

James T. Kloppenberg '73  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
The Dartmouth Vietnam Project  
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Transcribed by Karen Navarro

STEINBERG: This is Leigh Steinberg ['18], interviewing Professor James [T.] Kloppenberg ['73] for the Dartmouth Vietnam Project. We are on the phone, and I am in Rauner [Special Collections] Library at Dartmouth College [Hanover, NH]. It is October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

Okay. Hi, Jim. How are you doing today?

KLOPPENBERG: I'm fine, Leigh. Pleasure to be with you.

STEINBERG: Great to be with you. So let's just start with the beginning. So where and when were you born?

KLOPPENBERG: I was born in Denver, CO, on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1951.

STEINBERG: So you grew up during the Cold War. What was that like? What was your childhood experience like?

KLOPPENBERG: Well, my parents ran a sheet metal shop in Englewood, CO, which is the suburb immediately south of Denver where I grew up. And so it was a small family business, and they worked very hard at it, morning, noon, and night. My father worked Saturdays, mostly Sunday afternoons as well. So that was really the center of our lives.

The only Cold War-related experience I have probably parallels that of most people in my generation, which was the Cuban Missile Crisis, and I remember vividly going out to a drive-in for a hamburger with my mother and my brother, Joe, and her saying something—I don't think she probably realized how ominous it sounded to us—about whether this would be the last meal we had before a war started. And that was quite alarming to both of us, but it, as you know, though, the crisis passed, and then everything went pretty much back to normal.

I attended a Catholic grade school, and the Catholic Church was really at the center of my own personal life, if the shop was at the center of our family's life, because I was active both as a choir boy in a reasonably good Gregorian chant choir, because our choir director was quite a serious musician, and she insisted on

a certain level of excellence. And I was also a mass server, an altar boy, and those two pieces of my life took almost as much of my time and interest as the various sports that I played growing up.

So the Cold War came and went, but it wasn't really the dominant feature of our lives. It was very much the kind of life that so many kids in 1950s America whose parents were struggling to recover from the Depression and make a lives for themselves would have experienced.

STEINBERG: Great. So you mentioned that you went to Catholic school. Kind of, what values of Catholicism did you gain from that and carry into your post-Catholic school experiences?

KLOPPENBERG: I remained, and remain to this day, a practicing Catholic, and it was a formative experience in my life. It certainly shaped my sense of myself in the world. We were quite enthusiastic in my school about Vatican II, and the sense that the windows had been thrown open in the Church was very clear and palpable, and all of us loved Pope John XXIII, and thought that this was a great moment moving forward for the Church.

My parents were much more conservative culturally and were, I think, ambivalent about the changes in the Church. My mother had been brought up a Methodist, and converted to Catholicism when she married my father, and the departure from the Latin mass, and from some of the older devotional traditions of the Catholic Church, was hard for her, because she had transformed her life in order to conform to the traditions of the Catholic Church, and so when it changed, that was difficult for her. But, for me as a young boy, it was not a problem; to the contrary, it was something quite inspiring.

And when I got to Dartmouth, I continued to attend mass at the Catholic Student Center, the Thomas Aquinas House. And I was not happy with the continuing conservatism of the pastor there, who was a man many alums loved, but who seemed to me somewhat out of touch with the post-Vatican II Church, and I think many of the boys—and we were all boys the first three years I was at Dartmouth—had that same sort of ambivalent feeling about the Aquinas House. We were grateful to have a place to study, we were grateful for the nice facilities there, we continued to go to mass, but, at least to the people with whom I was friends, the conservatism of the person who ran the center

was not quite in line with what we thought the post-Vatican II Church was about.

STEINBERG: Yeah. So you mentioned—we'll return to your Catholic involvement at Aquinas House a little later when we get to your Dartmouth experience—but you mentioned Vatican II, the Cuban Missile Crisis. When did you become fully aware of current world events?

KLOPPENBERG: Well, I think in grade school, it was only through what I heard from my parents' conversations and read in whatever textbooks we were reading about American history. But when I got to high school, things changed pretty dramatically. I went to a Catholic high school as well, St. Francis de Sales High School, in Denver, [CO], which is now a grade school, like so many Catholic high schools that closed in the early '70s.

But in high school, I became active in debate and—both debate and an event that was then called “extemporaneous speaking,” which meant that you were given a topic the day of the speech meet, three different times, and you would be given a half hour to prepare, I think a ten or twelve minute talk on whatever the topic was. And so from the point at which I began doing that, which was actually freshman year, I began devouring news magazines and had quite an extensive [laughter] collection of sources that I could draw on for topics that had to do with absolutely everything under the sun, from domestic policy to foreign policy.

And so from that point on, I became very much involved with both political and social questions. But because, probably, it was both the conservative family in which I was raised and a conservative school that I went to, I was quite a conservative boy in high school, and in 1964, when I was only thirteen, I would have followed my parents in voting for Goldwater.

So part of what is striking about the time that I had at Dartmouth is that during the first year I was there, I changed from being both culturally and politically very conservative to being at the left end of the political spectrum, where I have remained to this day. So that first year at Dartmouth was really transformative. That was the year, 1969-1970, of “Cambodia Spring.”

And I came to Dartmouth expecting to continue to debate and to continue to play baseball, which had been my main sport in high school. And I did play baseball my freshman year; I did debate. And in the spring, I remember going to the—what was called the

Novice Nationals at the University of Chicago [Chicago, IL], the big debate tournament at the end of the year, and having a good time, and doing quite well with my partner.

But sometime during the spring quarter, with the teach-ins and the cessation of classes and the invitations that we were all given to focus our attention on Vietnam, I learned so much more about the history of American foreign policy, and about what I saw as the injustices, not only that the United States was responsible for in Vietnam, but more about the injustices at home, than I had realized before, even though I thought of myself as being well-informed.

And, as a result, a lot of the things I was doing at Dartmouth began to seem less important to me, and so I decided that I would not continue debating the next year, and I decided I would not continue playing baseball the next year, and I decided I would be much more engaged in political activity and much more serious about my studies. And so that spring, the spring of 1970, was really in some ways the turning point of my life, and it was the anti-war activities at Dartmouth that were responsible for that change.

STEINBERG: So what was the first anti-war activity that you got involved with after you came home after having this realization? You got back to campus. What was kind of the first involvement, exposure that you had to the anti-war movement?

KLOPPENBERG: Well, let me say a little bit more about the spring, because I think it is something that this record should contain. The first teach-in that I remember at some point during the spring of 1970 was either organized by, or at least featured, a professor of Chinese history named Jonathan Mirsky, who continues to be a very visible commentator on Chinese affairs to this day. And I remember being astonished by the gulf between what he was describing as American foreign policy, not just in Vietnam, but more generally, and the ideas that I had had growing up and the position that I had about Vietnam.

And I was one of those kids who, when he was given leaflets and was given, you know, five-page pamphlets about American foreign policy, actually sat down and read them. And some of us did; a lot of people just thought, "Hey, it's a lark. This is great." Especially some of the guys on the baseball team, I remember, just thought this was fun. We got to play more baseball; we didn't have to spend as much time on our classes. But I really took it

very seriously that this was something that the people in positions of authority wanted us to focus our minds on. And so, I did.

And, from that point on until my junior year, it wasn't really as much a daily engagement as it was just a complete change of focus and affiliation. It was like a gestalt switch that I went from being opposed to the war and critical of American foreign policy and critical of so much domestic policy. And that was, I think, more an intellectual transformation than it was a transformation that manifested itself immediately in going to marches or going to Washington [D.C.].

So initially it was more just a change of outlook. But by the time I was a junior at Dartmouth, I had gone to the Dartmouth program in Bourges, France, in the winter of my sophomore year. And I had gone to the University of Denver [Denver, CO] for a quarter in the spring of my—I mean, in the spring of my sophomore year, I'm sorry, I had been in Bourges, and then after that, for spring quarter, I had gone to the University of Denver where a number of my friends had gone, where my brother was a student, and lived there and worked in the sheet metal shop during the summer of that year.

And it was in some ways a strange sort of migration to the left during that period, that even as I look back on it, it is hard to understand, except that it seemed to me what was happening to me was what happened to a very large number of people of my generation. We had been taught such a rosy story about American history, that when we became more seriously interested in studying America, and during my freshman year, I was also taking courses in Dartmouth's Government Department and the History Department, and as I continued to read the parts of American history that involved racism and the preservation of white male supremacy, it began to seem much more salient to me as ways of understanding the problems America was facing now than anything I had read before.

So it was a process that probably took from that initial shock of the spring of 1970 through to the fall of my junior year at Dartmouth, when I really did begin to be more involved. And I'm happy to talk more about the way I spent the spring of my junior year, which was entirely devoted to anti-war activities, but I shouldn't get too far ahead of the story if there are other questions you want to ask.

STEINBERG: No, we can kind of take a circular route. I'm interested, when you went home to Denver, what was—had your relationship with your parents changed, considering their politics and now your intellectual shift?

KLOPPENBERG: Yes, yes, it certainly did. My parents had always been very supportive, and we had gotten along quite well. We hadn't had the kinds of blowups that a lot of teenagers have with their parents. I mean, it was a—not a warm and fuzzy relationship with my father, because he was a German father who thought that discipline was extremely important, and considered himself to be a very gentle man because he didn't beat us with a belt the way his father had. But he was—he insisted on a certain kind of stern discipline, and working on Saturdays and summers and many other times that were free in the sheet metal shop was something that he considered to be perfectly appropriate, and since most of my friends did not work the hours that I worked, I was a little bit resentful of that.

But they allowed me to do the kinds of things in high school: the sports, the debate, that I wanted to do, and that was generous of them to do that, because neither of my older brothers had had as much opportunity to do that as I had done. But when I came back from Dartmouth in the spring after my freshman year, it was much harder, because I didn't at that point want to keep my political ideas under my hat. And by the end of that summer, by the time I went back to Dartmouth, it was pretty clear that we were just going to have to agree to disagree and not talk very much about politics, because they remained very staunch Republicans, and I was very critical of the whole point of view of the [President Richard M.] Nixon Administration.

And so, from that point on, we pretty much had to just not talk that much about politics. My hair got longer, I grew a beard, the kinds of things [laughter] that kids in my generation did.

STEINBERG: Uh-huh.

KLOPPENBERG: And my mother was, I think, just completely dumbfounded, because these seemed to both of my parents, I think, to be symbols of rebellion. And I wasn't rebelling so much against them or the way they had treated me, as I was, as many of us did, against what we saw as the parts of American culture that we had grown to dislike. So you've put your finger on a very important issue, the psychological—not physical, but

psychological estrangement from my parents and from their world.

STEINBERG: Yeah, great. So let me take you back to the fall of 1969. You arrive on Dartmouth's campus. What is the campus culture like at this time? You know, the Parkhurst [Hall] takeover had happened in the spring before you came. And so, what was the campus culture, the anti-war movement? Can you kind of just give me a feel for what the pulse of Dartmouth's campus was at the time?

KLOPPENBERG: I would say it was schizophrenic, because I was involved in two different activities. I was playing baseball, and the coaches of the baseball team were extremely conservative, and insisted that all of us boys keep our hair very short and present ourselves as if we were still in 1959, and most everybody did that. There was no open rebellion that I can remember anybody even talking about.

And then at the other end of my experience, I was active on the debate team. And a couple of the guys who were a couple of years ahead of me had already turned radical—one of them had been involved in the Parkhurst demonstration—and they were, I mean, they were friendly guys; they were smart; I enjoyed getting along with them. But, as the year went on, that gap between the culture of the baseball team and the culture of the debate society was just getting wider and wider and wider, and I found myself more drawn toward the activism of the debaters than to the focus on sports that was true for most of the guys on the baseball team.

I remember that we were all expected as freshmen still to wear beanies, and they were actually these funny sort of hats that fishermen wear. I don't know why they were called "beanies," but they were. And within about, I don't know, five or six days, all of us just stopped wearing them. And I think it was the kind of hazing ritual that had probably gone on at Dartmouth for decades, and I think the upper classmen had basically lost interest in enforcing it, and none of us had any interest in wearing what we thought were these silly caps, whether we were left or right of the political spectrum.

So that was the first moment, just in the first few weeks, when it was apparent that things were beginning to change at Dartmouth, and this was the beginning, if my memory serves me right, of John [G.] Kemeny's presidency. I think I remember that John Sloan Dickey, gave us the introductory lecture when we

arrived at Dartmouth, but very soon after that, I believe John Kemeny became president, and I could be mistaken about that. The record will indicate when he actually became president. But during my freshman spring, I took a course with him, and I was impressed that a man as eminent as he was, the founder of the BASIC [Beginners' All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code] computer language, and one of the real pioneers of what became the world of personal computers, would descend from his lofty perch as one of the leading computer scientists in the world to teach this introductory math course to a hundred or so freshmen.

And so I, from that point on, was quite an admirer of him. We all poked fun at his strong Hungarian accent, but—but he was a very engaging, genial man. And so I was being in some ways drawn toward the life of the mind that my professors were presenting me with and that I was encountering for I don't know how many hours a week, a dozen hours a week at the debate club. And then, at the same time, attending mass at Aquinas House, and hanging out with the guys on the baseball team. And this gap, as I look back on it, just kept growing through the whole of freshman year.

STEINBERG: So would you say that this gap kind of encompassed the entire campus, and that other students were struggling with it as well, just like you were?

KLOPPENBERG: I'd say yes and no. In every dorm—I mean, I was in Hinman Hall down by the river, which I think does not exist anymore, and just on my floor, we saw this same thing playing out. There was a guy who had come to Dartmouth to play football who, I think, basically lost interest in football during that time. There was—my roommate was a fairly talented guitarist, and he and I loved singing and playing music and writing songs, and as the year went on, his hair got longer and longer and longer, and he, I think, began to feel pulled into, not the political counterculture, but just the other part of the counterculture. I'm going to ask you to pause this, Leigh, for just a second, okay?

STEINBERG: Yeah.

KLOPPENBERG: All right, I'll be right back. [Pause]

STEINBERG: All right. We are recording again. So you were telling me about your freshman floormate who was involved in the counterculture.



KLOPPENBERG: Right. And as a musician, his focus began shifting more toward the, what was then folk rock music scene, and then into the rock music scene. And he ended up spending two of his four years at Dartmouth in Germany, in Mainz, and really basically sort of absented himself [laughter] from American culture, both physically and psychologically.

Another roommate, across the hall, a young man named [Michael] Mike Tracy ['73], who was probably the best athlete among us, even though he didn't—I don't think he played a sport; he might have freshman year, but I don't remember—but he became interested in modern dance, of all things, and he became one of the founders of the dance group, Pilobolus, and that was what first sort of opened my eyes to modern art, which I had known nothing about as a grade school or high school boy.

And Mike was really a fascinating character. I don't know if you know anything about Pilobolus—

STEINBERG: Uh-huh.

KLOPPENBERG: —but it's become one of the most innovative, and I think successful modern dance troupes in America since the early '70s. And, so Mike was really [laughter]—Mike was out there. But he introduced all of us to an entirely different side of Dartmouth, because there were, once Pilobolus got going, dance groups that came to the Hopkins Center [for the Arts], and there was just a whole arts scene that I had been completely unaware of, but became quite interested in during my undergraduate years.

So, not only politically, but also culturally, the place was becoming a kind of a cauldron of ideas, and I don't think anybody on the outside would have expected that of Dartmouth College in 1969 and '70. But it may be that it had been the Parkhurst demonstration. I mean, I had already accepted the offer of admission to Dartmouth before that happened, and my parents were very wary about it when they realized that the contagion of radicalism had spread to Dartmouth.

But the image that we had of the college was of a very fine educational institution that was pretty much, you know, safely distant from those hotbeds of radicalism, Boston and New York. And little did they know, or little did I know when I arrived that it was—that I was going to experience the late '60s, even in the wilds of New Hampshire.

STEINBERG: Yeah. That is definitely an image that I think is still kind of falsely perceived today.

KLOPPENBERG: [Laughter] Yeah.

STEINBERG: So—yeah, so one more question about kind of your involvement before we jump into the anti-war stuff, is going back to the Aquinas House and your involvement there. That was definitely, as you said, pretty conservative religiously, but how was the anti-war movement, and your activism specifically, received there politically?

KLOPPENBERG: Well, it didn't come up, basically. It was much less interactive than I suspect every religious group at Dartmouth is today. It was more going to mass, listening to the priests, and studying there. And, when I think about it now, whenever I have conversations with students at Harvard [University] where I teach who happen to be Catholic, I talk with them about what they see as the social and political implications of their Catholicism. But those questions were much less often discussed in that generation.

When I was in high school, I had a theology class with a young woman, who is the sort of young woman who would have become a nun 20 years earlier, but was not going to become a nun; she was going to be a teacher in a Catholic school. And she engaged us in conversation and in dialogue about difficult social and religious questions, even though all of us were still quite conservative. But, the reason that stands out is that she might have been the only religion teacher I had in 12 years who wanted us to do anything other than just repeat what we had been taught.

And when I got to Dartmouth, that culture of dialogue and engagement in the Catholic Church had not yet penetrated Aquinas House. So, by the time I got to graduate school, I was aware of liberation theology, and I was aware of the ways in which the Catholic Church was being transformed by the post-Vatican II ideas of the liberation theologians and was transforming much of the Southern Hemisphere, because of the commitment to social activism, but that was not a part of the Catholicism of Aquinas House when I was there.

Occasionally a young priest would come to say mass and would give a homily that would, I think, cause a lot of us to do a mental double take during the mass, because the ideas were

considerably more, I would say progressive—I suppose I would have said then “radical”—than the ideas that I was accustomed to hearing from the pulpits of Catholic churches.

But it was subtle, and there wasn’t—I mean, I don’t remember ever seeing a political flyer or anything posted on a wall at Aquinas House, so that the political engagement that I became involved with in the second half of my time at Dartmouth, and the continuing affiliation that I had with the Catholic Student Center, didn’t really have any connection with each other. [laughter] I never really thought about that much before. But, as I look—think back on it, it wasn’t as though the one was fueling the other; they just inhabited separate spaces in my life, I guess I’d say, in the same way that the debate and baseball did in the freshman year.

STEINBERG: So did your Catholicism transform at all over your four years, based on your experiences? Or you kept them very separate?

KLOPPENBERG: No, I think it did transform, but I didn’t feel the need to talk as much about it. Part of that actually had to do with the time I spent in Bourges in France, because I went to Paris almost every weekend, as most of us in Bourges did, and as I was going around to different churches in Paris—mostly I went to Notre Dame [Cathedral] just because of the beauty of the high mass—

STEINBERG: Yeah.

KLOPPENBERG: —but occasionally I would go to different churches in Paris, and there were already some churches in which social action was becoming a really important part of Catholicism. And so, since we were supposed to be reading all we could in France in French, I did start doing a little reading in some of the more left leaning Catholic communities in France.

And when I came back from that time in France and found myself back in the University of Denver, I started going to a church in Denver, not the one that I was part of growing up, either the grade school or the high school, but a new church in which there was a young pastor whose sermons were much more progressive and his congregation was much younger than the congregations that I had been part of when I was growing—when I was in grade school and high school.

So it was happening subtly, but I don’t remember it manifesting itself in Aquinas House. The pastor, Bill Nolan [Monsignor

William Nolan], was there the whole time I was at Dartmouth, and as I said, he was a much beloved man. He had raised an enormous amount of money; this was a beautiful facility; and it really did feel, I guess, just to me ungracious to call him on it. I mean, in some ways he was like my father in that this was who he was. He was probably a man in his 60s at that time, I expect, and he wasn't going to change, and I wasn't going to change him.

So I think those of us who continued to go to Aquinas House just basically shrugged our shoulders and said, this is still Nolan's place, and if we want to be part of it, we're gonna be part of it on his terms. So I don't remember the activism actually seeping out of the world of politics and into Aquinas House at all.

STEINBERG: Great. Yeah, that's a very interesting answer. Thank you. So, December, 1969, the draft lottery starts to be implemented. What was your reaction to this, and were you scared that you were going to get drafted?

KLOPPENBERG: I wasn't because I had already been declared 4-F [draft classification]. In high school, I was playing football and basketball, in addition to baseball, and as a [laughter] I don't know how many pound weakling of a quarterback my sophomore year, I got crunched by a big football player and suffered a back injury, and the physicians who examined me said that I was lucky I could still walk, because I had this congenital condition in my lower back that made it very weak and meant that I was at risk if I were to have the kinds of violent collisions that football players have 20 times a minute. And, so I stopped playing football.

But the consequence of that was that when I registered for the draft when I turned 18, I had a physical examination and I presented the x-rays that the doctors had taken when I was in high school, and they just said, oh, this is easy. You're 4-F. And I don't know if—my eyesight was very bad, too—I don't know whether that would have disqualified me, but I knew that my back disqualified me. And so, I was a kind of passive observer of the lottery, because I knew it didn't really matter for me.

But I remember vividly sitting around with a bunch of my friends who really were very, very worried about it, and most of them got numbers in the two hundreds, and so they didn't have to worry about it. And I didn't actually know anybody who was drafted. This is a classic example of the experience that white suburban

boys had in my generation, that we knew there were people going off to fight, and we knew that people were being killed, but being part of a group of kids who went off to college, it wasn't as much of a personal experience of mine as it was for a lot of people.

There were kids in my high school a few years older than I am who joined the Army, and a couple of whom who fought in Vietnam, and I remember hearing them talk about it in assemblies at St. Francis. But at that point, all of us were gung ho and thought, this is just great. We have to save the world from the threat of Communism, and when our turn comes, we'll certainly want to do our share. And by the time I was having to face whether or not I would actually be going off to war, I knew I wouldn't be, because I knew I'd been declared 4-F.

So, to this day, whenever my lower back acts up, which it does, I don't know, a half dozen times a year, I say to myself, *on balance, this is a good bargain. I wasn't killed because of it—*

STEINBERG: Yes.

KLOPPENBERG: *—and as a result, whatever pain or discomfort or trouble it causes me, it kept me from having to worry about going to Vietnam.* And I don't know what I would have done. By the time of the—my junior year, I think if I had been in line to be drafted, I might well either have gone to Canada or tried to do something else. I don't know that I could have pretended I was a conscientious objector to all wars, because I was not, but I was certainly sufficiently opposed to America's role in Vietnam, that it would be very hard for me to accept induction into the Army.

And that's—I mean, it's interesting to put this in a framework, because one of my best friends from high school, the catcher on the baseball team that I was the pitcher on, went to West Point, and we remained good friends through high school, and we remain good friends to this day.

And I was not at all, in the time that he decided to go to West Point, opposed to that. None of us thought this was a strange thing to do. It was what any good red-blooded American would do. And I was interested to know during his time at West Point that the culture *there* changed as well. I mean, everybody knew they were going into the Army, but the degree of hazing, the kind of hierarchy, the kind of unyielding or unquestioning discipline, obedience, that had been part of West Point when he arrived

had all changed by the time he graduated. So it wasn't only Dartmouth that was going through changes during the years; it was happening even in a place like West Point.

But, as far as the draft goes, I don't think that any of my friends had numbers low enough when the lottery occurred that it had any consequences for any of us other than just everybody breathing a collective sigh of relief.

STEINBERG: Yeah. So, with your friend at West Point, did you guys have discussions about the war and politics and American foreign policy while you were both in college?

KLOPPENBERG: Not so much. It was probably only about 10 years later that we finally had more conversations of that sort. And it's surprising that we didn't, because when I think back to it, the one thing that is striking and slightly unusual about our high school was that about 10 members of our graduating class of 1969 married each other, and so many of us dated our future spouses through high school, as I did and as my friend at West Point did. And so, we were in each other's weddings, and we spent some time with each other in the summers, although he was usually deployed during the summers, so we didn't see him as much.

But we just didn't talk about that. We talked about the other kinds of things that 18-, 19-year-old kids talk about. And when we finally did have that conversation, I think it probably was 10 years after we were all out of high school, he had gone immediately from West Point into, I think he was in Germany for the first four or five years, and then in South Korea, and he had never been in Vietnam. And so, he—it didn't impact him personally any more than it impacted me personally.

But I found out, again 10 years later, that he and many members of his generation had found themselves really at a crossroads in the military, because they had become very doubtful about the—either the justifiability or the winnability of the war in Vietnam, and he said he considered himself very lucky that he didn't have to go. He would have gone. He didn't think it was a reason that he would stop obeying orders. But he said that he didn't—by the time he left West Point in 1973—didn't feel the kind of crusader mentality that most people had felt 10 years earlier about going to Vietnam. He was very skeptical about whether it made any sense, and was very glad that he didn't have to go.

STEINBERG: Great. All right. So, kind of leaving high school and going back to college—

KLOPPENBERG: Okay.

STEINBERG: —I want to—can you take me back to—we discussed a little bit President Kemeny—so can you take me back to the 1970 student strike that happened May 5<sup>th</sup>, the day after Kent State, in reaction to the invasion of Cambodia? Can you take me back through your experiences with that, and the campus experience during that week-long strike?

KLOPPENBERG: Well, that was a huge moment for me, because I remember hearing about it, I think, in my introductory French class, and being stunned that this was going to happen. And, being the earnest young man that I was, immediately deciding, *Okay, I'm going to attend everything I can attend, read everything I can read, and find out what this is about.* Because I was still more inclined to defend than to criticize Vietnam policy when the strike started.

And, as I mentioned, it was Mr. Jonathan Mirsky, it was, I think, actually probably hearing the conversations of my American history professor, Peter [G.] Slater, who was a very lovely man. He's had most of his career at Mercy College. He was denied tenure at Dartmouth, and this is one of those situations in which one has to just shake one's head and say, it's very hard to be a fully devoted teacher and be a successful academic, because he just spent much too much time with all of us to get his own scholarship done in the way that he would have had to do in order to earn tenure at Dartmouth.

So I'm grateful to him. He was an extremely good teacher of mine. He was one of the advisors for my senior thesis. But he was the instructor in the course that I had the spring of freshman year. And I do remember that the second half of that course, after the strike was declared, we spent a lot more time talking about current events, and placing whatever issues in American history we were discussing in class in the framework of contemporary politics. And I think that probably had a lot to do with changing my mind. It was a course in post-Civil War U.S. history, and it was the course that was most directly connected with the issues that were being discussed in the strike.

One of the other courses I was taking, I believe, was a course on modern poetry, and the instructor in that course was much less

engaged in politics, and I don't remember ever bringing it up. But I remember that my French instructor, who was a young woman whom all of us were in love with, I think, was very serious about what this meant as a—it was just a crossroads for our nation, and Peter Slater was very thoughtful about it. So, it was an important moment.

STEINBERG: So you were sitting in class. Did you participate in the strike at all?

KLOPPENBERG: Only by attending the teach-ins. I was—again, I was more a passive observer than an active participant. I didn't have anything to say, because I didn't know enough to venture opinions. But I remember going to sessions in classroom buildings. I think Mirsky actually stood outside Dartmouth Hall. I don't remember whether I—I mean, [inaudible]—your records will indicate whether that's true or not. My memory, which is probably valuable itself, is of a big gathering either on the Green or in front of Dartmouth Hall, with Mirsky on a box of some sort, raised a little bit so we could see him, and holding forth, basically, at considerable length on the history of American involvement.

And that was a point at which readers were beginning to be available on the history of American involvement, and that, I think, was really decisive for me, because I do remember reading some of the documents from the early days of American engagement, and learning, I think for the first time, that the U.S. had known that if the elections of 1954 had been held, Ho Chi Minh would have won 90% of the vote. And that's an arresting fact when you see it printed on the page, and you've been convinced that your nation was on the right side, on the side of the angels, and you realize that we had actually stood in the way of a democratic process, because we were confident we would not like the outcome.

So, that understanding of where Ho Chi Minh came from, going to Paris to the Peace Talks, and expecting that Woodrow Wilson would be on the side of the Indochinese people, all the way through to '54, and then into the slow and steady involvement in the war from '54 on. As all of that began to come clear to me, I formed a much stronger conviction that this had been a mistake from the start and that it needed to end.



STEINBERG: And were there other history classes—you mentioned your post-Civil War class—were there other history classes or government classes that were very formative in this experience for you?

KLOPPENBERG: Well, the course I had with Charlie Wood [Professor Charles T. Wood] on medieval Europe I can't say was particularly. [laughter] It was a great class, but it didn't have much to do with contemporary America. I took a course with Jim Wright [Professor James E. Wright] on the history of the American West, which was a spectacularly good course, and as a kid from the West myself, I was very much taken with that. And he gave me the opportunity to do the first really serious research I had ever done, but that didn't come until a little later.

So, most of my studies in history actually came in my junior and senior years, after I had already made this shift. And at that point, they were confirming the convictions I had come to in freshman and sophomore year. But, as far as the freshman year, I think the course with Peter Slater was the only history course I took.

I went into Dartmouth thinking I was going to be a philosophy major, and had one course with a man who had just gotten his Ph.D. in analytic logic, who drew mathematical formulas on the blackboard the entire quarter, and that was enough to convince me I was not going to be a philosophy major, because I found it completely uninteresting and unimportant.

And then I thought I would be a government major, but the course I took on American government struck me as bloodless. It was all about systems of government and institutions, and that struck me as not terribly interesting at that point. I've since become more interested in political institutions, but I was not so much then.

But I was interested in political theory, and the best course I had, I think as a sophomore, was a course in the fall with [Professor] Roger [D.] Masters, who was teaching political theory, and it was a course on Hobbs, Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx. And that was a course that was really important for me, both because it showed me how one does serious political theory—Masters was at that point involved in the translation of the complete works of Rousseau, and so whenever we were working on Rousseau, he wouldn't bring in the edition that we were using; he would just bring in the French edition and do all the translations by sight, and that was impressive to me.

But he was such a careful and serious political thinker, that by the time we had finished Marx and had written pretty detailed papers on the economic and philosophical manuscripts of 1844, I realized that that was a kind of thinking that I found just absolutely captivating. And so that course was a very important intellectual shaper of my sensibility. And, even though I didn't ever come to think of myself as a Marxist, the critical bite that one could find either in Rousseau or in Marx stayed with me, and I continued to look for courses that would enable me to do that kind of critical social and political analysis.

And so, gradually I began moving in the direction of courses that dealt with theory. And when I was going into my junior year, I think, I had already gone—because I was put off by the institutional focus of some of the courses in government, decided that wasn't where I wanted to major, although I wanted to just continue taking courses in political theory.

So then I went to the English department and took a couple of courses there, and thought, *gosh, this looks good, and so I was going to be a major in English*, and then took courses in art history, especially around the time I was in France and fell in love with art history. Dartmouth had one of the great art history departments in the world at that point. It had John [C.] Wilmerding [Jr.], who went on to be the American curator of the National Gallery [of Art] in Washington [D.C.], and a man named—what was his first name?—oh, we just called him Professor [Franklin W.] Robinson—I can't remember what his name was—who was also a tremendous scholar, who I think went on to the Clark Museum [The Clark Art Institute] in Williamstown [MA]. And it was just, it was an amazing time to be studying art history at Dartmouth.

But, I wanted to combine all of these things, and so I tried to put together an independent concentration. And the last signature I needed after I got the signatures from people in government, English, art history, was a historian. And I can't remember now if it was Jim Wright or Peter Slater who looked at it and said, this is fine, but what you have created for yourself basically is a program in intellectual history. And I said, "What's that?" And they explained that intellectual historians try to put together the different pieces of a culture as it changes over time, and I said, "I'm in."

And so, then I decided to major in history, and so junior and senior year I took a lot of history courses and wrote a thesis in the history department. But all of that simply, I would say, opened my eyes wider and deepened my sense of the importance of a kind of critical approach to American history.

There was a young woman at Dartmouth during those years named [Professor] Carolyn [Woods] Eisenberg. “Rusty” Eisenberg is what she insisted we call her. Even though none of us called our professors by their first names, we all called her “Rusty.” And Rusty insisted that I give up this idea that I was beginning to hatch in my junior year of becoming a professor, because she said, “If you do that, you’ll end up teaching at a place like this, and you’ll end up teaching kids who are gonna go on to be the CEO of General Motors, and nothing is ever going to change.”

And I didn’t formulate it as clearly in my mind when I was having a conversation with her, but I changed my mind about the possibility of going to law school, because I realized my own life had changed. And so I just disagreed with her; I thought, *This is the place where lives can change*. And so I thought, *This is where I’m gonna place my bet and see what happens*.

But, the Dean of the College at that point was a man named Carroll [W.] Brewster, who had been the Dean of Admissions at Yale Law School, so he was a sort of expert in how to get Dartmouth students into the top law schools. And I got to know him reasonably well, because I was a serious student, and I was one of these guys who had a chance to go to a good law school.

And I remember vividly having a conversation with him, and I’m going to go into this in a little detail, because it’s connected to the way Vietnam really changed the way all of us thought. I asked him what the proudest moment in his career as an attorney had been, and he gave me a lengthy description of a case that he had been part of arguing as a junior attorney in a firm in New Haven [CT], and it was defending a two-bit mobster in a case, and the case was argued all the way to the Supreme Court. And it was not *Miranda [v. Arizona]* or *Gideon [v. Wainwright]*; it wasn’t one of the landmark cases, but it was a case that did involve criminal investigation procedures.

And he said that the guy was exonerated, because of the way that the arrest had occurred. And I said, “Did it bother you?” because he said the guy was guilty as sin. And I said, “Did it

bother you at all that you knew you had actually participated in the successful defense of somebody who had broken the law and had a career of breaking the law?" And he said, no, not at all. If you go into the law, you really can't ask yourself those kinds of questions. You just have to commit yourself to the majesty of the law, and that's your life.

And, as you can tell that I remember that to this day, that was a very important conversation for me, because I realized at that point, *If I can avoid it, I don't want to live that life. I don't want to live a life where maybe half the time I'm actually doing what I consider to be not the work of the angels, but I'm on the wrong side. And if there's a way that I can find a life that doesn't involve those kinds of ethical compromises, or uneasiness, then I'll try that. And education looks like a way to do it.*

And I don't think that I would have had that—in fact, I'm quite sure if I would not have had that conversation with him, I would not have had those misgivings, had it not been for the senior year—or the freshman year I had had at Dartmouth. Because after that, things did look different to me. And that came as a result of the work that I did in my courses as much as it had to do with anything else, because it—what I was learning to do was to be a critical and inquiring citizen, and to ask questions about what the purpose was of everything I was doing.

And so, all the courses I was taking, I think I would say, contributed to that change of mind that led me not to be willing to be—and this is the great line from Mario Savio, right, in the Free Speech Movement, that you don't want to just go along; you want to be—you don't want to be a cog in the machine. You want to break the machine; you want to stop the machine. And that was basically what the student strike began to make me wonder about, as it did, I think, many of my peers—not everybody, by a long shot—but many of my peers. And so it was, I think, of *huge* significance. I can't imagine the people who organized it or participated in giving the talks could have realized just how long lasting the changes would be for at least some of us.

STEINBERG:

Yeah. So, that critical mindset that you talked about fostering through your classes: When did that translate over to the Vietnam sphere? Or more specifically, how did it translate? So, what are your most formative memories about the anti-war movement and your criticisms of it?

KLOPPENBERG: Okay. This is—this, I think, is probably what caused Ed Miller [Professor Edward G. Miller] to think I'd be a good person to interview for this, [laughter] because this was a fascinating moment. In junior year—this is the spring of 1972—In the fall, my now wife of 44 years and I decided to get married in the summer of '72. And so my mind was on the things other than politics.

But, the bombing of—I think it was the bombing of Hải Phòng Harbor on Christmas of '71, January of '72—was an issue that Rusty Eisenberg discussed in the class I was taking with her, and it was something that just grated on all of us, because it seemed so gratuitous to engage in this if we were, as Nixon insisted, on our way out of Vietnam, just a sort of act of cruel madness. And that was, I guess, maybe the point at which I decided, *I've got to do something, whatever it is that I can do.*

And I remember vividly going to a meeting in the fraternity house that I had been a member of for a grand total of about six weeks when I was a sophomore, Alpha Theta, which, again, I think is no longer in business. Let me just insert this in brackets about that experience, because I think it is also relevant. I was a member of the pledge class, as it was called, in my sophomore year, because most of the guys that I was friendly with on the baseball team were members of that fraternity, and I thought, *Well, this will be fun.*

And they took the six of us in, and they took the six of us in, and they said, these are the things that we're gonna do for—as pledges. And the six of us stopped and talked a little bit after we left the house that first night and said, "Do you want to do that?" "No, I don't want to do that." "Well, let's not do it." [Laughter] And so we basically didn't do any of the stuff that they wanted us to do, and that was sort of the end of the hazing rituals at Alpha Theta.

But, because I was—maybe because I was still with my then girlfriend, now wife, even though she was in Colorado when I was at Dartmouth, the sort of bacchanalian weekends at Alpha Theta, even though they were pale compared to some of the other fraternities, just sort of turned my stomach, because these were guys who I knew were smart, who were friendly, who were nice guys, just turned into lunatics when they were drunk enough to consider themselves to be having a good time. And after watching this happen, you know, Friday and Saturday night for six weeks, I just said, *This is not for me. I have no interest in this whatsoever.*

And so, again, I think all of this was of a piece. This was all just turning away from what I probably would have gone into without any second thoughts just six months before. But, after the Vietnam—or Cambodia Spring, everything looked different. And so going through that ritual, then staying in that world of what I thought of as wretched excess, just didn't make sense. And so, I decided against doing that.

But now, back to the January of 1972, when we came back to campus, and began having these conversations in several classes. And a friend of mine and I, a man named [Michael W.] Mike Jennings ['72], who has actually been for a number of years the chair of the German Department at Princeton University—so the two of us both went into the academic world. He was a year ahead of me at Dartmouth, so he was a senior, and I was a junior.

And we decided we were going to try to do something to get students to Washington [D.C.] to lobby their congressmen, because we were still—and now I'm tempted to say naive enough—but I would be inclined to say idealistic enough to think that that would actually make a difference, that we could let our voices be heard, and let people know that students at universities all over America were opposed to the war, and not opposed just to the sense—in the sense of marching against it, but in the sense of wanting to have discussions, to have arguments, to try to persuade our elected officials that this was a mistake, and that we needed to withdraw right now.

And so, Mike and I thought the best thing we could do would be to organize students from colleges around the northeast to come down to Washington and meet with a congressman, because at the Ivy League colleges, just as there are now, there are kids from all over the country, and we thought this would be a good way to make our voices heard.

So we located a couple of places in D.C. that were willing to let people sleep on floors, and we went in to talk to John Kemeny about this, because we—actually Mike had not been at Dartmouth yet, because he had transferred from Arizona—but I had been through the student strike freshman year, so I knew that there was precedent for giving people a chance to do other kinds of work to complete their academic work than their classes.

And so we proposed to President Kemeny that he give the faculty an opportunity to give students the chance to go to Washington if they felt moved to do that, and do their—complete their assignments either during the summer or do other kinds of assignments, but just to look at it as an opportunity to do something different, to do a kind of work that they would consider to be of academic value, but also would make a difference for the country.

And President Kemeny, whom I had taken two classes with, but I hadn't really met—I mean, I had listened to him in big lecture halls of a hundred people, but I hadn't really gotten to know him at all—but we made our spiel, and of course we were nervous, because we had no idea what the response was going to be, and he listened very carefully and asked us questions, and wanted to know how this was going to work and how thoroughly we had thought it through, and whether we would actually be able to find the places to put people and get them in to see their congressman. And he ended up, at the end of the conversation, writing us a check for what I remember was \$300. I can't remember whether that number is exactly right, but it was an amount that enabled us to get a fleet of buses going from Dartmouth, and gave us a kind of template for what people at other colleges could do.

And this thing ran for, I think, six weeks from the time we started it through the end of the spring. So it took us a while to get it started, because if I think back on it now, it was the spring quarter, not the winter quarter that I spent in Washington, so it must have been either at the end of the winter quarter that we had this conversation with President Kemeny or at the very beginning of spring quarter. But, in any case, he not only endorsed it; he gave us money to get it started, and didn't—[he] said, I don't want this to be official. I don't want this to be, you know, the President of Dartmouth College. I want you simply to do it.

And so, we took him at his word, [laughter] and we never said a word about where the funding came from, but we went ahead and ordered the first set of buses, and there was a sizable contingent of Dartmouth students in Washington through that entire spring, living mostly in churches around the Georgetown [University] campus.

STEINBERG: And were you guys—like, what were your daily activities in D.C.? What was life like surrounded by this group of Dartmouth kids, but also kind of right in the heat of Washington D.C.?

KLOPPENBERG: Yeah, that was probably as close to being part of the counterculture as I've ever been, because you got to know people who knew people in the D.C. counterculture, and so we were going to parties of a sort that I had never been to before, and meeting people from other campuses, because people were staying on floors of not just church assembly halls, but also people's apartments. And it was really interesting. I mean, when I think back on it, I can't help but smile because it really does seem like it was just about my only immersion in the sort of '60s that comes up in people's minds when they think of the '60s.

So it was kind of comic, because that was what the nights were like. And during the day, I would put on my suit and go to see every congressperson from Colorado and the senators from Colorado, and then work on trying to make contact with other colleges and try to find places for other kids to stay, and try to find ways to get them from other places. And I don't know how many colleges were involved in this, and I don't think we ever had anything that could be glorified with the term, "organization," so I don't know whether there's any record of this or not.

But I do remember meeting with aides of every congressman from New Hampshire, from Colorado, and from several others, where I would just go with other people who were there. If one of the people who was there was from California, and that person was going to see a congressman from California, if you didn't have an appointment yourself, you would just accompany that person, you know, as a moral supporter, just a show of numbers.

But, this was an interesting experience, because I remember, as we were getting this going and as we were having meetings at Dartmouth to try to get the—get people aware of this as a possibility, there was a meeting at Alpha Theta—which is how I got started on that excursion into the history of my brief career at Alpha Theta [laughter]—and one of the guys I had known in freshman year, who had lived in Hinman Hall, who I think later became a drug dealer and died at an early age, was standing in the middle of this gathering, ranting about how pointless it was to go to Congress, that what we needed to do was to "burn it down," which was one of those phrases that people used during that period. And I don't think they knew—nobody knew: What would you burn down? How would you burn it down? What point



would it serve? But it was just this sort of, the showy version of student radicalism that appealed to a lot of people, but I just, from the beginning, thought of it as infantile. I couldn't see what anybody thought would happen, simply by causing violence. And so, I mean, this was the period, roughly, of the Weathermen and when there was violence being done in the name of the anti-war movement, but that never made sense to me.

And so, this division at that meeting between those of us who thought, *Look, this is a democracy. If we can make our voices heard, we can actually make it clear that, politically speaking, this is now a weakness that anybody who supports the war has. And as you go forward, these are your future voters.* All of those are arguments that any activist would use at any moment. And the gulf between those of us who viewed it in those terms and those who viewed it as simply kamikaze politics became very clear to me, and it became clear to me that my future lay in organized political activity, not in radical demonstrations.

And so, after that spring, my wife and I did get married that next—that summer, and we came back to Dartmouth. And in the fall, things really began to take on an almost surreal quality, because that was when it was clear that Nixon was going to be elected over [Senator George S.] McGovern, even though from our point of view, he was continuing a policy that was utterly indefensible and utterly futile, and was not going to succeed.

And so, Rusty Eisenberg organized a bus of people who would go down to Washington to protest the inauguration in January, and so, we got back from Colorado in time to do that, and went to the march. And some of the people on the bus gave us instructions on how to deal with the tear gas that was certain to be unleashed against us.

And my wife and I decided that the most [laughter] productive thing we could do would be to follow after the march and clean up afterwards. [Laughter] So we decided as we were getting to D.C. that we really were not interested in having our heads bashed, that we were much more interested in making a show of our opposition, but not engaging in violent activity, but instead cleaning up the mess afterwards. So that was how we spent the inauguration in January of 1973.

And, from that point on, it just—in my mind, it unraveled, because that was the point at which Nixon soon embarked on the Peace Talks, and eventually, after Watergate and after

everything else, the war wound down to its pathetic close. But, it was the spring of '72 that was the sort of high water mark for me and a number of my friends in terms of active engagement with the anti-war movement.

And a Dartmouth dimension of this was the willingness that Jim Wright had to engage me as a research assistant as I was doing an independent study with him on the Dartmouth Indian symbol. And so, I spent the—much of the summer of '72, and part of the spring, and then I think probably part of the fall when I got back—I can't remember exactly when I gave him the paper—but, doing research on the origins on the Indian athletic symbol.

And this is one of the reasons I'm willing to engage in this oral history with you. I did some oral history with Dartmouth alums who were adamant that they had worn the Dartmouth Indian symbol on their athletic jerseys in the early 1920s. And I was able to show them photographs of their athletic teams without any athletic symbols, and to give them the evidence that it had started as a result of some work that a Boston sportswriter had done to create this symbol that he could contrast to the Harvard pilgrim that he liked to draw. And people just wouldn't believe it. It seemed to me that the evidence was really incontrovertible, yet their ideological connection to the athletic symbol, the Indian athletic symbol, was so strong, that even pretty solid evidence would not convince them to the contrary.

And so, I know how memory can play tricks on a person, and so that's why I'm saying from time to time, "The records will show exactly what happened," because my memories are cloudy at this distance. Some things are very vivid, but whether I actually have them in the right moment or in the right spot, it would be hard to know without having corroborating evidence.

STEINBERG: Well, all of the memories you've shared so far seem extremely interesting, and I'm sure very true. But, one item I want to expand on—

KLOPPENBERG: Time will tell. Well, we'll see.

STEINBERG: --one item I want to expand on are your few mentions of President Kemeny. So you took two classes with him. You had this meeting with him where he handed you a check. What was the feel on campus around Kemeny? He was obviously more progressive than President Dickey that he succeeded. And was there a respect around him? Did people feel like they could push

his boundaries? Like, how was he perceived on campus during this time?

KLOPPENBERG: I think he was a polarizing figure, because those of us who were very happy that Dartmouth had become this kind of, I thought as an intellectually very alive place—and this was the point at which coeducation was under active discussion, which I thought was the best thing that ever happened to Dartmouth College, and thought so at the time—those of us who were on that side of things considered him to be the best thing that had ever happened to Dartmouth, and admired him deeply.

And I knew there were people who thought all of these changes and proposed changes were just horrible, that they were going to rob Dartmouth of what made it special. And I had come to the conclusion—and that's why I wanted to tell the Alpha Theta story—I had come to the conclusion that what it was that those people thought made Dartmouth special was what made Dartmouth problematic, and that it needed to change pretty dramatically in order to become the kind of college that I thought it should become, that I thought its faculty believed it should be, which is a place for intellectual inquiry more than anything else. And that was certainly the experience I had there for the four years I was there.

And it's interesting—this is just a sidelight—the man who was the chair of the History Department for many of the early years I was at Harvard was a Dartmouth graduate, 1972. The man who was the dean of the social sciences at Harvard, a member of the Sociology Department, was a member my class, Peter [V.] Marsden, from 1973. And as I mentioned, my friend, Mike Jennings, has been a distinguished professor of German at Princeton for a long time.

So, this moment at Dartmouth, this moment of intellectual ferment, I think really did generate a kind of intensity among the students for their academic work that seems to me to be Dartmouth at its absolute best. And the fact that many of us turned away from the athletic teams, that we turned away from the clubs and forms of social life that had been the defining feature of Dartmouth, seemed to me to indicate that Dartmouth had turned a corner.

And it was deeply unsatisfying to me when I found in later years that, I think in part due to *The Dartmouth Review*, but perhaps in part due to other decisions that the college made in the

aftermath of President Kemeny's years in office, it pulled it back from that. And I know that I've talked to enough students to know that it's still not only possible, but likely that students will have a very good academic experience at Dartmouth, but I think that the decision to hold onto, and even to entrench some of what I saw as the less wholesome features of social life at Dartmouth have, I think, kept the place from being what it could be. And I know Jim Wright worked very hard in the early years of his presidency to loosen the grip of the fraternities on the social life of the college, and I was certainly behind that initiative and hoped he would succeed, and deeply saddened that he did not, because they still poison the overall social life of the place.

But, in my experience, it was a moment in which John Kemeny tried—I wouldn't say singlehandedly, because he had certainly plenty of people who were on his side—tried to pull Dartmouth out of what he saw as the less academic and less intellectual focus that had been the experience of many people at Dartmouth prior to the late '60s, and turn it into a place that was first and foremost a place of serious academic work. And I admired that in him when I was there; I still do.

STEINBERG: How do you think that—going off that—that the decision to go coed affected the intellectual and social life at the college? Like, was that part of Kemeny's kind of push to bring back this intellectual fervor on campus?

KLOPPENBERG: I think so. I think it was very self-consciously on the part of the people who made it happen, an attempt to break down what I would characterize as the Neanderthal sexism of many of the boys on campus. And my wife was there in the year '72-'73. She was a special student rather than a degree candidate, because she had already had three years of college and would have had to go two years at Dartmouth to get a Dartmouth degree. But, again and again, she would have the experience of having somebody approach her in one of her classes and start talking with her, and then the moment that she revealed that she had been married to a Dartmouth student in the preceding summer, the boy would turn on his heels and walk away.

And there was a lot—I had a few women in my classes junior year as special students. I don't remember any before that, although there may have been, and when I was a sophomore I know there were special students—brave, brave women. But, by the time I was a senior, there were, I don't know, enough that there were women, I think, in every class I took. And a few of

them graduated in our class. I think ours was the first class to have graduating women, and so they had been there as special students either as juniors or sophomores, and so to have the two years to earn the degree.

And it seemed to me, again, like so many other things, that there was a really deep rift in the male student body, that many of us welcomed them and thought this was just the greatest thing ever to transform social life at Dartmouth, and also to transform the tenor in the classroom as well. But, there were many other people then, as I suppose still now, who thought this was just terrible, that this was the end of civilization as we know it, and they weren't afraid to let the women know that. And that's why I said the ones who came early were very brave. It was easy for my wife in some ways just to say to all of them, "I don't need them." But still, it made it a very unpleasant year for her, except for the people who were both of our friends, and with whom we had a good time senior year.

But, there was a lot of animosity that was expressed to the women themselves who were the pioneers of coeducation at Dartmouth. But I think—my recollection of it is that everybody understood that this was a direct frontal assault on the old Dartmouth and an insistence that Dartmouth had to enter the twentieth century and begin treating half the population as if they were human beings. And I don't to this day have any respect for the opposition to that, and think it was a marvelous change that has all been to the good. But, my recollection is that not everybody felt that way.

STEINBERG: Was your wife involved in the anti-war mindset and protests that happened in '72 and '73 while you guys were still together and while she was here on campus?

KLOPPENBERG: Well, as I mentioned, she and I both went down on the bus that Rusty organized for the protest march against Nixon's inauguration. But that was about as much as we did. It just—I think between the spring—I felt as though I had done what I could do in the spring with the lobbying, and I think we both just decided after Nixon's election that this was just something that was not likely to change. And it was not until the next year really that Watergate began to reveal just the ways in which he had secured his election, although he might have won even without that, which is part of what compounds the idiocy of it.

But I think the realization that we had cast our first ballots for a candidate whom we admired, but who was defeated as soundly as anybody has ever been defeated up until 2016. And George McGovern came to campus. I heard him speak. He was somebody I thought very highly of. But it was clear that this was just not a majority view in the United States, and so I think we decided we were just going to focus on our own academic work, and not continue to be as engaged in the anti-war efforts as I had been in the preceding year.

But I would want to be sure that the record reflects I view myself as an almost insignificant foot soldier in this effort to try to end the war. There were many, many people at Dartmouth and everywhere else who did a whole lot more than I ever did. It was transformative of me, but I don't think anything I did transformed the situation or had anything to do with the end of the war. It was a cathartic experience and transformative experience, but I don't think finally that any of the things I did were effective in the ways that we had hoped they would be effective.

STEINBERG: So, this personal transformation that you went through, how did that influence and impact where your life went after Dartmouth?

KLOPPENBERG: It was completely responsible for the transformation. After my graduation in June, my wife and I went back to Denver and decided we would work as long as it took to earn enough money that we could go to Europe and live in a Volkswagen van for as long as the money would hold out. And she had always worked in railroads, where her parents both worked, and so she got an office job in the railroad office at downtown Denver, and I went back to the sheet metal shop. And after we had worked for a few months, we decided we would take enough—take the money we had and sell the car that I had had at Dartmouth, and go off to Europe. And we lived there for almost a year before the money ran out. But during that year, all we did basically was read.

And when we left, I had taken both the GRE test and the law boards, and didn't know whether I would be applying to law school or to graduate school, and if to graduate school, I didn't know if it would be in political theory or in history. But, that year of intensive reading in whatever we felt like reading convinced me that what I was really most deeply fascinated with was American history, and especially American intellectual history, the history of American thought and culture.

And so I applied to several graduate programs in history, and was admitted to several, and went off to Stanford [University, Stanford, CA] because they had a joint program at that point in history and humanities, and the humanities part of it involved two years of seminars on Western thought from classical Greece up to the present. And that was exactly what I wanted to do. I wanted to continue my liberal education from my undergraduate years, and so I was able to do that, and also get a Ph.D. in American history. And so, that program appealed to me very much.

But I would never have taken that step, I think—and my parents, I think, still, from the time I started that until I was tenured, actually, imagined that I would eventually leave that line of work, get a law degree, and come back and work in the shop. And I think they weren't angry that I had taken this path, but I think they saw it as a kind of detour from the path that was really laid out for me, and they're probably right that it was a pretty dramatic departure from what anybody who knew me in high school would have predicted would be my trajectory.

And had it not been for the experience that I had both politically and even, maybe even more decisively, in the classrooms of Dartmouth, I would not have decided on at least attempting an academic career. And I was not naive enough to think that it was going to be a slam dunk, but I thought, *I can always go to law school after I finish my graduate work. If I go to law school and somebody offers me a nice paycheck, I'm unlikely to say, no, thank you very much. I'd rather have six more years of poverty in graduate school.* [Laughter]

So, making the bet to try graduate school first really did come out of the four years at Dartmouth and that year of reading afterwards, and I got lucky. I was one of the people who was able to get a good job, and so have been able to have a career in the Academy [American Academy of Arts and Sciences]. But, if it hadn't been for the experience I had at Dartmouth, I think I probably would have sailed off into some law school, and then into some world of work in the law. Whether I would have enjoyed that, found it as satisfying as what I've done, I have no idea. But I doubt it.

STEINBERG: And has your work on American democracy and intellectual thought changed retrospectively your views on Vietnam or strengthened them? Like, how has your work and research as a

history professor influenced the way that you think about Vietnam?

KLOPPENBERG: Well, for the first 15 years that I was teaching at Brandeis [University] before I moved to Harvard, I often taught the American History survey. And in that course, I would always devote probably a third of the class to American foreign policy, and I insisted that the students read a lot about Vietnam, because it did seem to me to be one of the defining moments in American—especially American diplomatic history—but American history more generally.

And so, I would say that everything I did in graduate school, and then in my own classrooms was shaped by the experiences I had starting at that student strike in the spring of 1970, that that not only changed my way of looking at it; it set me down a path that has been confirmed by everything I have read and thought since then. And I think that the standard approach to Vietnam in the American Academy [of Arts and Sciences] now is very much the approach that I started to discover during that spring of 1970. And it's deepened, it's broadened, it's gotten more nuanced and sophisticated. But I think that the overall contours of the understanding that I developed as an undergraduate at Dartmouth have been confirmed by the historical scholarship that's been done in the succeeding decades.

STEINBERG: And what exactly is that view on Vietnam? Like, how do you categorize the teaching of Vietnam today in American academia?

KLOPPENBERG: That's a very good question, and it would be—it would require several lectures to give an adequate answer to it. [Laughter] But I'll give you the short version, which is that America came out of World War II convinced that we were the strongest nation in the world, and that there was going to be a struggle to the death with global Communism. And I think that simplified version was made possible, in part, by the purging of all the China hands in the [U.S.] State Department during the McCarthy [Era] years, and once that had happened, we really didn't have very many people in positions of policy-making who understood the situation in Asia, more generally, or in Vietnam particularly.

And so, I think when the French effort in Indochina failed, it was a kind of reflex on the part of the [President Dwight D.] Eisenhower Administration to say, well, then, we've just got to step in. We can't let this happen. We can't let this country fall to



China or to Russia, or to whoever it was going to fall to. And I think if there had been people still in the State Department or in the United States Government who understood the dynamics and understood that Indochina had been fighting against China for centuries, that this was hardly going to be a pawn of China, we would have been much more wary of that.

But we were not exactly wary after World War II. We were frightened of the Soviet Union having gotten the atomic bomb; we were very much concerned that our geopolitical position was at risk, and that we were not going to be able to maintain our position of dominance if we lost parts of the globe as, I mean, the way the demonology ran, we had lost Eastern Europe, and now we had lost China, and now we were in danger of losing Indochina. The question of what it meant to say that “how could we lose it if it had not been ours to begin with?” was a question that I think just was not asked.

So, the idea that these were under our control and we needed to keep these parts of the world under our control, even if it meant bringing Chiang Kai-shek back to mainland China, these are the kinds of delusions that I think drove American foreign policy in the decade after World War II, and then continued to mature as America got deeper and deeper into Vietnam. And I think once we had committed ourselves in the early '60s, then the reason for continuing was simply that we had already made too big a commitment to withdraw at that point, and at that point it just becomes harder and harder and harder to extricate the nation from what I would say was an error of judgment at the beginning.

And I think the way that the situation has played out after the end of the war in some ways confirms the judgments that people who were opposed to the war were making at the time, that there was no danger of Vietnam falling either to the Soviet Union or to China; it was going to be its own independent nation. But, at the end of a civil war, there was certain to be retribution, there was certain to be an amount of violence, because violence had been going on for decades in Vietnam. And you don't just stop at the end of a civil war and shake hands and everybody comes out happy.

But I think now things have pretty much fallen into what many people were saying—people who knew much more than I did—were saying at the time, that Vietnam was a proudly independent culture that was going to maintain its independence once it was free of American and Russian or Chinese involvement. And I

think that it's not exactly a glowing success story—it has the problems that all developing countries have—but I think it's better off now than it was in the middle of a civil war that we were not only helping to fight, but—this quip, the source of which I don't recall, but it has always seemed to me to be as good a single sentence assessment of what was going on as any other, and I'll conclude with that, that “we were not on the wrong side; we were the wrong side.”

STEINBERG: And so, that being said, and with your work in the history of American democracy, do you think that this Vietnam era and the Vietnam experience transformed how Americans view democracy, both in our foreign policy and domestically?

KLOPPENBERG: Yes and no. I think those of us who would put ourselves on the left—most people now came of age—people of my generation came of age during those years—have continued in our work, both as scholars and teachers, to present this way of thinking about America in our courses.

And the person whose education I know more about than any other, and that's [President] Barack [H.] Obama, encountered this way of thinking about Vietnam when he was a student at Occidental [College] and when he was a student at Columbia [University]. And I think that what has come to be known as the Obama Doctrine: “Don't do stupid stuff,” grows directly out of this way of thinking about the Vietnam experience, that we have done so much stupid stuff since World War II that was misguided by a sense of American omnipotence and by a sense of the rest of the world's untrustworthiness, that we have again and again blundered by overreaching, and by misunderstanding conditions in the countries in which we were trying to flex our muscles, exert our military might. And we continue to make those kinds of mistakes now, but as it was difficult to extricate ourselves from Vietnam, it's equally difficult to extricate ourselves from the messes we've gotten ourselves in in the last 20 years.

So I think it is the case that the generation that is coming into power—I mean, Hillary [R.] Clinton will be the last President of my generation. Whoever succeeds her is going to be considerably younger. All of us, I think, were shaped, as I believe that Hillary Clinton was shaped, by the sense that America had made terrible mistakes abroad and was guilty of tremendous injustices at home, particularly on questions of race. And I think between the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam war movement, an entire generation of people who then gravitated

into the Democratic Party, was shaped by those two experiences, and the politics of the Democratic Party has been shaped ever since McGovern by that awareness.

Now, a number of Democrats, including Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton above all, have thought that the solution to this problem is not to keep alive the Bobby Kennedy/McGovern flame, but instead to try to split the difference with the Republican Party. And there are people who see Hillary Clinton that way; I don't.

But I think that there are plenty of centrist Democrats who think that the members of my generation who formed the ways of thinking that I just described have gone too far, and that there's more to say in defense of American foreign policy, there's more to say about the efforts that have been made to solve the problems of race, that we're not giving the country enough credit for having made as much progress as it has in righting the ship.

I think that the speech that Barack Obama gave in Cairo early in his presidency, and the speech he gave when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, are both indications of the way in which his generation was taught to think by my generation and the generation that taught me, to be aware that America can overreach, that America is not always on the right side of every struggle, and that we need to listen, rather than always telling everyone else what to do.

Now, that Arab Spring that he helped spark with that Cairo speech has turned to dust since that time, and whether or not we're any closer to making good on the pledges he made then to transform American foreign policy in relation to the Third World in general, and to the Arab World in particular, is hard to say. It's still too soon to answer that question. But, I do think that both he and Hillary Clinton are much more chastened in their approach to foreign policy than the generation of Eisenhower and Nixon were.

STEINBERG:

And so, building on this idea of generations teaching future generations, how do you think that the current college generation, millennial generation—you're on a college campus today—how do the lessons of Vietnam and the anti-war movement influence the culture on college campuses, specifically protest culture in college campuses and with young people in America, in general, today?

KLOPPENBERG: It's a very good question. I think you're probably in a better position to answer it than I am, but I'll give it a shot. I do think that there's a lot more idealism and activism in American college students' culture today than a lot of people give you credit for. And I find much to admire in most of the students that I teach. There's not, I think, nearly as much inwardness and myopic focus on career building as the standard narrative would suggest. So I find the students I come in contact with much more thoughtful than I think the journalistic approach to them would suggest.

But having said that, I think a lot of it is focused on issues that seem to me less consequential than the issues of geopolitics or the issues of domestic politics. I mean, I think a lot of the furor on campuses about campus life is a tempest in a teapot. I think it just—I mean, these are some of the most tolerant, open, diverse spaces in American history, and I think they don't really deserve the kind of venom that is being directed against them by some student activists today. That said, the problems of racism and sexism remain, and need to be addressed.

But I do think that the problems of global poverty, injustice, and inequality in the United States are so much more urgent and more pressing than the problems on college campuses, and that's why I'm heartened by the number of college students who are interested in doing kinds of social service work or kinds of political engagement that take them off college campuses and into communities where they can make a difference, either as teachers or as legal aides or doing the kinds of work that I think are much more productive than complaints about the way things are unfolding on college campuses. That just doesn't seem to me to be as big a problem facing the United States or facing the world in 2016 as the problems off college campuses.

But I think the sense of America's place in the world in most colleges in the United States, again not by any means in all, is much more critical than it was when I arrived at Dartmouth, and that I think is a good thing. I think it's still very hard for anybody to have a clear sense of how America should position itself in a world in which there are definite challenges coming from not a Communist bloc, but from people who are very much opposed to the American way of life. And that's a serious problem, and the question of how you engage it is as hard to answer as it was in the '50s and '60s when those challenges coming from the Soviet Union were real challenges.

I don't mean to minimize that there was a Cold War or that Americans were worried about their position in the world, and I think we continue to worry about our position in the world for lots of good reasons. But I think that the—what I would call the unthinking acceptance of whatever the American position is as the correct position, that phrase, “America, right or wrong,” is I think less prominent, less pronounced among most college students now than it was in the middle 1960s, I'll just put it at that.

STEINBERG: And, so when you were on Dartmouth's campus—just bring you back one more time—did you guys have a sense of the gravity of the situation in Vietnam and the implications that America's decisions would have globally and domestically in the future?

KLOPPENBERG: That's a hard question to answer, because everybody was aware of the gravity of the situation, but I think there were people—I don't know how I would say, 60/40, 70/30, 50/50—who thought the gravity was if we withdrew and abandoned our global responsibilities, and that would mean that the Soviet Union would expand infinitely to fill up all the space.

Those of us who were on the other side thought that the danger was instead that American hegemony would make it impossible for peoples all over the world to take control over their own destiny, that this sense of the global Cold War was going to make it appear to be imperative for the United States to continue to stand in the way of every liberation movement everywhere in the world.

And so, I think both sides thought that the stakes were enormous, but we just had a very different sense of which direction we should take in order to prevent the worst outcomes. And, from the perspective of conservatives, the worst outcome was a global takeover by the Soviet Union. From the perspective of those of us who were protesting against the war, the worst outcome was that the United States would continue to be, in the words of the diplomatic historian, Thomas [A.] Bailey, a reactionary force in a world of revolution. Bailey, who was himself a very conservative man, was fond of saying that the United States was born as a revolutionary force in a world of reaction, and had become a reactionary force in a world of revolution. And I think many of us thought that was exactly where we stood in the late '60s and early '70s, and it was time for us to do something about that and to stop standing in the way of every progressive movement everywhere in the world.

STEINBERG: So, I think on that note, a very conclusionary note, do you have any other things you would like to add? Any topics we haven't discussed that you would like to be included as part of this interview?

KLOPPENBERG: Let me think for a second. I think the answer to that is no. But let me just think back to see if there's anything rattling around in my head that needs to be added to the record. [Pause] I guess one last thing—I guess this is one incident that, again, is vivid in my mind that I haven't mentioned yet. When—that spring of '72 when we were in Washington [D.C.], I remember going to a meeting to plan some action that was going to occur during the time we were there or during the summer. I can't remember what it was. And it was another moment when the gap between those of us who were there because we wanted to be engaged in the political process really did feel as though we had nothing in common with the people who wanted to blow things up.

And there were enough people from the Progressive Labor party, in particular, a Trotskyist organization, who really were making plans to engage in violent forms of—I wouldn't even call it civil disobedience; it was just disruption, the kinds of things that the Weather Underground then went into. And I remember thinking and talking with people afterwards that, whatever needed to be done, that was not going to solve the problem, that that was only going to end in a loss of more life, either the people who were interested in committing these acts of violence or the people they would injure or kill, that that would only make things worse. But I remember vividly being struck by the intensity of the commitment of the people who were talking about engaging in violence.

And that was—I mean, the guy at Dartmouth that I mentioned earlier I didn't take seriously; he just seemed to me as sort of a clown who might do something stupid, but who wasn't really going to lead a revolutionary movement. But, these folks were really in earnest, and they were really—they were in it for the long haul, at least so it seemed.

And that was part of what kept me from spinning into the more radical fringes of student activism when I was in graduate school, that moment, because it really did make clear to me that there was a huge gap between the people who thought we really did need a revolution, and there were people who did feel that way, and those of us who thought, *No, we have a democracy. We don't need a revolution. What we need is mobilization and we*

*need persuasion. We need to change people's minds.* And that, I think, was one of those moments that, looking back on it, I say that helped change my way of thinking.

STEINBERG: Was there any way that you think that gap could have been bridged at that time? Or it was just two divergent paths that were going to have to go their separate ways?

KLOPPENBERG: Well, I don't know whether the—I don't know how many of the people who were committed to that kind of extreme revolutionary politics came around. I mean, I know those moments all flamed out by the end of the '70s, but they carried on for a fair amount of time in San Francisco [CA]. I mean, we were at Stanford, so we were in the Bay Area and were aware of things that were going on in San Francisco and Berkeley [CA], not as much at Stanford, but some things still there. And, as is true in our day, the people at the extremes sometimes have no interest in getting over the conflict; they feed on the conflict. And I feel that way about our current moment, that it might be that people will realize, you just can't mobilize a majority on something that is perceived by most Americans as being of a fringe position, and the people will walk back toward the center.

But, there's no guarantee that that will happen, and it's I think too smug to say, "We've had these kinds of moments before," because even though we did in the 1790s, and we did again in the 1820s, and both of those rifts were healed, we also had one in the 1850s that ended in civil war. And I don't see this ending in civil war, but it would be unfair to say that our system always recovers, because I do think that the kinds of denials of the legitimacy of the process that we're hearing this time are without precedent in American history. If people actually believe that, they are likely to form a kind of persistent resistant mass in the culture, and that's how democracies die, when people stop trusting the legitimacy of the system actually to operate.

And I think this man is a clown and that he's going to go away in the way that carnival barkers usually go away when they've made their splash. I hope that's what happens. If it doesn't happen and this becomes a more lasting movement, then I think it will be incumbent on people in the center of both parties to say, "We just can't have this. This can't be considered a legitimate form of American political activity. This is outside the bounds." And I think if that were to happen, we'd be a healthier polity.

But at this point, what seems likelier is that we're going to have to endure four more years of stalemate, precisely because people are not willing to find points of agreement in the way that I think did happen during the course of the 1970s. And I think Jimmy Carter deserves more credit for having helped make that happen than he's usually given. And I think the fact that most people on the left made their peace with Ronald [W.] Reagan, much as they disliked him, also indicated that there was room for negotiation in ways that radicals during the late '60s, early '70s, didn't think possible, and that I would say some radicals today don't think possible.

But, it seems to me that the moral of the story of the long history of democracy that I tried to tell in this book, *Toward Democracy [The Struggle for Self-Rule in European and American Thought]*, is that nothing poisons democracy like civil war does; nothing makes it harder to keep democratic institutions going than civil war does; and anything that threatens civil war needs to be taken *very, very* seriously indeed. Now, there were people who thought during the Vietnam era that we were going in that direction. I never thought that was true. My sense was that the people who were interested in radical revolutionary activity were a tiny, tiny fraction of the very large number of people who mobilized in the civil rights movement and the people who mobilized in the anti-war movement, but that those people were almost always more committed to the vitality and the attractiveness of the American ideal, rather than they were committed to tearing it down and replacing it with something else.

So I think that the lesson of Vietnam is that when you have a deep, deep rift in the culture, it's important to address it and to take positive steps to deal with the sources of that unrest, and I think the end of the war helped to do that, and I think that addressing the problems of exclusion and unemployment and cultural division that we face now is going to be the hard work of the next generation of politicians, and I for one remain optimistic that it can be that again. So I'll leave it at that.

STEINBERG: Good. Well, thank you so much for your reflections on your time at Dartmouth, the Vietnam War, and kind of bringing some of your research into this interview as well. It was very enlightening. And it was a pleasure talking to you.

KLOPPENBERG: Same here. I appreciate your taking the time to do it. Thanks, Leigh.



I want to add one more detail to what I said before, because it just didn't come up, but I want to be sure it's on the record, and that is what an impact Jim Wright had on me both then and since, because I think even as we were undergraduates, Jim was not wearing his Armed Service on his sleeve, but it was known that he was a veteran, and that he was beginning to engage in the kinds of critical questioning about American foreign policy that many of us were engaging in, I think was *very* important at the time, and the work that he's continued to do has been equally important in my sense of how a concerned, thoughtful person with good judgment should view the role of America in the world and the responsibilities that America owes to the people who have borne the battles, to use the title of his book [*Those Who Have Borne the Battle: A History of America's Wars and Those Who Fought Them*]. So, just one last note on the role that Jim Wright played then and has continued to play since.

STEINBERG: All right. Thanks.