development Foundation was started with an appropriation of one million dollars; we didn't have a lot of money. We were trying to maximize our impact. We picked six countries in which to fund projects: Kenya, Mali, Ghana, Tanzania, Egypt, and Zimbabwe. We had a lot of projects. One of the first projects proposals we received was from a Tuareg community in Niger. The letter was addressed to the African Development Foundation, Washington DC. The return address on the envelope was Echo Well, Sahara Desert, Niger. It was amazing that the letter got to us. They were asking for \$1000 to set up a kiosk so that cigarettes, soap, kerosene and matches and things like that could be purchased out there in the middle of nowhere. I hired Earl Brown to be our first director of field operations, and Earl Brown hand carried that check to Niger. He was an old friend from my Peace Corps days.

The beauty of the African Development Foundation and the Inter American Development Foundation was that the legislation was unbelievably flexible and open. It encouraged the Foundation to take risks, to insure that the projects were designed and managed by Africans themselves, to put money directly into the hands of Africans -- into their banks and their financial institutions. It really gave us a dream mandate to do whatever we could do prudently, to insure that the aspirations and desires and the vision of Africans at the grass roots level could be realized by having them fully engaged in the development, implementation and management of their own projects.

*Q: Was that the idea of the kiosk to get your money back eventually to plow into something else or was this...*

ROBINSON: No, but you have touched on a very interesting point. As a consequence of the experiences that all of us brought to the African Development Foundation, we did not want our projects to consciously or willingly create a dependence on funding from ADF or any other private foreign source of money. Our grants could go from five dollars to \$250,000 per project over a three to five year period with a possibility of renewal. The cap was \$250,000, which is a lot of money for an African village. We insisted to the extent possible that the projects have an income generating component. If it was a vegetable gardening project, a percentage of the vegetables should be sold on the market, and the funds should be put into a revolving account for the use of farmers or for the women who might be running the project. Practically every project that we seriously considered during my tenure at the African Development Foundation had an income generating component, which was designed to enable the managers, whether at village level or in the city, to perpetuate the enterprise by having an income stream derived from business. We funded furniture making, vegetable gardening, you name it; the African Development foundation tried it all. I would say that during my time at ADF, our projects were maybe 50%-55% successful.

We know the Africa Development Foundation was having an impact. I remember in 1986 (I think it was), Congressman Howard Wolpe, who at the time was still the chair of the House subcommittee on Africa, said to me at a meeting with his staffers, "Len, how do we know these projects are working? How do we know if these projects are having an impact?" I said, "Let's evaluate these projects." So we did something very innovative. My staff and I went back to our office after that meeting and we brainstormed about how we could get these projects evaluated in an innovative way. We decided to hire five journalists. Randy Daniels, who is a former deputy mayor of the City of New York, was one of those five journalists because at the time he was a reporter with CBS. The four other crack journalists came from in and around the Washington area. We sent them to Africa to look at and assess ADF projects on the ground. It was a fascinating approach because all of the journalists had been to Africa or had lived in Africa and had reported on AID projects in the past; so they knew something about development. But more importantly, they could write. They could be descriptive. When they returned, we put together a report entitled "From Myth to Reality." The "myth" was that people in developing countries could not take development into their own hands and make it work for them; the "reality" was the impact ADF projects were having. We submitted this report to Congressman Wolpe and the House committee on Africa. He was fascinated. He said, "This is amazing, but I think we need to have even more proof."

So he asked the Office of Technology Assistance, a non-partisan Congressional agency, to take a look. That was part of its functions; it evaluated and assessed Congressionally funded programs all over the world. The OTA report on the African Development Foundation was just glowing. They went out and spent almost a year evaluating ADF projects all over Africa, and they noted the income generating aspect of our projects, and they were very impressed. As a consequence, by the time I left the ADF in 1990 to return

to the department, we had increased our appropriation from one million dollars in 1984 to seventeen million dollars in 1990. So obviously we did a lot of things right. We established great rapport with Congress. The congressmen saw for themselves what the African Development Foundation could do. It had always been my goal to see if we could push the ADF's budget up to as much as the Inter American Foundation was getting. The Inter American Foundation was getting about 22-25 million a year. I got to 17 million dollars a year. The IAF was much older than we were. They started in 1972-1973 although the legislation was passed in 1969. Nevertheless, in a six year period, we had a dramatic increase in Congressional appropriations for the African Development Foundation. That was attributed to the fact that I assembled an extraordinary talented and committed staff of professionals at the ADF that really made things work.

*Q: You left the ADF in 1994; is that right?*

ROBINSON: Yes, in 1994.

*Q: Then what?*

ROBINSON: After Bush lost the election, we all had to leave. I was a political appointee. I joined a law firm. I had a strong intuition in August of 1992 that Bush was going to lose the election. I tried to make some moves to create some options for my future including the option of being a boring wonder and staying at State Department. As I said, after the 1994 election, all political appointees had to leave their jobs. I was in the senior executive service corps. I had two significant offers, both from law firms. I decided to go with Washington and Christian, because I had known the senior partner of this law firm for 20 some years. I had known his sister as well who along with her husband and my first wife lived in India in the late 1960s when both of us were Peace Corps professionals. Her husband was a Peace Corps director in the state of Andhra Pradesh, and I was the Peace Corps director in southern India. So my relationship with the Washington family had been a long standing one. So I joined his law firm.

*Q: How long were you with the law firm?*

ROBINSON: It turned out that it was not one of my better decisions in terms of professional career. The law firm turned out to be run by a couple of guys who I would characterize as dishonest in a sophisticated way. One of the matters in which I was involved had to do with a narcotics interdiction program in Nigeria. When I was in the State Department, during the Bush I administration, I had a number of portfolios, such as West Africa, central Africa, democracy, terrorism, the Peace Corps and narcotics. We were very concerned about drug trafficking in Africa during that time, particularly through Nigeria which had become a major distribution point for illicit drugs to Europe and to the United States. In fact, at one point in time, based on a briefing I had with the customs department, I knew that a considerable amount of narcotics came primarily through the John F. Kennedy Airport in New York. I knew for a fact that 63.5% of all of the shipments originating in Africa were from Nigeria. So in 1994, I think it was, the government of Nigeria contacted our law firm and asked them if we would help them

devise a narcotics interdiction program that included the vetting of their Nigerian narcotics control force, including everybody involved in law enforcement and border patrols. They wanted to have them vetted. They wanted to have them polygraphed to ascertain whether they were “clean.” At the time, Abacha was the Nigerian head of state.

Knowing what was going on with narcotics trafficking in Nigeria prior to Abacha, during the Babangida regime, I thought this was something we needed to do. It was my recommendation that we look at the Nigerian request very seriously. But before we agreed to take on this contract, I went out to a number of agencies to meet with former colleagues of mine including the intelligence officer for Africa at the CIA and asked him and others whether the Abacha regime had made any attempt to clamp down on what senior officials including ministers in the Babangida regime had doing with drug trafficking. I was told that the U.S. government was aware of the fact that the Nigerians had come to us asking to help them with their drug interdiction program. They said, “We encourage you to do this because there is a window of opportunity here. We see Abacha trying to clamp down on drug trafficking; so there is a window of opportunity here to strengthen the program.” My law firm did enter into an agreement with the government of Nigeria which included writing legislation, drafting and adopting policies to tighten the interdiction laws on drug trafficking and to be sure there was no corruption within the ranks of the enforcement agencies. We helped to set up a polygraphing and vetting system for all of their enforcement personnel. In fact, once all these actions had taken place, we even wrote the speech that Abacha gave on national television one night announcing the new drug laws and the new interdiction procedures and policies.

The law firm had serious cash flow problems. In 1997 I decided to leave that firm to start my own international consulting firm called LHR International Group Inc. I also accepted a position on the faculty of the University of Massachusetts in Boston. I was hired by the John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs at U. Mass as a visiting fellow and as a professor of African studies and U.S. foreign policy. That is what happened between roughly late 1993 to early to January 1997.

*Q: How did this new venture work out?*

ROBINSON: I really thought that I could sell my considerable experience, using my vast contacts in Africa. I was the honorary consul for the island nation of Sao Tome and Principe. I had been a deputy assistant secretary of state twice as well as the president of the African Development Foundation. I naively assumed I could translate that background into a fairly viable international consulting business specializing in advice and counsel and analysis on foreign policy issues as they applied to various countries particularly Africa and in Southeast Asia -- since I started my international career in India. I knew a lot about India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, etc. But when you are trying to develop a business and you have been out of the orbit of the region that you want to do business with for a substantial period of time, it was a different sort of environment than the one to which I had been accustomed. So it was difficult. I did get some contracts in Zimbabwe and Sao Tome and Principe and Togo and some other countries. But it was difficult. It was okay because I was also teaching at the University of Massachusetts in



Boston which gave me a great deal of professional satisfaction. Both my parents were college professors so I knew I could teach. It was in my blood. The only problem was flying back and forth between Boston and Washington; it got to be very monotonous. But that inconvenience was offset by the fact that I was teaching.

In November of 1997, in the middle of my teaching stint, I got calls from C. Payne Lucas, the president of Africare, and Tim Bork who was at the Ford Foundation as vice president for Africa. This was during the time that the National Summit on Africa was in the process of establishing itself. It was funded by the Ford Foundation to generate awareness throughout the U.S. about Africa and to develop an international policy plan of action on what U.S.-Africa relations should look like in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. I had been named to the board of directors of the National Summit on Africa. We were very unhappy with the performance of the group's first president. I got these two telephone calls, as I said. Both Lucas and Bork essentially asked me if I would join the management of the National Summit on Africa, as vice president. After some considerable hesitancy on my part, I decided to accept the position in early 1998. That re-engaged me with Washington and led to my being eventually named president of the organization.

*Q: What was or is the National Summit on Africa?*

ROBINSON: The Ford Foundation and Carnegie Corporation of New York and other major foundations, which for years have provided assistance to U.S. organizations and entities engaged in promoting and advocating on behalf of Africa, were very concerned there was no effective constituency for Africa in the United States – “effective” being the operative word. There was also a concern that there wasn't a broad base or broad outreach effort that included all Americans in an advocacy environment for Africa. Tim Bork had been an AID official in Africa and in Washington; he had been general counsel for the Africa bureau at one time in light of his legal background. He had left AID in about 1994 to join the Ford Foundation as vice president for Africa under Susan Berresford who was then president of the Ford Foundation. Tim had been a long term supporter and proponent of U.S.-Africa relations. So in his new capacity as vice president at the Ford Foundation for Africa, he decided to consult with Payne Lucas because he had concern for the lack of a strong American constituency for Africa. He went to see Payne Lucas and said, “Look, I will give you some seed money to hire a couple of consultants and maybe you guys can come up with a new concept to promote Africa and generate a greater base of support for Africa in the United States.” C. Payne Lucas and two consultants, Solly Booker and Sheree Waters, did come up with the concept of the National Summit on Africa.

The group had three primary objectives. One, to increase the awareness and knowledge about Africa among all Americans, and I underline the word all. Two, to expand the base of support for Africa in the United States among all Americans. Third, to formulate a national plan of action to guide U.S.-Africa relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The National Summit on Africa was established with a board of directors to oversee the implementation of these three goals. The board of directors consisted of about 25-30

prominent Americans who essentially represented most of the major Africa focus groups in the United States.

The establishment of the group was very controversial because the more established, older organizations like the Constituency for Africa, Trans-Africa, The Africa-America Institute, you name it, all thought that the money should have been given to them to create a series of regional summits around the United States. But, as I said at the beginning, this new entity was created because of the concern on the part of the Ford Foundation and other major supporters of Africa that the existing institutions were not diverse enough, not inclusive enough and too narrowly focused. They wanted to have a more open, inclusive tent. So that is why this new entity was created and called the National Summit on Africa. So when the board was appointed, in order to assuage many of those who were quite frankly angry and frustrated that funds had not been given to their respective institutions and organizations, a political decision was made to put all of these people on the board of directors. This quite frankly was designed to foster interaction, foster dialog, and foster support among all of us for Africa related priorities.

I would say in the final analysis the board composition was partially successful. One could imagine that the vast majority of the members of the board worked at cross purposes because of the funding issue. It was a political minefield that had to be navigated at all times. It didn't always work out well, but the summit process itself was highly successful. Let me say that the Ford Foundation and Carnegie Corporation in New York combined to provide about \$8,500,000 for essentially a three-year nationwide program to achieve the three objectives that I just articulated.

It was decided by the board of directors, working with management, that there would be a series of "summits" around the country, which would include a union style discussion and debate around five themes: peace and security, education and culture, democracy and human rights, economic development and trade investment issues, and sustainable growth and development. These were the issues for grass roots development. The National Summit for Africa hired 25 Africanists, both American and African, to conduct research and to write a complete professional academic theme paper around each of these five topics. The five theme papers were written by five Africanists each. These Africanists were Africans and Americans academicians expert in African affairs or experienced practitioners. The conflicting philosophies and ideologies that emerged forced NSA to take about a year-and-a-half for these theme papers to be fully fleshed out.

Each of the theme papers contained major findings and recommendations concerning U.S.-Africa relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As I said, we established a union style system for discussing and debating the papers at each of the regional summits. The regional summits lasted about two days. Each regional summit drafted a plan of action on U.S.-Africa relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The first summit was held in Atlanta in May of 1998. We planned for a summit of 500 people. Three thousand five hundred people came to that summit in Atlanta to kick it off. It was unbelievable. Jimmy Carter was there; Jack Kemp; Andrew Young was one of the co-chairs. Newt Gingrich, who at the time was speaker of the House, was present. A spectacular event and very successful, with high

impact. We then went to Chicago, San Francisco, Boston, Baltimore, and Denver for regional summits, and then we held mini summits of a policy nature at UCLA in Los Angeles, and at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma. At the end of each of these regional summits, we had a draft plan of action that contained specific recommendations. When all the regional summits and the policy forums had been held, we then synthesized all of that material, and put all the recommendations and findings into a national draft plan of action. That is the document that we used in deliberations and discussions during the grand national summit on Africa which was held in Washington, DC in February of 2000. This summit was the largest gathering in the history of the United States on African affairs. We planned for 4,000 people; 8,000 people came. It was an incredible success.

*Q: Why did not the program carry on?*

ROBINSON: It was only designed for a four year period. I told you how the politics shaped its creation. There was an unspoken agreement that after the National Summit on Africa concluded, and after the final report of the national plan of action was published and disseminated to practically everybody in the country, we would phase out and allow the other well established long-term Africa-focused organizations to reap the benefits of the power, the momentum, and the reach of the National Summit on Africa to attract support for their programs..

But something began to happen. Atlanta was so powerful that as we moved across the country to Chicago, to San Francisco, etc, we brought into the dialogue Americans of all walks of life. Africans were aggressively encouraged to participate as well -- those who resided in the United States regardless of their visa status. An excitement began to build across the nation. After the Chicago regional summit, we held a meeting of all of those who had been involved -- the key leaders from each of the states involved in the Atlanta and the Chicago regional summits. During that meeting which was held at the Carnegie Corporation, Earl Shinhoster -- I think that was his name -- the head of the Atlanta chapter of the NAACP, stood up in this meeting and said, "Look, we understand that the National Summit on Africa will close down after the concluding grand national summit. I believe, based on what I observed in Atlanta and in Chicago, that it would be irresponsible on the part of the National Summit on Africa secretariat to shut down after this process is over, because I predict this is going to be a very powerful process, and that for the first time since the "free South Africa" movement there will be a tremendous amount of ferment throughout the United States about Africa. Why should we develop a national plan of action and then shut down; who is going to implement it? Who is going to make sure there is follow-up in terms of implementing the recommendations coming out of the National Summit on Africa plan of action?" He raised a very good point. So a year after the National Summit on Africa process started, we were beginning to get feedback from across the country that we needed to rethink whether we were going to shut down. People were saying we were being irresponsible by shutting down. So, the management of the National Summit on Africa and the board made a preliminary decision that we would revisit the issue of shutting down at the end of the final summit depending on how well the summit was received.

As I said, the summit exceeded our expectations. President Bill Clinton opened the summit. A week later it was closed by now secretary of state Colin Powell. We had Madeline Albright here; we had Andy Young here. We had Jesse Jackson there; we had Judith McHale from Discovery there. We had the late Reverend Leon Sullivan there, we had Dick Gregory there. We had everybody at the national summit. It was an incredible event. It was powerful. The momentum and the energy that was generated was unprecedented, and so it became clear that we needed to continue. As Leon Sullivan said in the Mayflower Hotel lobby in 1999, he said, "Robinson, one of the reasons I have been critical of the National Summit on Africa, even though I am one of your honorary co-chairs, is because I really believe that you are just barely scratching the surface. None of these people in the lobby here," he pointed to this person and that person. "None of these people know anything about Africa. They need to know about Africa; the National Summit on Africa is barely scratching the surface. You have got to continue this process in perpetuity to educate and inform all Americans about Africa. If you will keep trying to find a way to continue to educate Americans about Africa and continue to support what I am doing in Africa with the Southern Summit, I will support the National Summit on Africa."

We had encouragement from all over the place to continue this project. As a consequence of the success of the summit itself, we decided in May-June of 2000, to establish the Africa Society. I did not want to continue to call it the National Summit on Africa because it sounded like we were just an organization that did meetings and conferences. When I went to raise money from corporations and foundations, they were reluctant to give money to an organization that sounded like it only ran meetings, as opposed to something that had more substance to it. I took a page from the Asia Society and decided to call this the Africa Society because, like the Asia Society, we are about the business of educating everybody in the U.S. about Africa. That has made a big difference in terms of establishing credibility and being able to raise funds. We have great corporate support. I am very convinced that in the Africa society of the National Summit on Africa, we had retained our original goals so there is a connection for legal purposes. We had funding from Exxon Mobil and Chevron Texaco which played a key role in helping us because once that summit was over, the grants from Ford and Carnegie were expended. For 18 months, we didn't have any money coming in from anybody because Susan Berresford, the president of the Ford Foundation had said, "Lenny, the summit was incredible, spectacular, way beyond our expectations, but we did not agree to fund a new entity. We will fund your phase down. We understand the necessity for the establishment of the Africa society but it cannot to be funded with Ford Foundation funds." She said, "You have got to demonstrate to us that you can raise funds from corporate America, and other foundations."

We did that; we obtained grants from Chevron Texaco, and Archer Daniels Midland, which really made it possible to get the Africa Society off the ground. Exxon Mobil, Daimler Chrysler, Coca Cola, George Lucas from Lucasfilms who was a Peace Corps volunteer in India, the Rockefeller Foundation, etc. all chipped in. When we received funding from these various entities we went back to the Ford Foundation and obtained a

\$150,000 grant to implement the Teaching Africa project. We are well on the way to establishing ourselves like the Asia Society as the preeminent institution in the United States to educate and inform all America about Africa.

*Q: In your work was there much of a change between the Bush and the Clinton administration?*

ROBINSON: No, not really. We had great access to the Clinton Administration. We were able to get, as I said, President Clinton to address the National Summit on Africa. I think he addressed an audience of about 5,000 people. We had official delegates from every state in the country. And with the Bush administration, we have enjoyed equal access to the White House and State Department. So it has been seamless in that sense.

*Q: And so it continues.*

ROBINSON: And so it continues. Today it continues. We have a very powerful relationship with Discovery.

*Q: Discovery is what?*

ROBINSON: The Discovery Channel, which is perhaps the most innovative, creative, dynamic media giant in the United States to come along in a long time. I think quite frankly when the history is written about the U.S. I think that Discovery will eclipse Walt Disney Productions as the media entity that has had a very powerful impact and influence over the way the media depicted the world. Discovery's president, Judith McHale, is on our board of directors.

We embarked on a very significant project a couple of Thursdays ago: tours of Africa. The first one has been produced. This is a joint project between Discovery and the Africa Society with Chaos Productions of Santa Monica, California, working with the African governments that represent the six countries that we selected as the first to expose Americans to their history, culture, and people, flora, fauna, and natural wonders. They were Uganda, Tunisia, Botswana, Mali, Ghana, and Ethiopia. This summer the Discovery production crew and I and my vice president, as well as Forrest Sawyer who was the host commentator, went to Uganda. We were received by President Museveni, who led the Discovery production crew on a tour of his country. A unique feature of this series is that the tour of the country has to be led by the head of state. We had an opening Thursday before last at Discovery's headquarters in Silver Spring, and it was a spectacular event. Over 550 people attended the screening -- standing room only in the theater. We had a reception afterwards at the Discovery building right across the street. Over 600 people came to the reception. It was perhaps the most incredible event we have had thus far. So we have very strong partnerships. This is but one example. We have many partnerships around the country including the World Affairs Councils, the International Diplomacy Council in San Francisco, the Southern Set of International Studies in Atlanta, which is our key partner in the "Teach Africa" project, on and on. We have been very fortunate to

have gotten as far; my vice president is hopeful that Congress will make a significant appropriation to the Africa Society for fiscal year 2004.

*Q: Where do you see the greatest need for assistance from something like the Africa Society?*

ROBINSON: I know the Africa Society made a contribution to Americans after 9/11 by introducing them to countries about which they unfortunately had known very little. It is a curious irony that we, who live in the most powerful nation on earth, have so little understanding of and appreciation for people of other cultures, though we are a nation of immigrants from every part of the globe and from many different cultures. The contribution that the Africa Society is making to our education by providing a channel for information flow from a continent of 800 million people is extraordinary. We are reaching teachers of children in Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade and even professors through our "Teach Africa" program which is designed to provide orientation and training to the educators on how to teach Africa in an innovative way. This has raised education on Africa in their schools substantially. We have had two pilot projects; one in the Bay Area which on October 11 attracted almost 300 teachers for an all day training session. People in the Bay Area predicted that we wouldn't attract more than 30 people. We had 300 people from all over the Bay Area, even four or five hours away from San Francisco. They stayed until 6:00 in the evening. It was incredible.

This past Saturday we had a similar workshop for teachers from Virginia, Maryland and the District. Two hundred fifty teachers came from 8:00 a.m. until 9:30 Saturday night; we were late because we had a concluding session. The ambassador from Tunisia was just wonderful. He and his wife opened their home to us. Teachers came from Texas, Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and North Carolina to be a part of the training program here in Washington, DC. It was just extraordinary. They all thanked us because they had never attended anything like this before. In partnership with the southern center they now have extraordinary material -- textbooks and teacher training aids as well as a video. In the afternoon we had experts who represented the Kennedy Center's Africa Odyssey program, the Smithsonian Museum of African Art, the NGO and governmental communities, including the Peace Corps. We gave the participants, in a one day session, information which equipped them to go their classrooms and really teach about Africa in a very exciting and dynamic way. This is going to, in time, revolutionize how people think about Africa.

Our connection with the Discovery Channel enables us to expose Americans to Africa and perhaps change their views about that continent. For example, Americans need to know that the Pioneer space craft that sent back those incredible pictures ten or twelve years ago was designed by a Malian, born in a village in Mali, who came to the United States and got two Ph.D. degrees in astrophysics. This is the kind of contribution that Africans themselves are making to the growth and development and prosperity of the United States. So in time, within the next year or two, we hope to take the "Teach Africa" project to every state in the U.S.

Next year, with support from the World Cultural Foundation and the chocolate manufacturers association, we are going to move into Grand Rapids, Phoenix, Seattle, Boston, Atlanta, and Miami with the “Teach Africa” program. That is only one of many programs that we have in the African Development Foundation. But like the Asia Society that was established by John D. Rockefeller in 1955, now with an endowment of \$82 million and many other assets, we expect that the Africa Society in time will also become a major force in this country with respect to fostering interactions between Africans and Americans and in terms of increasing the education process. The U.S. will be better off for it and relations between Americans and Africans regardless of their hue or ethnic background will also be vastly improved.

*Q: There are some things we really haven't covered adequately. To do that I am going to turn it over to you.*

ROBINSON: Maybe collectively with our brain power we can take 30 minutes or so and think of what we have not covered before. I left the African Development Foundation in 1990 to go back to the State Department to once again be deputy assistant secretary for African affairs. My first appointment at the DAS level was during the first four years of the Reagan administration, I handled primarily economic affairs including activities of private sector enterprises. We really were trying to energize or stimulate a greater commercial relationship between the United States and the various countries in Africa. During my second appointment, I handled issues more of a political nature. I was responsible for west and central Africa on narcotics and terrorism as well as democracy and the Peace Corps issues.

Let me add that prior to my departure from the African Development Foundation, as I have said earlier, we managed to take the African Development Foundation appropriations from \$1 million in fiscal year 1984 to \$17 million plus for fiscal year 1990. I felt very proud of what my colleagues and I at the African Development Foundation had done over a six year period of time to really bring the Foundation to fruition. Going back to the State Department was not something that I pursued. I was contacted by Ambassador David Miller, who had been the national security advisor for Africa at the White House at the beginning of the Bush administration. He asked me to seriously consider returning to the State Department to be one of Hank Cohen's deputies, because Liberia in particular was not getting adequate attention.

This began after Christmas, December, 1989 and it spilled over into 1990. The Liberian civil war became a 14 year horrific experience for the people of Liberia and for the whole west Africa region. It really was that Liberia dynamic that I think prompted Ambassador Miller to ask me to consider going back to the department of state to work for Hank Cohen. I eventually agreed to do that. After all of the papers were processed and full field investigation completed, in September of 1990, I went back to the State Department. The Liberia issue became a personal matter. I was fixated by it; one reason being that the Liberian representative to the African Development Foundation was in Washington DC at our Foundation headquarters office when the civil war broke out. Her husband and her two children were caught up in the crossfire, so to speak. Her kids were in Ghana at the

time. Her husband was in their village. The kids couldn't get back into Liberia from Ghana. The husband was subsequently killed in the fighting. She could not get back to Liberia because of the security situation there. So this young lady, like many thousands of others, had to flee the country and become a displaced people as well as a refugee. That made the Liberian civil war a personal issue; for a period of 3 ½ years after I returned to the State Department I really became the point person in the department on U.S. policy as we tried to help to resolve the war in Liberia.

*Q: What was the situation in September of 1990?*

ROBINSON: Chaotic. Doe had been killed by this time. The interim government of Liberia, headed by the former President Samuel Amos Sawyer, was struggling to try and bring some order to chaos in and around Monrovia. ECOWAS had deployed to Liberia a cease fire monitoring group known as ECHOMOB to try to find a way to negotiate peace and to protect the citizens in and around Monrovia. The military strategy that evolved through ECOWAS was to protect the capital and a perimeter of about 12 miles around Monrovia. But by 1990, Charles Taylor and the National Patriotic Liberation Front of Liberia had made significant gains throughout large segments of the country. Chris Johnson was the field guerrilla commander for the NPSL. He and Charles Taylor were the principal protagonists of the NPSL. They were the leading rebel leaders. So it was a pretty dicey situation in 1990 when I became deputy assistant secretary of state.

*Q: What was the role of Libya? What was Taylor after? What were the issues?*

ROBINSON: Taylor wanted power. He wanted to be head of state. He wanted to take over the executive mansion. That was the prize. He had been trained in Libya along with Foday Sankoh who later became the principal guerilla leader in Sierra Leone. There were about eight of them trained in Libya. They were armed and financial resources were provided. There was a fairly well documented connection between Libya and Burkina Faso insofar as the NPSL guerilla group was concerned. The principal objective of Charles Taylor was to become head of state of Liberia. Eventually he succeeded.

*Q: What was Qadhafi of Libya doing?*

ROBINSON: Qadhafi had always had in mind a grand scheme in which he would have his tentacles in every country in Africa. Certainly at that time, he did have his tentacles in practically every country in Africa through the use of his oil-generated resources and his various emissaries and agents and spies. Qadhafi's reach across the continent was fairly significant. A lot of it was *sub rosa* but it was there nonetheless as we could tell from our various sources. I would also say that Qadhafi always had designs on as much territory as he could reach. Not that his ideas were imperialistic, but he certainly wanted to have political and religious influence in as many parts of African continent--and perhaps others as well -- as possible. The fact that Liberia had a special relationship with the United States was probably a factor in Qadhafi's calculations. Remember that we checked Qadhafi's ambition in the Haidzu strip in Chad back in the early 1980s when there was an aggression.



*Q: This has become known sometimes as the Toyota wars.*

ROBINSON: That's right. So I think it was to some extent a finger in the eye of the United States that Qadhafi was sticking because he was certainly working in collaboration sometimes with the French--and sometimes not. We certainly prevented Qadhafi from taking over and penetrating into Northern Chad at that time.

*Q: At that time, were we thinking of doing something with Qadhafi, saying knock it off or we will hit you again as we had after the...*

ROBINSON: Something did happen in the Reagan administration.

*Q: And that stopped his activities?*

ROBINSON: That stopped him. It checked him for a long period of time. He maintained an extremely low profile. It was difficult initially to find the Qadhafi or the Libyan fingerprint on what was happening in Liberia, but there is no question it was there. I think, in his own low key way, he saw it as a relatively risk free way of irritating Washington.

*Q: Was there a Liberian lobby, either Liberians themselves or friends of Liberia in Congress or anything, the Black Caucus or anything. Were there groups outside the administration interested in Liberia?*

ROBINSON: They were individual players, but they never seriously came together. There were attorneys for Taylor. There were attorneys for the interim government. I am thinking of Paul Lifler who certainly represented Amos Sawyer and the interim government of Liberia. He often met with us to talk about how to generate resources for the interim government and how they could get their ship registry back up and running. Liberia has always had a very large maritime registry. Ships all over the world have registered through the Liberian maritime system; it was an important financial spigot. So they wanted to get it back up and running.

On the Charles Taylor side, there were a couple of lawyers. H.P. Goldfield was one. He had a partner who was about 6'6"; H.P. Goldfield himself was about 5'7." They reminded me of the Mutt and Jeff show. We had a number of emissaries from the Liberian community in the U.S. There were people from Liberia itself who found their way to Washington. Tom Noweyu who was the so called defense minister for Charles Taylor. He spent a lot of time walking the halls of the Pentagon and the State Department arguing on behalf of APSL. We were often visited if not inundated by Liberians both from Liberia and from the United States with ideas for resolving the issue. Liberians were shocked that the United States did not take a more aggressive military posture in late 1989 and early 1990 to check what was happening to the government of Liberia--the Doe regime -- as the NPFL insurgency gained momentum, gained ground, gained territory and really began to challenge the Liberian armed forces in a very significant way. The

Liberian armed forces were defeated time after time by Charles Taylor's force, which initially was just a rag tag band of about 50 men and then grew to a large force of guerillas; the armed forces of Liberia simply could not handle them. The Liberians were shocked, especially the American Liberians who were direct descendants of African-American slaves. They were really shocked by American inaction given the special relationship, based on the fact that Liberia had been founded by freed American slaves, and that the capital city of Monrovia had been named after former President James Monroe. It was the President Bush's policy right from the outset of the hostilities that the United States was not going to get involved militarily. We were involved diplomatically. We never did shut the embassy in Monrovia although we came close to doing that on a number of occasions.

*Q: What was the rationale for not getting involved?*

ROBINSON: It had no constituency domestically; there was no support for intervention; the fear of having American troops killed on African soil was too great. We believed that there was a double standard in light of how we had intervened historically in other parts of the world with our military. We simply decided to step back from Liberia. It was a shock to a lot of people in the United States as well as to the Liberians.

I think Charles Taylor crossed over from Danané in the Ivory Coast in late December 1989. When George H.W. Bush was informed of this action by his National Security Advisor, Brent Scowcroft, his alleged reaction was, "Oh my goodness, we don't want to get involved in this. It is going to be a mess. It is really going to be a mess." I think in part he had that reaction because he had been the CIA director at one time and therefore was intimately familiar with circumstances in Liberia. The hostilities in part had their roots in years of perceived oppression and negligence and discrimination by the Americo-Liberian oligarchy that had ruled the country. The Talbert administration had raised the price of rice significantly back in 1978-1979 which led to the rice riots. Subsequently Doe overthrew the Americo-Liberian oligarchy; he came from the Krahn tribe and favored his kin.

The Krahn and two or three other tribes formed a coalition and dominated the government. Charles Taylor had a hatred for the Doe regime. He had been an officer in the army. He had been head of the general services administration and had been charged for embezzlement and fraud during his tenure in that position. He got pushed out of that position and fled to other countries. He had been a fugitive in the United States itself. But that is another story. So the hatred of the Doe regime, and Taylor's quest for power, that really led to the uprising. And, as I have said, looming in the background certainly was Colonel Qadhafi.

*Q: Did the Black Caucus of Congress take any particular sides on this?*

ROBINSON: Not as a body. Not as a bloc. There were certainly individual members of the Black Caucus, most notably Merv Dymally who chaired the House Subcommittee on Africa at the time. He was very interested in helping to try to find a way to resolve the

conflict in Liberia. In fact, on two or three occasions I met with him in Africa while trying to help resolve the problem through diplomatic means. Congressman Payne of New Jersey, who is still a member of Congress and a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, was very much involved over the 14 years in trying to see what Congress could do and how he could move the Black Caucus to be more aggressive about getting the United States to try to do something. But at one point I think that Congressman Payne was persuaded by Charles Taylor that he would pursue democratic principles and practices were he to become the head of state. This is in the early-to-mid 1990, prior to the voting which resulted in Taylor being “elected”. Payne became someone with whom Taylor could communicate from time to time. Former president Jimmy Carter also had a lot of communications with Charles Taylor, and assumed that he might be redeemable and embrace democracy, including protection of human rights, etc. That never happened under Charles Taylor. I do not recall the other members of the Black Caucus proving to be effective in helping to move U.S. policy toward Liberia in a more positive, aggressive direction.

*Q: You were dealing with Liberia as a DAS from when to when?*

ROBINSON: September, 1990, until July of 1996. That is when I left.

*Q: What else were you engaged with during that time besides Liberia.*

ROBINSON: I mentioned earlier the other portfolios that I had such as narcotics and terrorism, democracy, the Peace Corps, but Liberia really consumed most of my time. On the narcotics front, we were very concerned about the trafficking of drugs through Nigeria. Nigeria loomed large as a problem in Africa at the time. In Africa per se, drugs were not a serious problem in the early 1990s on the east coast with perhaps the exception of Kenya and Tanzania to a limited extent. But certainly in West Africa, Nigeria was the path mechanism. We didn’t see much evidence of drugs being manufactured or of plants being cultivated in Africa, but certainly as a trans shipment channel...

*Q: From where?*

ROBINSON: From Asia. From Europe. Nigeria loomed large. As I mentioned earlier, I can recall in 1992 having a conversation with the director of customs. He told me that 62.3% of all of those apprehended at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York for trying to smuggle drugs into the United States were from Nigeria, which is pretty startling.

*Q: Even today on the Internet and the scams, Nigeria is sort of the hustler of the world. Nigerians are... any fancy deal, whatever it is.*

ROBINSON: Nigerians are a very enterprising people and the narcotics trans-shipment business was a big business. We suspected that during the Babangida regime there was drug trafficking and drug related businesses being conducted by people within the Babangida administration which caused us a great deal of concern.

*Q: This is the administration in Nigeria.*

ROBINSON: That's right. General Babangida. So, given the drug problem in the United States, we had a great deal of concern about narcotics trafficking through Nigeria.

But, as I said, my focus was principally Liberia and Sierra Leone. During this period that I was at the State Department I made, I think, about 33 trips to West Africa, meeting with various ECOWAS heads of state from Abdou Diouf in Senegal to the late Houphouet-Boigny in Cote D'Ivoire to Toure in Guinea. I spent a tremendous amount of time with Amar Efiue, the foreign minister of Cote D'Ivoire. We were looking for possible actions to energize the process of peace enforcement and for negotiations of a peaceful resolution to the civil war in Liberia. When the NTSL crossed over into Sierra Leone in March of 1992, we tried to use that in the State Department as a rallying point for the various heads of state in the 16 countries that make up ECOWAS (the Economic Commission of West African States). We wanted to realize that there was a need for more aggressive militarily action as well as diplomatic to rein in the NTSL and other factions that were beginning to rise up. We said that if the Liberian problem was not solved, it would spill over into Sierra Leone, and into other countries in the region thereby de-stabilizing the region.

Frankly, a lot of the problems we have seen over the past 13-14 years in west Africa, in my view, stemmed directly from the inability of ECOWAS and the international community and particularly the United States to bring the Liberian civil war to an end sooner rather than later. It sparked so many unfortunate dynamics in west Africa that it really set the region back by at least a decade.

*Q: What was there we could have done that we didn't do?*

ROBINSON: After Ambassador Jim Bishop left Monrovia, there was an outbreak of hostilities in Liberia in December of 1989 up until September of 1990. Hank Cohen was able to at least give the United States some presence by attending meetings that the ECOWAS heads of state had convened in Banjul and in Bamako to discuss how to deal with the situation in Liberia. But I don't have the impression that Liberia commanded a tremendous amount of attention and focus in the department prior to my arrival. As I have indicated, one of the reasons why Ambassador David Miller was pressing me to return to the State Department was to bring some focus on Liberia.

Let me give you an example of the attitude that prevailed in the State Department. There was no one at the deputy assistant secretary level who was really focused on the Liberia issue. At the time, the directorship of West Africa was split in two, Francophone West Africa and Anglophone West Africa. Ambassador David Rawson was responsible for Anglophone West Africa. He was a very good man and a friend of mine.

*Q: He is in Chicago?*

ROBINSON: He is somewhere in the Midwest. We just recently were at an ECOWAS summit on Liberia in Dakar in July. David Rawson had his hands full with all kinds of issues in his area of Africa; he didn't have a lot of supervision other than Hank Cohen who was responsible for the entire continent. But David also didn't have a lot of leeway and authority to do anything on Liberia. When I came on board, I took the bull by the horns and energized the Department to get busy on Liberia. We didn't have any significant intelligence on what was happening outside of Monrovia -- behind enemy lines for example. We didn't know what was going on in Liberia. I managed to get all of that refocused, so that at least we could begin to make policy on an intelligent basis, based on new information previously unavailable. When I started my DAS job, there was clearly a vacuum of leadership, a vacuum of focus, and a vacuum of energy on Liberia. That all changed after I got there.

*Q: During the approximate 2 ½ years you were dealing with this, what happened? I mean were we able to get really engaged?*

ROBINSON: We had a lot of conversations with Charles Taylor on the telephone. I met with Charles Taylor in person in March of 1992 in Dakar, Senegal. We had a four hour meeting face to face. I met with Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso on at least three occasions to try to get him to stop facilitating the flow of arms to Charles Taylor. There is no doubt that our dialogue intensified. Our diplomatic presence in West Africa was ratcheted up 100 fold. We pushed for the deployment of Senegalese troops who, in terms of training and discipline, were the best armed forces in West Africa.

*Q: They had a tremendous reputation in WWII and WWI.*

ROBINSON: They also participated in the Gulf War. I established a very close relationship with Monsieur Sec who later became their ambassador to Washington. It was that contact with General Sec and with President Abdou Diouf that enabled us to set a meeting for Diouf with President Bush in Washington -- some time in late 1991. Bush asked President Diouf if he would deploy a battalion of his troops to Liberia to help keep the peace in and around Monrovia and to strengthen the ECOWAS who was supporting the cease fire monitoring group, principally through Nigeria and Ghana and Guinea. That meeting of the two presidents and the discussion on Liberia took place because of our work behind the scenes in the State Department. The African peacekeepers agreed to the Senegalese involvement on the condition that we provide logistical support, materiel support, military support in terms of weapons etc. and munitions. We did that. We facilitated the deployment of the Senegalese to Liberia. If it had not been for the Senegalese being on the ground, I am convinced that in November of 1992, Charles Taylor would have overrun Monrovia. He did not overrun Monrovia. That was because of the heroic efforts of the Senegalese military. We redeployed the battalion back to Senegal in January, 1993, because of an election that was taking place throughout that country. President Diouf needed to have his forces back in order to bolster security during the national elections in Senegal. In any case, the Senegalese played a major role in Liberia. We were able to facilitate that intervention. I think that, at least for awhile, we were able to get Blaise Compaoré to block the flow of arms.

*Q: Were the French playing any role in this? This is not Francophone, but still the French had a significant military establishment and ties.*

ROBINSON: We had lots of contact with the French and the Quai d'Orsay in Paris and the Lycée in Paris. A couple of my conversations were with Jean Christophe Mitterrand, Mitterrand's son.

*Q: He was the African hand.*

ROBINSON: That's right; he was the Africa person in the French government. I think that the French were less than genuine in their interest about Liberia. The French ambassador to Cote D'Ivoire, who had been there for 12 years, gave out misinformation and often outright lies to our ambassador, Ken Brown, in Abidjan. He claimed that he did not know what was going on with Charles Taylor. We subsequently found out that the French ambassador had been meeting with Taylor. I think his name was Dupree. He held meetings with Taylor on a regular basis -- almost on a monthly basis. For a year or more, he told Ken Brown he didn't know what was happening. The French talked out of one side of their mouth, "Yeah, we want to be helpful." On the other hand, the French did things that were not very helpful.

Sometime in 1991, I started meeting with various leaders to try to persuade them to have a peace process. I tried to involve Houphouet-Boigny of Cote D'Ivoire, Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, Ibrahim Babangida of Nigeria, Conté of Guinea, Eyadema of Togo, Jerry Rawlings of Ghana; they were the key heads of state in the ECOWAS mediation efforts in Liberia. There needed to be a process to bring all the interested parties together at the table. The Yamoussoukro peace process was initiated by ECOWAS, essentially through the leadership of Houphouet-Boigny, in July of 1991. It was the first of a series of peace negotiations took place in Yamoussoukro, the traditional capital of Cote D'Ivoire. That is where the basilica is located that Houphouet allegedly built with his own personal fortune.

*Q: It is a replica, except a little bit bigger, of St. Peters.*

ROBINSON: That is right. It is quite stunning. The first of at least six extensive peace negotiations took place in Yamoussoukro. We planted a germ of the idea for a peace process. We discussed the idea with Houphouet-Boigny and Amar Efié, his foreign minister. I remember Efié in a meeting with Alphonse Batar, the prime minister at the time of Cote D'Ivoire, and me. They were saying, "How can we help; what can we do?" At one point, they were in denial about the tremendous refugee problem they were having in Cote D'Ivoire with the spillover from Liberia and, to some extent, from Sierra Leone. They denied they had a problem. They finally realized you could buy an AK-47 on the street of Abidjan for five dollars. They were beginning to show up in profusion. The Ivory Coast leadership then realized they had a problem; there was plenty of evidence. Houphouet definitely wanted to play a more positive role to see how peace could be brought to Liberia.

*Q: Now during the time you were dealing with this, were diamonds a factor?*

ROBINSON: No.

*Q: Because later diamonds became almost the principal driving force for the power struggles that went on in that area.*

ROBINSON: I am sure that diamonds were being sold in order to generate the resources to purchase arms. But in terms of the possibility of some of the diamonds and the resources from the sale of diamonds ending up in the hands of Islamic terrorists as we certainly have today, that was not an issue.

*Q: Any petroleum in the area?*

ROBINSON: No. Bauxite. Bauxite was being exported; tin was being exported. They had these sources plus the diamonds and gold to generate funds to buy weapons.

*Q: What was our position on Charles Taylor?*

ROBINSON: I would say that we were principally opposed to Taylor taking over. But we tried to maintain a modicum of neutrality. What we were trying to do was work with ECOWAS to stabilize Liberia and to allow for free, fair and open elections, so that all of the factions could participate. Monies were routinely allocated on an annual basis to set up an electoral commission and try to put together elections. These timetables kept slipping. One of the major components in the various peace negotiations was an electoral commission, a timetable for having national elections, a process of campaigning wherein Taylor represented the NPSL along with somebody from the interim government and any other qualified candidates pursuant to the criteria to be established by the electoral commission. All parties participating in the elections would have to lay down their arms and then campaign for the presidency of Liberia and form hopefully a government of national unity. It wasn't until 1996 that ECOWAS and the international community was able to get to that point. During my time, the election issues proved to be elusive in terms of negotiating a peace agreement, as did a cease fire and a process of going forward that would hold. Taylor would agree to certain conditions in the peace negotiation meetings that took place in Yamoussoukro. Then he would turn around, walk out the door after three or four days of negotiating and say, "No, I deny everything. I didn't say it. I didn't agree to it." He proved to be a very difficult person to negotiate with at the table because he didn't negotiate in good faith.

*Q: Looking at Liberia, I have the impression that there is Monrovia, and then the whole hinterland, without much connection between the two, so that having an election and all seemed to be problematic.*

ROBINSON: We were worried about that. There was built into the timetables an interregnum of six to twelve months which we thought would allow enough time for

displaced people to get repositioned in their villages and their homes. At one point, there was so much frustration at how it could all work out within a limited period of time that we were even considering ways which would allow bona fide Liberians, living outside the country, to cast their votes. There was some concern about the feasibility of such a scheme and, as I think about it, that is why there was this push to stabilize the Monrovia area and environs and beyond. One of the reasons why the Senegalese redeployed back to Senegal was because in trying to extend the perimeter of stability and peace throughout the country, six of the Senegalese soldiers were ambushed by NPFL and killed in a pretty horrible fashion. Security beyond Monrovia was a pretty difficult challenge, but the country had to be stabilized. How could the country be secured so that people would feel confident that they could return safely and participate in the campaign process as well as the actual casting of votes? The elections were not held until nearly three years after I left the State Department.

*Q: Did you know what was happening out in the bush or outside Monrovia?*

ROBINSON: We did after a fashion. When I returned to the State Department we didn't have any intelligence whatsoever. All of our assets had either been destroyed, compromised, or withdrawn. I thought that was rather unfortunate. How were we going to make decisions about how to proceed with our diplomatic strategy if we didn't have any intelligence? In various meetings with the agency, we found a way over time to ratchet up our ability to find out what was going on, not only in and around Monrovia, but in the bush as well. Finally we did manage to obtain some fairly good human intelligence as well as satellite imaging that gave us a better picture. It wasn't an entirely clear picture, but it certainly was a better picture of what was happening than when I first got to the State Department.

*Q: What was the role of our embassy? Who was our ambassador during this time in Monrovia and what was he and his staff doing?*

ROBINSON: Our ambassador in Monrovia was Peter Jon de Vos. He was key to keeping the channel of communication open, not only with the interim government of Liberia headed up by Amos Sawyer, but also with Charles Taylor and various others who represented Charles Taylor. We did keep the embassy open. We never closed the embassy even during the most tense period in Monrovia. That was kind of weird. I kept saying that we had reduced ourselves to a bunch of talking heads in Monrovia.

We hadn't shown a great deal of ability to marshal resources for the Liberians. We were able to do some things. When Charles Taylor crossed over into Sierra Leone we provided almost a million dollars to the Sierra Leonean military for military transport and some equipment; it was really non lethal support to Sierra Leone. On balance, the embassy was kept open primarily to assure everybody that the United States had not totally turned its back on Liberia. It was more symbolic gesture than anything else. The ambassador accompanied me to the meeting I had with Charles Taylor in Senegal. He accompanied me to meetings I had with Blaise Compaoré regarding the flow of weapons through



Burkina Faso and meetings I had with Houphouet-Boigny in Abidjan. The Liberian ambassador was also there.

*Q: Did we keep sort of a Marine landing force cruising off the area?*

ROBINSON: No. We had a couple of ships with Marines on board on the horizon off the coast of Monrovia in 1992, when the situation in Monrovia got really dicey. It got really dicey in Sierra Leone. I briefed General Powell, then chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff, on the situation. The Pentagon then did deploy a couple of battleships.

*Q: These would be landing assault carries, helicopter carriers.*

ROBINSON: No, we didn't have anything like that. Again having them steaming off the coast was more symbolic than anything else. They were really poised there in the event that we had to evacuate. But they were never brought into play. Not while I was in the department.

*Q: What about American interests? At one time we had a very large establishment there. By this time what did we have?*

ROBINSON: Not much. The USAID program which got huge during the Doe regime in the mid-1980s was shut down; all of our intelligence assets were gone; Roberts International airfield, which was built by the United States during WWII, and all of our assets were destroyed. The Firestone tire and rubber operation was still up and running, but with great difficulty. They subsequently shut down because of the intense hostilities. One of the reasons why we didn't respond more aggressively, when the rebellion began, was because since everything had been destroyed by the rebel forces throughout the country, some people in Washington argued that U.S. interests had been demolished. Why should we stay? Everything has been destroyed except the American embassy. The embassy was only maintained for symbolic reasons.

When Taylor became president in 1997, there were attempts by some American companies to get re-started in Liberia. But Taylor really never used the power of his office to fix the country. He just let the country continue to decay for his own personal aggrandizement. Now that Taylor is exiled and an interim transitional government of Liberia is in place for two years leading up to elections, there is every hope and expectation that the situation is going to improve significantly. In fact, Congress just approved an emergency appropriation for \$200,000,000 to begin the process of reconstruction and rehabilitation of Liberia. Liberia Watch, which is a coalition of interest and advocacy groups here in the Washington area including the Africa Society, really helped make that happen.

*Q: Bush I lost the election in 1992. You stayed on for awhile.*

ROBINSON: There isn't really a changing of the guard until after inauguration. I stayed on at the State Department until July 1993. Then I left the State Department to join a private law firm.

*Q: What did you see in the transition period and very early Clinton time about our policy toward Liberia?*

ROBINSON: Most of the action with respect to Liberia was to hand off a lot to the United Nations. I was part of helping to make that happen. Ambassador Howard Jeter, another career foreign service officer, and Dane Smith, our former ambassador to Guinea, picked up the ball after I left and ran with it. Both of them did that for different periods of time and were designated special U.S. envoys on Liberia. So our diplomatic involvement in trying to help keep all of the groups and governments in west Africa focused in finding a way out of the problem in Liberia continued to go forward. I think that is what happened in 1996 in terms of arriving at an agreement that subsequently led to a cease fire and the creation of the environment that allowed the elections to take place in Liberia in late 1996 when Charles Taylor was elected. I think all of that came about as a consequence of our continued involvement diplomatically in the Liberian civil war.

*Q: So when you were handing over the reins as an interim person, you didn't feel this new Clinton administration was sort of saying well, let's forget this. I mean it was a continuum.*

ROBINSON: That is right, it was a continuum. George Moose became the assistant secretary of state for Africa. Howard Jeter and Dane Smith were DASs. Our involvement in Liberia did continue.

*Q: Okay. Well, I think this is probably a good place to stop.*

ROBINSON: That's it.

*End of interview*