

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

Interview
Amedeo Armenti
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Interview conducted by Richard Robbat
Videotape length 66 minutes

AA: I was born in Newark, New Jersey. Everybody calls me Al. I found it difficult to explain my name. It's an Italian name that my mother picked out of her romantic novel, I believe, and it's the same name that Mozart is supposed to have for his middle name—it is "love of God." I grew up in New Jersey and met my wife in New Jersey. Served in World War II for three years in Europe from Normandy up to Nuremberg as a medic. Before going to war, was involved at Rutgers University. Got my bachelor's degree there in journalism. Was drafted after the first year at Rutgers. After the war, continued my education and got my Bachelor's degree in 1949. Married my wife Terry and we...well, after graduation I was married and we went to California, University of California at Berkeley, the natural place for all radicals. Spent a year there doing graduate work in philosophy. Moved to Michigan where I got my Ph.D. at the University of Michigan. Spent nine long years in Michigan, not our most pleasant years. Had three of our four children there, and then moved to Massachusetts where in 1960 I started work at Lincoln Laboratory, a research laboratory connected with MIT. I had 24 years at Lincoln Laboratory before retiring.

In 1971, the year of the Lexington arrest, we were in the middle of the Vietnam War. And most of my adult life I had been very active in social action work of one kind or another, involved particularly in civil rights work and then fair housing work. Very active. In 1971 I believe I was still president of the Federation for Fair Housing and Equal Rights which was one of the organizations in Massachusetts that was most active in trying to break down the discrimination against blacks and minorities. So I had quite an active life in liberal politics and the war taught me that the way to solve problems was to try to arrive at some form of conciliation between nations rather than destroying people. This was certainly a lesson I learned in the destruction I saw in Europe, both in England and in France and in Germany and what I saw in the way of the harm it did to people. So that

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

when the protests started against the war in Vietnam I didn't need any persuading. I was already part of a group that was in the forefront of protesting the Vietnam War. And, of course, this was reinforced by the fact that my son was of draft age at that point. At that time parents like myself were getting more and more concerned about their sons going over to Vietnam to fight. And many of them were seriously considering leaving the United States and going to Canada. We found ourselves, my wife and I, in a very disturbing state of mind over this possibility.

My son decided he was going to march with the veterans into Lexington. I decided to march with him. And we went with them. The veterans marched to Lexington, not down the center of the road, but in essentially the way the Minute Men had followed the British, along the sides of the road. They were in single file on both sides of the road. And we marched and walked in Lexington and we already found a large gathering of people on the Battle Green. The negotiations to allow the veterans to camp on the Green had already taken place. I wasn't aware of that, as far as I can recall, until we arrived in Lexington. When we came onto the Green we saw that the Green was covered with people—that people had taken places in protest against the decision that the Selectmen had made—and they had simply taken positions all over the Green. I joined friends of mine, a number of them from Lincoln Laboratory. We simply sat on the Green and waited for a change of policy from the Selectmen. A small stage or podium had been set up with a microphone and speakers. We would get periodic reports on the negotiations that were going on with the Selectman. We never anticipated being there for a long period of time. We expected that at some point we would get a report that the Selectmen had accepted the request of the veterans, because it seemed so ridiculous, the event seemed so absurd, taken up a position in opposition to their decision. But as the evening progressed the reports that came through didn't give us any indication that the Board was going to relent.

My recollection, too, is that we simply spent our time talking about our personal affairs pretty much. I mean I don't think there was any deep discussion about the war or about our policy in Vietnam, although I'm sure that that was part of our discussion. But principally I think it was sort of a sense of frolic. We felt as though we were just going through a play-acting in a way. It was fun. We were

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

having a good time, like a picnic, having fun together. Because from our point of view it was clear in our minds that the Selectmen's opposition was a frivolous one and that they would soon come to their senses, being sensible people, that they would come to their senses and would call the whole thing off. And so we were prepared to leave sometime in the evening and go home.

INT: You said that you were there with your son. Could you describe the cross section of people who attended this?

AA: Yeah, mostly they looked to me like they were families. People had brought their children. And kids were running around on the Green and simply having a playful time while the parents sat around waiting for the Selectmen to make their final decision.

INT: Later on that day or early evening there was a Special Town Meeting called where people could express their particular views. Did you attend that?

AA: No, I didn't, but we did get word of it taking place from the announcements that were being made from the podium.

INT: Do you recall if there was a significant mood change during the evening hours?

AA: As it was getting on into evening, I mean somewhere around 10 o'clock, we got the sense more and more that the Board of Selectmen was not going to relent. And this came through to us as interesting in several ways. I think the feeling began to grow—and I think at this point we were discussing it quite actively—that the Selectmen had gotten themselves out on such a limb that it would be an embarrassment to them to back down at that point. So it was pretty much at that point that we began to realize that maybe we were going to have to stay there all night. And I think that word was starting to circulate. I can't be sure on this, but I think word was beginning to circulate that the Board was going to take some direct action. We didn't know exactly what it was. By this time it was getting very cold. And some of the people from the Green left because it was too cold to stay there. Others left and came back with blankets for those of us who weren't prepared for the evening. My son and I were prepared to stick it out to the very end, whatever that end was. And a core group of people who remained on the Green, a sizeable number

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

of them, were determined that they weren't going to leave until the Board backed down.

INT: As the evening went on and an announcement was made that the Selectmen were not going to change their minds, what was your personal reaction? Did you share any reactions with your son? And what was the general mood of the group?

AA: Yes, I think the general mood throughout, in the early part of the evening, was essentially that it was a ridiculous situation and we were going to be there for a short time and we would just make the most of it. But as the evening wore on we got more hardened to what was happening. And while we were getting more and more angry over the actions of the Board we also continued to think of it as an absurd situation. It seemed like a chapter out of Kafka that here was a board of officials who for all intents and purpose were sensible people who were taking a stand in a most ridiculous fashion considering that there was no good reason why they could not allow the veterans to just stay on the Green all night. There was no explanation that we were given that suggested that there was any reason for them to refuse the veterans. And, in fact, there was some suggestion—although I never verified this—that at one time people started thinking of past occasions when a similar situation had come up and my notion was that there was a time when the Boy Scouts of America had camped on the Green overnight. That was never verified. I never verified it, so I'm not sure whether it actually happened or not.

INT: Did you and your son have an unspoken commitment that you were going to follow through with this? What was the nature of the exchange between your son and yourself?

AA: Well, you've got to realize that my son is his father's son, and he grew up in a household believing as I do that the war was uncalled for, that it was absurd, and that he felt as strongly as I did that it was mistake to fight in Vietnam. It's not that we grew up believing that, or he grew up believing that you don't defend your country—that was not the notion at all. After all, I was working at a laboratory that was funded by the government, whose major charter was developing systems of defense against a threatening enemy. So neither of us felt—and I certainly didn't feel—that it was wrong for the country to go to war against a serious threat as it was

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

in World War II, for example. But from our point of view, from my point of view, and my son agreed entirely with it, the war in Vietnam had been concocted. It was a false war. Eisenhower had already said many times that we ought not to get ourselves involved in a war in Asia. We were reading about the history of Vietnam and our getting involved in Vietnam. We found no good basis for the United States' position in Vietnam. So we were pretty much in agreement with, I'm sure, all of the people on the Green who were part of the group that was convinced that the war in Vietnam was a tragedy; it was a mistake.

INT: Do you think that was the primary issue that coalesced the group of people there?

AA: I have no doubt at all about it. I think that all the people—I knew many of the people, either I knew them directly or I knew of them through other people—these were people who had spent a good deal of their adult life being concerned about our country from the point of view of its...the way they treated people in the country itself that is the social fabric of the country, as well as our policy, our foreign policy. My impression was certainly that most of the people, if not all, were thoroughly informed about the policy in Vietnam, the history of our taking part in Vietnam, and were thoroughly opposed to our being involved.

INT: So in essence you're saying from real perspective the protest that was going on was anti-Vietnam?

AA: Totally anti-Vietnam. And they were prepared, as many of them did, to continue the march with veterans as we did when the next day when they continued to march into Bunker Hill. Many of the people who were on the Green were also at Bunker Hill.

INT: From the morning when you and your son left your home to join the veterans on the march to Lexington to late evening, had you been in contact with your home at all and your wife to let her know what was happening?

AA: Yes, we got word back through a friend of mine who left the Green. He or his wife called my wife and told her that we were staying on through the night. I don't think she felt...she thought it was because there were so many people involved that it was just a campout.

INT: Did your wife share the same political convictions?

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

AA: Entirely. [Laughter] She would have left me a long time ago if she hadn't.

INT: Okay. At what time or during what period during the evening was there an ultimatum given to the people that were on the Green?

AA: Yes, there were several, as a matter of fact. We got periodic reports, sort of; in effect we were kept waiting for the report that we should go home. But when it came to about midnight my notion was that at that point we began to feel sure that either we were going to have to stay all night or something else was going to happen. But I think it wasn't until after midnight, because midnight was sort of a deadline that had been set by the veterans themselves, and it was after midnight that we started getting word that if we continued to stay on the Green, we would be arrested. But it wasn't until three in the morning that we were arrested. If I remember correctly, it was after one o'clock when word first came through that we were going to be arrested. The chief topic of conversation was: Why don't they come now? Why are they waiting? And this added to our anger over the way the Selectmen were behaving. Because it appeared to us as though there was a deliberate plan on the part of the Selectmen to keep us there, to wait us out and make it as uncomfortable as possible for us to remain. That's the only reason we could figure that they waited until three o'clock in the morning to arrest us.

INT: Hoping that more and more people would leave?

AA: Would leave, and that the number of people would dwindle and become a small group of people and that therefore they would have no problems with that group.

INT: You said that anger began to develop, or people were angry.

AA: They were angry.

INT: In what ways were they angry, or why were they angry, or how did they express that?

AA: Well, you've got to remember that these people, most of whom as far as I could tell were professional people, [were] well educated, well-informed people. There were very cerebral people. So they didn't shout. They didn't yell. They didn't jump all over the place. They talked to each other. [Laughter.] And they talked, trying to understand; throughout the evening they continually tried to understand why were the Selectmen doing what they were doing. They were also law-abiding

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

citizens, all of them. And they weren't about to do anything that they felt would be a violation, a serious violation of law. No one knew at that point whether there was an ordinance even that covered the situation. It wasn't until close to arrest time I think that the word came out that we were violating a Town ordinance. People were questioning what ordinance; where could they have found an ordinance to cover this situation? So there was no sense that there was a serious violation of the law.

INT: Was that same sense of non-serious violation carried with you when the actual arrests took place?

AA: That's interesting. Actually, there was a show of elation when the buses pulled up. While there was no sense of fear, there was certainly no sense of protest. In fact, they welcomed the police when they came upon us. But the scene, looking back now—and even then I think it was really a terrible thing to behold—the police formed a phalanx, a single rank that stretched from essentially one end of the Green to the other. And the buses had pulled up on Massachusetts Avenue, one after the other. There was a line of buses in single file. And then police formed up by the buses and marched in step toward us—not in any real threatening way, slowly. But they marched forward and they looked like Gestapo. They looked like, well, like storm troopers. They were dressed in battle gear essentially, in riot gear. And they were carrying nightsticks that were very obvious. And they were wearing helmets. So it was a very ominous looking police force that advanced on us. But the reaction of the people on the Green was acceptance of this, in fact, elation, as I said. They got up and walked toward the police. And the police then took them, led them to the buses. And they got on board the buses. And people who were in the back, who didn't get on the buses, protested because they wanted to be arrested. A number of them engaged in a protest with some of the police officers telling them that they wanted to be put on the bus. And the policemen said, we can't take you because the buses are full. So you really had this rather absurd scene of the police behaving as though they were about to arrest a group, a bunch of rioters, hoodlums, when in fact what they were doing was being greeted by citizens of the town who were eager to get on board the buses. So it was really an absurd situation. I have to say that the police did not in any way [act] offensively toward any of the people. Nobody protested. The police didn't push anybody around or force anybody to do

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

anything. We simply walked over to the buses and got on board.

INT: Spend a couple of minutes explaining what happened with the bus ride. What happened when you got off the bus?

AA: We didn't know where we were going. There was a lot of guessing, where were they going to take us. There must have been, what, four or five buses—I'm not sure how many buses, and there may have been others that came along after—these were the yellow school buses, you have to keep in mind, which made it even more absurd. They had commandeered all of the school buses, which may have been a violation on their part. But they commandeered the school buses, and as far as I can recollect, I don't think there were any police on board the buses. I think it was just those of us because we had gone up very willingly onto the bus. And there was, again, a very jocular atmosphere and ridiculous. None of us took it seriously as being a violation of any law that would result in our being imprisoned. And the ride to the DPW [Department of Public Works] barn, I guess they call it, was relatively short. Didn't take us long to get there. When we got off the buses we were taken in single file and that was my first view. Of course, my son and I were together all this time. That was our first view of where we had been taken. It was this enormous huge open space in the DPW barn. People were already in ahead of me. A number of lawyers were already there ready to put up bail for us. We were processed. There were tables there that we had to go to and we had to give information like our names and...

INT: Who was doing the processing?

AA: I presume it was people from the Lexington Police Department, but they were civilians. And there were police standing by. There were police around. And there were civilians. But we were moved along quite rapidly. I think I had to go to at least two stations. The processing including fingerprinting, as I recall, and, taking down all information about our name, the usual information about us. We did have lawyers with us who had volunteered. These were also lawyers who were connected in some way with the anti-Vietnam protest. They were prepared to put up bail. Somebody, I don't know what organization, was prepared to put up bail for our release. But we were not due to go into court until the next morning, until that morning actually. So we arrived at the DPW barn around 3:30 or so and we were

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

there until court session the next morning which was about 10, I believe. Was it 10 o'clock? And so this must have been Sunday morning; I didn't realize until recently it was a Sunday; I thought it had been a weekday, but it was a Sunday morning. The night was spent restlessly. It was cold. We did have some blankets. People found whatever space they could find to lie down or get up and walk around, go to the bathroom, whatever you had to do. I was sitting close to Noam Chomsky and I tried to engage him in some philosophical conversation, but he was in no mood for it. [Laughter.] I don't know whether it was because of the circumstances or because I was so poor at the philosophy. In any case, the next morning we did get donuts and coffee. I think this was from some voluntary organization that brought it in. I don't think it was provided by the town. I doubt it.

Then my recollection was we went to the courthouse, which was in the center of Concord at that time. They hadn't moved it. It was right in the center of Concord. We came by bus, the same school buses. [There was] a huge crowd of people who already knew that we had been arrested. These were friends, relatives, mostly sympathizers. They all cheered. I don't recollect any boos. So this was all sympathetic people and they had to form an opening for us to walk through to go into the courtroom. They could only let us in a few at a time because there wasn't room. We crowded into the courtroom and Judge Forte who was the presiding judge was on the bench at one end. Individuals were taken up to him one at a time. One of the things that I was impressed with very strongly was that he insisted that everybody wear a tie. Not all of us had ties. In fact, it was my general practice then, and still is, not to wear a tie. So we didn't have a tie. We ended up passing a tie from one person to the other in order to look presentable for Judge Forte. He had a reputation of being a very stern judge. My recollection is that day he was very stern. He didn't like any of the people who were coming before him. That came through very clearly.

INT: In what way? How did it come across that clearly?

AA: Very gruff, very direct, very short. There was no room for any explanations, protests, no questioning of the judge's ruling. In fact, if I remember rightly, our lawyers advised us not to because it was going to be

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

a relatively trivial charge. It was a misdemeanor, a violation of the ordinance. And the judge just found us guilty and cited the bail. I presume that bail had already either been taken care of or was taken care of after the sentencing because immediately afterward we were free and could leave the courtroom and go out and meet our joyful friends.

INT: So after the court experience, what happened? You're outside the courthouse. Where did you go, what did you do, who did you see?

AA: At that point I believe my wife was there and we just went home. It had been a long evening, long night, and we needed to rest. So we just went home. The feeling of absurdity was with me throughout and I know it was with others as well. In fact, if anything characterized the whole episode from beginning to end, it was the absurdity of it. Because on the one hand, here were people who were behaving in what I'm sure must be regarded by any intelligent person as the most patriotic way of behaving for an American citizen in a situation that just cried out for protest. And yet we were being treated in a fashion that was characteristic of the worst that we know of in World War II. Here were veterans, Vietnam veterans, men who had served their country, who were doing nothing more than showing that they dissented from the U.S. policy. That's all they were doing. And they were doing it in a most amicable way. There was no hostility involved at all. Yet they were being treated...

INT: Let's explore that just a little bit more. Absurdity, as you define it and explored as you just did, you talk about freedom of expression.

AA: Exactly, yes.

INT: Let's go back to an earlier remark then. As you reflect on the whole episode now, what took priority: The protest of the war in Vietnam or to have freedom of expression?

AA: I think the two were really mixed, very much mixed up. On the one hand, our country was founded on the notion of dissent, on the fact that the Constitution has built into it in the most positive way one could imagine the notion that we want to allow the people, if we're going to be a free people, that we have to allow free expression and the freedom to object to government policies. Here was an instance in which it was not only a dissent, but it was a dissent from a group primarily—the primary group being veterans—who had already demonstrated their patriotism and

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

their loyalty to their country by putting their lives on the line. And by people who are supporting them who felt very strongly, very committed to the ideals of our country. The actions of the Selectmen, if anything, either betrayed a total ignorance of what it means to be an American and living in America, or else they had taken on some kind of an authoritarian posture that was reminiscent of the Gestapo. The idea that once you've made a decision that you're not going to allow people to do something, they're going to stand by the position to the point of putting the people through considerable discomfort even though these were respectable citizens of the town and of the communities around it. So the absurdity of it was just so overwhelming, absolutely overwhelming.

INT: For several years, the United States has been besieged by several many important foreign policy questions that have a lot of people, activists such as yourself, to express themselves in ways that might or might not be consistent with what occurred during the Vietnam era. Those were protests about political changes, occurrences in Nicaragua, and also with respect to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf War. Why don't you, if you can, do some reflection on those recent incidents and how you can compare those to your interest in and involvement with the Vietnam era protests?

AA: Yes, I think there's a natural extension from the protests against the war in Vietnam when considering that the people that I've associated with in the protests have strong feelings. These are people like CPPAX, which is the Citizens Participation in Political Action¹, and other groups of that kind. There's been a deep and very troubling concern over policies that established at the federal level which involved people in very tragic situations, such as the Vietnam War when in fact the people themselves, the people who get involved, and the children know that people get involved, are relatively poorly informed about the rationale for going into it. During the Vietnam War, for example, it was something that evolved over a long period and slowly enveloped the country. The same thing happened in the case of Nicaragua. In Nicaragua, all of a sudden there was covert action that was established to support actions on the part of the Contras against the Sandinistas. Our government

¹ CPPAX is the organization that resulted from the merging of Citizens for Participation Politics (CPP) a state-wide organization that worked for greater citizen representation in the political process and supported anti-Vietnam War efforts, and Mass PAX, an anti-war organization.

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

policy was to support that action. Well, along with the people that protested the war in Vietnam, many of the same people...I was outraged by the policy. Because, again, it seemed to me that our government was making a policy decision essentially outside of the democratic arena. It was not giving the people an opportunity to make a choice, to make a decision on whether this was a policy that was vital to the interests of our country, a policy which might seriously involve the death of young people, 18 and 19 year olds. I had very vivid memories of myself in World War II as a 19 year old and my concerns over my son as a 19-year- old possibly going to Vietnam. So those of us who got involved were just as much concerned that our government was going into a policy that would eventually require our own children to go into a war, a bloody war that was not in any way tied to our vital interests.

A number of us in Concord were seeking to find ways to educate and inform—first people living in Concord and hopefully beyond Concord—about what was happening in Central America. We thought that a good vehicle for this was to participate in what was already an established movement in the country, the sister city movement. There is a federal organization which was started by General Eisenhower. Actually, Eisenhower had made a speech in which he suggested that it would be good for cities and towns across the country to form alliance and affiliations with towns in other countries as a way of having a cultural exchange and getting to know what other people are like on a one-to-one basis. We thought that this would serve as a nice way of educating people about what was happening in Nicaragua. So we formed a group to promote a sister city relationship between our town, Concord, and a town in Nicaragua. We chose a town called San Marcus, which has a profile that's relatively close to Concord. That is, it's somewhat rural. It has a small population and it was easily accessible from Managua. In order to legitimize the relationship we felt it was important for it to involve as many people in Concord as possible. So we introduced an article into the warrant at Town Meeting. This was in 1986. And we brought it before Town Meeting and we got a substantial majority voting in our favor. It was something like three to one. That established us as an official Town Meeting [body]. In the course of promoting it we were very much aware that there was an opposition group forming in the town. This group consisted of people who were very much in tune with the policies that were

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

established at the federal level and that were promoted by the State Department. They believed very strongly that the Sandinista government was a Communist government and that the Contras were fighting to free their country, liberate their country, and that we were supporting a freedom from tyranny. Some of us at least, including myself, were not as much concerned about the Communist question as we were about our policy with respect to a foreign country as a sovereign taking positions that we were taking. That was my principal concern, and the fear that our own sons and daughters would be involved in a bloody war. That was my main concern. But there were a number of people in the group who were sympathetic to the Sandinista government and felt that they were doing a credible job. Also, they were opposed to the Contras who had been essentially established by the Somoza [previous dictatorial ruler of Nicaragua] government. So we recognized that there was a split in the town to some degree, except that we were meeting with church groups, all of the church groups in town. And we were meeting with the fraternal groups who went before the Chamber of Commerce. We went before other groups. We were convinced that we had a good fraction of the town—or at least those people who were politically in tune with what was happening—sympathetic with our point of view. Since our concern was primarily one of assisting on a one-to-one basis, people-to-people basis—the people of San Marcus—and educating people in Concord about Nicaragua, we got a great deal of support. As a matter of fact, we had something like 400 or 500 supporting it with no difficulty at all in providing us with funding and assistance in trying to get our program through. Over the six years that we've had it we've continued to have such support. But we had to contend with this group who felt very strongly that we were being a front group for the Sandinistas in this country. At our meetings, our general meetings, numbers of people would voice concern over presenting ourselves in a proper way so that we did not arouse hostility. That meant we had to be very careful that we did not make any statements that had a political bias to them in some way. It was important for us to present ourselves as a sister city committee with all of the programs that the sister cities internationally promoted, and that we were not going to use our committee as a propaganda outlet for the Sandinistas.

INT: Do you think that the committee was a propaganda outlet?

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

AA: No, it was not. While there were members of the committee who wanted to make it into a political organization, the resistance from those of us who opposed it was very strong because it was very important from our point of view to use the committee strictly as a way of getting the residents of Concord to understand what the people were like in Nicaragua; that they were just people who were poor, living in a poor country, and were in desperate need of assistance from the other countries, and that the danger of the Communist threat at least was being exaggerated, even though we didn't promote that message. From our point of view it was an exaggeration because Communism in Central America essentially takes second place to Catholicism. So from our point of view we should deal with the people as people rather than as having some kind of a political bent.

INT: Let's interrupt you and just ask a broader question. Based on what happened in the Middle East and Nicaragua and Vietnam, and alluding to your introductory remarks with regard to Nicaragua, do you think that foreign policy questions should be decided by referendum?

AA: No, I don't. But I think whenever a foreign policy decision is made which can have serious and longstanding effects on large number of the population such as going to war, I think it's not only the right, but the duty as Thoreau said, to protest it. And I think it is perfectly proper for groups to not only protest but use every political mechanism that's available to them that's legal to protest it. If that includes using Town Meeting, which I think it does, then you should use Town Meeting. In fact, in Concord, of all places, Town Meeting has a history that goes back to prerevolutionary war days of protesting policies including the discussions against the King of England at the time when we were a colony and including the protest against slavery in the South. These were matters that came before Town Meeting with no qualms at all. I mean this was accepted as a natural right of people to discuss in Town Meetings. Our opposition group protested against us publicly in the newspapers and through leaflets and lectures that they gave claiming that Town Meeting was not a legitimate forum for discussing national policy, that the business of Town Meeting was town business, which meant discussing sidewalks and paving of streets and the town budget. But it's clear from the history of the town that this

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

has not been the only role of Town Meeting. In fact, we had a resolution at Town Meeting protesting, which was voted, in that it voted for the nuclear freeze. There were others, a number of others.

INT: Let's jump forward a few more years. In regard to what went on the Middle East, is this a subject of conversation at Concord Town Meeting?

AA: It did not come up at Town Meeting. There was an attempt made at the last Town Meeting, interestingly enough, but the moderator gaveled it down. A protest was made on grounds that...I forget what the article was. There was an article [that] had to do in this case with setting up a safeguard against Nuclear Metals in Concord. Nuclear Metals uses spent uranium to make the missile points for anti-tank missiles. Over the years some of the residue from the processing has created a pollution problem. So there was a group in Concord that very strongly felt that enough was enough, that the Board of Health was not properly monitoring NMI. One of the people at the Town Meeting rose in support of the article, but used as an argument that it was perfectly proper for the town to monitor NMI considering that the...let's see, how did she word it? She put it in a context of money being spent on the Gulf War. She was trying to connect the money because one of the arguments against the article was that we couldn't afford it. She was putting it in the context that if one looks at the loss to Concord, just what Concord contributed to the war effort in the Gulf, that it would amount to a considerable loss. She had the numbers to back it up because studies have been made of that kind. And she was gaveled down.

INT: How did the protest work out?

AA: There were vigils kept around the flagpole in Concord Center and people marched or stood with signs. There were also nightly vigils and there were regular vigils during the week at various times. We also had meetings. There was an organization called Grassroots formed to try to coordinate protestors from the surrounding towns. Personally, I was a member. I joined a group called Veterans for Peace as a veteran of World War II. And I participated in protests with the Veterans for Peace as well.

INT: Yellow ribbons—did the town endorse or have yellow ribbons around?

AA: Yes, they put yellow ribbons on the Town House [the name of Concord's Town Hall], as well as around town. And I was not at the Selectmen's meeting, but I

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understand it was discussed with some controversy. There was at least one boardmember who didn't think it was appropriate. I don't know what his arguments were against it. I don't remember what his arguments were against it. But he didn't think it was the proper thing for the town to do as a town. But he lost, and there were ribbons put on the Town House, as well as all around town.

INT: What significance did those yellow ribbons have to you?

AA: To me?

INT: In the context of protest movements.

AA: I think that when a policy is set by the federal government that puts us on the road to war, it becomes extremely difficult for many people to dissent against it. The chief arguments I guess are they know what's best. They have more information than we have. And there is a strong sense that if you don't accept the federal decision, the decision made at the federal level, that you're being unpatriotic. My own feeling is that this is a mob mentality, the same kind of thinking that goes into lynching and that goes into rioting and I would never join a protest group that would participate in that fashion. I've been part of many large protest groups, but they've all been orderly protest groups. And I believe very strongly that they should be orderly. The people who join in with the consensus view—many of them, if not probably most of them—are probably poorly informed about what the issue is, have not paid much attention, typically are apolitical, or even hate politics. Most of them don't even want to think about politics until the time when they have to go in and vote. So they don't understand what the whole process of democracy is about, many of them, I have to say. If you combine this lack of understanding of what it means to dissent against the government in a democracy and the mob psychology that takes hold when a decision is made at the federal level, I think you'll just find people automatically falling into line. Now there are a number of them I'm sure. A lot of them agree that the policy is the correct policy. In fact, I've been surprised sometimes to find people that I would have expected to be opposed to our policy in the Gulf, people who would have joined me in other protest movements, who agreed with the policy on accepting the rationale that Saddam Hussein was a Hitler and that he had been an aggressor against Kuwait and so on and accepting the entire rationale for that.

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INT: Let's flip back to Vietnam and taking your explanation. Isn't it just as easy to take the flip side of what you said and suggest that an antiwar movement can also develop a mob psychology?

AA: Oh, absolutely.

INT: And have people in and of themselves stopped thinking? Couldn't that also be a criticism of the anti-Vietnam...?

AA: Oh, yes. I think a large number of the protestors in the Vietnam War, many of them, didn't understand why they were protesting. There may be a thousand different motives; some joined it just because it was the fun thing to do, some joined the protest because they were talked into it by their buddies or something of this kind. Yes, there were many...and it's very possible that the Vietnam movement or the protest movement could have been wrong in the sense that it was going against what was a correct policy, in some sense, a correct policy. That's very possible. But I don't know what the conclusion to that is.

INT2: Were you tempted to pull down the yellow ribbons?

AA: No. I should point out that our opposition friends are doing precisely that in the most ridiculous way. We have a bulletin board in the Town House. Now they're posting propaganda leaflets up on our board and they're not supposed to. I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't go around tearing down [other] people's.

END OF INTERVIEW

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