

Hoyt S. Alverson
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
The Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

HANNAH J.
SOLOMON:

Hi. This is Hannah Solomon in Rauner [Special Collections] Library on Dartmouth College's campus. Today is August 20th, 2015, and I am here with Professor Hoyt Alverson.

Thank you so much for being here.

ALVERSON:

I'm pleased to be here and hope I can be helpful.

SOLOMON:

So I'd just like to confirm, for the record, that you have signed the agreement.

ALVERSON:

Mm-hm. I have signed it and dated it, yup, today's date.

SOLOMON:

Wonderful. Okay. And if you at any point want to take a break or anything, just let me know. We can pause the recording.

So I'd like to start with some biographical information. Where are you from?

ALVERSON:

Washington, D.C. I was born and raised in a kind of scruffy, working-class—what then would have been maybe called a suburb but was in fact a part of the city of Washington, D.C., called Anacostia, which has been in the news recently as having a lot of mean streets. It didn't have such mean streets then, but it was certainly a working-class part of the city of the District of Columbia, across the Anacostia River from the [Washington] Navy Yard.

SOLOMON:

Got you. And can you tell me what your parents' names were?

ALVERSON:

My father's name was, is Elwyn, E-l-w-y-n Alverson, and my mother's maiden name was Myrtle Hall, Myrtle like in the creepy ground cover and flower.

SOLOMON:

Oh, I think it's a beautiful name. [Chuckles]

ALVERSON: One is from what we would consider the North, and the other is from the South, so I had exposure to two different family histories regarding at least the recent history of the United States, one very much Southern, Southern Baptist, and my father came from what would have been considered the North. His grandfather fought in the Civil War.

SOLOMON: Oh, wow!

ALVERSON: And many other relatives, and the same on my mother's side for the Confederate states.

SOLOMON: So was that sort of a family history that you heard a lot?

ALVERSON: No, not a lot, but certainly my mother still had interest in and control of a farm in the South, which I visited in the summer. I didn't so much visit relatives in the North, one or two, but summers as a child, I'd often be farmed out, literally,—

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

ALVERSON: —to a farm. And so I got to know a good number of people on both sides of the family, and they were certainly very different, but would today have been called kind of salt of the earth, rather conservative—they're both from Appalachia, northwestern Pennsylvania, near Erie—

SOLOMON: Okay.

ALVERSON: —and south-central Virginia near the North Carolina border,—

SOLOMON: Got you.

ALVERSON: —so that becomes—it's the Piedmont.

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: They do share that in common.

SOLOMON: Got you, got you.

Can you tell me a little bit what it was like growing up in the suburb outside of D.C.?

ALVERSON: Yeah. But this suburb was actually in D.C.

SOLOMON: In D.C.

ALVERSON: One of the things which comes to mind in light of your questions and project is that when I was in the seventh grade—that would be 1954—the public schools in Washington, D.C. were integrated immediately, and at that time the District of Columbia was pretty much a African-American city in regard to population; that is, about half African-American, half Euro-Americans. And the schools were integrated, so beginning in the seventh grade, in middle school, I went to integrated public schools. And that was certainly something which I was aware of in light of the fact that many of the people who lived in this working-class, inner-city suburb left because of the lack of understanding of and/or tolerance of African-Americans in classrooms, so there was tremendous white flight, which our family didn't participate in. And so that was one feature that was certainly notable.

And often, visiting the farm in the South, my Southern relatives would say—"Hoyat. I'm gonna tawk lahk"—I actually used to talk this way, because of my mama, mama and them. Anyway, they'd say, "Hoyat. What is the situation up they-ah?" And that was always a code word for living cheek by jowl, and a little later in the neighborhood, which became African-American and white, mixed, for a good spell, but also in the schools, so they were very—Virginia and Maryland maintained segregation for some years after that. And that's where a lot of the neighbors went, was Maryland and—Prince George's County in Maryland and Arlington County in Virginia.

SOLOMON: Got you. Do you have sort of a memory of when you personally became of the civil rights movement or of the actual social shift that was going on?

ALVERSON: [Sighs.] I certainly became aware of it pretty much immediately because it was a very hot topic in the news. My parents talked about it, my father more than my mother. So it was definitely a topic around the table. And also—I can't remember the exact year—we moved our residence, still within the southeast Anacostia area, from one house to another, because the school that I would have gone to, where I was born—from the house I was born in—became somewhat of a—it was a real rough patch educationally. And

I went to Anacostia High School, which was still—that wasn't [Phillips] Exeter [Academy]—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: —or St. Paul's [School], but it was considered a cut above Eastern [Senior] High School, where I would have gone, so the moving of the house engenders a lot of conversation, and the topic of civil rights was very much current in the papers. Back then, my parents, as you would guess, read papers, even though they were not highly educated, but they did subscribe to the two D.C. papers. And there was lots of buzz among my peers amount school integration. So that would have been in middle school,—

SOLOMON: Got you.

ALVERSON: —and that continued.

SOLOMON: And that continued. So, then, can you describe a little bit of your high school experience for me?

ALVERSON: Anacostia High School was a mixed school. I would guess that it had about 40 or 50 percent white and 40, 50 percent African-American and a smattering of—there wasn't a large Latino population at that time, of other so-called races. It was a good school, a decent school. There was not a lot of consciousness of colleges and so forth, but the expectation there was that they used to have a track system, an honors track, a college preparatory track, a commercial track and a shop track. And that led to a lot of segregation within the school—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —because the honors and college track were more light-skinned, and the commercial and shop and so forth were more people of color. But still we had lots of classes in common. It was just that certain courses would be more heavily subscribed by people of one background or another. And I was in the college preparatory track.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: And I was not an honors student. The home environment was not one where there was a lot of high pressure to do—

my parents expected I would do something besides dig ditches,—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: —but it wasn't very prescriptive, and the demands were, you know, "You go to school and do your work there, and then you come home and we feed you and you're our dutiful son." There was a lot more law and order back then. There was a lot less concern about self-esteem and more—

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

ALVERSON: —and more concern about obedience,—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —and doing what you're told.

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: And no lip.

SOLOMON: No lip. [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: No lip.

SOLOMON: What kind of things were you involved in in school?

ALVERSON: I did play the flute and picked it up since I retired, quite seriously, so my father was a flutist in the [U.S.] Marine Band.

SOLOMON: Oh, wow.

ALVERSON: He was a [U.S.] Marine in World War I, so he was older than many of my peers' parents. And he played the flute pretty good. He was in the regimental band, was stationed in Cuba to guard the sugar cane from the Germans. And, of course, back then Cuba had recently been taken from Spain.

My mother—my family was very religious in the sense of a kind of fundamentalist—

SOLOMON: Okay.

- ALVERSON: —background, and I went along with that until probably my high school years, when I began to connect dots and not come up with the same narrative that my parents did about the importance—I was a Boy Scout. I was an Eagle Scout. So you can see there was this kind of orthodoxy there.
- SOLOMON: Yes.
- ALVERSON: But I began to chafe and rebel against that in my own mind a lot earlier than when I started to take some action [chuckles].
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: But certainly high school was a period in which I do remember becoming skeptical—
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: —organized religious dogma. I don't know whether that addresses your question, but it's certainly something that stands out as part of the shaping, or lack of shaping, of my family background, upon me.
- SOLOMON: Gotcha. Yes. Understood.
- What was your favorite subject in school? What did you like to study? Were you thinking that way at the time?
[Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: I did not have that mature a sense of—some courses were good and some weren't, but it was, as I recall, mostly a function of whether I liked the teacher.
- SOLOMON: Yes. [Laughs.]
- ALVERSON: The teaching quality varied a lot, and I remember liking courses in math or literature or civics or geography, or not liking them, depending mostly on the teacher. And I didn't really develop—the school subjects were taught rather—history was, you know, dates, kings, queens, wars, a lot of rote memorization of big events that were in newspapers. English was a subject that I did okay in. Reading, I liked or didn't like, depending on the books.
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

- ALVERSON: You know, something like *The Vicar of Wakefield* [chuckles], for example, did not give me goose bumps, but I liked, you know, the American in particular: [John G.] “Jack” London, [Ernest M.] Hemingway. I was also drawn to sort of Mickey Mouse science. It was called science, but it was really just fooling around—
- SOLOMON: [Laughs.]
- ALVERSON: —with springs and levers. I became kind of handy and liked doing experiments in the labs. I don’t think I was thinking any deep thoughts.
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: I wasn’t worried about quantum theory or relativity theory—
- SOLOMON: [Laughs.]
- ALVERSON: —at all. But I liked lab sciences because you got to mess around, so, as with most kids in that age, we were constantly fiddling with chemistry to try to build bombs.
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: And I did build a cannon, which—
- SOLOMON: Wow!
- ALVERSON: —yeah, out of an old pipe and using some ball bearings. This was a kid—we were boys.
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: And the sort of hands-on, gee-whiz-wow part of science was of interest to me. I don’t think I really excelled or got interested in subject matter till college,—
- SOLOMON: Got you.
- ALVERSON: —which was very important. We can go into that later—
- SOLOMON: Yes.
- ALVERSON: —if you want.

- SOLOMON: Absolutely, in one minute.
- I would like to go back and talk about your father a bit.
- ALVERSON: Mm-hm.
- SOLOMON: You said he was a Marine in World War I.
- ALVERSON: Mm-hm.
- SOLOMON: How did that—do you think that shaped your family dynamic, and how did that shape it?
- ALVERSON: I'm sure it did. You're asking much tougher questions—
- SOLOMON: [Laughs.]
- ALVERSON: —because the questions you ask force me to come up with—or suggest I should come up with answers, and I don't want to invent answers that simply seem satisfactory—
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: —for the occasion. My father came from an authoritarian family, Presbyterian. His grandfather fought in the Civil War. His father was a telegrapher on the Pennsylvania Railroad, very much worked 29 days a month. That was back in the old days of the Pennsylvania Railroad. And his mother was a high school graduate, a very strong woman, who did participate in the feminist movement in northwestern Pennsylvania.
- SOLOMON: Oh, wow!
- ALVERSON: And my father's sister, quite a bit younger than he, did become quite a forceful and eager participant in the women's suffrage movement, to get the vote. This would have been back before World War I. But the idea of obedience, family structure, authority, right or wrong were kind of hard and fast principles, and children were to be molded to succeed in the roles that were pretty well set out. So it was more of a 19th-century kind of family,—
- SOLOMON: Got you.

ALVERSON: —know from fiction. So I would say the Marines was not inconsistent, but whether it changed my father, I don't know. But that's certainly in keeping with what he would have done.

SOLOMON: Got you. Got you.

Okay, so—college. Where did you go to college?

ALVERSON: I went to college at George Washington University, which is a private university but with a strong presence in Washington, D.C., as a place where a number of public school students sought to go. And I did. On a scholarship.

And it was in college where the kind of teaching and the kind of approach to the subject matter was so different from high school—anything! It was such a rupture intellectually. I'm sure that looking back on it, the teaching was okay, but I just loved—I mean, from the first lectures, I would sit and listen to people who would speak sort of like the preachers in the church, but they had many different kinds of things to say—

SOLOMON: Yes. [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: —from, you know, hellfire and damnation. And so I just began to develop this voracious appetite based on early courses that I took in all fields but particularly in the social sciences: psychology, anthropology, sociology. I just loved that stuff because it seemed to offer a rational account of human beings, individually and socially, and I just dove in and loved it.

SOLOMON: You liked asking questions? [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: Pardon?

SOLOMON: You liked asking questions?

ALVERSON: Absolutely.

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: Absolutely, and hearing people who had so much to say in answering them. They brought such a different experience from the high school teachers, for instance, who were pretty much part of the fairly scruffy working-class background that I was from. And these people had been places, done things

and had personal backgrounds that just made me think, *My gosh!* So I became—as a first-year student, I remember just staying, *Oh, I wanna do this. I wanna do that.* In the social sciences, mostly.

I don't want to get into anecdotes, but—

SOLOMON: Oh, please.

ALVERSON: —sometimes an anecdote can be illustrative.

SOLOMON: We are here for anecdotes.

ALVERSON: I remember in a course that I took—I'm pretty sure it was in my first year, in I believe sociology, there was this fellow who worked for the National Training School for Boys, which was an institution dealing with juvenile delinquency. And I thought, *What an interesting way to think about crime, deviance and so forth.* Instead of just sort of saying, "Well, lock up the criminals," there was this attempt to explain what I had grown up seeing. I didn't participate in any gang activities, but crime was all over the place, and here were people offering accounts of why people became criminals. And I thought, *Well, that's a neat kind of topic.*

And so this one guy, who was sort of a dapper fellow. He, I remember, wore suits and diamond cuff- —I thought he looked like a mobster,—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: —lots of jewelry. And he took me under his wing and took me to this old Bastille structure in Baltimore, the Maryland state lockup. And here I am, an 18- or 19-year-old, being shown—and he'd say—he'd introduce me to the warden and say, "Alverson here is thinking about penology and criminology." Of course, I went on to many other subjects. [Both laugh.] But there were professors who actually took you places, and—holy smokes!

I also had a job. I worked 20 hours a week throughout college. So it was very—my life was pretty heavily programmed. I wouldn't say I had fun in college—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

- ALVERSON: —in any sense that Dartmouth would be, say, a provisioner or provider of fun. Twenty hours a week and taking five courses a term—
- SOLOMON: Wow.
- ALVERSON: —keeps you off the streets.
- SOLOMON: Yes, it does. [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: And I worked at the Library of Congress.
- SOLOMON: Oh, wow!
- ALVERSON: That paid for a big part. And it was in the end, at the end of the first year that I left home, because of the ferment in my mind and conflict between me and my parents over things like civil rights, which was very much cracking up. Had already. But I was exposed to it in a very different way at college—this would be 1960, '61—than I was in—just in the neighborhood and in high school.
- SOLOMON: Right. Can you really quickly—what year did you enter college?
- ALVERSON: Nineteen sixty.
- SOLOMON: Nineteen sixty. Okay. And how did—let me think of how to word this. Did you see your relationship with your parents—you said you saw it change when you entered college.
- ALVERSON: Well, certainly—yeah, it gave me a lot of capacity for reasoning and ways of thinking that changed it, yes. I think the underlying dynamic, which was rather rebellious and skeptical, became better informed.
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: It wasn't just, *I don't want to do this*. There were reasons. And I got involved in sort of early civil rights activities with not so much at GW, where I went to school, but at the Library of Congress, where we had a lot of students from Howard University, which is the big African-American school, and Miner State Teachers College, now called District of Columbia University [sic; University of the District of Columbia].

SOLOMON: Did your parents—

ALVERSON: And my—

SOLOMON: Oh, sorry, go ahead.

ALVERSON: Oh! [Laughs.] There was—this is not that important, actually, but [at] GW they had a group of students who were participating in a lot of desegregation activity in Maryland, on [U.S.] Route 40, which was still segregated at that time. And *The Washington Star*, which is a conservative paper, began to write articles about this communist cell at GW, which is back then the word you used for any kind of behavior that seemed to threaten the establishment.

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: And my father figured out—I'm not sure how—that I was sort of being swept up in this stuff, and he would have these tantrums, yelling and bellowing and raging about my ruining my life if I got associated with these people who went out and had the state police drag them away from lunch counters. And so it was in part that—I'm skipping ahead maybe some months, but it was that kind of thing that made me think, *I can't stick around*. And I left and got my own apartment right near GW, at Washington Circle. Now it's so genteel—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: [Recording glitch; words missing; 21:52]—with a roommate, I paid sixty dollars a month, thirty each—

SOLOMON: Wow.

ALVERSON: —to live in an apartment. It was a total cold-water flat. But now an apartment in that building would cost \$5,000 [chuckles], so you can see times have changed.

SOLOMON: Did your parents' reaction have—did it make you think twice about anything you were doing, or did it sort of—

ALVERSON: No. For instance, they sent around a minister from my mother's and father's church. He tried to call. I didn't want to talk to him. But he went calling [to] tell me about, you know,

how I have to—I'm leading to this breakdown of the family as well as repudiating God, blah, blah, blah. And indeed I was. And I became more and more convinced of the—at least more and more confident that I'd done what was difficult, because I was on my own—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —but was important to do.

SOLOMON: And then I understand you went to Yale [University] for grad school?

ALVERSON: I went from GW right to Yale, yes. I was supposed to go into the [U.S.] Navy, but I met my—the person who is still my wife, who said, "You're crazy."

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

ALVERSON: And so that—I hadn't put two and two together. I was enrolling in the Reserve Officer Corps [sic; Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps], which is sort of a Navy officer program, because working-class people—I had a draft card and I was A-1 (sic; 1-A, Selective Service system classification: available for military service), which meant I was perfectly eligible—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —to be drafted if I—except there were deferments in the sense that if you were in college or married or had kids, there were these—it was a poverty lottery,—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —basically, back then. Anyway, but because of my eyesight that fizzled. Then I met Marianne [Melchior] in my third year, and she said, "Naw, you can do better than that."

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: "You can go to"—because I was very much interested in my subject matter of study, anthropology and linguistics, by that time, and she said, "You should go to graduate school." "Graduate school? That sounds like the royal road to unemployment."

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: And I didn't—although I suppose I could easily have done okay as—in a profession, it seemed like the life of the mind back then. The post-Sputnik money was flowing like crazy. What was it, '57, that the Russians sent up the first rat or dog?

SOLOMON: [Unintelligible.] [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: The money flowed into colleges and graduate schools: national defense loans and grants. And so it worked out that I got a—I had actually a scholarship to Yale, and then got an NSF [National Science Foundation] or an NIH [National Institutes of Health] grant to continue studying at Yale for four years, and I finished in four.

SOLOMON: Got you.

You said your wife's name was Marianne.

ALVERSON: Marianne, spelled in the French or German way, M-a-r-i-a-n-n-e.

SOLOMON: And what was her last name?

ALVERSON: Her maiden name—

SOLOMON: Her maiden name, sorry.

ALVERSON: Her maiden name was Melchior [pronounced MELL-she-oar]. She was German.

SOLOMON: Can you spell that?

ALVERSON: M-e-l-c-h-i-o-r, like the Biblical king,—

SOLOMON: Oh.

ALVERSON: —one of those guys. She was actually born in China. Her parents were German, but they lived in China. They were not part of World War—her immediate family were not part of World War II.

SOLOMON: Got you. And how did you two meet?

ALVERSON: At college, at GW. In the same class. Also at the Library at Congress because at that time, GW didn't have a very extensive library, so a lot of college students would just come into the Central Reading Room, where—by that time, I had been moved up to be sort of a fixture at the central desk, so I would see lots of young people from all over the city who were studying there. That no longer happens. You got to have a pass.

SOLOMON: Yeah. [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: It's very hard to get in.

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: Anyway, so we met at college and at the library.

SOLOMON: And she talked you into grad school.

ALVERSON: Yes, I would say.

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

ALVERSON: Well, she certainly turned my thinking that way, yes.

SOLOMON: Got you. Why Yale?

ALVERSON: Back then, a big variable was how much financial aid. I didn't have any money. My parents were not poor, but they certainly didn't have any money. My father worked as a repo [repurchase] man for a furniture store in Washington, D.C., and—this is skipping ahead—he was quite old, and he worked for this small furniture store, which was burned down when the city burned in 1967. Well,—this is skipping ahead, but they didn't have money, so I had to pretty much pay for my way, and so it was important to get—and Yale offered a very good financial package.

And I also taught at a small state school in New Haven. You weren't supposed to, but I did,—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: —because we had a kid that came along unexpected in my second year.

- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: So that keeps you serious.
- SOLOMON: That does. [Chuckles.] Were there other grad schools that you had applied to?
- ALVERSON: Yes, quite a few. And I got into all of them. But the financial packages were different, and I was focused on the money.
- SOLOMON: Great.
- ALVERSON: I got into very good—as I say, this is post-Sputnik munificence, so I got into [University of] Michigan, University of Washington, [University of California,] Berkeley, Harvard [University], Columbia [University] Stanford [University], I think. I mean, this shows you the—
- SOLOMON: Yes.
- ALVERSON: Because this isn't really a compliment to me; it was a comment on the times. If you had a pulse, they wanted you to study—
- SOLOMON: [Laughs.]
- ALVERSON: —so that you could be useful to the national defense.
- SOLOMON: Right. Right. So you had options.
- ALVERSON: Yes, very much so.
- SOLOMON: But Yale was your best financial choice.
- ALVERSON: It was the best financial choice, and a lot of—two of my favorite teachers at GW were from Yale, so they talked it up and wrote letters and—
- SOLOMON: Got you. And that helps. [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: That helps. Yes, I'm sure.
- SOLOMON: Can you talk about Yale's campus a little bit, the general social situation?

ALVERSON: Well, as in undergraduate school, I was very busy in my own little world, so I wasn't paying too much attention. New Haven was pretty much what it has—it was in one of the down phases of a pretty rough decline because of the moving out of manufacturing jobs, so New Haven was a very poor, we would call it a crime-ridden city. And Yale was this island of opulence. And the interactions between the campus, the university and the town were quite factious—or fractious.

So it didn't affect me so much because I really did throw myself into my studies. In my third year there, I was preparing to go away to do field work in Africa. So I wasn't as cognizant of the campus life. Oh, I loved it. I went to all the colloquia and seminars and, you know, the presentation of—and you know this kind of sort of neo-Gothic architecture: stones and lots of mahogany. I think Yale was also in a bit of a financial hard patch, but it still looked pretty spiffy—

SOLOMON: Yes. [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: —and glitzy to me. And I enjoyed my courses—oh, immensely! And arguing and picking fights with—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: —you know, over issues of the day, in the field. And that kept me going for two years, taking comprehensive exams. Back then you had to do well in several different tracks in anthropology: biological, archaeology, linguistics as well as cultural. And then in my third year I went to Africa for a year, for field work, so that sort of took me away.

But it was in that year—that year, '67, that so many of the American cities—'65 in Watts' [a neighborhood in Los Angeles, California] case, but in '67 several inner cities, including Washington, D.C., were burned by the riots—

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: —that—like the sort of thing we've been hearing about in Baltimore and St. Louis, except much bigger, and the cities went through a—they plummeted—the core of areas of cities were hollowed out, and D.C. became a waste- —you know,

it became a wasteland in many ways except for the most genteel suburbs and so forth.

But I was in Africa at that time. I was in South Africa, actually, working in the mines on a problem or issue that even bothers here, but in any case, people would say, "Well, why do you want to go back to the States? It's burning." Of course, South Africa was a tinderbox—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: —but not acknowledged to be such—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —at the time, although Nelson [R.] Mandela was arrested I believe in 1966, if I'm not mistaken. I'm not certain about that. But that was the era.

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: So things were very much—the caldron was boiling, but it seemed very orderly—

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: —because of the oppressive state.

So I did come back in late '67 and then spent '68 writing my thesis. And then—that was the time that I really began to reengage with the civil rights movement, with the labor movement at Yale, with the antiwar movement, which had been building. I had been involved in the Vietnam antiwar movement in college.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: But that sort of got put on the back burner—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —when I was in grad school. But then it revived in '68, and that's when I came to Dartmouth. And so I was bringing a lot of baggage.

SOLOMON: Yes. [Chuckles.]

So just to go over some context, you got to Yale in 1964?

ALVERSON:

Mm-hm.

SOLOMON:

Okay. And I do want to backtrack a minute and ask: Do you remember where you were when [President John F.] Kennedy was assassinated?

ALVERSON:

I do. That was 1963.

SOLOMON:

Yes.

ALVERSON:

I was an undergraduate school, and I was standing in the college bookstore with Marianne when the news came over that he had been shot.

SOLOMON:

Wow.

ALVERSON:

As you are surmising, you have these kind of—they're not always accurate, but I think mine is in this case—a kind of flash bulb memory of the place. I'm pretty sure I was standing in the bookstore, and the radio was on. We were buying some books. That was way before the Internet.

SOLOMON:

[Chuckles.]

ALVERSON:

And the news came on, and we were just absolutely stunned. And then—shortly before that, also, I was at GW—I think it was the year—the Cuban Missile Crisis.

SOLOMON:

Yes. Yes.

ALVERSON:

Which was, I believe, '62 or early in—

SOLOMON:

It was '62.

ALVERSON:

Yeah, in '62. And I remember students in classes bringing little transistor radios because here we are, in Washington, D.C. If there's going to be an atomic war,—

SOLOMON:

Right.

ALVERSON:

—we're going to be right in the middle of it.

SOLOMON:

Right, right.

- ALVERSON: So it wasn't, like, Minnesota or Tennessee.
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: So we were really anxious.
- SOLOMON: Was there any sort of uproar on campus at that point?
- ALVERSON: The uproar over the—no, not that I remember. There was student group, which I was associated with, SDS, Students for a Democratic Society, associated with the Free Speech Movement—
- SOLOMON: Yes.
- ALVERSON: —at Berkley, which I think was two or three years earlier than that,—
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: —'59, '60. But the antiwar activity was certainly, in my experience of it, having its earliest manifestations around Kennedy's decision to send advisers—
- SOLOMON: Yes.
- ALVERSON: —to Vietnam and then picked up a lot with [President Lyndon B.] Johnson's acceleration. But by that time, I was in New Haven, so there was some antiwar—you know, standing around, handing out leaflets, but it was kind of subdued.
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: Who are these people? The civil rights—[the Rev. Dr.] Martin Luther King [Jr.] would have been assassinated, what, in April of '68, so—
- SOLOMON: Yes.
- ALVERSON: —that—but the four years prior to that was a kind of crescendo, and I was involved in that but decreasingly so because I was more oriented toward getting into graduate school at that time, and I was absorbed with research I was doing at GW.

SOLOMON: Got you.

ALVERSON: So I was a little less engaged in my third and fourth year. I also got married after college.

SOLOMON: So we have this buildup.

ALVERSON: Mm-hm.

SOLOMON: And then 1968—1968 you got here, in Dartmouth.

ALVERSON: In July, right.

SOLOMON: July.

ALVERSON: July or August of '68.

SOLOMON: So— Going over somethings...

ALVERSON: Are we sort of on track—

SOLOMON: Oh, yes.

ALVERSON: —in terms of the information that you were—

SOLOMON: Absolutely.

ALVERSON: —hoping might be there?

SOLOMON: Yes, yes. So '68 was a big year. [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: Yes, it was. It was a very big year.

SOLOMON: That was the start of the Tet Offensive, I believe, and—

ALVERSON: Yes. There was a lot—the war was going badly—

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: —by '68, and I was newly assistant professor here, and my students were—I was very much—very much carrying on from Yale, where I—when you're writing your dissertation, you have more time to make trouble.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm. [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: And so I was very involved with the antiwar movement at Yale. I did not burn my draft card. I was about to. William Sloane Coffin [Jr.]—the name may ring a bell—he was the chaplain of Yale University. He actually just died recently. He retired at South Strafford here in Vermont. And he was down there at Beinecke [Rare Book & Manuscript] Library, and we were all going to throw our draft cards in the hopper. And fortunately, I thought I had—I'd been offered a job at McGill [University],—

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: —so the plan was, *If they draft me, I'll—*

SOLOMON: You'll go to—

ALVERSON: —*I'll just go to McGill.* And I had that in my pocket, but also the job at Dartmouth.

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: And I couldn't obviously go [to] both, but I felt ready. But my son, Keith, who turns I believe 50 this year, was a three-year-old in '68. He was born in '65. And so Marianne came down with Keith and started screaming, "You can't burn your draft card."

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

ALVERSON: "You've got a family to support." So I didn't. But there I was. Anyway, when I came, you can see it was a pretty full head of steam—

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: —coming to Dartmouth.

SOLOMON: Yes. Absolutely.

I was going to ask something, and it's totally left my head. [Chuckles.] Talking about—oh, I was wondering: What was your thesis about?

ALVERSON: At Yale.

SOLOMON: At Yale.

ALVERSON: Doctoral thesis.

SOLOMON: Yeah, at Yale.

ALVERSON: Yes. Well, let me give you the sprightly title.

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: It was called “The Social and Organizational Antecedents of Job Satisfaction Among Black South African Industrial Workers.”

SOLOMON: Wow.

ALVERSON: And it was a rather quantitative study of what sorts of characteristics of people who were basically from either rural areas of South Africa or adjacent countries or who were from the townships around cities, what led them to want to continue working as a career as opposed to just remaining a migrant and going back and forth between a rural area, where farming was common, and going to jobs as the need for money required it. So it was a study of the transition from being farmers to being industrial workers. Even though the work conditions were horrific.

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —there was—this was the cash economy.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: But the thesis, you know, was okay. I published a little of it here and there in articles, but it was really later, when I went back to the rural areas to study the other half—I had worked in the industries that had migrant labor: glass factories, chemical plants, gold mines and so forth—

SOLOMON: Wow.

ALVERSON: —with the African workers, but the home life back in the farm was something that I simply heard stories about.

SOLOMON: Right.

- ALVERSON: And so I realized in the early '70s that I had to go back at least to some sample of rural areas to see, well, what's the impact on their absence, on the arrival of cash, and that was—it was all one piece of research. It wasn't just the thesis. I sort of continued that, and I wrote a book in '78, which did very well,—
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: —summarizing the research that I'd done over about four or five years on that topic.
- SOLOMON: Got you. So did that—did that track of research have anything to do with your relationship with Dartmouth at that point and your job offer?
- ALVERSON: I think that—yes. I think that Dartmouth and some other schools were intrigued by the fact that I was—at that time, anthropologists weren't known for working in factories or in cities.
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.] Right.
- ALVERSON: They were—it was the stereotype of under the banana tree—
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: —on the small island, [cultural anthropologist] Margaret Mead—
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: —and that I was working at this border land with other social sciences, working on rapid change that was associated with the breakdown of geographic centers or focus of cultures, that cultures were being created across huge distances, and movement of people. That was kind of novel.
- SOLOMON: Yes. Yes.
- ALVERSON: The work I did was pretty happily and well recognized as kind of path breaking for that time. It's since become quite ordinary, but—anyway.
- SOLOMON: Ordinary, well— [Laughs.]

ALVERSON: Yeah, or at least more common for—

SOLOMON: Still fascinating!

ALVERSON: —in the anthro department today. The cultural anthropologists worked in medicine, in hospitals, in conservation movements. Obviously the isolated rural tribe, which never was a reality, certainly has ceased to even the appearance of that. People don't live in little isolated villages much, at least as a full part of their life. There's constant movement in and out.

SOLOMON: Got you, got you.

So you get to campus in 1968. What was Hanover like then?

ALVERSON: It was amazing.

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

ALVERSON: I mean, after Washington, D.C., New Haven—which were both pretty scruffy—I had lived in sort of an experiment in New Haven, which was an integrated housing project,—

SOLOMON: Oh, wow.

ALVERSON: —which had all kinds of crime. It was a kind of—almost seems like utopian attempt to build housing in the inner city, and what it was populated with were working-class African-Americans and graduate students. Well, that's not the ideal composition—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: —for a neighborhood, because the graduate students come and go,—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —and it was built in a slum, a real ghetto, where crime was rampant, and so there was constant burglary. We've had burglars in our place,—

SOLOMON: Wow.

ALVERSON: —stealing the laundry. It was pretty mean streets.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: And so after that, coming here—

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

ALVERSON: *Holy smokes! This is a silk cocoon!* Even though back then, it was nothing like it is now. There was only one stoplight in Hanover, and the roads were not trafficked, and Hanover was this little island of—and Lebanon was a declining, working-class community. Lyme was a farming community. Hanover was a fraction of its size.

But from the point of view of just not locking your doors and the kids run out—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —and go anywhere and so forth, it was wonderful. So from that point of view, it was a great—I can give you an anecdote if you want.

SOLOMON: Yes, please.

ALVERSON: We're going to run out of—we're going to run out of time if I do too many anecdotes. So I had a pistol in New Haven because of security.

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: And we had a burglar in the house. And I didn't shoot anybody. But I took this gun to the police station in East Haven, Connecticut, and said, "I want to turn this thing in because I'm going to a place where we don't need this for security." And there was a program in Connecticut at the time to turn in your handgun. Well, you know where that went.

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: So the guy said, "Are you crazy? You gotta keep this!" And I said, "No, I don't need it." So I gave it to him, and he turns around and says, "Hey, does anybody want a pistol?"

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

ALVERSON: This is the policeman.

SOLOMON: Oh, my gosh!

ALVERSON: But I was glad to be rid of it.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: And that's kind of a story that makes you realize that I knew where I was coming [to], because I'd visited a couple of times and knew what it was—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: And so Keith, the older one, would have been about three, and the younger one was not born for two more years. But it was a great place.

SOLOMON: Nice.

ALVERSON: But it was also a place where the antiwar movement and, to some extent, the civil rights movement, because of Martin Luther King's assassination in '68, there was sort of a wedding of those two.

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: And then only a couple or three years later, the women's movement—

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: —with the coeducation, in which I was very much involved. And these were coming almost like a maelstrom, almost like—you know, the world is falling—I read the little essay, I expect, I wrote there that the world seemed to be falling apart and I was certainly not helping.

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

ALVERSON: Except to make it fall apart. [Chuckles.] And so I and some other faculty, not too many, were known as sort of the agitators and coaches of the—

- SOLOMON: Interesting.
- ALVERSON: —of the antiwar movement and the civil rights movement and then the move for coeducation. And I was much too busy for my own good in that, but I also wasn't a deadbeat in terms of study, so even though they wished the hell I would get out of here,—
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: —I stayed.
- SOLOMON: Do you remember at all campus reaction to, you know, the Tet Offensive or MLK's assassination, [Senator Robert F.] "Bobby" Kennedy's assassination?
- ALVERSON: Well, Bobby—the Kennedy assassination—sorry, the MLK assassination took place before I was really here.
- SOLOMON: Gotcha.
- ALVERSON: That was in April.
- SOLOMON: Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes.
- ALVERSON: And so I didn't get here till August. So that political turmoil was somewhat behind, but there was still a lot of invocation of those events as significant episodes in what students deemed to be the course of change.
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: Also happening at the same time, although I wasn't so much associated with it immediately, but there were a lot of students who were beginning to despair of this and were seeking this sort of "back to the land"—which had been a current in American thinking for some time, but—the hippies.
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: And the counterculture.
- SOLOMON: Yes.
- ALVERSON: Woodstock [Music & Art Fair]. I forget when that was, but it was I think '68.

SOLOMON: Sixty-nine,—

ALVERSON: Sixty-nine?

SOLOMON: —I believe.

ALVERSON: And the whole thing—it's hard to tease apart. And I wasn't a booster, but I was certainly very eager to let students talk about it, and they saw me as—I mean, another anecdote, to take time: When the students who were in Parkhurst [Hall, for the takeover] in May of '69 were arrested, several of them were in my course on culture change, and they had to go to the lockup—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —at Grafton [County Jail] for 30 days. Some were sent to other places. And so a couple or three times at least, I packed all the subject matter in books in the van and went up there and held a class right on the prison grounds for the students, so they could keep up with the coursework. Well, today that would sound very exotic.

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

ALVERSON: But it seemed back then to be just sort of—I was also very interested in things like admissions—

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: —and the curriculum and what was going on at Dartmouth that could better prepare students to address—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —those national movements and so forth.

SOLOMON: Right. So—yeah. So Parkhurst, I believe, was spring of 1969?

ALVERSON: Yeah.

SOLOMON: So that was your first spring on campus?

ALVERSON: It was the first spring on campus. But there had been a lot of teach-ins. I don't believe the Collis Center [for Student Involvement] yet existed, but there were student-organized courses that addressed civil rights, that addressed the war, and I think that in '68, '69 and '70 the war became the biggest piece of the student activism because of the—well, there wasn't a big city, for instance, with a civil rights movement in it, but there were—ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] was on campus. The ideology of the times among the antiwar movement was that universities were complicit—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —in providing intellectual and physical resources for a horrific and stupid war. And that certainly got a lot of attention. There were lots of faculty meetings about keeping ROTC or not.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: And I think, looking back on it, the attempt to blame ROTC was more—it was more a target of convenience than it was a rational attack on the strategy. But the disruption—lots of students would rent buses and go to D.C. for the marches.

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: The general disturbance of the streets, of which many Dartmouth students were a part, I think was probably the most potent theater connected with the antiwar movement, rather than throwing poor [then Dartmouth president] John [S.] Dickey out of his office—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: —at Parkhurst.

SOLOMON: So you were a relatively young professor.

ALVERSON: Yes.

SOLOMON: Did you feel that you were sort of caught between the positions of the administration and the students?

ALVERSON: Well, to some extent yes. So, for instance, there were several meetings in—well, I can give you an anecdotal answer. There were several meetings—this was before and independent of the student takeover of Parkhurst, of which I was not a part—but there were meetings in Parkhurst Hall, in the stairwell, so when you go up those stairs,—

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: —there would be meetings on the staircase, there would be meetings in the stairwell, and I was often there and asked to speak and talk about it. I had no particular academic background that would have made me better, but I didn't mind speaking, and I had been involved for a while. Leonard [M.] Rieser [pronounced REE-sir, Class of 1944], who was the dean of the faculty at the time, was there once, and I gave a talk, and—[He applauds.]

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: And Rieser turned to me, and he said, "Hoyt, I'm holding you responsible for everything that goes on in this building."

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: So in answer to your question, yes. I mean—but I suspect that at that time, I was not sympathetic to the problems of being a dean or an administrator. I did definitely see them as stuck on the wrong side of history and that they were—I didn't see them as the enemy, but they were definitely—how should I say?—unsympathetic to the rough and tumble of protest, which has got to take place somewhere.

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: Well, students aren't going to go down to the parking lot in West Lebanon to hold demonstrations; they're going to do it here. So for administrators, it was—it was like, "You're giving our university a black eye." You know, they were preoccupied with law, order and PR [public relations],—

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: —which is their job, so in that sense I was not too concerned about their PR problems—

- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: —at all, and that this was using a local resource as a fulcrum for increasing one’s leverage to change in national policy, and students do that.
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: And I don’t think this was particularly disruptive at Dartmouth, say compared to the University of Wisconsin and Berkeley, Columbia—
- SOLOMON: Yes.
- ALVERSON: —maybe even Harvard or Yale. I didn’t know what was going on there. But that’s what happens when young people get incensed. They start making noises,—
- SOLOMON: Yes.
- ALVERSON: —and the college is trying to tamp it down, although they—you know, there was—you know, I wouldn’t say that they did anything that was illegal to repress it, but they just weren’t seen as part of the solution.
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm. Got you. So you really went from a city in the middle of the situation to still a city but slightly removed, to the middle of nowhere.
- ALVERSON: Right. Yeah, you could say—
- SOLOMON: But you were also seeing time progress.
- ALVERSON: Yes.
- SOLOMON: And the movement progress—
- ALVERSON: Mm-hm.
- SOLOMON: —across those years.
- ALVERSON: Right.
- SOLOMON: So—I’m trying to think how to phrase this.

- ALVERSON: Well, the waters from the centers were lapping up in the boundaries and the edges of the periphery. Even small campuses like Colby-Sawyer [College] or Hobart Williams [sic; Hobart and William Smith Colleges] or some of the, you know, smaller schools were equally embroiled.
- SOLOMON: Yes.
- ALVERSON: And campuses were, because of the draft—let's not get too idealistic—
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: I know from the Iraq War there was not a lot of student interest in the Iraq—the stupidity of that,
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: —which I was equally horrified at, the idea of—the invasion of Iraq was one of the dumbest—you didn't have the scale of the Vietnam War, but the ignorance—
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: —was every bit as great, and the enthusiasms were equally hubristic and misleading, at least, if not criminal.
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: I just think that it's—well—but at that time, the campus was—you know, there were a few—I stood on the corner of Wheelock and Main [Streets], with signs, with forty or fifty other people. Well, it would have been four or five hundred in the Vietnam War, and the difference, I think, was the lack of a draft.
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: So if you want to fight wars and not stir up the pot too much, don't have a volunteer army, and the powers that be saw that pretty clearly.
- SOLOMON: Did you see sort of a change in campus tension when the draft lottery was reinstated? I believe that was December of 1969.

- ALVERSON: I can't—I can't relate what I saw to that specific event.
- SOLOMON: Got you.
- ALVERSON: I suspect that's the case, but I cannot—I don't have any memory or evidence that that was focal. It certainly split the campus in the sense that there were a number of students who graduated and went into the service.
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: And then there was this antiwar, anti-ROTC [pronouncing it ROT-cee]—
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: —movement here. And I suspect the lottery was fed into that in some way, but I don't have evidence as to how exactly.
- SOLOMON: Right. Okay.
- So at this point, were you still in touch with your parents?
- ALVERSON: Yes, in a distant way, around mainly the issues of they wanted to see the grandchildren.
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: So we would visit for short visits. And I remember having lots of almost funny encounters when we'd go down there. This was in the early '70s—
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: —late '60s. My father would rant and rail about the city being driven to a stop by the antiwar demonstrations. "They haven't got the brains, gotta send them for [unintelligible.]" And one or two of them—I had been in those demonstrations and just came over to the house, and he was talking about me, obviously, but I didn't tell him.
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: So a part of the just modus vivendi was that we didn't talk. I didn't say anything about what I was involved in in Dartmouth. They thought, "Well, he's got a job in an Ivy

League school. I guess that's—that's good. And they have the grandchildren," blah, blah, blah. So it became parallel lives.

SOLOMON: Got you. Got you. Okay.

Let's see. So the Kent State [University] shooting also. That was—

ALVERSON: That was huge.

SOLOMON: That was huge?

ALVERSON: Yeah, really huge. What—remind me, was it '70?

SOLOMON: I believe '70, yes.

ALVERSON: Nineteen seventy. Yes, that—again, there was ongoing—Kent State, the Cambodia bombing [Cambodian Campaign] and then, a little later, Watergate [scandal] and [President Richard M.] Nixon—those were adding to the crescendo of activity that began—because I left for Africa at the very beginning of 1973 and was away for two years—

SOLOMON: Got you.

ALVERSON: —I lost a lot of touch with how Dartmouth dealt with Nixon's temporizing and the bullshit from [Secretary of State Henry A.] Kissinger and the Paris Peace Talks [sic; Paris Peace Accords] because I wasn't here; I was in Botswana,—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —in Africa, so I—I was living in a mud hut. And so that has its own challenges, and you don't—I listened to the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation], gleefully, and would hear reports about Nixon, but I sort of don't have data from '73 till I came back again in late '75, so it's not that nothing was happening; I just don't know what it was.

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: There was no Internet. You know, you got aerograms.

SOLOMON: Yeah. [Chuckles.] Wow.

- ALVERSON: So it was very different. Quite isolating.
- SOLOMON: Yeah.
- ALVERSON: It was a great piece of fieldwork. I loved it. But it's very absorbing when you're living in a tiny agricultural community in the middle of central Africa. You just don't stay plugged in the way you do if you were in a big city.
- SOLOMON: So did you see, with the change in, I believe, administration after Parkhurst? I believe there was sort of a—
- ALVERSON: [John G.] Kemeny became president, yes.
- SOLOMON: Yes.
- ALVERSON: Let's see, he became president in 1970, I believe, and he was smart enough to sort of get in the front of the train regarding the war. So he had, for instance—[George S.] McGovern, the antiwar, peace candidate was here several times.
- SOLOMON: Yes. Oh, wow.
- ALVERSON: And Kemeny was—positioned himself very differently from the way Dickey did.
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: It was sort of this old guard, State Department type. And Kemeny was a young, new mathematician. The thing that became, I think, Kemeny's big problem was coeducation.
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: Which was not really direct, but it was certainly indirectly fueled by the general sense of ferment and change that the Vietnam War created, so in some ways, the move for coeducation benefited from the enthusiasms and the mobilization processes that were afoot. But that was where Kemeny and I parted ways.
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: There was a long history, and I think a bad history, of how coeducation came to Dartmouth. It's portrayed officially as a

top down set of decisions that were made by people—that's bullshit, total bullshit.

SOLOMON: Oh, please talk about it a little more. I would love to—

ALVERSON: If that's rain, I'm going to have to—yeah. I'm on a bicycle, but I'll call my wife.

The—[Chuckles.] Well, that's a shift of subject, the coeducation.

SOLOMON: That's fine.

ALVERSON: Are we finished with the war?

SOLOMON: I mean, if you would like to talk a little more about sort of campus climate or student protests—

ALVERSON: It was a regular feature of—my classes weren't—I didn't let them become political arenas. I was pretty businesslike about classes. But after classes or in student seminars and in the campus activities, the anti-war, anti-ROTC activities were constant, were leitmotifs or themes that cropped up here and there.

SOLOMON: Got you.

ALVERSON: The coeducation one was coming on at the same time and I think inspired by a lot of the move for civil rights and the student empowerment (a buzzword back then). And I was very much involved, along with a lot more faculty, regarding the desirability of coeducation. And that's where Kemeny was caught between the curmudgeons with the money and the campus, which seemed, from the point of view of faculty and students, to be strongly leaning toward wanting coeducation.

SOLOMON: Coeducation.

ALVERSON: And there were lots of debates about, "Well, could Dartmouth afford it?" "What about the reduction in the number of male matriculants?" "Would the alumni stop writing the checks?" And there were lots of very bombastic statements about how coeducation could doom this place. In the end, Kemeny got in front of that, but he was also dragging his feet. He made some very silly proposals about

establishing an associated school for women, that is not publicized much—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: —because it's such a harebrained idea, to have subjects that women were interested in, and—uch, it was always pathetic. But he was—that was a case where the president was caught between—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —his conservative and probably well-to-do alumni and people with access to the megaphone—

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: —and the money putting pressure on him, and finally he capitulated. But there was a minor scandal, not made public (that I know of), that full sex-blind or—yeah, sex-blind admissions didn't occur until about 1979 or '80.

SOLOMON: Oh, wow!

ALVERSON: So there was a six-, seven- or eight-year period where women were screened to produce a complementary group that would appreciate the men at Dartmouth [chuckles]—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —and not ruffle their feathers. And Kemeny was very much a part of the—of the need—what he felt was the need to regulate the spigot:—

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: —the kind of and the number of women admitted. And it wasn't until '79—and then he I think was succeeded by [David T.] McLaughlin [Class of 1954, Tuck Class of 1955] in '80. I believe that's right, but I'm not certain. By that time, the trustees voted, with him dissenting, to have sex-blind admission.

SOLOMON: Wow.

ALVERSON: That's not a piece of public record—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: —that's well known. It's part of the public record, because I have it.

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: But it's not something that Dartmouth—

SOLOMON: Publicizes?

ALVERSON: —publicizes, right.

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

ALVERSON: But there was this period—and, boy, was it hard on women!

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: It was really hard on women. I know a number of female students, who were students of mine or I knew well, who said it was a rough road. There was a lot of—as you might imagine—it was like sexually integrating a fire department.

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: There's going to be a lot of raspberry and making it hard.

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: That, I think is now past, but it certainly wasn't made easier by these stalling and moderating influences—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —that Kemeny was pretty much tied to.

SOLOMON: So I know that in 1968 to '69, I believe, was the first year they had I think seven women on campus as sort of an experiment. Did you—

ALVERSON: Not women. It was seven colleges. There were certain schools who would allow women to come to Dartmouth for a year and do a transfer year: Wellesley [College], Smith

[College], [Mount] Holyoke [College], Amherst [College] and some others. When you said “seven students,” I was—

SOLOMON: I believe 1968 to 1969 did sort of an experiment where they had seven women join the drama department for a year, and they were not allowed to stay and get their diplomas; they were asked to leave after the one year.

ALVERSON: I can't—that's the first I've heard that particular formula- —there were a lot more women than that in classes, because they were in my classes. But they were called exchange students.

SOLOMON: Okay.

ALVERSON: And they were women.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: So I think we might be on different topics here. The drama department may—in fact, Meryl Streep was one of them.

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: That may have been specific to the drama department. I don't know. But there were certainly many more than seven women. They weren't huge numbers, but they were—

SOLOMON: Well, 1968. This is '68?

ALVERSON: I'm talking about sixty- —well I don't know about '68—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: —because I came—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —in '68. But certainly from '69 on,—

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: —my recollection was that there were female students, not numerous, in many departments.

SOLOMON: Got you. Got you.

- ALVERSON: But I can't speak about the drama department.
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm. Okay. So that was a big change on campus,—
- ALVERSON: Yes.
- SOLOMON: —clearly.
- ALVERSON: Mm-hm.
- SOLOMON: You said from your point of view there was general student support for that?
- ALVERSON: Yes. I think that if you go back and look at *The [Dartmouth] D*,—
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: —or any other sort of public media record, you'll see that the students seemed, by '69, '70, to be really—particularly '70, '71, '72 there was quite a growth of student support for coeducation.
- SOLOMON: Got you. Did you see sort of a transfer of energy, I guess, from, you know, Vietnam protesting to coeducation movement?
- ALVERSON: Yes.
- SOLOMON: Yeah?
- ALVERSON: I'm not sure the physics is that exact,—
- SOLOMON: [Laughs.]
- ALVERSON: —but certainly the spirit of the times seemed I think conducive to tapping in to those energies, and sort of the irreverence, the belief that the administration were, you know, old farts and were not about to be leaders in this.
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: They were dragging their feet. I think the stereotypes from the antiwar movement transferred over into the women's movement, which was very much tied up with coeducation.

SOLOMON: Right.

So you said, then, in '73 you left campus and went back to Africa?

ALVERSON: I did. Actually, late '72, to do two years of field work on the topic that my dissertation was on,—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —but to put it in a bigger context.

SOLOMON: Do you want to talk a little bit about that more?

ALVERSON: Uh,—

SOLOMON: If you are interested? [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: Can do. The issue that I realized from my favorite stint of work in the South African mines and industries was that the rural area was really the biggest piece of the picture as to why—of the phenomenon, labor migration, and culture and psychological change among African populations that were caught up in this vortex of industrialization.

South Africa, as you might know from your classes, recruited mine labor and migrant labor from not just South Africa but many of the surrounding countries, and very few areas of southern Africa (almost as big as the United States) were not left alone in that, so young men in particular but, increasingly, women in terms of domestic service and other reasons—part of their rural life, an intimate part was leaving and working for wages, often to supplement food production or to buy what we'd call capital equipment for farming or to pay school fees or to whatever.

So the world of industrial factory, formal employment and the world of semi-subsistent (because it wasn't fully adequate, ever) agriculture and rural life were intimately being connected.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: And what my research showed and I hypothesized pretty early was that what used to be thought of as contraries:

traditional-modern—and there were a lot of—the word back then was “modernization studies,”—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: —what makes people mi- —I thought, *Boy, that’s a real simplification* because in a sense, neither the nature of formal wage labor nor the nature of rural areas was staying constant while they got knitted together by this movement of people. Everything was changing. And it was a systemic change that required a whole different way of looking at human society,—

Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: —where you have these *entrepôt* [French, as defined by Merriam-Webster: “an intermediary center of trade and transshipment” source: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/entrep%C3%B4t>] of formal employment, wage labor institutions of control that are part of western society and their insertion into rural areas, which were being changed by that process, often by the migrants, themselves, who suddenly are bringing money, who have ideas about individuality and their persons, personhood because of being both involved intimately in wage labor and being involved as often kinfolk in a smaller scale, rural community,—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —which is nothing like what it was 150 years earlier. So that was the topic. And I wrote a book called *Mind in the Heart of Darkness*[: *Value and Self-Identity among the Tswana of Southern Africa*], which played a bit on the title of [Joseph] Conrad’s book [*Heart of Darkness*]. Played quite a lot on it.

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: Which was to show that the meaning of the title—the irony there is that the heart of darkness is not the Congo and the African world; it was the world of the Colonial—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —structuration of those societies. That was the heart of darkness, was the Colonial system,—

- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: —not, you know, the “savages” running around with skulls on sticks.
- SOLOMON: Right. [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: That’s why I was making a cerbic [sic; an acerbic] kind of comment on what—where the darkness lay—
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: —and that the adaptations were as much to this whole Colonial regime as it was to physical environments or just individual survival, mine being the metaphor for the ability, the tenacity, the resilience, adaptability of the people—
- SOLOMON: Right. Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: —to live in his whole new world.
- SOLOMON: Yes. Yes.
- ALVERSON: So that’s as fast as I can summarize a lot. [Both chuckle.]
- SOLOMON: Did you feel that your sort of absences from the mindset of the United States at this point and your own research—did that have any effect on how you viewed the antiwar movement and the civil rights movement and the way that it was being conducted?
- ALVERSON: Yes, I did. Now, you’re asking a much more complicated question—
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: —than it appears. And I’m sure on reflection I’ll have gazillions of thoughts, but to try to sort of just off the cuff say, well, how does the fact—for instance, my conceptions of skin color had to have been profoundly—
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: —and we lived in a little village. We were the only white people. And Brian, my younger son—I remember it was an

anecdote that Marianne wrote in one of her memoirs, that he came up and said, “Mom, why are we this funny yellow color?”

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: Well, that’s not—that’s a kind of eye opener,—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —like, what’s normal and what’s different?

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: So skin color definitely was not in my awareness after this kind of experience, as a significant marker, because I had to move in between—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —and did so pretty successfully. Also, the concept of race, which trades on a sort of pseudo-biological—what’s the word?—mythology, sort of a pseudo—yeah, pseudo science, biology. Races do not exist in the human species.

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: They do among dogs and corn—

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

ALVERSON: —but not among Homo sapiens. We are a very homogenous species.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: But skin color, as a social marker, is huge.

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: Obviously, as a signifier, you don’t get much bigger than that. So one of my puzzlements is how could, in this day and age, something that that’s irrelevant in terms of our species’ existence, be such an important segmentation—

SOLOMON: Right.

- ALVERSON: —of people? Melanin is an adaptation to ultraviolet radiation, and it's sort of like adaptation to lactose or adaptation—
- SOLOMON: [Laughs.]
- ALVERSON: —to certain bacteria or to whatever, and nobody goes around saying, “Hey, I’m Type A,”—
- SOLOMON: [Laughs.]
- ALVERSON: —“and you’re Type B, so we really can’t be seen together.” I mean, that would be nuts because it’s invisible.
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: But it has no more significance than melanin.
- SOLOMON: That’s true.
- ALVERSON: It’s, you know, an evolved characteristic that differentiates, in minor ways, one group from another. So my perspective on race—
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: —was I think informed pretty strongly by my experiences that you just asked me to talk about.
- SOLOMON: Yes. Yes. And how about the antiwar movement or the support for the war?
- ALVERSON: Yeah. Again, you’re asking really good questions, and I’m afraid that I’ll just flip out something that I will later think was kind of stupid.
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: Certainly, my involvement with people who were then part of what was called the Third World—I mean, what was then called the Third World, poor regions of the world—I certainly feel that the business of the horrors that we meted out had a kind of skin color, exotic other—you know, “We can bomb *them*”—

- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: —“*because they’re gooks.*” I’m not sure we’d do Vienna if we felt the Austrians were getting out of line, you know. I just don’t—although Bosnia may be an exception to that. But I think that there is this notion—and some people have even alleged about the use of the atomic bomb. I’m not so sure that’s true, but the “other’ing” of people—
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm. Yes.
- ALVERSON: —who I have come to see as—it takes a lot more work to find likenesses—
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: —if you’re focused on superficial differences. And superficial differences, however, are usually what become signifiers.
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: What time are we getting to be?
- SOLOMON: We’ve got time. We’ve got plenty of time. It’s about 4:20 or so.
- ALVERSON: Yeah. I probably should wrap up.
- SOLOMON: Okay.
- ALVERSON: —around—by—I’m not too worried about the weather; I always get caught in the weather.
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: I ride my bike, still, to sort of stay active. But we should probably wrap up by 5.
- SOLOMON: Sure.
- ALVERSON: And if *you* want to continue, I don’t know—I’m impressed or at least superficially flattered—
- SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

- ALVERSON: —that you want so much biographical detail in this project. But you're asking extremely good questions as to how I feel experiences have informed other experiences, and that's a tough—that's a tough one to answer in good conscience or off the cuff.
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: And it's also a kind of challenge to one's own narrative skills.
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: Well, I'd like to give you a good story about how A affected B, and I'm not sure whether it's accurate or just, you know, self-deception. But certainly my view was that the Third World had been exoticized through these war efforts. And Iraq is a perfect example, not so much because of skin color but this idiot, [former Secretary of State] Condoleezza Rice and those people like her who had these theories about how Arabic-speaking societies in the Middle East are organized were so ignorant. They had no clue of what an endogenous clan was and had no clue that that's the way a lot of these nations have been structured long before the Colonialists drew the boundaries.
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: And to go in and say, "Well, we're gonna go 'fix' something"—
- SOLOMON: Yes!
- ALVERSON: —it's like taking a sledge hammer to open a radio—
- SOLOMON: [Laughs.]
- ALVERSON: —so that you can see whether the anode and the diode are working. It's just nuts.
- SOLOMON: Yes.
- ALVERSON: And I don't know where—what kind of incubators these people get their heads into to think we can sit around in Washington or New York or wherever and invent theories about how we fix other societies.
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

- ALVERSON: I mean, that's the anthropologist in me.
- SOLOMON: That's right. [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: If you don't know how—if you don't understand it, don't mess with it.
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: But America—you know, it's the power game, too. Power tends to blind one to: "Well, we don't really need to understand it because we're gonna blow them up."
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: It's like—you know, building an airport is a lot easier than building a farming system. You can just drop the cement, put up the wind sock, and you've got an airport,—
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: —whereas if you're going to change a farming system, you've got to really think, *What do people live like?* It's that kind of problem. And America tends to have seen the world through a power dynamic for so long that I think it's a kind of blindness,—
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: —which I—I'm not claiming any—
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: —super-superior insights on this, but when you have these intimate experiences in other places, you get rather impatient with people sitting around in D.C. in suits,—
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: —talking about how the other people can benefit from this, that and the other thing.
- SOLOMON: Yes. Yes. So you have—you had a very unique experience in that you seem to have been really integrated in all of these movements from a very young age, so none of—how

to phrase this? [Chuckles.] The climate of the time period—that was never sort of a surprise to you. Wherever you went, it was sort of—

ALVERSON: Right. The movement tends to have been a means for fitting in, in a certain way, in new places.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm. Right.

ALVERSON: I don't want to put words in *your* mouth, but that's true. I think that when I went to work in South Africa, for instance, I was determined—I knew enough to know that I could get in trouble working in townships where I wasn't supposed to be.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: And I said, *Well, what can they do? All they can do is throw me out.*

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: So I was—unlike, say, my South African academic colleagues, who were very liberal whites at the University of [the] Witwatersrand, were sort of appalled how snotty—snott-nosed I was about the police. And I'd just go in and out of Soweto [an area of Johannesburg], and I got stopped a few times, and they see the U.S. passport and—"[Mumbles.] Dis Nort Amerikan."

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: And so I was a bit insulated. But I still was determined, so I brought African students or African research assistants into the common room of the university, and you could tell these liberals were a little upset that this was being integrated by me and my—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —they called them my—"Alverson and his slaves"—

SOLOMON: Oh, wow!

ALVERSON: —"are being—you know, sort of roughing up the edges of the university," which had a reputation as a center of integration. But when it came to sort of day-to-day things,

bringing Africans in to eat meals in the common room with the faculty, you could tell a lot of people felt this was pushing the envelope. But I didn't want to, you know, pussyfoot around that.

SOLOMON: So this was the university in?

ALVERSON: Johannesburg.

SOLOMON: Johannesburg.

ALVERSON: It's one of the two big, three big universities: Witwatersrand, [University of] Cape Town and Durban (University of Natal) [now part of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban].

SOLOMON: And this was the second time that you were there. This was the mid '70s?

ALVERSON: Both.

SOLOMON: Both times.

ALVERSON: Both times, yeah. In the second time, I merely used it as a place where I got camping equipment, and they rented me a Jeep to go out to Botswana, which was about 300 miles away. But I'd come back, say, every three or four months and be there for a few days to consult and catch my breath, et cetera.

SOLOMON: Got you.

ALVERSON: So I was in connection with people that I knew in South Africa from the first visit, where I was more, you know, there full time.

SOLOMON: Now, did you have any—and you were rather removed from the situation, I guess, for some time, in Vietnam. Did you have any close friends or people you knew who were serving in Vietnam?

ALVERSON: I certainly had acquaintances. Close friends, no. But certainly I knew a lot of people who were in Vietnam, yes. But they weren't people that would have hooked back up with me to give me intimate sort of veterans' accounts of what it was like.

- SOLOMON: Got you. So that was never really—oh, I guess you talked about having the decision between McGill and Dartmouth and whether or not your draft number was going to get called.
- ALVERSON: Yeah.
- SOLOMON: But did it sort of—was there this shadow over—you know, was it something that you were actively concerned about a lot, or—
- ALVERSON: You mean after the—in what period? I guess I lost the time thread.
- SOLOMON: Yes, sorry.
- ALVERSON: Sorry.
- SOLOMON: So I guess just any—you know, starting—starting at Yale or GW, through your time at Dartmouth. You know, a lot of people who were directly involved with the war still, you know, very greatly felt—
- ALVERSON: Mm-hm.
- SOLOMON: —sort of a shadow over them because of it. I was just wondering if—
- ALVERSON: Yes. I felt that it was consuming.
- SOLOMON: Yes.
- ALVERSON: A lot of students, I don't feel did,—
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: —that life went on. But there were—I think—again, you may have read it in the essay. The students who were part of the back-to-the-land movement—
- SOLOMON: Yes.
- ALVERSON: —here—Jake Guest, Charlie [unintelligible], [Steven E.] “Steve” Tozer [pronounced TOZZ-er]—the names that come up in the book—

- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: I mean, you can see their picture. You can identify all. I think that they were just overwhelmed by this phrase I borrowed from [the poet William Butler] Yeats, “The center doesn’t hold.” That we can’t really patch this thing together. It’s falling apart. And so we will go out and try to create a more cohesive or coherent way of life. That has been a thread in American utopian thinking—
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: —for a long time, and the Nearings, who lived in Vermont and then moved to Maine—their work was a kind of template for what a lot of the students were trying to do.
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: There were communes here, like the Wooden Shoe, et cetera, which I had no central involvement with at all except I knew people who moved out there.
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: And I think for them, the shadow, to use your metaphor, was much bigger than it was for me. I felt that I was doing what I could do better and it was more important to do it in the context of teaching than, you know, throwing in the towel and growing crops in Canaan, New Hampshire.
- SOLOMON: Right.
- So just for context for the recording, the book that we are referencing is *How Many Roads? Photographs of the Sixties and Early Seventies*, put together by Jonathan [E.] Sa-adah [pronouncing it sah-DAH]. [Transcriber’s note: In the book is an essay by Hoyt S. Alverson.]
- ALVERSON: SAH-dah.
- SOLOMON: SAH-dah. So you recommended that I flip through this. [Laughs.]
- ALVERSON: Just to see if there was any—you know, it might engender some thoughts that you could find useful.

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: I don't know whether that's true or not, but—

SOLOMON: Oh, yeah. I thought it very interesting. Do you have maybe a favorite photograph or—

ALVERSON: [Laughs.]

SOLOMON: —anything from, from the book?

ALVERSON: I can tell you one that's the funniest to me. It's a picture of me in there.

SOLOMON: Oh! Which one is this?

ALVERSON: On the steps of Parkhurst with a broken leg, with crutches. And there was a show at the AVA [pronounced A-vuh] Gallery [& Art Center] in Lebanon just two or three months ago, and the AVA Gallery used that photograph to publicize [laughs] the photography exhibit which Jonathan put on.

SOLOMON: This one?

ALVERSON: Yeah, that's me.

SOLOMON: Wow.

ALVERSON: So I broke my leg skiing, so that's why I was on crutches, so it looks more heroic—

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

ALVERSON: —than it actually is. And that's—when I alluded to Rieser being on the steps, that's the steps of Parkhurst.

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: So I wouldn't say—that would be a little, narcissistic to say that's my favorite photograph. I actually think his cover photograph is very poignant, from the point of view—there's a lot of photographers, one of whom he studied with, who died recently, who does a lot of urban street photography, where the issue of who's looking at the camera—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —is the camera looking at them—I'm not an artist or a photographer, but I think that that steely gaze of the young lady straight ahead and the sort of quizzical, maybe a little suspicious look of the guy—I don't even know who they are. Also the one where the young ladies, who were also students at Dartmouth in the exchange program, were at Colebrook[, NH], at the lockup.

SOLOMON: Awesome.

ALVERSON: Yeah. Right. There are several in there that I really do like. The back cover, that sort of captures some of this wistful almost innocence of the back-to-the-land movement. And I think—you know, he asked me to write the essay, because he'd been a student of mine.

SOLOMON: Oh, okay. Gotcha.

ALVERSON: As did Steve Tozer.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: And I don't know whether you know—what's his first name?—Teju [pronounced TAY-jew] Cole. He's got quite a reputation as a writer. He wrote the introduction. It's just a short essay. He's a photographer, an essayist. He's a Nigerian-American. And he's written two very, very widely reviewed and praised books: *Every Day Is for the Thief* and there's another one about the city. One is about Lagos, and one is about New York.

Anyway, he makes the point, which I think is a good one, that the pictures to him—although he's much too young to remember; he didn't know anything about this, but he says they seem very contemporary in terms of his engagement with the Iraq War. And I think there is a sort of contemporary quality to them if you just translate in your mind how much the Iraq invasion—

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: —has resonances.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

- ALVERSON: But we don't have that kind of rebellion, because—lack of a draft, among other things.
- SOLOMON: Right.
- ALVERSON: But I think those pictures do have a kind of timeless quality, but the superficial appearance does require a little help. As I said in my essay, how you see—you know, what you see is fundamentally a cultural and cognitive question and not just what's depicted in front of you.
- SOLOMON: Right. Right. And how you interpret what—
- ALVERSON: Yeah, exactly. Every feature of the picture is a stimulus that requires explanation, or it becomes a focus of bestowing meaning.
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm. Yes. So—
- ALVERSON: But I think it would be—you know, it's also a little bit of a—I tried to write my essay as a kind of: "Listen, you gotta put yourself back," and I wrote it, like, in the present tense, like news headlines?
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm.
- ALVERSON: To show you that this was all piling up—
- SOLOMON: Yes. Yes, yes, yes.
- ALVERSON: —at a tremendous rate. And Yeats's quote, "the center doesn't hold" [sic]—
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: —I think really does typify what drove a lot of the back-to-the-land piece of it.
- SOLOMON: Mm-hm. So can you explain a little bit, just for context, about the back-to-the-land movement?
- ALVERSON: Wow. Yes. Asking me to explain it is over- —overrating what I can do.
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: There was a couple named Nearing, N-e-a-r-i-n-g, who were very active as—they weren't communists, but they were certainly part of the questioning of the industrialization of North America in the '30s and '40s, and decided that too much of the real fundamentals of life were being lost by the hurly-burly and hubbub of the city and the work, and that they felt that you needed—it was a kind of [John] Dewey-esque idea: We've got to live that way to restore these values that are being lost by the anonymization, the atomization of people.

And so they did try to build two settlements, one in Vermont and then later in Maine, I believe, which served to some extent as a kind of sleeper, the way Simone de Beauvoir's *[The] Second Sex* I think served as a kind of sleeping document for women, who rediscovered it, you know, through Betty Friedan and—was it Crowley? I'm blocking on her name. The other big feminist writer of the '70s. Gloria Steinem.

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: So it wasn't that that was taught, but that kind of thinking was around.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: And the other books that I cited, that I think had enduring effect, that were vilified at the time, was Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*,—

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Betty Friedan's—I forgot the title of her book. Those were big.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: And I think at a university, having courses deal with that kind of stuff doesn't turn people into hippies or back-to-the-land people, but there are always going to be some people who say, "Yeah, this is not only interesting, but I want to try this." So Steve Tozer, who is a very well-known educator—he runs a school in Chicago for school teachers and administrators—was one of the—he's in there, a big, bearded fellow.

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: He was in one of my classes, where—and he wrote me after—saw I was putting this thing together, and he said, “You know, I didn’t know the word ‘ecology’ until I had your class in 1970”—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: —or whatever it was. And so just—often having an intellectual framework for thinking about issues changes the way—just good, rational scientific discussions of topics like environment, race, et cetera, can demystify it, can defang it—

SOLOMON: Yes, absolutely.

ALVERSON: —a good deal. And I think that would be my quick answer to what—I now have forgotten exactly—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

ALVERSON: —was your question.

SOLOMON: Sort of the discussion of the back-to-the-land movement.

ALVERSON: Back-to-the-land movement. And think that the back-to-the-land movement was, like most movements, a few people adopting in a more personal and an action-based way that which is out there as a recipe—

SOLOMON: Gotcha.

ALVERSON: —from other eras, even.

SOLOMON: So that was more of a removal from society?

ALVERSON: Well, yes. It’s like [Henry David Thoreau’s book] *Walden*.

SOLOMON: Gotcha.

ALVERSON: The story is—

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

ALVERSON: —he went out there [to Walden Woods] and lived on his own. Well, it doesn't say that he every couple of months took his laundry down the railroad track to his mother's house to wash it and get a shower and a hot meal. So the story takes on a life of its own, and it's not ever—

SOLOMON: Right.

ALVERSON: —a really accurate description; it's more like a vision.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

ALVERSON: I would say that. But, you know, they really did work. There were some farms out there [chuckles] in Norwich [Vermont] and in Canaan and so forth that were really scruffy and hard to maintain. It was—well, you see the pictures.

SOLOMON: Yes.

ALVERSON: That's hard work.

SOLOMON: Yes. Absolutely.

ALVERSON: There's no question that's hard work. And trying to be pure. You know, "We're not going to use the car."

SOLOMON: Right. [Laughs.]

ALVERSON: These people were not too used to mules, so you still have to make your compromises, and then the VW [Volkswagen] bus becomes the sort of okay—it's a sign that you're doing your best to tread lightly, that kind of thing.

SOLOMON: Got you. So maybe if you—

ALVERSON: I think—

SOLOMON: —want to—

ALVERSON: —I'm running out of gas.

SOLOMON: Yeah. [Laughs.]

ALVERSON: And maybe running out of things that would be interesting. But are you satisfied with the material you've gotten?

- SOLOMON: Oh, absolutely, yes, yes. Yeah.
- ALVERSON: Is there any point, I mean real pointed question that you felt has not been asked?
- SOLOMON: I don't think so.
- ALVERSON: It seemed to me like—from what I gather you were saying—that we've covered the ground better than I thought. Well, nothing like structured questions to help one sound coherent. Otherwise,—
- SOLOMON: It's true. [Laughs.]
- ALVERSON: Yeah, so the story isn't just free flow.
- The only thing I would say is that I'm sure if I reflected on your questions, I would revise them, smooth them, which is true of all memory.
- SOLOMON: Oh.
- ALVERSON: I've actually done a fair amount of work with cultural memory, and it's amazing how we assimilate. The past is always in the present, in the sense that the stories we tell are so immersed in the urgent existence of now that it can't be just a look back.
- SOLOMON: Right, right.
- ALVERSON: And as long as you know that and know I'm still—I'm a victim of the same—or beneficiary—
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]
- ALVERSON: —of the same processes—
- Are you going to do this with other people?
- SOLOMON: In the future, yes. But I—
- ALVERSON: In the—putting together a collection of—
- SOLOMON: Yes. So the project, itself, is a collection of oral histories, people's memories from this time period.

ALVERSON: Biographically sort of focused; i.e., what this person—

SOLOMON: Yes, exactly.

ALVERSON: —has to say about this person's personhood.

SOLOMON: Yep, exactly.

ALVERSON: Mm-hm. Interesting.

SOLOMON: Exactly.

ALVERSON: And is this being done as a course project?

SOLOMON: It's a research project that is going to be available online as an archive, basically.

ALVERSON: Mm-hm. And who—what official umbrella is it under? Is it a departmental or is the college supporting it,—

SOLOMON: I think it's just—

ALVERSON: —or is this just—

SOLOMON: —Dartmouth College. It's run by two history professors.

ALVERSON: Mm-hm.

SOLOMON: Yeah.

ALVERSON: Good. Well, it sounds *very* interesting.

SOLOMON: It is. You should check out the rest of it.

ALVERSON: I will. Now that I've given my spiel, I'll see what the design is.

SOLOMON: Well, thank you so much for talking to me.

ALVERSON: Been a pleasure. Good luck to you.

SOLOMON: Thank you so much.

ALVERSON: Yup.

[End of interview.]