Jimmy H. Zien ’69
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
The Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

HARRISON: This is Tim Harrison. I’m in Thetford, Vermont, with Jim Zien [pronounced ZI-uhn]. Today is May 10th, 2015.

Mr. Zien, thank you very much for speaking with me.

ZIEN: Sure. Call me Jim.

HARRISON: Jim. Jim, can you tell me where you were born and what your parents’ names were?

ZIEN: I was born in Knoxville, Tennessee. Burton Zien was my father; Betty Zien, my mother.

HARRISON: And what did your parents do?

ZIEN: Well, that’s the beginning of the long story. I was born in Knoxville not because my parents were Southerners but because my father at the time was the head of the National Labor Relations Board of Eastern Tennessee. The significance of that is that that was the era of the major public works projects of the South: the dam projects; TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority); Oak Ridge, Tennessee, nuclear developments. And the labor aspect of that was that it was the first time the federal government had major influence on wage and hour laws, because the federal government was running those projects and investing in them. So my father was in Tennessee for that reason, his professional activity with the National Labor Relations Board.

HARRISON: How early did your parents move to Tennessee?

ZIEN: Well, my father had gone to Tennessee in the ’30s, when he was a college student, to help with the floods on the Mississippi [River], and he got involved in labor organizing in the ’30s, after he graduated from college. He went to the University of Wisconsin. And then he lived down there for quite a few years after that, essentially until he volunteered in the service in World War II. He actually met my mother in New York City when he was in training for Officer Candidate School.

And then after the war, they were married in 1946, I was born in 1947, and he had returned to Tennessee to continue working in the labor movement but as a government official.

HARRISON: What was the impact by the late 1940s, early 1950s, when you were born and then growing up, of these New Deal programs that you speak of? Were they still very active in this part of the United States?

ZIEN: Well, after the war, the biggest things that were happening in the South were the continuation of the New Deal enterprises. I mean, these were the biggest—probably until the Space Race, these were the biggest projects that had ever been undertaken in the United States of America in terms of technology and construction. TVA was a vast collection of projects that electrified the rural South, building dams and today what some people would say were terribly misguided—you know, blocking rivers and creating artificial lakes and so forth, but it was all about creating electric power in the South.

And Oak Ridge, Tennessee—the development of so-called peacetime nuclear energy—that was actually a direct follow-on to the work that had been done during the war on atom bombs.

HARRISON: Can you remember coming to some of the TVA projects?

ZIEN: Well, I was only—I was three when we moved away from Tennessee.

HARRISON: I see.

ZIEN: And the back story to that has to do with my father's politics. My father had been a pretty radical person in his college and post-college life, so the late '40s and early '50s were the times when the government was trying to clear out people who had formerly been involved in the labor movement and in the civil rights movement and the Communist Party sometimes. So my father had to abandon his post because he became involved in the regional version of [the] House Un-American Activities Committee hearings.

HARRISON: So he was very much pushed out.

ZIEN: Yeah.

HARRISON: And where did you all go?

ZIEN: Well, then we left Tennessee to go back to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which is where my father was born and had grown up and where a good portion of the rest of the family lived and where his father and his brothers were in business together.

HARRISON: And what was your understanding of this episode when you were growing up?

ZIEN: I didn't understand it until years later.

HARRISON: Certainly not when you were three, but—

ZIEN: Right. I had no knowledge of it. But at some point, probably—I'm guessing in high school; it might have been just after I came to college—my father handed me a big old leather briefcase with all of the transcripts of all of the hearings that he had been subjected to from 19-probably-49 through '51 or '52. So then I got the picture. I mean, when I was growing up in not so much grade school but probably by the time of junior high and high school, I had many conversations with my father about his early years in the South and in organizing and his involvement in—

You may have run across this in your oral history interviews. There was a place in Tennessee called the Highlander Center [now the Highlander Research and Education Center]. Well, the Highlander Center is very, very important in the early days of the civil rights movement and other political organizing. The Highlander Center was where all the civil rights—it was the training ground for peaceful protest and was recognized as such throughout the United States, and my father was involved in the Highlander Center in the days when it was essentially training the leadership of community organizing.

HARRISON: And what year—that would have been late ’40s?

ZIEN: That was—well, no, the Highlander Center would have been—it probably started in the ’30s, my guess is, but it persisted until—it may still be going, for all I know, because I remember that our family took a trip back to Knoxville on the occasion of the—there was a World’s Fair in Knoxville sometimes in the ’80s, I think it was, and we went back to Knoxville, the first time I’d probably been there since we had left, and we went to the Highlander Center, and it was still operating then, outside of Knoxville, up in the hills above Knoxville.

HARRISON: What did your father do during the war? You mentioned he served.

ZIEN: He was in the Army Air Force. He ran radar installations in the South Pacific, which were on tiny islands, set up to guide fighter jets and fighter bombers in the Pacific theater.

HARRISON: So he really was involved until the last segment of World War II, I imagine.

ZIEN: Oh, he was stationed in Tokyo after V-J Day. Yeah, he spent probably six months or something like that living in Tokyo during the, you know, beginning of the occupation.

HARRISON: Did he ever talk to you about that?

ZIEN: Oh, yeah. Many times.

HARRISON: Do you recall some of the things that he would have said?

ZIEN: Sure! He became friendly with Japanese families, several of them, including the family of a pretty significant industrialist, who had a—I guess you’d call it a ranch, in a somewhat rural area outside Tokyo. He kept horses, Arabian horses. This was the Japanese industrialist. And many people in Japan at the time were, you know, trying to make friends with the Americans. You know, they didn’t want to be seen as the enemy anymore; they wanted to be part of the reconstruction. We have pictures of my father actually riding horses out on this farm owned by this industrialist, who—he would invite U.S. servicemen who were there to come out and spend, you know, a few yours.

HARRISON: When you were in high school, as I imagine, at the same time that you were hearing these stories—

ZIEN: Mm-hm.

HARRISON: —about Japan, what do you remember hearing about the 1930s and late 1940s in Tennessee?

ZIEN: Well, the early days that my father was there, after he graduated from the University of Wisconsin, were in the early days of the organizing movement for minimum wage, he was I guess you'd call it an inspector. He was an agent who would be sent into companies to determine whether those companies were following what were then the brand-new wage and hour laws that had been passed by Congress. And companies that were working for the federal government, that were contracted by the federal government were required to do that.

And it was rough work because they didn't like these feds coming in and looking at their books and asking them questions, and my father's partner was actually killed. He was shot on one of their assignments, because there was no love lost between people who were running, you know, businesses as they had always run them, paying way below what was then minimum wage, which was probably—in those days, it could have been 30 cents an hour, for all I know—and the government officials who were essentially forcing them to abide by the new minimum wage laws. So it was a tough time. They were out there, you know, risking their lives to try to create better working conditions and pay for tradesmen and unskilled workers in these huge projects that employed thousands upon thousands of people.

HARRISON: What did your parents do—what did your father do after this move, after the move to Wisconsin?

ZIEN: He joined the family company, which was a mechanical contracting company that my grandfather had started as a journeyman plumber back in the '20s. This was a standard-issue company that did plumbing, heating, air conditioning and was—it was a growth time after World War II with the suburbs being built and a lot of people needing help with their basic systems in their homes. So my father and his three brothers ultimately took over the company from my grandfather, their father, and ran that company for many, many, many years.

HARRISON: And how did you end up at Dartmouth?

ZIEN: Well, I ended up at Dartmouth because I was looking for a small school with a kind of an outdoor characteristic about it. I had spent almost every summer of my life in northern Wisconsin, in outdoor activities. I was looking for a school that didn't have too much—at that time much less than now—focus on graduate work and research because I was looking for classes with professors who were teaching undergraduates. And I visited a number of schools around this part of the country, and I just found that I liked the atmosphere of Hanover at that time, which was, of course, a lot smaller and less busy than it is now. This was 1965 I started.

And so I applied early decision, and I was admitted, and I never applied to another school, so I really didn't make any choice after I made my choice to apply to Dartmouth, you know, early on.

HARRISON: At the time, in 1965 and before, when you were in high school, do you remember following current events? Was this part of your life?

ZIEN: Oh, current events was a part of our daily existence in my family.

HARRISON: How was that?

ZIEN: Well, it was just always a topic. Anything that was going on that had anything to do with, you know, social issues, matters of political consequence were part of our daily existence. My father continued to be very involved in social causes and politics his entire life and became involved in a number of political campaigns with liberal and progressive candidates. Actually, we were very close to Gaylord Nelson, who was a senator from Wisconsin. In those days, my father was his campaign finance volunteer director. I even worked in Nelson's office one summer.

HARRISON: And what, at the dinner table, and what for you—what were the big issues of this time that you can remember?

ZIEN: Well, of course, the Vietnam War, which is why we're here talking. My father was an early opponent of the Vietnam War, before it was fashionable to be so, so we would talk about that before it even hit kind of the big-time media, starting in the kind of early '60s as the commitments were being made. So we would talk about that and what a bad idea it was. And Gaylord Nelson and [William] "Bill" Proxmire, the other senator from Wisconsin, were early opponents of the war.

Nuclear—the issues of nuclear risk were always big. We used to talk about—I actually remember there was a—I think they still use it, but there was a countdown clock. Some people who were concerned about this would see it, how close we were to midnight, nuclear midnight. We had one of those clocks in our house, and most of the time in the late '50s and early '60s it was about two minutes to midnight. People were very worried about the possibility of a nuclear war.

Some people who were engaged in that, in efforts to—nuclear disarmament efforts politically used to receive a magazine, as we did in our house, called—I think it was called *Sane, S-a-n-e*, which was an acronym for something, Society for Atomic Nuclear something or other. [Transcriber's note: Founded by Norman Cousins, the organization was called the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, which in 1969 changed its name to SANE: A Citizens' Organization for a Sane World.]

Anyway—so that was a topic of conversation. The civil rights movement was a topic of conversation. I mean, those were the days, shockingly, it seems to me now as I look back—you know, the South was still heavily segregated, and we've lived in the segregated South, although I was never old enough to really understand that that's what we were doing, but certainly my parents—my mother was an activist as well. She was a journalist, although her writing was not about that, but she was very much involved at the same time. She was an immigrant from Russia. She had been born in Russia. Came to this country when she was 9 years old.

So there were the issues of, you know, what was happening in Europe and the Cold War and what was happening to Jews in the Middle East, although our family was not a Holocaust-victimized family because my father and his father were actually born in the United States, but my mother and her parents were victims of the pogroms in Russia. That's why they left. So topics of what was happening to the Jews in Europe were current topics for us.

HARRISON: I know that you felt very directly, your family felt very directly this McCarthyism sentiment,—

ZIEN: [Chuckles.]

HARRISON: —running all over the United States.

ZIEN: Right. My father was a victim of it.

HARRISON: He was a very literal victim. On the flip side of McCarthyism, were there moments where you felt, growing up, the increased militarization of the United States, the major defense budgets that the 1940s and 1950s saw?

ZIEN: Well, I don't remember in my elementary, junior high, high school years so much being aware of military budgets per se. I guess my awareness of the amounts of resources that were being expended for—I would call it background awareness. In other words, when you're talking about expenditures for nuclear armament, they were huge, but we didn't talk about the expenditure part; we talked about the implementation, the incidence part. And similarly for the Vietnam War, although, you know, probably by the time I was in high school—in fact, I was on the debate team in high school, and the debate subject of our best year, which is when we won the Wisconsin state championship, was a resolution that the United States should unilaterally disarm its nuclear capability.

HARRISON: So this was a more popular idea in your high school, would you say, at least among this debate team?

ZIEN: Well, in a debate nothing is popular. In a debate, you get assigned what side you're going to argue.

HARRISON: Oh, I see. Okay.

ZIEN: Right? I'm talking about literal—the formal—you know, the formal debate team process.

HARRISON: I see. I see.

ZIEN: This was a big subject of the time, so consequently, for the high school championship debate contest of that year, that was chosen to be the topic. I mean, ironically, I was arguing on the negative side. You didn't have a choice. Your debate coach said, you know, "You two guys are going to be negative, and you two guys are going to be positive."

HARRISON: In high school, what *was* your attitude, in reality, towards that—

ZIEN: Well, in reality, I was coming from—as you can tell from all this history of my parents, I was coming from somewhere between a radical and progressive political perspective.

HARRISON: How do you define those terms? What do those mean, radical and progressive?

ZIEN: Well, radical is probably more activist in the fundamental sense of wanting wholesale change in a certain area, whatever it is that you're radical about. Progressive is a little less aggressive, I would say. So if you're a radical and you believe that the U.S. government is on the wrong track, you might want to overthrow the U.S. government.

HARRISON: I mean, that's highly radical.

ZIEN: That was not—well, that's radical. You know, there were people who felt that the U.S. government at the time was working in the disinterest of the American people.

HARRISON: And in the world, I imagine.

ZIEN: Well, in the world. So in other words, I'm just saying—you were asking me what the definition of, the differences between a radical and a progressive. And then there, of course, anarchist, which is a completely different domain, but—whereas a progressive wants to see change, progressive change, and usually it's applied in the direction of improvement of societal opportunities for people of lesser means—or might be political progressivism would be: How about if some people get to vote who haven't been voting? Racial progressivism would be: How about if we figure out how to integrate our schools? Or what have you.

HARRISON: Were you aware of these issues internationally and domestically in high school, and were these conversations that you would have had with friends at the time?

ZIEN: Yes, I would say so, yes.

HARRISON: You were in high school when [President John F.] Kennedy was assassinated.

ZIEN: I was in my school building when his assassination was announced, yeah.

HARRISON: What can you remember about that?

ZIEN: Oh, I remember that everything stopped. You know, there was one moment we were, you know, in class, and the next moment everybody was gathered around the few, one or two televisions that existed in—I went to a public high school—in the building to hear the news. Yes, that was a big deal. And we had been involved—I mean, even in high school I had been involved in political campaigns, including campaigns at the national level, to a limited degree. I mean, my father was. My father was a Kennedy worker, and before that—I used to go to—I think they probably still do them—the Democratic Party used to have these events called Jefferson-Jackson Day dinners.

HARRISON: I think those do still exist, yes.

ZIEN: And I used to go to the Jefferson-Jackson Day dinners with my parents, who were Democratic Party supporters. And there would always be a fairly marquis person at those dinners because Wisconsin was an important state politically. I met Hubert [H.] Humphrey, I met Harry [S.] Truman, I met John Kennedy—I mean, I met these people. "Met." You know, here's this kid who's—at that time I might have been—we're talking about the early '60s, so, you know, I was–1947, '57—I was maybe 13 or 14 years old, maybe 10 sometimes, meeting these people. I mean, how much I actually understood about who I was meeting and what they stood for, well, that's a different story. I can't—

HARRISON: When did you start to form an opinion about what these people stood for? It must have been in high school, right?

ZIEN: Well, I understood what they stood for because my parents were supporting them, was basically what my parents stood for, which was, you know, social progressivism and civil rights and antimilitarism, to some extent, although my parents were not—I wouldn't say that they were pacifists because they knew, from their own experience or some experiences of their friends or their friends' families, that pacifism doesn't always work when somebody's not going to be interested in whether you're a pacifist or not.

But, yeah, that's what I understood, was that—you know, I understood the difference between Democrats and Republicans at a certain, you know, early stage level in terms of their systems of values and the contexts in which they lived and the political objectives of their representatives, whether it was locally or nationally. I mean, I got that. I got some of that.

HARRISON: Did you do volunteering in high school?

ZIEN: I don't actually remember volunteering in a political campaign in high school. Let's see, did I? [Makes five clicking noises.] I don't think so.

HARRISON: Along a similar line, would you have been active politically? I mean, was it just lots of current events conversations? Were there clubs in high school where you had an outlet for this interests?

ZIEN: No, not that I specifically remember. I was pretty mainstream, I guess you'd say, in high school. That is, although I was aware of what was going on in the world, I was active in sports, I was active in music, kind of the things that, you know, suburban kids were doing at that time. So I don't—honestly, I don't—it wasn't until I got to college and my awareness of what was happening primarily in—I would say that the Vietnam War was the formative kind of time for me in terms of moving from awareness to more action, so high school, not so much, that I remember.

HARRISON: You would have graduate high school in 19- —

ZIEN: Sixty-five.

HARRISON: Sixty-five?

ZIEN: Right.

HARRISON: Until that point—I'm interested in fleshing out a little bit this divide that you've set up between more passive and more active civic participation.

ZIEN: Yup.

HARRISON: What do you think it was about pre-1965 that didn't push you over the edge?

ZIEN: Oh, it was probably the context I was living in. I was living in a suburban, middle-class, all-white environment. I was probably really focused at the time on what my next academic life was going to be, so I was doing the things that were sort of, I guess you'd say functional and beneficial in my view at that time, I guess. I mean, I'm making this up a little bit now because I don't exactly remember my state of consciousness at that time. But I was doing things that I felt were going to, you know, make me a desirable college candidate.

I mean, I guess—it was also true for part of those years that my father's activism sort of—he suppressed a lot of it for a while because it was dangerous for him, so that didn't come back into full flower, so to speak, until the mid '60s, early to mid '60s. For my father, it was also the Vietnam War that sort of rekindled his life as an activist. So, you know, I guess, you know, there was a certain level of just lack of bigger picture of who, what I wanted to be in the context of the issues of the day. I was aware of them, but I wasn't actively involved. And I guess you could say that, in some self-serving sense, I didn't truly get involved in activism until I felt personally threatened by the approaching possibility I was going to be involved directly and personally in a war that I didn't think was worth fighting.

HARRISON: So tell me about your early recollections of college. What sorts of things did you do, and what sorts of classes did you take? What were your interests?

ZIEN: Well, when I got to Dartmouth, I, like everybody, was assigned a roommate I didn't know, in a room in Hitchcock Hall, which I never left. I stayed in that room for four years.

HARRISON: Which one was that?

ZIEN: That was 302 Hitchcock.

HARRISON: You know, I think my sophomore summer room was 305 [chuckles], not 302, but it's a very nice building. I understand why you didn't leave.

ZIEN: It was a nice building. I became close friends with the student across the hall, and he's still one of my closest friends. He teaches now at Dartmouth.

HARRISON: Who's that?

ZIEN: Peter [J.] Robbie [pronounced ROW-bee]. He runs the design program at Thayer [School of Engineering at Dartmouth]. So Peter and I met each other the first day, and we became friends and basically lived across the hall from each other for four years. In fact, I was told—I don't know if this is true or not—that that room, that Hitchcock room was Nelson [A.] Rockefeller's room when he was at Dartmouth. I don't know whether that's true or not. Somebody told me that once. Which was ironic later on because Nelson Rockefeller spoke at our commencement, and some of us didn't like that, and we stood up and turned our backs on him. Seems kind of silly now, but we did.

So in the very beginning, I took—I was an English major. I liked reading and writing, and I pretty much knew that that's what I liked to do, so that's where I kind of started, and focused on the English department a lot. I had great professors, one of whom is legendary at Dartmouth, [James] "Jim" Epperson, who—my very first term, I took a seminar course from Jim Epperson. As I recall, I did not have to take the *Paradise Lost* course because somehow I was exempted from it, so I got to take a seminar course right off the bat.

That was my first political paper, actually, I wrote. It was a satire course, and I wrote my first paper at Dartmouth on *Li'l Abner*, which was a highly political—although people didn't necessarily realize it, it was a highly political comic. The *Li'l Abner* writer, Al Capp, started out being a radical—in fact, a communist. And then he became very right wing over his time period of being a comic artist in the newspaper. Anyway, it was interesting. So I kind of started out, in an academic way, looking at kind of the politics of a certain era, seen through a comic artist.

I mean, over time I became more involved in the student movement, which was obviously building at that time, starting before '65 but certainly '65, '66, '67, leading to Parkhurst [the Parkhurst takeover], as everybody knows. I was there. I didn't get arrested. When I mention [O. Theodore] "Ted" Roberg III—I haven't been able to get—I think I have a phone number for him now, but Ted Roberg was one of the ones who was arrested. There was probably—I don't know how many kids, students—

HARRISON: He was arrested inside or outside?

ZIEN: He was arrested inside. And Ted was in jail for—some of the students were there for at least a week, I think. He was younger. He was a couple of classes behind me, but I kind of took him under my wing because his father was very concerned about him, and he'd come from a pretty conservative family, and his father would call me and say, "What's happening with Ted?" So I would say, "Well, I don't know. I haven't seen him back yet, but I think he's okay." And I would ask those who were able to visit—wherever they were held; I can't remember where they were held exactly.

But anyway, so my involvement was going to meetings, going to SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] meetings, going—although I never joined SDS, but I certainly was part of the crowd that was doing the protesting.

HARRISON: What were the meetings like? Where would they be held, if you could remember that?

ZIEN: Oh, any old place. They could be held in students' rooms,—

HARRISON: How many people would be there, usually?

ZIEN: Depending on who called the meeting. If it was highly organizational, it could have been 30, 40, 50 people. If it was somebody who, you know, wanted to put up posters about something, it could have been five people who said, "Let's get some posters up" on whatever the topic was at the time. I mean, the big issue, big for us at that time, was ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] on campus. You know, in those days, those of us who thought we knew what was right thought that there shouldn't be ROTC on the Dartmouth campus. I think in retrospect, I question whether we were right about that, but—

HARRISON: What were people saying specifically was wrong with having ROTC?

ZIEN: Well, it was the—about the college not supporting the military machine—I mean, the language of the day. It was the college should not be feeding people in the military who were then going to go and lead—because, of course, that's what ROTC was about—who were going to go and lead warfare on a country that we shouldn't be in in the first place. That was pretty much the objection to ROTC.

You know, and then there was friction on the campus, as I'm sure people have told you, between not just the students who were in ROTC but others who supported them. I mean, Dartmouth—I'd be interested to know, in retrospect, kind of what percentage of the campus actually was antiwar versus either passively don't care, I don't know about it, or pro-war. I don't have that perception now. I mean, we all, who were in the so-called movement, were sure we were right. I mean, there was just no question about it, and everybody else was really stupid and didn't get it. That was the tenor of the times.

But I did have one or two friends who were—I wasn't sure what their politics were, and we didn't talk about it.

HARRISON: Why? Because they were more conservative?

ZIEN: Yeah.

HARRISON: Yeah.

ZIEN: Mm-hm.

HARRISON: So you were able to keep it out. With those people—the tenor of the day—everyone else was stupid—was it really that, or was it more complicated, that perhaps there were reasons, forces that kept people who had power in the United States from understanding what was wrong with the war?

ZIEN: No, I think we were aware that as far as those who were actually, literally responsible for pursuing the military effort in Vietnam and Southeast Asia generally, that—I mean, they thought they had information, apparently. They had goals. They had economic and other agendas. No, what I mean is at the campus level, on the campus, those of us who were antiwar were sure that that was the only way you could be, and if you understood what was going on in the U.S. government and in the military and in the pursuit of the domino theory of international relations, there was no other way you could be but antiwar. And who was stupid was the kid, the student who just didn't understand that this was terrible.

HARRISON: What did it mean to be antiwar in '66, '67?

ZIEN: Well,—

HARRISON: It's a hard term to pin down sometimes.

ZIEN: Mmm, it meant opposing the U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. That's what it meant very specifically in those years. It wasn't pacifism necessarily, which would be broadly antiwar under any circumstances. No, this was anti-Vietnam War. I mean, that's what I thought of as my position at the time, and I think—I mean, I think most people who were involved in the protest movement, the Vietnam War protest movement were thinking very specifically about that military adventure. And that's what I [unintelligible] meant.

HARRISON: When you came to Dartmouth that first day in Hitchcock Hall, if I had walked up to you and said to you, "Jim, are you anti-Vietnam War?" would you then have been mature enough in this way of understanding the world and understanding this particular conflict that you would have said yes without any ambiguity?

ZIEN: Yes. I would have said, "Yes, I'm opposed to this war." Yes, I would have said that. And I would have said that, however, more in an abstract way, in the sense that I hadn't expressed my opposition in a way other than, you know, among friends or family or, in some cases—you know, primarily—it was only a verbal expression, I guess I would say, of that opposition; it wasn't an activist expression—

HARRISON: A dinner table conversation.

ZIEN: —because that came later. Yeah.

HARRISON: Yeah. So in high school you said—that in high school you described yourself as more of a mainstream person.

ZIEN: Right. Mainstream in terms of my activities.

HARRISON: I see.

ZIEN: Not necessarily in terms of my thinking, but in terms of the activities that I was engaged in.

HARRISON: I see. How would you label, in [the] early 1960s, thinking in opposition to escalating Vietnam or even involvement in Vietnam? Was that mainstream thinking?

ZIEN: Well, there was a time I actually—I used to argue with my father.

HARRISON: Tell me about that.

ZIEN: Because I—probably in—well, I was in high school from ’61 to ’65, and the U.S. media, the major media in the United States, which is to say in those days that would be a handful of national magazines, *TIME* magazine, *Newsweek* and so forth, and the newspapers that we all think of as the standard for journalism in the country. Most of them had yet to discover that this was a bad idea. And I was a consumer of—you know, of media. And so I would read *TIME* magazine, for example, and there was nothing in *TIME* magazine that suggested to me that there was something wrong with this war. You know, there were some reasons why we needed to be concerned that, you know, the North Vietnamese or the Vietnamese communists were—to my limited way of understanding—I hadn’t yet formed any sense that there was an alternative to what the national media were proposing.

My father, on the other hand, knew that the national media are *way* behind the curve, always, and that the national media, and those kinds of national media, let’s say—I mean, today it’s different because there’s national media of all stripes, but in those days there was—that the national media generally [is] in the establishment camp until something pushes them strongly into some other point of view.

So when I would read *TIME* magazine and *Newsweek* and whatever it was as a high school student, I would think, *I don’t know what you’re talking about. It seems like everybody who’s writing about this is thinking that it’s the right thing to do*. And I would argue with him. And it wasn’t until at some point, probably when I was a senior in high school and I began to get the drift of some people I knew being sent to Vietnam, who were slightly older than me, and having a little bit more sense of a world outside of the United States, that maybe people have different values and—I don’t know. It’s hard to put my finger on. But at some point, I realized, *Oh, yeah, now I understand why my father is saying this isn’t a good idea.*

HARRISON: Before that point, what had you been reading in *TIME* magazine, and what had you been saying when you were arguing to your father? What was the substance of this?

ZIEN: You know, the beginning—the “beginning”—the U.S. involvement in the war started in the early ’60s, and in the beginning, the media was essentially documenting the raw facts and was reporting on the rationale: You know, why are we as a country halfway around the world interested in pursuing a military victory in a small country that nobody—most people couldn’t even tell you where it was on the map?

And the answer was the standard answer. The standard answer was: Because otherwise, the communists will take over the world, and this is one place where that will happen if we don’t stop them, and there are other places around the world where it’ll happen if we don’t stop them.

I thought, *Well, I don’t wanna see that happen!* And that was kind of ironic because my father had flirted with the Communist Party early in his career, although it was a flirtation, not a commitment. But anyway, if you didn’t know, as a 14- or 15- or 16-year-old—if you didn’t have anywhere else to go to get information besides the magazine that came into your house every week—or let’s put it this way: At that point I didn’t try—you know, I wasn’t aware enough that I could—there were other places, other things I could be reading. But I bought the message for a while.

HARRISON: What do you think was the information your father had that gave him this conviction so early on?

ZIEN: Well, the information he had wasn’t information; it was actual experience, that it took decades for the federal government to do anything about poverty in the United States of America. Still taking decades, actually. And it took about a hundred years for the federal government to do anything about civil rights. And so, you know, he lived that. He saw that in the South. I mean, that’s his early experience, going to the South for one reason, which was the flooding in the Mississippi, but staying there and seeing what life was like in the rural South for people, he was aware that regardless of what *The New York Times* or, you know, the major national magazines might say, that there was a big problem and we needed to do something about it.

HARRISON: So the idea was that the government could be wrong, in his mind, or was the idea that the government could be slow to act in the right direction, or was it both?

ZIEN: Well, I think it's both. It's always both. I mean, wrong—I suppose "wrong" is subjective, but in certain circumstances, where human lives are concerned, radicals or progressives would say, did say, "This is wrong, and it's wrong not to address it," whatever the "this" is, whether it's lynchings or the kinds of poverty that were documented by photographers in the Depression. "This is wrong. The government should address it."

And then along comes [President Franklin D.] Roosevelt, and then the government *did* begin to address it. The Roosevelt era was the time when there was a major shift in the nature of government as a force in the lives of dispossessed people. Until then, [Theodore] "Teddy" Roosevelt [Jr.]—Teddy Roosevelt was actually pretty good in that, too. But it wasn't really until Franklin Roosevelt that that happened.

And then many people like my father went from being kind of street-level, you could say, activists to joining government in order to participate in the government response, a government response, with federal resources, to these conditions that had existed for a long time without the government ever really paying any attention to them at all.

HARRISON: Your father had been a New Dealer. He had been in World War II, serving.

ZIEN: Yes. Mm-hm.

HARRISON: How was it that he managed to get over what I assume was support for the federal government from those two experiences to such an early lack of approval for what the government was doing in Southeast Asia?

ZIEN: Well, it wasn't about whether the government was doing the right thing. I mean, it wasn't government right or wrong; it was how does the government address—the federal government, in the case of international affairs—what is it that the government is addressing. And my father volunteered in World War II because he perceived that there was a crisis that, without U.S. intervention, both in Europe and in Asia, you know, could essentially end life as we knew it.

That didn't mean that 20 years later that he was going to support a government that was engaged in a needless (in his view and many people's view) incursion into a country in which our interests were—there wasn't a crisis of the kind that we ought to be killing people and attempting to overthrow a popular movement.

HARRISON: At the same time, though, you were at the end of your high school experience. You were reading in these mainstream magazines—

ZIEN: Oh, it was more at the beginning of my high school experience.

HARRISON: Oh, okay. In the beginning, you were reading in *TIME* magazine—

ZIEN: Yeah '62, '63—'61, '2, '3.

HARRISON: —that it was a very similar crisis, a very similar threat to the American way of life.

ZIEN: Well, that was the message that was being promulgated.

HARRISON: But he didn't buy it.

ZIEN: Well, he didn't buy that, no.

HARRISON: Why do you think that was?

ZIEN: He knew better, because he was better read and better informed than I was as a high school student, and he had seen, in early times of his life, the federal government undertaking initiatives with negative consequences for human beings. So he had the awareness that the Vietnam War, the war in Vietnam was of a fundamentally different nature than American involvement in World War II was an international conflict among, you know, powers.

HARRISON: Did you start to agree with that position at the end of high school?

ZIEN: I think so.

HARRISON: How did that happen? How did it begin to happen, I should say?

ZIEN: Well, I mean, I think for me it probably was that—there started to be a shift altogether in society. That was the beginnings of both the media, the national media and kind of the advocacy of leaders in government, some senators, congressmen, who began to understand that we'd already been in this war for five, six years, and just purely practically—I mean, quite aside from the politics of anti-communism—that purely practically, we were killing off a lot of our people and many, many more of those who lived in that country at the time. And this wasn't—we were losing our perspective on what—we had lost our perspective on what the purposes and the outcome of this could be. That was already happening in '65—'65, '66, '67. The sentiments were shifting.

So in some sense, I mean, I can't take any—you know, there was no—I don't think that I had any big epiphany. I think that I stopped believing that it was the right thing to do and started understanding what my father was saying, sort of—you know, in the last couple of years of high school.

Kennedy was assassinated right in the middle of my high school time, and I think once Kennedy's leadership was absent, and people tended to believe that he knew what he was doing, for whatever reason—I mean, he'd only been president for a couple of years, but they tended to believe that he knew what he was doing, which actually he was probably more responsible than was anyone else for making sure that that war was going to get—you know, wind up—get wound up.

But nevertheless, there began to be a lack of trust in many corners of society of the political leadership that was continuing to pursue this war, and evidence that the information that we— we, the public—was getting was not true. It was not right. It was actually false information. And that became more evident, and the media began to pick up on that. And so I guess in some sense, I was in the flow.

HARRISON: Can you remember having some initial impressions of [President] Lyndon [B.] Johnson after the Kennedy assassination?

ZIEN: I don't specifically remem- —I mean, my impression of Lyndon Johnson in the context of the Vietnam War was he was implacable, and he was going to pursue that war at all costs. In those days, that's how I saw him. And so, you know, he was the target of the antiwar—of the anti-Vietnam War, let's call it, movement. I didn't have any other particular impressions of him. I would say my impression of Lyndon Johnson was entirely formed by a sense that he wasn't acting to end the war.

HARRISON: Mm-hm. Ever strike you that he and your father had such a similar formative experience from the New Deal? Both very involved in the TVA?

ZIEN: I'm not sure I knew that Lyndon Johnson was involved in the TVA.

HARRISON: Very much, at the start of his career.

ZIEN: What was his—now you're telling me something I didn't know. So how was Lyndon Johnson involved in TVA?

HARRISON: You know, I'll have to look it up on my cell phone to make sure I get all the information right. But it was—

ZIEN: I mean, he may have been supporting TVA, as a congressman.

HARRISON: No, he was—I believe he was an administrator.

ZIEN: Oh, really?

HARRISON: Before he ran for Congress, yes.

ZIEN: Oh. See, that I—I didn't know that.

HARRISON: So that wouldn't have been something on your radar in the 1960s.

ZIEN: No. It was the first time I ever heard that Lyndon Johnson was involved with the TVA.

HARRISON: When we finish, I'll try to pull it up.

ZIEN: I'd be interested to know that. I always thought of Lyndon Johnson as a fully-fledged Texas politician, you know, whose life had been spent in Texas, you know, in various public offices.

HARRISON: So that was his image to you, then, as very much a politician.

ZIEN: Oh, absolutely.

HARRISON: Mm-hm.

ZIEN: Yeah. Yeah, and—I mean, maybe this is—maybe I'm attributing something to my own consciousness that is not really true because I learned—because it became clear later on that, you know, he was a wheeler-dealer in Congress, you know, and his involvement—again the *Selma* film and a couple of other things that I've read and seen subsequently to my image, my sense of Lyndon Johnson when I was in college suggested that he was a lot more complicated than, you know, anybody gave him credit for. There's a play, a stage play about Lyndon Johnson and his involvement in the civil rights movement that's very cogent about that.

But in those days,—those were very black-and-white days. Really. You know, not just civil rights black-and-white, but they were black-and-white days for those of us who felt a) that the country was being railroaded into this war by interests that had nothing to do with our interests and b) that personally we were at risk. There wasn't a lot of—at least I don't feel like I was particularly nuanced about any of that.

HARRISON: What can you remember from the first year of college about SDS and organizations like it? When can you remember beginning to have that sort of more active experience?

ZIEN: Well, I don't think it was until sophomore year, really. My freshman year, I was all focused on pretty much, you know, *What is this new life, and what am I supposed to be doing, and what kinds of courses should I be taking that I'm going to be interested in, and how do I do my work as a student and make it count?*

HARRISON: So this was 1965, was your freshman year?

ZIEN: Sixty-five, year.

HARRISON: So that would have been, probably not coincidentally, the year of so-called Americanization of the Vietnam War, the entrance of American ground troops in—

ZIEN: Correct.

HARRISON: Do you remember reading about that?

ZIEN: Sure, absolutely.

HARRISON: Do you remember conversations about that?

ZIEN: Yeah, we used to talk about it—you know, read the headlines and see the footage, film footage from, you know, the early days of fighting in various parts of the country.

HARRISON: Before you had become more involved in the organization, were there events that were taking place your freshman year, protests or activities similar to that, or was it more of a peaceful year? I shouldn't use the word "peaceful." Was it more of an inactive year in 1965?

ZIEN: In '65—'65, '66, I don't really remember that there was much of any significant campus conflict, campus protests. It didn't really start until '66 '67. At least that's what *I* remember. There may have been—early on, people started to do the Ledyard Bridge, holding placards—you know, "End the War in Vietnam" placards. I don't know whether that was '65 or '66, but once that started it never stopped. People were out there on the Ledyard Bridge almost every day.

There were—there may have been ROTC protest activity on the [Dartmouth] Green in '65. I don't remember. But certainly by ’66 and ’67, that was happening. I mean, ’65 was a kind of bridge year. The mid to late ‘60s in some ways—the greater awarenesses then were about the civil rights movement because, you know, the run-up to my college matriculation was, you know, Kennedy, [the Rev.] Martin Luther King [Jr.], Mohammed X [sic; Malcolm X]. Those years— although the Vietnam War—the U.S. role as advisers in the Vietnam War was present, the major events of the day had to do with the civil rights movement, and the major losses of the day had to do with the civil rights movement in terms of leadership losses and so forth.

So I actually remember more, being more aware of the civil rights movement in the sort of high school run-up to college—I mean, other than the conversations I had with my father about Vietnam, which seemed pretty remote at the time. It *was* remote. Who the hell knew where that was, even?

HARRISON: What about the proximity of the civil rights movement? How did you feel that?

ZIEN: Well, I mean, we felt that—literally, directly, we lived in Milwaukee, and there were—in 1965, there were riots in all major American cities, in the black communities. And because my father had been involved to some extent in some economic development efforts in Milwaukee, in the black communities, we knew some people, you know, who were active in the black community in Milwaukee, and there was major conflict and property destruction. I don’t remember if there was loss of life in Milwaukee.

But the summer before I started Dartmouth, started as a student at Dartmouth, a friend of mine and I got in a car, and we did a car trip from Milwaukee to the West Coast and back, and when we got to Los Angeles, Los Angeles exploded. Summer of 1965, August ’65. Los Angeles started burning.

HARRISON: So you were there during the Watts riots?

ZIEN: We witnessed that, yes.

HARRISON: Wow. What can you—

ZIEN: We weren't in Watts, but we were close. We were close by.

HARRISON: What was that like? What was going on?

ZIEN: Well, it was shocking. It was, like, you know, we were, you know—we could see—I remember this very clearly—driving down the Pacific Coast Highway. We could actually see the smoke coming up out of Watts. And, you know, that was, like, *Okay. What the hell's going on here? Why is this happening?* I mean, we understood, or we knew kind of what the sparks had been to these conflagrations in various places, but that was the beginning of—I mean, if there's one formative sense that I have of an image of the day as I started college, it was Watts burning.

HARRISON: And I imagine, given your background, the way you grew up, that you supported—and what your father did, economic development—that you supported the civil rights movement.

ZIEN: Oh, of course.

HARRISON: Where did you draw the line? Was the Watts riot okay in your mind when you were driving down that highway?

ZIEN: Well, nothing was okay in the way of communities destroying themselves. I mean, that was just—you know, here we are, full circle. I mean, we've got communities destroying themselves, you know, in a couple of different places right now. I mean, that's déjà vu all over again. I was in Watts later in my life. I went to Watts as an adult—partly it had to do with a job that I had at the time—to see what that community looked like in the '80s, 20 years later, essentially.

But, I mean, to sort of say—to try to make a parallel between the civil rights—or ask a question, "What's the line in the civil rights movement?"—the Watts wasn't about the civil rights movement; Watts was about frustration at the failure of the civil rights movement, I guess you'd say, or frustration in an extreme at the lack of effective attention to a whole part of society. And, of course, you know, the assassinations and everything else that was going on.

So, I mean, do I think that it's good for people of any kind to burn down their communities, no, I think that's a pretty bad idea. Nobody's going to get anything out of that. Did it evoke some remedial action? Well, for a while it did, sort of.

HARRISON: Were you able to make sense of that when you saw it and after, by the time you got back to Milwaukee, or did it just seem like the world was burning down?

ZIEN: Well [chuckles], we were in an odd situation. We were two high school kids about to go to college, who had earned a little money for part of the summer and, you know, put the money in our pocket and went out camping across the United States and visiting some friends that we had in various places. And so, I mean, there was an extreme disconnect, in a sense, because not only did we see Watts burning but we also went to Disneyland the next day.

It wasn't until—I don't think at that time I kind of could put it all together. I mean, later, when I looked back on it, I thought, *Wow, that was pretty amazing. There we were, almost at ground zero of a major American city burning*, or part of one, one that most people didn't care about, but it became a big deal. And we were also hanging out at Disneyland and, you know, visiting our friends and going out for hamburgers. It was, like, yes, there are many different worlds that we live in, and if you're ten miles away from one of those worlds and it's going to hell, then it's pretty easy to ignore it. A better approach to life is: Try to understand where the flashpoints are and do something about them. And Milwaukee was in a similar situation in those years, in that year.

HARRISON: We've been speaking for a little over an hour. How do you feel about taking a couple of minutes of a break?

ZIEN: Sure.

HARRISON: All right.

[Recording interruption.]

HARRISON: Okay, so I'm back with Jim Zien. This is Tim Harrison, and we'll continue now.

So we just finished off talking about your recollections of seeing the Watts riots from a distance.

ZIEN: Correct.

HARRISON: You just told me that when you started at Dartmouth, there was something of a transition from the national focus being on issues of race [to] the national focus being on issues in Southeast Asia.

ZIEN: Well, I mean, it's just that race didn't go away, but—whereas the huge amount of public media attention in the years from the Kennedy assassination through the King assassination t through the Malcolm X assassination through the Robert [F.] Kennedy assassination—these were somewhat tied up, not exclusively, and the urban unrest and violence and so forth were more tied up with civil rights and social issues in those days. All of those issues persisted and then the U.S. involvement in Vietnam in a very active way, and the threat that that posed to those of us who were of the age who could be conceivably involved in a direct way, and the amount of the attention that was then focused on the war and the casualties and the so-called progress of the war, which we began to understand was not really true.

These things built up, you know, starting in late '64, early '65, and the draft became a threat to everybody my age. Well, it became a threat to the people my age who didn't really want to—I mean, in fairness, you know, there were people who believed that this was an important military undertaking and volunteered and did their service, and then there were those of us who a) didn't think it was a good thing to be doing and b) weren't really enthusiastic about participating.

HARRISON: When can you remember first hearing about SDS on campus?

ZIEN: Oh, probably—I don't know when I first heard about it, but I certainly knew about it in '66 at the cheapest. You know, I think by that time things were starting to get organized.

HARRISON: And you started going to meetings how often?

ZIEN: Occasionally. I wasn’t an SDS member, but I was interested in the conversation that SDS was evoking. I probably went to a couple of meetings in ’67, ’68, but just a few, because there were other rallies that were not SDS. I mean, SDS was one component of much more activism than just SDS.

HARRISON: What else was there?

ZIEN: Well, there were, as I said earlier, the ROTC protest, which wasn’t specifically SDS. I mean, those were rallies that were held periodically.

HARRISON: Who do you think organized those rallies?

ZIEN: I’m trying to remember the names of some of the guys who were the leading people. John—I don’t know. I think of it as names of people who were involved.

HARRISON: Not names of organizations.

ZIEN: Yeah, not so much names of organizations other than SDS. I mean, the Dartmouth—there were many other political organizations at the time in the United States that were important that weren’t necessarily represented on the Dartmouth campus. But they tended to be more the civil rights organizations than specifically the antiwar organizations.

HARRISON: Why were you never a member of SDS?

ZIEN: I’ve never been much of an organization person, so I guess I was never a member of SDS just like I’ve never been a member of most other organized entities in my life. I was interested in participation in the activism, but I wasn’t interested in organizing, so that’s why I wasn’t a member of SDS, principally. I don’t think it was particularly moral or ethical. I mean, SDS in later years was accused of doing all kinds of terrible things, but at the time I just wasn’t a joiner.

HARRISON: But in ’66 you don’t think it was an intensely radical organization at Dartmouth.

ZIEN: Mmm, I don't think so. I mean, I think it started as social activism, anti-Vietnam War group. I don't think it was ever hugely—as it was in some other parts of the country—a violent organization particularly. I don't remember SDS being anything other than sort of making a lot of loud political noise at Dartmouth, on the Dartmouth campus.

HARRISON: And what were they responding to, and what were you responding to when you went to those meetings?

ZIEN: Well, the issues were the same that we've been talking about. The issues were the escalation in Vietnam and the role that Dartmouth theoretically was playing in feeding the war by training officers to join the military. I mean, there were some other social issues on the campuses at that time. I don't remember whether SDS specially was involved. There was divestment.

HARRISON: In South Africa?

ZIEN: In South Africa. There were other war-related protests: Dow Chemical [Co.], so there's a variety of sort of international issues, some of which were related to the war and some of which were related to other concerns for human justice, and whether SDS was bigger than anti-Vietnam War, I really—I actually don't remember whether SDS was involved in those other things as much as it clearly was in the ROTC and general war protests.

HARRISON: What kind of conversations did you have about the draft at this time?

ZIEN: Well, it was hardly a day at some point when people, when students weren't talking about the draft, because we were all at least technically eligible. And in my case, I was early on ineligible because I have a regularly dislocating shoulder, so in a sense, I supported my friends more so in sort of the issues of draft strategy. There was lots of conversation about—I'm talking about among those who were not interested in being drafted and sent to Vietnam.

What were the strategies that one could employ to avoid that? And those were multiple. You could get married. Maybe you could have a kid. You could go to Canada. You could get a psychiatric evaluation that said that you were unfit to serve. There was a time, I think, when if you went on to further schooling you could continue an exemption for some period, although that ended, I believe, shortly thereafter, once the lottery was instituted.

And then there was the lottery, and everybody, you know, waited to see which number was going to up for them. So it was a big issue, as I'm sure all your interviewees who were in this time period of draft eligibility would tell you.

I think at the time, we didn't understand that it was in fact the draft that killed the war. We didn't have that understanding then, but later on, people understood ultimately that it was the rebellion of a large segment of society and not just the draft-eligible youth, young adults—the parents, the grandparents and so forth—that they could be next up.

HARRISON: What was the specific aversion to it on Dartmouth's campus? Because you all had grown up in an environment where service and sacrifice—everyone did it. I mean, everyone did that during World War II, your father included. Did something happen about Vietnam in the collective minds at Dartmouth first, or did something happen where going to war didn't seem like a good idea?

ZIEN: No, I think it was that the war was immoral. It was as simple as that. There are moral wars, and there are immoral wars. And at least those of us who were antiwar, anti-Vietnam War felt that this was an immoral war. This was not a war that could be justified on any basis other than this thin geopolitical concept of a domino theory and that a) that theory was bankrupt and b) we were killing millions of people to pursue a theory—hundreds of—well, tens of thousands of our own people and hundreds of thousands of other people. I mean, it's as simple as—to me, it was as simple as that, that it was not a moral war.

HARRISON: How early did that idea, sophomore year and in junior year—how early did that start to turn into action and what sort of action was there? I know you went to meetings. What protests can you remember going to, if any?

ZIEN: Well, there were things that occurred off the Dartmouth campus. I mean, so far we're limiting it to what happened on the Dartmouth campus, but there were rallies and meetings and marches nation wide, so there was the March on Washington [D.C.], there were marches in big cities, New York City, Boston.

HARRISON: Were you at any of those?

ZIEN: Yes.

HARRISON: Tell me about those.

ZIEN: I went to the March on Washington, except that that was—I graduated in '69. The biggest March on Washington was in '72. I had already moved to—I mean, I left the Upper Valley and day I graduated and went to Boston, and I was in school and worked for 35 years until I came back up here. Yes, my story about the March on Washington—and, again, this is sort of something I think about fairly often—that March on Washington involved hundreds—well, I don't know how many—tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of people, and it was organized [such that] you got on a line somewhere in downtown Washington, and you received a placard to hang around your neck, and the placard that you hung around your neck—and, interestingly, this is where these two threads come together of civil rights, in my mind, and the war—the placard that you hung around your neck had already pre-written on it the name of a U.S. serviceman who had been killed.

And then you got a candle, and then from that rallying point, we walked to—"we," a hundred thousand people walked to Arlington National Cemetery for a kind of, you know, burial ceremony, is what I'm remembering about it. Maybe it wasn't exactly like that. But anyway, I, along with my friends—I was living in Boston at the time—each received our placard, and the placard that I received, the guy's name was Lucky White, who was black. And I remember walking however many—a couple of miles from that rallying point to Arlington National Cemetery with this placard that said: "Lucky White," which was what I was, right? That's why I wasn't in Vietnam. I wasn't in the position that this guy was that was killed. And knowing that he was black.

So in some ways—I mean, the Vietnam War was fought mostly by—well, I don't know about "mostly"—substantially by African-American soldiers led by white officers, and the immorality of the war was multiple. It was that there was no rationale that could convince any of those of us who were opposed to the war—made it right, in the Vietnamese context, killing Vietnamese people. And there was no morality—there was no moral position that you could take in the American context, exposing people who had other, limited options—there was the draft, and then there were the people who didn't have any other options but to serve in the military.

HARRISON: And this Lucky White story—is this the big march from 1972?

ZIEN: Mm-hm.

HARRISON: Yes. Okay.

ZIEN: That was '72, yeah.

HARRISON: That's a very powerful story.

ZIEN: Yeah.

HARRISON: I'm not surprised you haven't forgotten it. That's a very powerful story.

So back at Dartmouth, we've discussed 1966 and '67. I know there were various protests against ROTC in those two years.

ZIEN: Yep.

HARRISON: And then in 1968 the election and in 1967 the lead-up to the election.

ZIEN: Yep.

HARRISON: As this election year—what can you remember thinking about Lyndon Johnson? Was it the same as in the early '60s after the Kennedy assassination, or were the thoughts more intense about him?

ZIEN: Well, I mean, Lyndon Johnson continued to be the target of the program, really, among those people who felt that he had taken up the mantle of the war and just couldn't see his way to concluding it, getting us out of there. So I don't think—I mean, there wasn't any doubt that Lyndon Johnson should be defeated. Everybody wanted to see him go. So there were various—I mean, in terms of the political candidates of the day, there were the people who supported [Eugene J.] McCarthy; there were people who supported Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy; to a lesser extent, Hubert Humphrey, I guess, but Hubert Humphrey was seen as captive of the Vietnam people, at least then he was.

So, okay, we the Parkhurst thing happened. That didn't change anything. You know—well, I think we all were smart enough to know that—or some of us, anyway—that, you know, we could *feel* okay about making our voices heard and cause a little stir (or a big stir, in some people's minds), but it was all noise, and what was going to maybe change the direction or help push the country in a different direction was a leader who had a different idea.

HARRISON: So you volunteered for McCarthy.

ZIEN: I did.

HARRISON: When did you do that, and what did you do?

ZIEN: Well, I did some canvassing and stuff around here, but actually, the thing that I did that was most focused was I ran a field office in Milwaukee—

HARRISON: Over the summer.

ZIEN: —for the McCarthy campaign.

HARRISON: So that would have been summer 1968.

ZIEN: Yeah.

HARRISON: Okay. Let's start at the beginning. I imagine you did the canvassing before the March 12th primary in New Hampshire?

ZIEN: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

HARRISON: Around Hanover?

ZIEN: Yeah, around. We had people—you know, we did carpooling and went around and knocked on doors and hung stuff on doorknobs.

HARRISON: When did you hear about McCarthy? What's an early recollection of him?

ZIEN: Well, I mean, I came from the Midwest. I grew up in Wisconsin. As I said, I used to participate or at least, you know, be present at a lot of Democratic Party events over time. I mean, I knew who the antiwar or at least, you know,—yeah, I guess I'd say the antiwar politicians were. The summer before '68, I interned in Gaylord Nelson's office.

HARRISON: In Washington?

ZIEN: In Washington, yeah. And those Wisconsin and Minnesota Democrats were all progressives, so I knew who they were. And when McCarthy began to—he gave many speeches, wrote many op-eds over a period of a couple of years leading up to that election, and I just decided early on that *it's time to see if we can get different leadership.*

HARRISON: In January of 1968, his campaign began in New Hampshire. At least he said he would run in the New Hampshire primary. How early can you remember starting to do something about it? There was a flood of students by February and March.

ZIEN: Yeah, I think probably it was—it was in—yeah, it was in the sort of, you know, spring term. I sort of remember going out and being cold. [Chuckles.] It was still winter then, obviously, as it is here. Yeah, I mean, it wasn't right away. It wasn't right in January, but it was during the spring term that we went out and did the canvassing. And my friend—Ted Roberg was a friend of mine, and he and I would go out together.

HARRISON: I'm asking about the organization. You would go—I believe the headquarters was in Lebanon. Is that right?

ZIEN: Mm-hm.

HARRISON: So you would go to the headquarters. You'd say, "I'm interested in doing some canvassing today." Is that how—

ZIEN: They'd give you a sheet with some addresses on it, you know. "Well, we need to cover"—whatever community, whatever few blocks or so of some community. I mean, it was standard canvassing. Some people did phone calling from the office, but some of us wanted to just go out and, you know, ring doorbells.

HARRISON: And they let you in?

ZIEN: I don't remember anybody ever inviting us in, but—

HARRISON: They wouldn't throw you out.

ZIEN: Sometimes. I mean, sometimes people would say, "Yeah, tell me what you have to say," and they would say, "I'm with ya. I agree with that." Some people would say, you know, "No, I respect that you're out here doing this, but I have a son in Vietnam, and I'm not voting for that guy." And some would say, you know, "Fuck off." [Chuckles.]

HARRISON: What was McCarthy—what did he stand for?

ZIEN: The other thing was that McCarthy was not known around here. I mean, Bobby Kennedy—everybody knew Bobby Kennedy, for obvious reasons. But Gene McCarthy. Nobody knew who he was.

HARRISON: You knew about him from where you grew up.

ZIEN: Yeah.

HARRISON: How do you think the other students from Dartmouth who did this and then many students, apparently thousands, who came up here from other colleges—how did they know about this guy? What was it before March 12th, before that New Hampshire primary?

ZIEN: Well, I mean, anybody who was reading anything by that time—as I said, the national news had moved on from just unquestioning—not support but reporting as if this thing were—there were no questions about it to reporting on the sentiment that this war was wrong or at least if not wrong, it should be ended. So anybody who was reading the newspaper knew that Gene McCarthy at that point was speaking out. So, I mean, I think that's how people knew. But when I say "nobody knew," what I mean is if you were to go over, you know, to Canaan or someplace, you know, knocking on a middle-class neighborhood door—I mean, those folks didn't necessarily know who Gene McCarthy was. People who were active, involved, concerned, interesting, reading the press and so forth certainly knew, and there was a groundswell of young people who wanted to participate, and they didn't have any trouble knowing, because it was all over the news by then, who was, you know, going to challenge the powers who were pursuing the war.

HARRISON: What other types of students were there who were doing this canvassing? What did they look like, and what did they dress like? What did they sound like?

ZIEN: Mmm, pretty—I mean, people hadn't—it was the beginning of people, you know, growing their hair long. But that wasn't—at Dartmouth, actually, it was anybody and everybody. I mean, anybody and everybody—I don't remember that it was any particular kind of appearance that characterized those who wanted to do this campaigning. It was about personal understanding or interest in trying to change the direction of things, if possible. So, you know, in the mid to late '60s, yeah, some people were starting to wear their hair long, some people had grown beards and moustaches. You know, Dartmouth wasn't much of a place that reflected its political consciousness in clothing. That was more West Coast and stuff, but it was there to some extent. But I don't remember that there was any particular type or appearance; it was people who were interested in the politics of the day.

HARRISON: Can you remember a catch phrase that went "Clean for Gene?"

ZIEN: Oh, yeah, "Clean for Gene."

HARRISON: What was that about?

ZIEN: [Chuckles.] You know, I never really thought about it. There were buttons. People put on buttons. Yeah, now that you mention it, I suppose it means don't ring somebody's doorbell if you look like a doper or something. But I don't know. I never really thought about it.

HARRISON: That's it exactly. That *is* what it meant.

ZIEN: I guess. I don't know. I wasn't—it's the first time I've really thought, *What does that mean, Clean for Gene?* I never gave it a thought. And in the office that I was involved in in Milwaukee—I mean, you didn't have to tell anybody to be clean for Gene because, I mean, nobody looked like they had just rolled out of, you know, some—you know, some—

HARRISON: Commune.

ZIEN: Yeah.

HARRISON: Something like that.

ZIEN: Yeah.

HARRISON: Yeah.

ZIEN: It's interesting. I don't know. I never gave it a thought.

HARRISON: There was a campaign memorandum in New Hampshire that actually specifically disallowed anyone who had grown out their hair or was wearing a beard or any sort of eccentric clothing, man or woman, from doing any canvassing work. These people had to be apparently kept in the basement of the Lebanon headquarters,—

ZIEN: [Chuckles.]

HARRISON: —according to this memorandum.

ZIEN: I believe it. I just—I guess I didn't—I guess I wasn't subject to the memorandum because I don't remember—at the time, I—

HARRISON: Did you have long hair or a beard or any sort of funky dress?

ZIEN: Mmm, no, not then. Later, I grew a moustache for a while, but that was after I left Dartmouth, actually, I think. Yeah, I'm pretty show. No, I still looked the same as I did coming out of high school.

HARRISON: Your parents, I'm sure, were aware of McCarthy and knew—

ZIEN: My father was working for McCarthy, you know, directly.

HARRISON: They knew about your volunteering in New Hampshire?

ZIEN: Oh, yeah.

HARRISON: What sort of conversations did you have with your father, with your parents?

ZIEN: Well, we were all on the same page. I mean, we would just be talking about the campaign and how it was going and, you know, what the chances were, and how the fundraising—I mean, my father—by that time, he was in his 60s, I guess, late 50s, early 60s, and he was doing fundraising. You know, so he said, "Well, we're going to have this event, and we're trying to get So-and-so to come." You know, he would tell me what he was doing and how the fundraising was going, and I was in Milwaukee then, that summer, so, you know, we would be talking about, you know, what the odds were—you know, following the polls and listening to the speeches.

HARRISON: McCarthy spoke at Dartmouth apparently on March 4th, in Webster Hall.

ZIEN: Mm-hm.

HARRISON: Can you remember that? Were you there?

ZIEN: Mm-hm. Yep.

HARRISON: What can you remember about that? The attitude on campus? The attitude in the room?

ZIEN: Oh, he had a large and enthusiastic audience. I mean, were there protests at his talk? I don't remember. I don't think so. I don't remember that there were. I mean, the place was packed. I mean, he spoke—he wasn't just speaking to students. I think—I think it was open to the public, as I recall. Is that right? I don't know. You tell me. I sort of remember that it was a speech that was open to the public, but—

HARRISON: But it was packed. Is that right?

ZIEN: Yeah. That's what *I* remember. Yeah, I mean, it was a big deal then, that a national presidential candidate would come to a college. I mean, it was also packed when George [C.] Wallace [Jr.] came. I mean, you know, these are—[Chuckles.]'

HARRISON: What was the mood on campus in March 1968? Were more and more people starting to oppose the war, and were more and more people wanting to support Eugene McCarthy, or were people not so aware of him before the New Hampshire primary?

ZIEN: Well, I think Dartmouth—I don't know. I'm not sure I'm qualified to answer the question. I mean, those of us who were working felt like we had a cause and that—I mean, I don't know that I remember specifically feeling like we were making a lot of converts to the cause. I think Dartmouth as a body of individual—of students was more conservative—it still is—than some other places, than lots of other places. But I think that there was—I mean, among those people who were involved, there was a sense that, you know, he had some mileage; he could possibly win the—you know, he could become the candidate.

HARRISON: Did it feel like a lot of Dartmouth students were supporting McCarthy before the New Hampshire primary, or was it more of a smaller group?

ZIEN: I don't honestly have a sense of numbers. The office was well staffed. I mean, but that's—30 or 40 people was well staffed, you know, in a campaign office in a town like Lebanon. I really don't have a sense of numbers. There was enthusiasm. There was activity. There were people who, you know, put in a lot of time. I mean, everybody understood that New Hampshire was an important starting point. But in terms of numbers? I would guess that it wasn't a huge participation. I mean, I don't think politically on the campus a lot of people, for the entire time that I was there, were uninvolved, in anything—I mean anything political.

HARRISON: Why was it that you were willing to take on the sacrifice for the campaign? You were going out in the cold. You were going up to strangers' homes. You were no longer passive in your opposition to the Vietnam War. All of a sudden, you were very much active.

ZIEN: Well, because I was convinced that the war needed to end and that the only way that was going to happen was if there was a national commitment to ending it and that either McCarthy, or Bobby Kennedy, for that matter, were probably going to make that happen, but I happened to sign up with McCarthy because he was out there earlier. I would have worked for Bobby Kennedy if he hadn't been killed. I mean, if that had come to pass.

Actually, as I recall it, more of the debates ultimately were between the people who were supporting McCarthy and the people who were supporting Kennedy than, you know, McCarthy or whoever was supporting any of the Republican candidates, because there was actually a kind of cultural friction, I think, at that time between the sort of Kennedy camp and the McCarthy camp.

HARRISON: How do you explain that friction?

ZIEN: Well, I mean, I think it has to do with the perception that McCarthy—in a sense, I was thinking "Clean for Gene" meant Gene is a little cleaner—thinking back on this and what I made of that campaign. It helped him. But the Kennedys had some baggage at that time. They had some affiliations and so forth that we weren't sure were really going to play out in the national leadership role in the way that we thought Gene McCarthy was going to play out, because he was such a purist. He was an academic. He had never wavered in his—and he'd never been involved in any—at least as far as we knew—unsavory parts of American society [chuckles] and stuff like that. I don't know.

But in reality, Bobby Kennedy was probably the more—he would have been the more effective leader. I don't know. You never know these things.

So sacrifice? I mean, I don't think we saw it as sacrifice, anyway. I mean, we just wanted to see something happen, and if it was going to happen, we thought, *Well, let's just go out and talk to people and see if we can convince one or two people.* I think it was pretty straightforward.

And in Wisconsin, of course, it wasn't—by that time, it was also summertime, but Wisconsin in those days, unlike today, was a very liberal state, very progressive state, whereas New Hampshire then was—you know, it was a contest. I mean, I'm sure that you've talked to people about the *New Hampshire Union Leader*, the *Manchester Union Leader*, the newspaper. I mean, that was one of the most right-wing papers on the face of the Earth at that time. So there was some of that, like, you know: Let's get up in the face of these bastards and show them that that's not the only thinking around.

HARRISON: And when you went out, you would wear—would you wear a suit and tie? Did you have to do that? Do you remember?

ZIEN: I don't remember wearing a suit and tie, but it doesn't mean we didn't. I guess we did. I remember wearing a suit and tie in Milwaukee, actually.

HARRISON: How did you get involved in that part of the campaign? You went home for the summer

ZIEN: Well, I got involved there because essentially the organizing of congressional, senatorial and presidential sort of political support was shared among the various leadership of the Wisconsin delegation, so the people who worked for Gaylord Nelson also worked for McCarthy; people who worked for Bill Proxmire worked for McCarthy. So, as I said, I had interned in Gaylord Nelson's office, and then when the discussions came up about, you know, supporting the campaign, the presidential campaign, I remember somebody said, "Hey, you did some doorbell ringing in New Hampshire. You gonna be home for the summer? We're trying to open a few offices in Milwaukee."

HARRISON: And you led an office.

ZIEN: Yeah. Well, I co-led with a guy from Yale. He and I set up this office that had a little territory.

HARRISON: And what would you do, canvassing?

ZIEN: Yeah. We would—yeah, we had lists, and every day we would go through the lists, and volunteers would come in, and we'd hand out lists. It was pretty retail politics.

HARRISON: What was this all about? I mean, obviously McCarthy stood for an end in some form to the Vietnam War. Were there other issues at play in 1968 that he stood for?

ZIEN: Well, McCarthy had at least the image of a highly moral, ethical individual, so his position on the war in Vietnam—and he was a historian. You know, he had the—or at least I remember thinking, you know, *This is a guy who's not going to go off the rails and be captured by some forces, the powers of business or*—well, primarily that, because we all thought in those days that big business was also part of the problem, that, you know, the war was partly about driving the economy—that he was not going to captured by those special interests, because of his upright, moral character, as we saw it or as he portrayed it and his understanding of history as a historian.

HARRISON: That's certainly valid. And so when you were in Wisconsin—you said it's a liberal state, but I imagine by the summer it was very much a battleground between—was Kennedy campaigning in Wisconsin?

ZIEN: Oh, yeah.

HARRISON: So what kind of—I mean, I imagine you were covering the same territory.

ZIEN: Yeah, Kennedy had campaign offices, and McCarthy had campaign offices, and, yeah, they were competing at that time. Of course, it was only a month and a half later that he was gone.

HARRISON: Yes. Where were the students going to volunteer?

ZIEN: You mean between Bobby Kennedy and Gene McCarthy?

HARRISON: Yeah. There were a lot of students working for you when you co-led that office?

ZIEN: There were students. There were just people, older people, adults in the community. It was an office—the office was in—I'm trying to remember where that office was. It was in a near-downtown neighborhood, as I recall. So our territory was more city than suburban. So there were young adults, there were housewives, there were students. I mean, the differences between the people who worked, who liked or who supported Bobby Kennedy—I don't think there was any difference in terms of—I mean, really in terms of how old they were or what they education was or anything like that. It was more I think that people saw—some people—and I think—I mean, I could have gone either way in some respects. People saw Bobby Kennedy as having a clearer understanding and relationship to the dispossessed in America, that Gene McCarthy was more of—you know, he was an academic, in a certain way. He came from a state that didn't have very many black people or people of color of any kind, whereas Bobby Kennedy had been down in the urban life of America, and, you know, he had done the rough-and-tumble with the FBI—you know, that he had more of a grip on society as it existed in places other than upper middle-class suburbs. And I think it was just a matter of, you know, what your immediate focus was, and for some of us, our immediate focus was strictly—not strictly, but substantially ending the war.

HARRISON: There were people who wanted to end the war, who would never have gotten involved in the political process as you did. They removed themselves from society.

ZIEN: Well, I'm sure there were people who went to Canada, for one thing. Not a lot, but some thousands.

HARRISON: There were people who started communes. There were people who began to form the counterculture.

ZIEN: Yeah, but some of those same people were activists in certainly the antiwar movement; they just moved on. I mean, when the antiwar movement kind of petered out after—essentially after the war ended—and some of those same people who were activists were also—you know, they chose in the '70s, sort of early to mid '70s to—they didn't want to be part of the establishment, so they decided that they would create their own societies. You're a historian. You know it's happened many times in American history—you know, utopian movements of various kinds, and they were one other version of that.

HARRISON: Can you remember McCarthy talking about—in many speeches, he talked about radicalization on campuses and radicalization in American society. Can you remember any of that? He was very concerned with students in particular dropping out of American society.

ZIEN: I can't say that I remember any strong emphasis on that. I mean, I remember speeches where he would say, you know, "You gotta stay involved." You know, I mean, "It's important to participate in the political process because that's the way—you have—that's a leverage. It's the only leverage you have." So, I mean, I remember that message in a general sense. I don't really remember a whole lot about his critiquing the back-to-the-land or the commune movement or anything. Honestly, I don't. But I do remember—he and others—I mean, every politician in the progressive realm will say, you know, "The political process is important, and we're here because we believe that we can have an impact on life and society." So that's—I don't remember.

HARRISON: Did you interact with people at Dartmouth who would have refused that position? Many people at Dartmouth did, and SDS, by the late 1960s, I think including 1968, had sort of had enough of the political process.

ZIEN: I don't specif- —because I wasn't there, inside SDS. I don't really have any perception. I mean, you know, we had—Dartmouth had a couple of groups: you know, the Wooden

Shoe group [the Wooden Shoe Commune in Canaan, New Hampshire]—you know, the Wooden Shoe, the commune here in—

HARRISON: I've heard of it, yes.

ZIEN: Yeah. And some of the Wooden Shoe people *were* activists during a period of time, but, you know, it had its—Wooden Shoe, I knew a couple of those people or at least I knew of them, but, you know, there was a whole set of sub-cultures at the time, and some sub-cultures were the dropouts, and some were sort of the continuation of the establishment, and some became druggies and didn't have any affiliation with anybody other than their—you know, their substances.

HARRISON: But these people weren't volunteering for McCarthy.

ZIEN: No.

HARRISON: Why do you think that was? Why do you think the people who volunteered for McCarthy did what they did and the others did what they did? How did you, in your mind, separate those people?

ZIEN: Well, I didn't really think too much about the people who *weren't* doing it; I was thinking about—you know, for me, because I'd grown up in a kind of political participation world, through my parents primarily, [I thought] that political participation was appropriate and meaningful at some level, and I wasn't particularly thinking about who *wasn't* doing it.

HARRISON: Did it ever occur to you that dropping out of society or doing some of this—maybe could we use the term "more radical" ways of living, ways of projecting society? Did it ever occur to you that you could participate in some of this?

ZIEN: For me personally? No, because after Dartmouth I had already decided what I was going to do. I was interested in inner city education at that time, and I went from my graduation ceremony at Dartmouth to inner city Philadelphia and began to work in an experimental school in inner city Philadelphia, so I wasn't going anyplace off the grid. I was going to try to do something in a context that I thought might have some value somewhere.

HARRISON: Mm-hm. How long did that last, that job?

ZIEN: Well, it wasn't a job. I enrolled at Harvard, at Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

HARRISON: Immediately after.

ZIEN: Yes. I mean, I applied, and I was accepted and had a partial fellowship or something. And the reason—my specific focus was inner city urban education, so that was the first part of my program, was to participate in a summer education program of what at that time was considered one of the most kind of interesting, innovative experiments in alternative learning in the country, which was actually some Harvard people who had gotten together with Philadelphia schoolteachers and created this program in an old warehouse in north Philadelphia, which was the same kind of community that blew up in other parts of America, you know, a couple of years before that. Essentially, you know, a black, poverty-stricken community.

So anyway, I went to graduate school. That was my first experience out of Dartmouth, was going from Hanover to north Philadelphia. There are no two—well, there are probably more extreme, you know, places in terms of their characters, but they're just pretty extreme. That's a pretty extreme difference.

HARRISON: Why'd you do it?

MAN: Because I thought—again, I felt that I wanted to be involved in some element of improving life in communities that were under-resourced, dispossessed. That's why I did it.

HARRISON: And can you remember at all back to 1968, back to that election, or as you went to graduate school and these alternative ways of living intensified, can you remember thinking that this was sort of not the way to do it? Did it occur to you?

ZIEN: No, I don't remember feeling very judgmental about, you know, people who were living in communes. I mean, sometime later, not that long later, a bunch of friends of mine bought a farm, a piece of farmland up in Albany, Vermont, which is another hour and a half north of here. And interestingly, it wasn't about a commune. I became involved with people, for whatever reason, who were studying architecture and planning, and it was a bunch of young people who were right out of college, who were now studying architecture and planning, and they wanted to make a space for themselves—you know, use their newfound skills of design and planning to create something that was an environment that they wanted to inhabit, not permanently but—anyway, so I was part of that group as well.

I mean, we would go up on weekends and fix up—you know, spent a couple of years fixing up an old barn, and some of the people built houses up there. But it wasn't a commune; it was just, like, "Okay, we'd like to have some agency over a piece of ground that we have some thoughts about in terms of how it's designed" and so forth. But it was purely a kind of weekend thing. I mean, it wasn't anything like Wooden Shoe. I mean, Wooden Shoe was really a serious commune.

HARRISON: Did you go there?

ZIEN: To Wooden Shoe? I never went there when it was active, but I went and looked at it once years later, just to see what—I think it had sort of fallen apart by then. No, I didn't. I mean, one of the, you know, main people at Wooden Shoe now runs Killdeer Farm. I don't know if you know that.

HARRISON: No.

ZIEN: You know Killdeer Farm in Norwich?

HARRISON: No.

ZIEN: Well, it's sort of the premier farm stand around here that people in Norwich, anyway, shop at all the time. It's right next to King Arthur Flour.

HARRISON: I see.

ZIEN: It's considered to be the best source, for some people, of fruits, vegetables, whatever grown here in the Upper Valley, and Killdeer Farm is right along—in fact, when you go back on 91, you go right by Killdeer Farm. You can see it from the highway. And then there's a farm stand in Norwich. Well, the guy who owns Killdeer Farm was one of the original Wooden Shoe people.

HARRISON: I see. You know, we're obviously coming to the end. You've been very generous with your time in talking to me, but going back to Dartmouth, we certainly don't have time to get to 1969 and the details of the Parkhurst takeover.

ZIEN: Yeah.

HARRISON: But I want to circle back to this divide one more time,—

ZIEN: Mm-hm.

HARRISON: —this divide between people who responded to the Vietnam War and doubled down on the political process, as you did, to try to create some change and the people who rejected the political process entirely. Looking back now—you've told me that you didn't think about that divide at the time. Does it seem like a relevant divide to you or were there other ways of organizing the response to the draft, the intensification of the Vietnam War and then also the civil rights issues taking place in the late '60s?

ZIEN: Well, the one group—the dropout group, I guess, if you want to call it that—I mean, that's the antithesis of organizing. That's disorganizing except insofar as you may organize your small group to, you know, grow your vegetables or whatever. Again, I didn't think about it much at the time. I think it's just, you can say, the normal distribution curve of political participation and interest. You know, I bet if some sociologist did a study over time of political participation, knowledge and participation, you'd probably see pretty much standard curves of, you know, numbers, percentages of the population that a) know anything about what the hell's going on—the people who don't know much about anything are probably in the majority, is my guess, right? And then you've got the people who *do* know what's going on, meaning, you know, they're reasonably educated about at least those things that they have some stake in, whether it's a war or whether it's poverty or whether it's race or what have you.

And then they further subdivide into, you know, various forms of participation or non-participation.

So, I mean, I think that in the ’60s, because of the Vietnam War participation shot up among people between the ages of 18 and, say, 25 because there was a big personal stake. And non-participation shot up. They both shot up because some people just don’t want to be involved. You know, they’d rather remove themselves from the fray than participate in the fray. I think that’s all about your own personal history—you know, where you were coming from to start with and what your experiences [were] with involvement in anything, but in particular in the political process and in the realm of, for want of a better word, activism. If you have no personal history whatsoever, maybe you don’t get the point.

So I don’t know. I don’t have any real wisdom about that except to say that the people who I knew, who were part of my circle of friends and classmates who were acquaintances and so forth were the people who were mostly involved in some way or other in one or another elements of advocacy or active participation in the political sphere or the social sphere, because, I mean, politics is one thing and social activism is something else. There’s overlap, but they’re not the same, by any means.

You know, I knew people who were not involved in politics at all who did terrific things in their communities, in their professional lives, whether they were in medicine or law or other fields, who maybe their only involvement in politics was actually to vote, which, by the way, is only 25 percent of the American populace anyway, right? So, you know, talk about involvement, that’s the lowest common denominator, and that lowest common denominator is not very popular among people, or it’s not very—there’s a lot of non-engagement. That’s the way it is.

But I had something else in mind to say to you about all of this that was more bringing it up to date, but now I can’t remember what it was, so if I think about it, I guess I’ll e-mail it to you.

HARRISON: Mmm.

ZIEN: But my experience was going from—and I'm not really involved in politics, to speak of, in these realms anymore. I'm involved with my local town. I've done some committee work in the town. I most recently sat on the committee that hired the new police chief. There are some town issues that I'm interested in that I'll speak up on if—but now I'm not working on a daily basis in an office, I'm thinking about *what is it that I'm going to do now in this current presidential election?* I don't know. I haven't come to a conclusion yet. But, you know, I have the time, so I conceivably could put in some effort. I'm not sure what that effort would look like right now, but I'm thinking about it.

HARRISON: Does it come from the same place as it came from in 1968, that personal history?

ZIEN: Well, that personal history is—sure, that shapes—you know, that's always going to shape my thinking about who I want to be in a particular political context or activism context. But no, I mean, yeah, sure, it comes from—there are some bad wars going on now, still, except that nobody—it's not like Vietnam because the incidence of the negative impacts is much more attenuated than it was in those days.

HARRISON: Without the draft, at least.

ZIEN: Without the draft and without the large numbers of people—although if you add them all up between Iraq and Afghanistan and Kuwait, maybe it comes to—you know, starts to get to the 55,000. But it's not as dramatic, so it's harder to conceptualize that we've got a problem. But anyway, we do have a problem. There's no question about it.

I mean, I went to Vietnam in the '90s. I made several trips there for a different reason that had to do with some economic development, so my perception of that whole experience is that the Vietnamese transcended it, and the United States of America has yet to transcend it. The Vietnamese transcended that experience. They moved on, just like they, you know, fought the war with limited resources and ultimately, if you haven't seen the PBS [Public Broadcasting Service] special yet that was on the other day about "Last Days of Vietnam" [an episode of the PBS show, *American Experience*], you got to watch it, the chaos and the disorganization of the exit.

You know, the Vietnamese did some bad things postwar to one another. Of course, they did bad things before that, too. But, you know, that country and that culture, between 1975, the need of the war effectively, and 1991, ’92, when I was there, and years later—you know, I wasn’t an unpopular person there, nor were any other Americans at that time, you know? And I was in the north. They were working on making sure they had enough to eat and making sure that their economy was going to survive years of bad communist management and move on to better ways of operating.

So my perception of Vietnam now—or then; I haven’t been back since the mid ‘90s—is, you know, it was a country that was nearly destroyed by American firepower that is one of the stronger economies now in Southeast Asia, certainly one of the most highly educated, because they always were, and a source of—it used to be a source of cheap labor for the U.S. after the war years, and it’s become not even a source of cheap labor anymore because the economy has grown.

So I felt like, yeah, there’s a purpose to, you know, making noise on the streets and on the steps of Parkhurst. There was a purpose of at least attempting to get new leadership at the highest level in the United States government. You know, it didn’t happen, at least the way we wanted it to happen. And there’s always a purpose to revisiting these things later to see: Okay, that was bad. A hundred thousand people were killed. What does it look like now? So, you know, you don’t gain much perspective when you’re 18 to 25 years old. It takes a while to kind of see—was it worth it or not?

HARRISON: And was it worth it in 1968?

ZIEN: Well, I think it was worth it because I think—I mean, ultimately. Of course, some people just shot themselves in the foot, but in the end, I mean, Lyndon Johnson gave up, and Richard Nixon was a liar and, you know, all these things, but, yeah, I think it was worth it. I think it’s always worth it, in some sense. I mean, it’s worth it to know your values and to act on your values, because it’s not so much about, did it change something the next day or the day after? It's, you know, can you contribute in some way to the loooong, long arc of history or [the] long arc of [the] future, actually is what it's about, because, you know, Vietnam today is a thriving, although still, you know, crappy government structure, but, you know, it's a thriving culture and it's a thriving, sort of thriving economy, better than some. I mean, you can only imagine what it might have been if it hadn't have been pretty much destroyed back in the '70s.

HARRISON: All right. Thank you very much for talking to me. As I said before, you've been very generous with your time, and I think we'll end it there.

ZIEN: Happy to do it.

[End of interview.]