

A Skirmish in a Wider War

An Oral History

of

JOHN H. TANTON

Founder of FAIR

The Federation for American Immigration Reform

Interviewed by

Otis L. Graham, Jr.

April 20-21, 1989

JOHN H. TANTON ORAL HISTORY

A Prefatory Note

It's a humbling experience to read a transcription of one's spoken words ... even when a conscious effort was made to be disciplined in what was said, anticipating the need to edit the result.

I've "cleaned up" this text — fixing grammar, cutting the "um's" and "er's" — but leaving the original meaning intact. I have occasionally changed words or added an explanatory phrase where I, or my wife Mary Lou, or proofreader Janet Harte saw a need. I thank those two ladies very much for their help.

Tapes of the original interviews are on file at the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, with my other papers.

John H. Tanton
Petoskey, Michigan
February 27, 1992

OTIS GRAHAM, JOHN TANTON, SESSION 1, APRIL 20, 1989, CAPTIVA ISLAND, FLORIDA

OTIS GRAHAM: *This is Otis Graham beginning the first interview with Dr. John Tanton. It is April 20, 1989, and we are on Captiva Island in Florida. John, why don't we begin by having you tell us something about your background, your origins, and where you were born.*

JOHN TANTON: I was born in Detroit, Michigan, on February 23, 1934. My father was an immigrant from Canada. He was raised in a business family, and served in the Canadian Expeditionary Forces in World War I, which provided a lot of family stories. He was educated at the University of Toronto as a chemical engineer, and graduated just about the time that the Depression hit. He moved to Detroit and worked in business there. My mother was of German stock. She was raised on a farm in the "Thumb" area of Michigan [northeast of Bay City], was the first person in her family to get an education beyond high school. She took a nursing degree program in Detroit. My father and mother met there and married, and I was born two years later, the first of three children.

One of the big events that I remember in my early life was the attack on Pearl Harbor, which came when I was about seven years old. I can still vividly recall the excitement and consternation in the neighborhood.

Another vivid recollection is the race riots in Detroit in the middle part of World War II. I remember being in about the fourth grade and going to the library behind my teacher's desk and picking out a book on those race riots and having it taken away from me because the teacher judged it improper material [laughter] for a fourth grader to be reading.

But I think one of the biggest events in my early life came in 1945 when my parents decided that they'd had enough of the city. I guess my father was ahead of the curve that way. He got sick of the city long before it was a common thing to do, so we pulled up stakes and moved, on February 1 of that year, to the farm in the "Thumb" of Michigan on which my mother had been raised. Her brother had been running the farm and had done a poor job of it, and it was about to go back to the bank. So we took over this 80-acre farm, some of the richest land in the United States — all old, flat, lake bottom. I was eleven years old at the time, and so I was really, in essence, raised as a farm boy. I was raised in a situation where my family sank or swam based on how well we did in managing that farm. We very nearly sank. After we got there, there were a couple of very bad, wet years. The land was extremely flat and had quite poor drainage. To make it work, one had to "tile it" — as the saying goes. This involved stringing subterranean drain fields over the entire farm. I have vivid recollections of

the tremendous amount of work that went into that. How many tens of thousands of tile did we put down in the bottom of those trenches to drain the water away? That took us up to the end of the '40s, and by then it was a pretty good time for American agriculture, since prices were good. So our family got back on its feet. I had the experience of working alongside my father, my mother, my brother and my sister, to make sure that the family survived. That was a strong, formative experience. I had the excitement of trying to get the hay in the barn ahead of the rain. And I became a lover of the land at that time.

I went to a rural high school. There were 39 kids in my graduating class. It was not a very rigorous education. I made the mistake of taking vocational agriculture rather than Latin. During four years of high school I wrote only one paper, of five or six hundred words, and that was on farm tiling! I gave my first public speech to an FFA [Future Farmers of America] meeting on tiling, at a public speaking contest. Throughout my high school years, for one reason or another, I began to be thrust into leadership positions. I was the president of my class and that sort of thing. I was a fairly good athlete. I was the second best scorer on the basketball team and also played football and baseball. I took part.

But I was always quite a serious person. My mother had been raised in the Lutheran Church, but my family attended the Evangelical United Brethren Church, which was a fairly fundamentalist group. My parents weren't particularly religious, but I was quite religious at that stage in my life. I took things seriously. On my own, I discovered Pascal's wager on the balancing of the chance of eternity against our short life here on earth. That was an early instances of many discoveries that I've made on my own of ideas that I later found had been written about by many people before. My mind seems to run in veins where thoughts like this keep popping up.

Q: Was your household bookish at all? Were there magazines, books? Were your mother or father readers?

TANTON: Yes, it was a very bookish household. We almost always had a dictionary at the dining table. My father was a great lover of words and of the etymology of words. My father was also a man of many sayings. Since he passed away several years ago, I have begun to collect his sayings as they crop up or occur to me. I have a list of, I suppose, a hundred to a hundred and fifty of them now. I've often considered myself excessively aphoristic. I can usually come up with a saying for almost any occasion, and I think this trait traces back to my father. Mother was not particularly bookish. We all worked with our hands much of the time — that's what farming is about.

Q: Your education: you've described it as you enter high school, obviously

with wider horizons; you're starting to make some choices about your career and your direction. How did you make those choices?

TANTON: Well, I was very much taken with the land. I loved to garden and still do. I liked to take care of the chickens and the turkeys and that sort of thing. Our family was of modest means, to say the least. We had just barely survived the transition from city to farm. I had the good fortune to win a scholarship to Michigan State University, went off to college there, and enrolled in the School of Agriculture. I was planning to become an agronomist, a soil scientist.

There was, however, a strong medical tradition on my father's side of the family. I had an uncle who had been a Rhodes scholar. He had gone to Oxford for part of his medical training, and was a tremendous athlete. He swam the Bosphorus, and was the first non-Englishman to be captain of the rugby team at Oxford. There was much family lore about the time that he swam out into Lake Erie and pulled thirteen people out of the drink.

Q: *What was his name?*

TANTON: Angus McLaughlin.

Q: *Apparently an influence in the family?*

TANTON: Yes. Then there was another uncle in the family, Roderick Gordon, who'd been in the India Medical Service. He was poker-spined, very proper, but a highly intelligent person. These two men formed my image of the medical profession. And, while I'd thought a little bit about medicine, I figured that it was beyond anything that I could attain, if that was the kind of person that it took to be a doctor. I was not a very good swimmer amongst other things! But I did quite well academically at Michigan State, and I began to feel that I probably could handle a medical curriculum. So after two years in the School of Agriculture, I switched to a pre-medical major and ended up taking my degree in chemistry. I won the student prize in organic chemistry and had close to a 4.0 average overall.

Q: *You're twenty-one or twenty-two years old, and you've not spoken at all of any political activities or dimensions to your family or personal life at this point.*

TANTON: Well, one of the first things that happened to me in college was joining a fraternity. I mentioned before that I was a fairly introverted and quiet person, and that really did draw me out of my shell. I pledged Delta Upsilon fraternity at the end of my freshman year. My last year in college I was president of that fraternity and was in charge of making sure that the brothers moved into the house and supported it financially. I reworked the

constitution of the chapter at that time. That was the first of many constitutions that I have done. I had the idea that some sort of long-range financial security was needed for $\Delta\Pi$, so we set up an endowment fund for the fraternity. Twenty-five dollars from everybody's initiation fee was put into this fund, which was to be managed in perpetuity. I've set up a number of similar funds since then, so I guess some of those same ideas have stuck with me.

Several of us tried to enrich the fraternity's intellectual life by starting a Great Books program. We had speakers come in on Sunday nights. We also listened to classical music and that sort of thing. It didn't work too well but, again, that's something I'm still promoting up to the present time. Trying to improve one's mind was an early theme.

Q: Was Michigan State intellectually alive? You are in an agricultural school in a somewhat remote place.

TANTON: Well, Michigan State was quite a big school. I suppose there were about 25,000 students. Back then it would not have been thought of as one of the leading intellectual campuses in the country, certainly. But I think my activities were my own innate tendencies coming out, rather than the result of the environment I was in.

Q: The religious activities of your high school years and earlier: were they continued in college?

TANTON: No, not in particular. I became much more independent of mind as I went off to school. You asked about family political activities — one of the great issues in the town of Sebewaing, the town to which we moved in 1945, was what to do about the rural country schools which were still in operation. There were still one-room schoolhouses which went through the sixth or eighth grade, with 25 or 30 students and a single teacher. Consolidation of these schools into the school in town was a big issue. One of the first political issues I remember was the vote on whether to consolidate or not. The progressive families, like ours, when it came time to vote, brought their wives! Whereas the oldtimers left the women at home, as had always been done, and thus lost.

Q: You noticed this at the time?

TANTON: Well, yes, that's why we won. The question of closing down the country schools was won by getting the women out to vote for the first time in that community. So I never did go to a country school. The consolidation took place shortly after I got there.

Sebewaing was very strongly Lutheran, because of its German

background, and even back in those days I can remember sharp community divisions along religious lines. The conflict was between the public school kids and the kids who went to the Lutheran parochial schools. There was quite open animosity between those two groups, and I belonged to the minority group. Of course, we still see that sort of group division in the United States. So I've been exposed to such things for a long time.

My father served on the school board when I was in late grade school and high school; my family was politically active from that standpoint. But my father always disdained formal politics and the seeming corruption and self-serving nature of much of it. But having your father on the school board was not a particular picnic. You got a lot of ribbing for it, especially if you were a good student. The accusation was that the reason you got good grades was because your father was on the school board, and the teachers were favoring you because of that.

In college, between 1952 and 1956, I was not politically active except at the fraternity. Those were quiet years on campus. Delta Upsilon was my main scene of activity. But I did spend a great deal of time on the fraternity. I learned a lot about organizations and getting along with people, and began to learn about running meetings, making agendas and making sure that minutes were well kept. We got our historical records in order while I was there — something I'm still interested in, hence this oral history project on FAIR. I constructed the first directory of all of the alumni going back to the time when the chapter was founded.

Q: *You found this sort of work congenial?*

TANTON: Yes, right. I've done it all my life.

Q: *You graduated from Michigan State in what year?*

TANTON: I graduated in '56. I should just mention that in my senior year, given the Rhodes scholarship background in our family, I decided that I would apply for one. That brought with it one of the hardest tasks that I've ever undertaken: to write down in a thousand words why I wanted to go to Oxford. As I mentioned, I had virtually no training in writing in high school, and I also had very little at Michigan State. I was a chemistry/zoology, and mathematics-type person, (in calculus I got the top grade, scoring 100% on every test) but, unfortunately, there were virtually no writing requirements in my courses. So I labored for weeks over that thing, and it was not a very good product. But I entered the competition. I recall very clearly going to the Detroit Athletic Club for the first round of interviews, where I was one of two winners. We were then sent to the finals, which were held at the University Club in Chicago. I remember vividly going over there. I think there were six scholarships for our six-

state region, and there were twelve finalists. I lost out in the final round. but it was a good and formative experience. The rules of the Rhodes scholarship contest were that you could apply either from where you were going to school, or from your home state. Well, what happened was that the students that had gone off to Yale and Harvard from the midwest came home to compete, because the competition was much less severe than it was on the east coast. I remember wondering about the fairness of that, and musing about the competition I was up against. These kids had gone to good prep schools and the best universities, whereas I'd spent my youth hoeing corn and beans in upper Michigan. So I was satisfied to make it as far as I did.

Q: This is 1956. What happens to your life at that point? Is there a draft at that time that you must be concerned with, or can you go on with your professional education?

TANTON: Well, let's see, the Korean War was in the early '50s and the draft was on our minds, but never too seriously. I think I had some sort of student deferment. I went on to the University of Michigan Medical School in the fall of 1956.

Q: So you go straight into medical school?

TANTON: Right. All of the persons from my high school class who had gone on to a university had gone to the University of Michigan. You mentioned earlier that Michigan State's intellectual reputation was not as good as that of the University of Michigan. I had received a great deal of ribbing all during those college years from my friends at the U of M. Well, some of those same folks went into medical and dental school with me, and I had the great satisfaction of doing better than they did in the first-year courses in medical school. I got straight A's — and even an unheard of A+ in biochemistry.

Q: It's my impression, from being married to a lady who went to Ann Arbor, that in Michigan there are literally class distinctions around those two schools.

TANTON: There are. My wife, Mary Lou, also went to Michigan State. That's where we met, during my last year. She was a year behind me in college.

Q: Well, I'm glad we have a lady introduced into the story for the first time. This is Mary Lou who?

TANTON: Mary Lou Brown was her maiden name. She belonged to Kappa Alpha Theta sorority, located a few blocks from our fraternity. We met at one of those infamous teas that sororities and fraternities had to introduce people. She had tried to avoid going to this one by being absent when they rounded up the girls, but they found her and dragged her along anyway. We both looked equally bored at the event and that was the basis for our finally getting to know each other.

Q: *Were you married right away or is that a later date?*

TANTON: We were married in 1958 between the second and third years of medical school.

Q: *How much of relevance to your later career, especially your public life, occurs in those years, the medical school years?*

TANTON: Well, there was an honorary society in medical school called the Galens, after the famous physician of Roman times. It was for juniors and seniors, and it was not strictly scholastic but more service oriented. I was inducted as a junior, and I became president my senior year. Again, I re-wrote the constitution for the Galens and compiled the first directory of all the people who had belonged to Galens through the years. The Galens used to have a drive at Christmas each year to raise funds for the poor kids in the town. It was a bucket drive on the street. The Galens also put on a caricature-type skit about the faculty every year called the Galens' Smoker, to which all the faculty were invited to see themselves roasted for their foibles. I have vivid recollections of participating in those activities.

Q: *Let me just ask, are there other formative influences during the medical school years?*

TANTON: Yes, several. My wife, Mary Lou, and I were married in the summer of 1958. That's been a signal event in my life because Mary Lou and I have a lot in common when it comes to projects that we've subsequently worked on. We've always worked on them together. We've been blessed with a stable marriage so we haven't had a lot of upheaval that could have taken our minds off other things.

The other thing that made a large impression on me in 1958 was the death of my brother, Tom, who was four years my junior. He was a student at Michigan State University and came down with a blood disease called aplastic anemia, in which the bone marrow shuts down. There wasn't much could be done about that in 1958. He was transferred to University Hospital in Ann Arbor, and died there a month after he became ill. That reinforced my natural tendency to take life seriously and impressed on me

just how short and tenuous our time here is. It also encouraged me to make sure I didn't waste too much time. If you want to get something done, you'd better realize that the clock is running and get on with it.

My interest in natural history also was strongly reinforced at this time. The summer that Mary Lou and I were married, we backpacked the length of Isle Royal in Lake Superior, a distance of 45 miles. We met some people there who introduced us to a group called the Wilderness Society, which was interested in wilderness preservation. We joined, and worked a good deal toward the passage of the Wilderness Act, which was accomplished in 1964 and signed by President Johnson in November of that year.

Q: The year that you made contact with the Wilderness Society people would have been '59-'60?

TANTON: Summer of 1958. Then later on in that year I was introduced to a natural area preservation group called the Michigan Natural Areas Council. They met periodically in southeastern Michigan — were particularly interested in botany and natural features of the landscape. I became secretary of that group and, in the course of that, got into discussions about the future of a very special place called the Huron Mountain Club, which is one of the most spectacular natural areas in the United States. It's located on the north shore of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. There are about seven thousand acres of virgin forest there, with huge white pine and maple trees and so on. I was fortunate to be able to visit that area. At that time, Senator Hart from Michigan was proposing a shoreline drive which would have gone right through the area, which would have opened it up to the public but it would have been degraded in the process. So that was the first of many battles I have participated in that revolved around questions of development and the public interest, and the long term versus the short term.

Q: At what point would you have consciously considered yourself, described yourself, as an environmentalist or whatever term was being used at that time?

TANTON: Well, the term being used then was conservationist, not environmentalist, which came along much later. I don't know when I would have actually used that term but I certainly thought of myself as very protective of the land. Even back in high school, my idea was that man's role was not to multiply and subdue the earth, but to exist in easy partnership with it and to study the natural world. I did not agree with Pope that man was "the proper study of mankind," but found that the study of the physical world that we live in attracted me much more. I was interested in making sure that we kept our hands off part of it so that at

least some areas could stay in good shape, both for natural beauty and museum purposes — for the preservation of genetic diversity, as it is now termed. But I was certainly interested in the preservation of species.

Q: You described your increasingly active involvement in matters of conservation without reference to any powerful single book or readings. You worked your way into it, I take it, rather more than simply reading an essay or book at the time?

TANTON: Yes, I think that's true. I mentioned earlier that I've often had the experience of coming up with thoughts on my own which I later found in the writings of others. But my mind, for reasons I don't understand, (I guess it's my nature and my nurture combined) seems to run in a vein that allows me to think up things on my own. So there was no particular, single, powerful experience but rather I think this preservationist streak in me was the result of my basic nature and the type of upbringing I had.

Q: As I think back on the conservation movement in the late '50s when you were beginning to get active, it tended, certainly if we judge by the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society both, to lack any interest in the population question, a question to which you later, I know, were drawn. Do you recall at this time in the late '50s, as you were beginning to think hard about these questions, when you began to be aware of the population connection to the conservation effort?

TANTON: Well, I began to wonder why all of these conservation problems were cropping up. I became convinced, and I don't recall exactly how, that increasing numbers of people were part of the problem. If we wanted to cut up more virgin valleys in the west, probably the reason was that we needed the timber, and one reason that we needed the timber was because there were more houses being built. With that background I chanced across the publications of the Population Reference Bureau in the late '50s. PRB was one of the main sources of population information at the time. It's actually the oldest demographic organization in the world. I found that many of their bulletins made a great deal of sense to me. So I began working on population matters.

When I moved to Denver, Colorado, for my internship in 1960-61, I worked in the birth control clinic at Denver General Hospital, which was the first such clinic in a publicly supported hospital anywhere in the United States, I believe.

Q: Had that been a consideration of yours in going to Denver or was that an accident?

TANTON: It was an accident, but it seemed to me that one way I could express an interest in the population problem was by trying to help people not have kids that they didn't want to have. Then when we moved back to Ann Arbor in 1961 for three years of residency in ophthalmology, my wife worked actively with Ann Arbor Planned Parenthood. I was busy with my ophthalmology studies so I didn't do much PP work. I did continue my work with the Michigan Natural Areas Council. Then when we moved to Petoskey in the upper part of Michigan in 1964, one of the first things we did was to establish a Planned Parenthood clinic in northern Michigan, the only one in that part of the state. Again, this was an expression of our interest in the population problem.

Q: Could I ask about Petoskey? To an outsider it's an unusual, small place, rather distant from the places where most of us spend our time. What was in your thinking about going to Petoskey? Is that an important decision or was this, at the time, just something that happened?

TANTON: No, it was an important decision. Mary Lou and I were both raised on farms. We'd both decided that we'd rather live in the country and drive for the city's advantages than to live in the city and drive for the country's advantages. I wanted to keep bees, as I had done ever since I'd been in high school, and have a garden, chop our own wood and be close to the land. We did all those things, and still do. So we decided we wanted to live in a small town, and it just happened that at that time there was an opening in Petoskey at a medical clinic, which was another thing that I was interested in. Rather than practicing solo, I wanted to join with a group of doctors to help provide comprehensive medical care. I was about the twenty-fifth physician to join the Burns Clinic, which was one of the very earliest clinics established in this country. It had been there since the early '30s, started by a visionary country doctor who patterned it after the Mayo Clinic which he had visited to see how they had organized things. So we went to Petoskey both because of our interest in natural history and because of wanting to live in a rural area.

Q: So you go to Petoskey, then. The year is...?

TANTON: 1964.

(End of Tape 1, Side A)

(Tape 1, Side B)

Q: This is 1964. The country is on the edge of a turbulent decade. Indeed, John Kennedy had been assassinated the year before. The Vietnam War is beginning. The intervention is one year ago, and the '60s are going to take on a very turbulent character for a lot of people. But you're a young doctor in practice. Would you describe how and in what ways you get involved in public life in the '60s?

TANTON: I was very busy in my medical practice. I was the main ophthalmologist in the area, since the chap whom I had joined was on in years and didn't want to operate anymore. So I had a very large surgical practice. Having been blessed with good health and the sense that we owed something back to the community, both Mary Lou and I plunged into things there before long. One of the first things we did was to set up a Planned Parenthood Clinic in northern Michigan. We worked with the health department to make sure that family planning services were made available to their clientele. We worked in the maternity ward, with the assistance of the obstetricians, to present birth control information to their patients. Women who have just had a child are usually highly motivated not to have any more for a while. I also started working on some social things. There was an evident need in the area for coordination of the social services available to the community. So I compiled the first directory of the social services that were offered in our area and made that available to agencies and so on, to try to help people find the assistance that they needed.

Q: Who are the users? What is the poor community or the social services community in a town like Petoskey?

TANTON: Well, it's a resort community, so there's a lot of seasonal unemployment. It's out of the mainstream of the economy of the state of Michigan, so there tends to be high unemployment in the area. In the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, even now it's not uncommon to find seasonal rates of 20-25%. So there's a large population that depends on welfare services for at least part of their subsistence. We wanted to find which agencies provided what and pull it all together in one place with addresses and phone numbers so that everyone who went searching wouldn't have to start from scratch. We began working on environmental things, too. The Bear River runs right through Petoskey. There's a good deal of public land along it, dating back to the time when there were dams on the river. The relics of these dams were still there. So I organized the effort to take out some of the dams. We ended up wading in the river, pulling out old tires, planting trees and in general trying to focus the community's attention on what would have been a wonderful resource in most urban areas, but wasn't

much appreciated up here because so much of the surrounding area was still nice and, as yet, unsullied. That project went on during the mid- and on into the late 1960s. Also during the late 1960s, I began to take some courses at the University of Michigan Biological Field Station, their summer school, located about twenty miles away from us. I took courses in freshwater algae, the taxonomy of flowering plants, ornithology, and the glacial geology of the area. I did this on my days off during the summer time. The course ran all day, one day a week, making this possible. This freshened up and expanded my basic stock of biological and geologic knowledge, which has helped me out a good deal through the years.

Q: Now your description so far is of an extremely active life, but devoted to your area, a part of Michigan. At some point, (I don't want to rush you through a story) but at some point you began to act on the national stage.

TANTON: Well, I had a state-level stage before that. My activity on the natural areas scene led to my appointment by Governor Milliken to the Michigan Wilderness and Natural Areas Council. The Federal Wilderness Act had passed in 1964 and that stimulated a great deal of effort in states and regions around the country to protect locally significant areas that might not be covered by the Federal Wilderness Act. This, in a way, was an outgrowth of my work with Michigan Natural Areas Council. Some of the other people who worked on the council also were "promoted," so to speak, to serve on this statewide board. We worked for a number of years and, on field trips, toured the fine natural areas of the state and, through an administrative procedure, got many of them set aside to be protected from development. Then toward the tail end of the '60s, Paul Ehrlich published his book, *The Population Bomb*. With all the interest I had developed in population by this time, I was very much taken with his book. I bought many copies of it to distribute, and read it several times myself. One outgrowth of that book, the organization called Zero Population Growth, was formed at the very tail end of 1968, and as soon as I learned about it, I joined, becoming one of the first members. Then in the early 1970s, pursuing my population interest and a membership I'd taken out in the Sierra Club, I was asked to sit on a regional Sierra Club planning committee. I recall very well meeting at the Morton Arboretum in Chicago. One of the chaps who was there, Richard Cellarius, was active in the national Sierra Club volunteer structure, and he suggested me for the Club's National Population Committee, to which I was appointed. So I was beginning to make the transitions from just working on local projects to some state-level ones, and then working on some national issues.

Q: I'm interested that you mention the Sierra Club having a national committee on population. It was my memory that the Sierra Club was quite

divided on that question, quite uncertain as to whether it belonged on their agenda.

TANTON: I think that's true. However, enabling resolutions were passed. I believe it was in the late 1960s that the Sierra Club recognized that population growth was a part of the conservation problem that they faced. One of the people on that population committee was a chap by the name of George Trichel, who was a geographer at San Francisco State University and a wonderful chap, widely traveled. He'd contracted polio when he was in Kenya as a child, was paralyzed in both legs, and got around with Canadian crutches. George, as it happened, was on the national board of Zero Population Growth, and although I was already a member, I'd never come to the notice of anyone there. So after I had been promoted to the chairmanship of the Sierra Club population committee, I was nominated by George for election to the national board of Zero Population Growth. That happened in April, 1973. I subsequently was elected national president of Zero Population Growth in 1975 and served until 1977.

I might back up at this point to a couple of other things that happened, one of which was the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, appointed by President Nixon. I believe it was in 1970 or '71. It made its report in '72. I had been giving a number of speeches in the late 1960s on the population problem. When the first Earth Week occurred in April, 1970, I spent a whole week on the road. In the course of a week I gave thirty talks on population growth as part of the conservation problem. It had long been my inclination, when talking about problems, not just to complain about them but to suggest ways in which they might be addressed. So I felt that in my talks I had to examine where population growth came from. I concluded that there were, for instance, women who were having children they didn't want to have — unwanted children. Maybe that problem could be addressed, as we had tried to do through Planned Parenthood. That would be a help. And then there were women who already had large families and who perhaps still wanted more children, but who could be convinced that two, or three, or four was enough, rather than five or six. So that was another group. Then I began to notice the question of immigration as a part of population growth, so I did some studies and found that in the late 1960s, immigration counted for 10-15% of U.S. population growth. I began to wonder about that as a possible category to be looked at to reduce the rate of population growth. I found virtually no one was willing to talk about this! It was a forbidden topic. I tried to get some others to think about it and write about it, but I did not succeed. I finally concluded that if anything was going to happen, I would have to do it myself.

Q: *May I ask — you're looking into matters that would require a library, a*

good library, a nearby university library of some kind. How is it that you get your hands on these materials from Petoskey?

TANTON: Well, I have my own extensive library. I'm an underliner, so I started early buying any book I wanted to read, because I didn't want to get halfway through it and wish I had been able to underline it for reference. So I have acquired a fairly large library. I've never counted, but it probably comes to two or three thousand volumes, plus literally thousands of clippings and articles, all filed by topic. I'm not a bibliophile in the sense that I collect first editions of anything, but perhaps I am in the sense that I like living around books. I like to have things at my fingertips, a good set of resource documents, good dictionaries, encyclopedias, and things like that.

Q: Is there someone you're talking to, constantly, there in Petoskey, or is this, as it sounds, pretty much a autodidactic experience? You're teaching yourself from reading? You have Mary Lou, but you have not mentioned a guru or a figure with whom you constantly touch base.

TANTON: Well, I guess a lot of it was autodidactic but I did, early on, run into some people who influenced me a lot. For instance, Garrett Hardin was on the Sierra Club population committee. When I learned that, I wrote to him with great excitement because I'd already run across some of his works. And I'll always recall his response, which was to resign immediately. He said that he was not a committee-type person. His work was writing, and he didn't even realize he was on the committee. I guess he'd been put on some years before. I think that was one of my first letters to Garrett Hardin — of which there have since been many hundreds through the years. We've had an active correspondence. Another happening in this regard was a conference in Chicago, in about June of 1970. It was called COPE, the Congress on Optimum Population and the Environment. I signed up for it, and took along the population literature I'd designed and put it out on the tables there. I ended up, by chance, sitting at a table next to Bill and Elizabeth Paddock. I already knew of the book that Bill and his brother Paul had written entitled *Famine, 1975*, which had been published about ten years earlier. In the course of the meetings in Chicago, I was invited by the Paddocks to a rump session involving most of my heroes at that point — the people whose writings I had come across. Paul Ehrlich was there. Bill Paddock and his brother, Paul, who had written the aforementioned book, were there. Elizabeth Paddock was there. Also present was Willard Wirtz, who was, I believe, Secretary of the Treasury at the time, and had been doing good work on environmental things. Also, Garrett Hardin was present.

Q: *Willard Wirtz? He was Secretary of Labor under John Kennedy and again under Lyndon Johnson. I had not realized that he had a population interest.*

TANTON: He did. And let's see, Stuart Udall was also there.

Q: *Marvelous group.*

TANTON: I'll always recall it. Hubert Humphrey came to address the general meeting. He had the misfortune to show up wearing his alligator shoes! [Laughter]

By this time, my medical practice was growing and getting substantially bigger. I had an associate by now, but I was still spending a great deal of time on these outside matters. I had built up my knowledge of natural history by taking courses at the U. of M. Biological Station. I'd gone beyond just local concerns, working now at the state level. After working on the state level for a few years, I had to drop these concerns as I went on to some national ones. We mentioned that I had discovered immigration as part of population growth in the late 1960s. I had actually begun writing to the national ZPG leadership in 1971 or 1972 before I went on the board, trying to call this to their attention and, as was common then, most people hadn't even noticed the phenomenon. And when they did notice it, they felt very uncomfortable about it and unable to deal with it. When I went on the national board in '73, I suggested that we take up the immigration topic and was invited to chair an immigration study committee, which I did. We produced two monographs on the role of immigration in the population growth of the United States — one that detailed the numbers, a second that made policy suggestions. For instance, such things as better control of the borders and better control of visas. We questioned whether or not family unification was a proper basis for an immigration policy. ZPG actually hired a staff person, Melanie Wirkin, who ran this program for a while. But as president I didn't feel that I should try to push my own agenda too much. I felt I was supposed to run the organization as a whole. It became apparent by the end of my term in 1977 that ZPG would never make the transition to doing very much on immigration, and in fact, it does not to this day. The ZPGers were unable to make the conceptual leap. It was great fun working on the population problem as long as we could flagellate ourselves for being bad people by having too many children. But then the birth rate fell precipitately during the 1970s, at the same time that the immigration rate was going up. Even though numbers of people was the problem that had drawn the ZPG folks together, they were unable to bring themselves to say, "Well, I guess we have to work on the immigration question now." So the year of 1978 was a year off for me. I was still on the ZPG board and went to the meetings but was no

longer president. I began to realize that if something was going to be done on this problem, we'd probably have to start a new national organization that would focus just on the immigration question and try to become expert on all of the aspects of immigration that might come up. That had been one of ZPG's complaints about taking it on. They felt free to speak on the population dimensions, but when it got into labor policy or border policy or education policy, they felt that their title gave them no claim to expertise in these areas.

Q: You said 1978 was a year in which you somewhat throttled back from your work at ZPG. You still live in Petoskey. You probably hadn't dropped out of all your Petoskey activities. What's going on there in your after hours?

TANTON: In the early 1970s large scale second-home development began to work its way toward northern Michigan. I had already helped found the local Audubon Society in the late '60s, and had passed the leadership of that group on. I had also helped put together the local chapter of the Sierra Club. One of the first development proposals was to dam one of our local rivers, the Maple River, to provide a pond around which a great many houses were to be situated. This is the only instance I can recall in which I've seen a problem and been able to pass it off to another person to work on. There was a wonderful chap there, retired fellow, by the name, believe it or not, of Rip VanWinkle. [Laughter] VanWinkle was his last name. Rip was obviously his nickname. Rip got very excited about the dam. He was a trout fisherman. We worked hard and eventually prevented the dam from being put in.

About this time, twenty miles away, in the community of Charlevoix, another proposal for a dam came up. This was to make a four hundred acre lake around which about a thousand houses were to be situated. And this, again, on a wonderful little trout stream called Monroe Creek. Well, we fought the permit for that dam all the way to the Department of Natural Resources Board and lost. And as I drove home that night from the meeting in Lansing, it became clear that this was one of those "fish or cut bait" situations. I had already read Professor Joseph Sax's book, published in the late 1960s, called *Defending the Environment*, learning about the ways in which the courts could be used to further environmental goals. And I had also helped to set up a foundation in Michigan to fund environmental lawsuits called the Michigan Environmental Protection Foundation. So after being home for a day or so, I called one of my attorney friends, Peter Steketee, with whom I'd worked with on the MEPPF, and asked him what it might cost to file a lawsuit to challenge this dam permit in the courts. Peter said he thought maybe four or five thousand dollars. This was the type of case where we had to file a suit very quickly to get an injunction to prevent work from starting or contracts from being let, which would have

increased our liability. I figured that I could probably raise that much money, but, if not, I could probably pay it myself and survive okay. Four or five thousand dollars does not sound like a lot of money these days, but when I started at the Burns Clinic, I made \$16,000 my first year there. So those were significant dollars back then. Peter and I worked through the weekend and got this suit together and filed the thing about four or five days after the permit had been issued. It was one of the very first environmental lawsuits ever filed under Michigan's new landmark Environmental Protection Act, which Professor Sax had drafted. Well, the trial was a celebrated cause, both locally and statewide, with a great deal of newspaper publicity — not just about the trial, but also about the whole question of growth coming to northern Michigan and whether or not we could do anything to control it. Our area, then, had very little in the way of zoning controls.

One of the things that came out of the Monroe Creek suit — and two subsequent, similar ones I filed — was good solid zoning ordinances and a much increased awareness of where the community stood in terms of development. We ultimately lost that suit but won the issue because it turned out our contention that there was not enough water in the stream to fill the dam was true, and the developer folded his tent and went away. So we actually won. That was one of my first introductions to the use of the courts, with which I've since been involved many times, and also to foundations and fundraising. As it turned out, the suit actually cost about \$30,000, but we had extremely good luck in raising money, largely from the summer people in the area. I guess they were mostly protecting their own backyards, but they showed a willingness to throw money into the pot to protect our area. So a little light bulb went on there: we could raise money on these issues. How could we best use that fact?

Before the Monroe Creek suit was over, another large scale development proposal surfaced in an adjacent community. Again, it had some of the same sort of considerations about water quality. I got several other people to work with me on this one. We thought there was good fundraising potential in this area, too. I was beginning to develop one of my basic principles, which is to always follow up on leads. One thing leads to another, just as my population work started out in Michigan and led to that meeting at the Morton Arboretum, which introduced me to a fellow who got me on the Sierra Club population committee, which in turn introduced me to people that led to the ZPG board. If I'd opted out at any one of these points or decided not to follow the lead, we wouldn't be talking here today. So with these lawsuits, one thing led to another. With a group that now numbered, with co-plaintiffs, about twenty people, we filed the Birchwood Farms suit [actually *Irish v. Green*] against this second development. In that case we actually won and substantially modified the nature of the development. We had them put in environmental controls, forced them to

put in central water, provide for a central sewer if it was needed, change the highway plan, and so on. Then, before Birchwood was over, yet another development proposal came along, and so we did the same thing again in the Cedar Cove suit. We lost that suit, but in the negotiations to prevent an appeal, won basically all of the points that we wanted. I mention all this just to say that we decided that we could only do this sort of essentially negative legal action only so long. Fortunately, we were in a boom period in Petoskey, and we could file these suits and not really put people out of work. There was more than enough work to keep the contractors going.

We decided that this was not really a positive or productive approach, but we had learned that many people would support preservation of the area. So we decided to start a local land conservancy as a follow-up effort. I had, by this time, through my work with the Michigan Natural Areas Council, learned a lot about preservation efforts. In the early 60s, I learned about a national group called the Nature Conservancy, our main national land preservation organization. I joined it and became a life member. I had thus acquired the background knowledge of how a local land conservancy could be set up. We recruited some of the leading lights of the community and launched this group called the Little Traverse Conservancy. It has been one of the most successful environmental organizations in the area and has won national awards. It's grown to the point where, through purchase or donation, it has preserved over 2,000 acres. We now have 1,600 members. We had a project two years ago that cost about \$1,400,000 to complete. We've just done another one that cost about \$800,000. I've now been able to drop out of the LTC for the most part, passing it on to other people. All this was one of the consequences of being involved in these lawsuits and knowing through my reading and association that it was possible. I learned about fundraising through this, and about direct mail, because we did some of each. I also learned something about environmental law and the establishment of foundations.

Q: You're describing a story of very substantial labors and successes, many successes. It's only in retrospect that it appears that this is training ground for larger labors to come. You are blocking development here and there, you are suing here and there, you're active, but you don't describe controversy. Weren't you attacked? Didn't you become, in some circles, a kind of a busybody, or at least some kind of a radical, local doctor? What is your reputation? What is the degree of conflict that's associated with the role that you had taken on?

TANTON: Well, there was a lot of conflict, and I was a very controversial person. I got angry, unsigned letters in the mail, and phone calls in the middle of night that had only heavy breathing on the other end of the line. [Laughter]

Q: *And not particularly friendly?*

TANTON: Mary Lou and I were both disturbed by this but able to put up with it. I guess we felt we had a responsibility. This idea of responsibility is one of the things that I got out of my early training. I got it from my parents and from the fairly religious background and experience I had as a grade school kid and in early high school. I felt that I had some duties to discharge. I was in a unusual position in the community because there were so few ophthalmologists around that I couldn't really be boycotted economically. [Laughter] And that was very important. I saw many examples, in projects I worked on, of businessmen who wouldn't sign a petition — who wouldn't take a stand — because they were afraid that the local folks would take their business elsewhere. Thanks to being in this clinic set-up where we drew patients from several hundred miles away, people from out of town wouldn't even know what I was doing, so they would still come to me for their eye care. If people locally decided they were going to make their point by not going to Tanton, there was still a long waiting list. I was unreachable that way. I felt that this not only gave me a chance to do this work, but gave me an obligation to do it, because a lot of other people were not so favorably situated. But controversy has its uses, and it got a lot of ink in the paper. And, as I say, we reached many people who were sitting on the sidelines, feeling the same way, but not knowing what to do or how to do it. When we filed the lawsuits, giving them a chance to become co-plaintiffs, a lot of them screwed their courage up to do so, and many others contributed heavily.

(End of Tape 1, Side B)

Q: You're describing a very busy life. You're an activist environmentally, a doctor, but also a family man, married. There must have been children coming along. What comments would you make about that aspect of your life?

TANTON: We had two daughters. Our eldest, Laura, was born at Denver General Hospital, where I interned, in 1961 just before we left. Then our younger daughter, Jane, was born four years later in Petoskey, in 1965. I mentioned earlier my good fortune in having met Mary Lou, and I think the truth of the matter is that I probably was not as good a father as I might have been in terms of spending time with our kids. Fortunately, Mary Lou was very good with the youngsters and was a good and nurturing parent. So I'm sure that the bulk of the burden of raising the children fell on her.

We have always done a great deal of traveling. When I finished my residency in 1964, it was common for a doctor to be deeply in debt. Most of my friends jumped immediately into a practice. We fortunately had little debt; I worked each year in medical school and Mary Lou taught school. So we decided to take two months off. Since we were leaving behind all our responsibilities in Ann Arbor, and we had not yet assumed new ones in Petoskey, this seemed like a hiatus in our life the likes of which we would not see again. That has proved to be the case. We purchased a camping van, and I worked in an ophthalmologist's office for two weeks to grubstake us. Then we took off and spent seven weeks in the western part of the United States. We floated the Middle Fork of the Salmon River with a fellow who was the head of the American White Water Association, which was one of the groups I had joined. We hiked in the Glacier Park area with an ophthalmologist friend who lived in Kalispell, Montana. I climbed Mount Ranier in Washington state. We camped out on the wilderness beach in Olympia National Park. It was a terrific time, all recorded in the family journal we keep on all of our trips.

Then after settling down in Petoskey, on several occasions we took the unusual step of taking time off without pay, again to travel. In 1969 we took a five-week trip through the southwest, during which we floated the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, visited Carlsbad Caverns, and camped out in the Chiricahua mountains of southeast Arizona. In 1971 we took a train trip across Canada, starting in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, stopping off at Jasper, and then going on to Prince Rupert. From there we took a boat up the Inside Passage to Juneau, rented a pick-up camper at Haines, and took a trip up to McKinley National Park and Fairbanks. We then flew to visit a friend in Nome, where we spent a week on the tundra. So we've done a lot of traveling.

I remember a phrase from Rudyard Kipling that I read when we were in Singapore in 1986 at the time of the 50th anniversary of his death. He

wrote, "What do they know of England, who only England know?" I think that our travel has helped us understand the outside world and has informed and modified the stands we've taken on things. Everywhere we went we tended to focus on the environmental and population consequences of what we saw. We reassessed what we were doing and made plans for our future work.

Q: This is the late seventies. I think we mentioned the year 1979. That happens to be a year in which your career and the career of young Roger Conner certainly connected in important ways. How does a Roger Conner come into your life?

TANTON: I met Roger during the Earth Day celebrations in 1970. He was in law school in Ann Arbor at that time. He was a student of Joseph Sax, mentioned earlier as the author of *Defending the Environment*. When Earth Week came along, Roger helped organize Earth Week in Ann Arbor, the first one held in the United States. I believe Roger and I met at that time but I don't have any clear recollection on that point. Perhaps he does. After Roger finished law school, having been heavily involved in environmental questions and having been appointed to the Michigan Air Pollution Control Commission by Governor Milliken, he was hired as the second executive director of a group called the West Michigan Environmental Action Council headquartered in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Roger and I worked on some things through WMEAC. He knew of the lawsuits I had filed, because the attorney who managed them was Peter Steketee from Grand Rapids, a WMEAC volunteer.

When I began to get the idea in early 1978, or perhaps at the tail end of 1977, of setting up a new organization to work on immigration questions, I wondered who might head it. I thought about Roger at that time, believing Roger had a great deal of potential. He's about ten or twelve years younger than I am. His career had been pretty much confined to Michigan up to this time, and I wondered if he might benefit from moving on to the national board of some organization. ZPG suggested itself. I was on the ZPG board at that time, and of course, I was always trying to sell people on the idea that population was part of the conservation problem. Roger was receptive to that idea. So we invited him to join the national board of Zero Population Growth. I believe the first meeting that we attended together also intersected your career, Otis, because it was in Rochester, New York.

Q: I remember that.

TANTON: Roger and I piled into our camper-van and drove across country to Rochester to the ZPG meeting. I think that would have been in the fall

of 1974, because I went on the board in '73 at the national meeting in Boston. I believe it would have been in '74 that you were invited to be a speaker, having recommended yourself by writing some articles in the *Center Magazine* on immigration.

Q: I think, in fact, I had not written on immigration at that time. They invited me to talk on planning, a subject on which I had written. I remember giving a talk on planning which was probably a very poor talk and not very well received.

TANTON: Well, at least we had the chance to meet you so that when I later saw your articles on immigration in *Center Magazine*, we knew a little bit about each other. Actually, I guess, there was a little subterfuge on my part in getting Roger on the ZPG national board. I thought it would benefit him and enlarge his view of population matters. But it also gave him a little taste of the larger world out there and would help set the stage for him to move beyond the local Grand Rapids scene. We saw a lot more of each other after that. We went on some natural history-type trips together in northern Michigan. Then in 1978 when I decided to go ahead and set up the organization FAIR, I took two steps. First, I talked to Jay Harris, a philanthropist who had preceded me as president of Zero Population Growth. He was president from '73, when I went on the board, until '75. I was elected president after his term was up, and he stayed on the board. Jay was a tremendous worker and very much dedicated to the population question. He also believed in the immigration question, and when ZPG failed to take it on, agreed that we needed to set up a new group to do so. I remember telling him my plans and asking if he would put up the money to start the thing off. Jay said he would think about it. Several weeks later (this is 1978) I received a hand-written letter from him pledging \$100,000 toward the launching of FAIR. He said he would give us \$25,000 the first and second years, and then \$5,000 less each year for five years, which if you add it up, comes to \$100,000. I remember that he finished his letter with the statement that the letter was legal tender and binding on his estate, and he signed it Jay Harris, L.S. I'd never seen those initials before. They stand for "legal signature." So he was a sophisticated and accomplished philanthropist. He knew that we needed more than just one year's funding, but he also knew that he shouldn't support it forever. He gave us the money to get started — and lots of encouragement — but said that we'd eventually have to go elsewhere to find other funds.

With that guarantee in place, I was then able to do the second thing and approach Roger Conner. He probably remembers a bit more vividly than I do his being invited to Petoskey. We sat out on our deck overlooking the valley below and the bay and hills beyond and talked about the big picture in the long run.

Q: *He describes it as you taking him to the mountain top, I believe.*

TANTON: We could look down over those bee hives that had played such an important part in my life. Then we talked about matters of population and matters of immigration, how we weren't addressing the latter on the ZPG board, and whether a new organization was needed. We both agreed it was, and that we needed to find someone to head this organization up.

Q: *And there were only the two of you there?*

TANTON: Right. This was a logical step in Roger's life. He'd spent five years at the Action Council, and taken it about as far as it could go. He wasn't going to stay there for life. He needed a chance to move on. So here was a new endeavor, one that involved playing on the national scene rather than just on the local one. Roger thought it over and agreed to take on the job of launching FAIR. I think that pretty much brings us up to the first part of 1979 when FAIR was actually started.

Q: *It's at this point that the FAIR story begins, and yet it is my impression that throughout the FAIR years, which we will get into in a moment, you're not simply a doctor who does immigration reform in his spare time. You've got a number of other things you do, and that what you are up to, a lot of things your close friends aren't fully aware of. This might be a good time to stretch across the eighties the other things that you're involved in before we turn and concentrate on the FAIR episode.*

TANTON: Okay. I mentioned before that I had a moderately religious background. I've often been struck, as I look back on many of the projects that I've worked on, how this has also been true of many of the people with whom I've worked, even though most of them are not particularly churchied at the present time. You, for instance, Otis: your father was a minister, and you came out of the same sort of background. Roger did too. I've often puzzled about why it is that the ideas of social responsibility, of persistence and self-discipline, tend to come out of that sort of background. They have served us well as we've gotten to be adults. Our family attends the Presbyterian Church in Petoskey, where we have been fortunate to have ministers with good minds, men of broad scope who were interested in the world around them.

One of the projects I helped start, and one of the highlights of my life, has been a Thursday morning breakfast group that meets weekly at 7:00 a.m. at the church to talk about all sorts of social, political, economic, philosophical, religious, and spiritual issues. We have for a number of years gone through the Foreign Policy Association's Great Decisions series each

spring. The Association puts out a book that has essays on eight different foreign policy topics. We divvy those up and each present on one of them. This provides a good chance to talk about something that's larger than our own local, individual lives. Those are terrific discussions.

In that same vein, there was another group of people who were interested in further exploring the world of ideas, and so we set up a section of the Great Books Foundation Program. For several years now we've been working our way gradually through their materials. We meet for five sessions in the spring and five again in the fall, and read Dewey or Mill or Locke, or whatever the selections might be. This has been a great thing too, and a high point in our lives — Mary Lou's and mine.

Q: The Great Books Program, was that administered through Bob Hutchins' center in Montecito or some other way?

TANTON: Well, there's actually a Great Books Foundation in Chicago. Mortimer Adler was one of the ones who, along with Hutchins, started that whole project. They originally read complete works from Sophocles and so on. This has now been abridged for the modern, busier, person. The Foundation produces paperbacks now with selections from larger works, though some shorter items are run in their entirety. This program has exposed me to a part of life that I largely missed as a chemistry and pre-med major at Michigan State, or as a student at the high school I attended in rural Michigan.

We've also started, in recent years, courses in French and German. I became interested in trying to refurbish the German that I had taken in college. My mother spoke German. I'm a great believer in the discipline of learning a language. We finally located a system of tapes and transcriptions that seem to work very well. We have had, for several years now, active groups in Petoskey that meet over lunch to read and speak the language of their choice. I still hope to get a Spanish language group started. These are a few of the activities we've helped to start.

My hobbies through the years have been mostly low key things like beekeeping. I started that in high school and have kept bees for the twenty-five years that we've been in Petoskey. These are all things with which my wife, Mary Lou, has been involved. We raise our own queen bees and have a big party the last weekend in August every year when a hundred or so people come over to help take the honey off and generally have a good time. We garden a lot and split a lot of our own firewood, about ten to fifteen face cords a year. As Thoreau said, "He who splits his own wood is twice warmed." In general our hobbies have been things that don't require much money. That's one reason we've been able to spend time and money on these other activities, because we've not had a lot of demands on our resources for boats, second homes, airplanes and that sort of thing.

Another important aspect of our lives is trying to stay in reasonable physical shape. I ran up to 1,000 miles a year for many years, until I started to have some trouble with my knees. I actually ran a marathon once, which was quite an experience. For years I've followed a routine of calisthenics, sit-ups, push-ups, chin-ups, things of that nature, which fit together with trying to lead a fairly vigorous life. There is a group of fellows from our area that for nearly twenty years has gone canoeing in Canada every spring. We often take a week or ten days for white water canoeing, fishing, and camping. These trips have been another very nice part of my life. They get one into the outback, and give one an appreciation for being alone and for being where it's quiet, in a place where you can see the stars at night.

As I think back about some of the principles that I have followed, these have, I think, developed out of projects I've undertaken, rather than preceded them. In the public sphere, I've always tried to concentrate on issues that were causes rather than simply effects. Hence in the conservation movement, one asks the question: "What caused the need for all of this work?" That was the questioning that led me to the population problem, which I saw as one of the ultimate causes, one which, if it could be modified, would then help a great many things downstream. I also think that persistence is a very important quality. I never considered myself to be particularly bright. I have an average mind, but as I look back in on myself, and try to be objective, one thing I have been is very, very persistent. For instance, I have worked at the population problem thirty years now, since the late 1950s. If one hangs in there over a long period of time, it's amazing what can be achieved, especially if the opposition is not as persistent.

Another important trait that's enabled me to do things that have brought me a lot of public criticism is my ability to rely on my own good opinion of myself, rather than seek the good opinion of others. If one wants to be liked and well thought of, that's a very severe restriction. If you're able to set your own standards and decide when you've met them, then you can proceed and not worry too much about public opinion. These are some of the ideas that have driven or nourished me through these years.

Q: I believe there was one development in your life that you have not referred to but which is relatively widely known. You spoke much earlier of the difficulty you had writing, I believe it was the Rhodes scholarship application, but you wrote something that was published and that won a prize. You haven't talked about writing since you had such a hard time with it, but apparently you got over that hurdle.

TANTON: Well, I have literally dozens of file drawers now full of memos and letters and things of that nature that I've written. But I have never

been a writer of books like yourself — long scholarly pieces that required a lot of cross-checking and footnoting. I guess most of the writing I've done has been of the opinion variety. But you're right; when I got started on the immigration question in the late sixties and began to collect material on it, I tried a number of times to find people who could take all this material and write it up and make something out of it. But I never succeeded in finding anyone. I finally concluded that I would have to try to do it myself, as best I could. One day I chanced to look in *Science* magazine and saw an ad for a conference to be held at the Woodlands, outside of Houston, Texas, on the topic of "Limits to Growth." It was inspired by Dennis and Donella Meadows' book of that title, which had been read by a Texas oilman, George Mitchell, then one of the wealthiest men in America. He was much taken with the book's theme and decided to sponsor a series of five biennial conferences on the general topic of the limits to growth. Part of the come-on was an essay contest, with a first prize of \$10,000. The second prize was \$5,000, the third was \$3,000, and the fourth was \$1,000. Well, that was quite a lot of money in 1975! According to the announcement in *Science*, contestants were to submit abstracts of their proposed articles, on the basis of which the judges would pick twelve or fifteen people to prepare final essays. I needed to do this anyway, so I wrote up an abstract and sent it in. To my great surprise and delight, I was selected as one of the finalists. So then I had a deadline. I wrote up a draft, but as I recall very well, we were going on another of our trips that summer to Cape Breton Island. When we took the ferry boat to the island, the girls became quite sick. So when we got to the Milford Lodge where we were going to stay (and where, incidentally, the biography of Churchill's mother, Jenny, had been written) we took a couple of extra days for them to recover. I'd brought along the final draft of my paper, so I spent those two days at the lodge putting it into final form, and then sent it back home for final typing and submission to the Mitchell competition. Well, it won third prize! One of the other contestants was the editor of the British journal, *Ecology*— I believe that was the name of it.

Q: *Or the Ecologist?*

TANTON: The *Ecologist*, that was it. He liked my paper, and printed it as the cover article in his journal. That was in 1975. So now at last I had my ideas on immigration down on paper, and they had the imprimatur of a fairly well-known journal. I now had a reprint I could hand out, rather than just talking about the issue. So this contest was actually a key step in the formation of FAIR.

Along about that time several other things happened. In the mid-'70s, Congressman James Scheuer from New York, who was quite interested in population matters, chaired a Select Committee on Population.

He held hearings over a number of years. I testified at one of them. Michael Teitelbaum, with whom we've since worked, was staff director of the committee. I can recall clearly raising the immigration question with this group. They had never really thought much about immigration as part of population growth.

Q: You had mentioned earlier the population commission that Nixon appointed, headed by Rockefeller, but you didn't have time to indicate how and in what way it touched the immigration question.

TANTON: There was a chapter in the report of the commission, number 11 or 13, as I recall, that dealt with immigration. The commission noted, actually for one of the first times, immigration's role in population growth in the United States. However, this caused a great deal of division on the commission. They were unable to come to any conclusions or recommendations about immigration policy other than to say that it should be left as it was. But that was still an important milestone.

Then Jimmy Carter was elected President in 1976, and one of the early things that he did was to appoint the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy, or SCIRP, on which Romano Mazzoli and Alan Simpson served, and where they got their basic education on the immigration question. So there was a great deal of ferment at this time. The immigration question was starting to come to a head.

If you think about the stages in the development of an idea, initially there's a period which Roger characterizes as "No talk, no do." Then comes a stage where it's "Talk, no do." We were still in the "Talk, no do" stage in the early 1980s. By then, immigration problems had been researched enough and had penetrated the public consciousness sufficiently so that Congress was getting set to act. It was just at this time that FAIR fortuitously came on the scene. Our timing was quite good. We weren't in a position to create a movement with our puny forces, but we were able to help shape what was already there. Society was ready to have an organization like FAIR to try to help mold the debate that came along in the 1980s. Incidentally, the third stage in an idea is "No talk, do," when the debate is over and consensus has been arrived at. We're still not there!

Q: In your education, your on-going education, in particular on the immigration question, you've mentioned a number of ways that you came to develop your own comprehensive view of it. You've not mentioned education in history. I believe you took no history as a formal part of your education, or very little, and yet it's my impression that at some point you began to read some history, at least on the immigration question.

TANTON: That's right. One of the articles that influenced me most was by Kingsley Davis. It was, I believe, in the September, 1974, issue of *Scientific American*. Davis is a demographer, and in this article he looked at migration as a human phenomenon going back as far as we have any recorded history, back to the time of the pictographs and petroglyphs of the caves in France. He ended up concluding that we were coming to the end of the age of massive migration, because few lands wanted more people, and there were no more vacant continents. This was a very important article. I also read Cecil Woodham Smith's volume, *The Great Hunger*, about the migrations that came out of Ireland at the time of the potato famine. Those are just two books that come to mind. But it was hard to find writing on contemporary migration problems. I knew something about the great dislocations of people that took place in India and Pakistan and Bangladesh at the time of the partition.

Q: You must have very soon become aware, as you began to talk publicly on this question, that the American people had an inherited history of immigration which was going to become a problem for work on immigration policy?

TANTON: Right. I also read *Strangers In the Land*, John Higham's book, *North From Mexico* by Carey McWilliams, and so on. In the early stages, back in my ZPG days, I ran into Dr. Charles Keely, an immigration scholar. At the time he was, I believe, at the Population Council in New York. Charlie actually gave some advice to our ZPG Immigration Committee, in an attempt to help keep us on the straight and narrow. This was quite helpful from that standpoint, but I doubt that Charlie now feels that he succeeded! He came all the way to Cincinnati for one of our ZPG meetings.

(End of tape 2, side A)

Q: Well, the time seemed fortuitous for this idea of yours. I take it you really developed this idea by yourself, with you and your wife undoubtedly talking. But one might observe that you were a busy doctor in the northern reaches of Michigan. An organization of the sort that you're discussing needed to have an office and be centered in Washington, D.C. That's far away. That's in an arena that you don't know intimately. So how did you manage this when you seemed to be, if not completely unprepared, not the most likely person for this?

TANTON: As with many of the things I've done, I've just plunged in and learned to swim once in the water. Probably that's good. I remember very well that first lawsuit that I undertook. The attorney estimated it might cost \$5,000, which I could have paid myself if need be. We ended up

spending \$30,000, which we ultimately succeeded in raising. But if I'd known at the outset it was going to cost \$30,000, I'm not so sure I would have gone ahead, as that amount was beyond my means. We had just seen *Measure For Measure* at the Shakespeare Festival at Stratford, Ontario, from which I remember this relevant quote: "Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win, by fearing to attempt." So I guess maybe we were a bit naive, but we went ahead anyway.

But I did know, actually, a fair amount about what might be required. First of all, I knew we needed a lead person, and we had been able to find Roger Conner. Secondly, that money was required. Here we had been able to arrange for a nice start-up pot from Jay Harris. And I also knew something about direct mail from my ZPG days, because ZPG was a direct-mail organization. That experience was applicable. I knew a fair amount about lobbying, as did Roger, since we had lobbyists at ZPG. I had learned quite a bit about organizational structures and politics. But one of the things that was perhaps most helpful was an article by Bernard in *International Migration* [Vol. XIII, No. 1/2, 1975] published by ICEM, the Intergovernmental Committee on European Migration. I had read the article in the early '70s and had re-read it several times. Bernard chronicled the steps taken to set up the displaced persons lobby in the late '40s and early '50s. He told how they found the necessary people and money, put out publications, got set to do the lobbying, dealt with the press and grass roots, and the necessary sequencing of these efforts. It was a 'cookbook' for setting up an organization. So we knew pretty well what all the different pieces of the puzzle were. And while we weren't perhaps the ideal persons to undertake this, we plunged in and learned as we went along.

Q: I can see that you weren't what one would call unprepared, entirely unprepared, for this. Still it is quite an enterprise. What were the first steps that you took back in 1979?

TANTON: Well, they were actually taken in 1978, to get ready for 1979. We got our tax ruling from the IRS in about August of 1978. We had arranged for some other contributions before that. One of the early contributions went to the ZPG Foundation and was subsequently re-donated to us when we finally got our IRS ruling. But a first step was simply finding an office. We located space in a basement on New Hampshire Avenue, N.W., that Roger moved into. He had just arrived in Washington with all his worldly goods in his car. He didn't even have a place to stay! Bill and Liz Paddock, early supporters whom I had gotten to know on the ZPG board (on which Bill served), had a house in Georgetown. They let Roger live there for several months during the early part of 1979, as they were out of town. So that got him in out of the wind and rain, and cut our

expenses quite a bit. Roger hired a secretary, so then there were two! After a little while, Gary Imhoff, a writer, was, I believe, the next person hired. The came Barnaby Zoll, who was going to night law school at that time. He came on to do some lobbying. Things grew from there.

Q: Now, you obviously can hire staff but they must have strategic direction, and the organization can't just be John Tanton and a bunch of Washington staff. You need to have friends. So you went about gathering them. I wonder if you would address your thoughts as to how you picked people who would share responsibility with you.

TANTON: I don't remember the exact sequence now in which people joined me on the board, but certainly Sherry Barnes was one of the very first people. Sherry had served with me on the ZPG executive committee, and I knew her quite well. She worked for Planned Parenthood in New York and was a free thinker who was able to deal with topics like immigration, unlike some of our other colleagues at ZPG. So she was key. Then there was Bill Paddock, who had been on the board at ZPG. He had left it by that time, but he understood our point of view. So that made three of us. You, yourself, were one of the original five board members, which is what we operated with for several years. I can remember well calling you, out in Santa Barbara, wondering whether I'd get the phone hung up on me or not, but broaching the subject. You agreed to come and test the waters and see what we were like. Let's see, the fifth person in that original group was Sidney Swensrud, the former chairman of Gulf Oil. Sherry knew Mr. Swensrud from his work at International Planned Parenthood and the Association for Voluntary Sterilization, and she thought he might be interested. So she swallowed hard and broached the topic to him at one point. He was intrigued, and so joined up. The five of us had our first meeting down in the basement there on New Hampshire. As you'll recall, the ceiling was about seven feet. Those were certainly cramped and not very elegant quarters.

One of the other early persons we hired was a writer, because our idea on the sequencing of new positions was that first we needed an administrative structure in place. The initial people hired had to do everything. But then as we got up to speed, we expected gradually to break out the various functions. One of the very early functions had to be a writer, because we needed to get down our beliefs, produce some bulletins and brochures, and start a newsletter. As we hoped to enlist members, we'd, of course, need a newsletter to keep them informed and "on board." So the writer's position was one of the early ones we filled, with Gary Imhoff.

Then, since fund-raising is key to all this, and since we thought that direct mail would be a way to go, we started conversations with a number of

direct mail firms. I recall that we met with Craver, Matthews, and Smith one time. We also met, on the other side of the political spectrum, with Richard Viguerie. Then, strange as it may seem, those two polar opposites actually got together at one time and were going to do a joint proposal for us. But our direct mail never really got off the ground because 1980 was a presidential year, and both of those firms by mid-1979 were caught up in the presidential mail campaigns. We were obviously very small fish in a very big pond, and so got little attention. We did have some other individual donors that came to our aid, so we managed to keep the ship afloat. Our first year, I remember quite clearly, we raised \$174,000.

Q: That was the budget for the first year?

TANTON: That was the amount of money that we raised altogether, right. So that paid the salaries of the three or four people that we had hired, the overhead, and provided some money for other things one needs to do. Our general plan for 1979 had been to put into place the writing function, the fundraising function, find some members, get a field staff going. After all these things were functioning would one be in position to start lobbying, because by then we would have developed some policy positions, would have some members to call on for lobbying pressure and so on. But as often happens, events ran ahead of us because in 1979 a bill was introduced that ultimately became the Refugee Act of 1980. We were certainly not yet strong enough to influence that legislation much, but we couldn't ask for history to back up and wait for us to get ready. The appearance of this bill, combined with some pressure from one of our donors, along about July or August of 1979, saying that we hadn't really done anything yet, and an offer from Jay Harris to supplement his contribution to allow us to hire a lobbyist to work on this bill, is what led us to employ Barnaby Zall as our first lobbyist. So we really did have a baptism by fire — a total immersion. After only a few months, we were forced to jump into what was a very difficult and sensitive issue, for refugee policy is one of the hardest parts of the immigration question.

Q: I see a kind of division in the tasks that organization builders face. There's a machinery side, membership, fund-raising, administration, hiring lobbyists. And there's a message side—getting your message together. Your message as to what the problem is and as to what needs to be done. I would think that the message problem is the most critically important. The other is important too. Would you talk about the formulation of the message in the early days? What difficulties were there, or did it fall in place rather rapidly, the intellectual part? What are we for and what are we against?

TANTON: Well, after I had written my paper for the Mitchell Prize, it was decided to put out a book on the first Limits of Growth Conference, to include the four prize-winning papers. So I was about to have another one of my learning experiences! An editor was hired for the book, and I got my paper back with more red ink on it than I ever recall seeing before.

Q: *We've all had that experience.*

TANTON: Late that year, in December, we were down at my wife's home for Christmas, and I chanced to pick up the *Readers' Digest*. It contained an article on a new writer's manual by Jacques Barzun, called *Simple and Direct*. I bought Barzun's book and found it a tremendous help. I learned a lot about writing from that book, and I subsequently had the chance to meet Barzun. That was a great privilege. With the aid of this book, I redid my paper and, I think, improved it some. It was finally published as chapter 13 in *Alternatives to Growth I*, brought out by Ballanger in 1977. When we started FAIR, we saw the need to put out a basic paper. So our writer, Gary Imhoff, took my article and reworked the whole thing. The result was published as our first immigration paper, called "Rethinking Immigration Policy." I believe you subsequently put out the second booklet in that series, the one on illegal immigration. It was an historian's look back at the early years of this century and the conflict then among progressives and labor unions as to whether they wanted large scale immigration or not. So we did launch, in that first year, a series of publications which we hoped would detail our concerns and positions.

Q: *There are ways that you frame the problem, and then there are choices, surely there are important choices, that you make with regard to the sort of solutions you decide to advocate. Can you remember those choices reasonably well and try to revisit them for us?*

TANTON: Well, we broke the overall topic down originally into categories of legal immigration and illegal immigration. We learned early on that one must capsuleize these things in a few words if one is going to catch the attention of the press and be able to express ideas in sound bites on television and radio. So we said our first goal was to end illegal immigration. We felt that people coming illegally to this country was not satisfactory. It was often hard on them, and we felt if people were going to come, they should come legally and aboveboard and enjoy all of the same rights and protections that the rest of us had. Secondly, we felt that the overall volume of legal immigration needed to be looked at from time to time to make sure it was consistent with other national goals. One other national goal we had in mind, of course, was population policy and the question of how populous we wanted the country to get, and to make sure

immigration policy also fit in with employment policy and so on. So that was the way we expressed our two basic goals.

A little later on, we reformulated it by saying that in immigration policy there are three great questions. The first one is: How many people shall we admit? Most people, even our opponents would, when you'd come right down to it, admit that we needed to have *some* controls. They were not anarchists. Well, once you admit the need for *some* limits, the question is: What should the limits be? So the first question is: How many people should we admit? The second question is: Who gets the slots? There are obviously tens of millions of people in the world who would like to migrate here if they had the opportunity. We can't take them all, so we need some way of deciding who gets in. And then the third question is: How shall we enforce the rules? Do you need better border control? Do you need interior enforcement? Do you need better issuance of visas in the embassies abroad, and things of that nature?

Q: Now, what we've not spoken of is immigration itself. But during these years the numbers and the trends are changing rapidly and historically. How do you recall the numbers and the nature of the problem itself at the borders and at the airports?

TANTON: One of the things that happened in the late '70s which actually occasioned setting up the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy was the increase of illegal immigration into the country. The number of people apprehended trying to cross the borders illegally grew steadily during the '70s and into the early '80s. That was the driving force behind the Commission. But also during those years, thanks to changes in the acts of 1965, it became possible for persons to come in outside the quotas — immediate relatives of people who had migrated earlier, for instance. We began to see an increase in the number of people coming outside the quotas. Unfortunately, now more people come in outside the quota than come under the quota. So there was growth in both legal and illegal numbers. As we looked at the overall immigration problem, it seemed that the first thing that needed to be addressed was the question of illegal immigration. After all, if the rules governing legal immigration were being widely flouted, it didn't make much sense to change the rules if nobody was following them anyway. So what happened was that the Simpson-Rodino Bill of 1986 was largely concerned with illegal immigration. There was an early effort by Senator Simpson to have a comprehensive bill that looked at legal immigration too, but that turned out to be too massive a task. There was also this idea that it was illogical to change the rules if the rules weren't being followed. First, let's figure out how to get the rules enforced! That thinking tended to limit the debate in the early 1980s to the question of how to deal with illegal immigration. Of the three fundamental questions

that I mentioned before — how many come, who comes, and how to enforce the rules — the Simpson-Rodino Bill really focused on the third of those. Everybody pretty much agreed that if we could solve that problem, then we could work our way back upstream and address the other two questions, as we have now come to do. In the late '80s, we are now starting to look at the characteristics of the people who are coming: education, job skills, language ability, and so on.

Q: You're not sure what it will take, what themes will play in the public. You're not sure what allies will come forward. You're not sure at this stage what enemies and opposition will come forward. You can formulate your ideas and your board's ideas, but to some extent you have to see how the thing develops. How did the argument develop and what became FAIR's central strategy? I take it that in 1979 and '80, perhaps into '81, you were just coping with events. The Mariel boat lift comes. The refugee legislation is forced forward. So you're reacting for a while but you obviously wanted to have a larger strategy, and it gets attached to legislation. How do you recall public opinion and how do you recall the arguments shaping up, and then your adoption of a central strategy?

TANTON: All five of the first board members, along with our executive director, came out of the population and environmental movements. The thing that got us all into this in the first place was the very high-level concern in the 1970s about population growth, and the population arguments were the ones we put forth initially. But we found they didn't seem to carry as much weight with others as they did with us. One of the reasons that ZPG didn't want to take the immigration issue on, and the reason that FAIR was founded, was because there were many aspects to this question beyond the population ones. ZPG didn't want to address these — such as the effect of illegal immigration on the disadvantaged in our own country, and on unemployment. As you'll recall, there were some periods of high unemployment in the early '80s. People were coming illegally into the country, and in some measure taking jobs. What was the effect on our own disadvantaged and underclass, as we've come to phrase it now? These types of arguments came to the fore. We set FAIR up specifically to deal with *all* aspects of immigration policy, not just those dealing with population numbers.

Q: Do you recall yourself as expecting some kind of victory over illegal immigration rather quickly, or what was your sense of how long this thing was going to take?

TANTON: Roger and I had read enough migration history when we started to know that this was going to be a very difficult battle. I can recall writing

Sam Ervin, who had been head of the Senate Judiciary Committee when the 1965 bill passed, which instituted the Western Hemisphere numeric ceiling. Up until that time, there had been a ceiling for Eastern Hemisphere countries of 170,000 a year, but none for the Western Hemisphere. This new ceiling was a hotly contested issue, but Ervin had insisted on it because immigration had been growing, and he just had the gut feeling that it might get out of hand. I wrote him congratulating him on his prescience. In reply, he denied having any of that. He said that it just felt like the thing to do, and that the way they'd picked the number 120,000 was that Western Hemisphere immigration was running at about 112,000 that year, so they just sat around the committee room and said, "Well, what sounds good to you?" And somebody said, "120,000," and "How does that sound to you, Sam?" So they said, "Well, 120,000 sounds pretty good." They had no sense of the role of immigration in population growth, or of a population goal as policy for our country.

Sam Ervin also mentioned that immigration was probably the single most sensitive topic that ever came before Congress. In the 1965 Act, I believe, they had well over a hundred different organizations testifying. So we knew that we were, in some measure, getting into a difficult area. When Roger and I decided in '78 to set up FAIR, we made an agreement with each other that we would work at it for five years and see whether it was possible to achieve anything. If it was, fine. If not, we'd cash in the whole thing at that point.

Q: You've got a small organization with a big task, up and running in the early '80s, out-manned and out-gunned, but ambitious, and you've got at least five years of commitment to try to make a difference. Let me just ask: You're back in Petoskey most of the time, but you've got some talents now and some pieces of the puzzle; how do you work with the people? How do you go about using all these people to do the many things you want to do?

TANTON: Well, we decided on quarterly board meetings, and being the compulsive and highly organized person that I am, I early on set up a system of board books for each meeting with very definite agendas. We insisted on reports from the staff, each in his own program area. This forced them to sit down every quarter and write out what it was they had been doing and what they intended to do in the next quarter. These reports were circulated beforehand, and then we'd gather in Washington for a day or two of meetings with the staff.

The board members all brought various skills to this combination. For instance, you, Otis, as an historian, knew a good deal about the background of immigration reform. You'd written on the topic, and so you brought us something from academe and the sensitivity that goes along with that background. Mr. Swensrud was the businessman. He had been

chairman of Gulf Oil Corporation, and was very successful as an investor. Also, I would add, he was rather like my father — a person of many quotations which he could readily throw out. I remember one in particular about taking down the fence one rail at a time. When you want to change something, proceed stepwise. Another good one, that we can mention with tongue in cheek, was about the question of how detailed the minutes of the meeting should be. Sidney said that a poor memory was much better than a detailed set of minutes! One of the seminal things that Sidney did for us was to note our tendency in those early years to spend every nickel that we took in. We were not planning much for a rainy day, which must inevitably come in this sort of work. So he insisted, I believe it was in 1980, that we set up an emergency fund. I recall the meeting vividly. It was in the offices of the Environmental Fund. We decided that we would take five percent of all of the contributions that we got, plus any interest that we earned, and stick it in an emergency fund that would not be touched by the staff without authorization of the board.

Q: This must have been very difficult because that amounts to a five percent cut in the budget.

TANTON: Well, pay yourself first, as they say. If you're going to accumulate something, you can't do it unless you save. So we did start this setting aside, and of course with the wonders of compound interest that fund actually grew fairly rapidly. It has proved a very great benefit through the years. We've often gone to the fund to borrow some money to tide ourselves over a difficult time, or to take up an opportunity where we just had to respond. The emergency fund provided a pool of funds for such expenditure, which we always repaid. Bill Paddock was another board member. He brought to the whole combine a long experience with the population problem and a generally exuberant, go-get-'em attitude that helped us push forward. Sherry Barnes, the other board member, was the same way. She had long experience in organizational matters, working with Zero Population Growth and Planned Parenthood. She knew a lot about population and the environmental movement and was very good from that standpoint. Being in New York City, she was also in a position to work with the media people up there.

Q: Were you and Roger a good team? Describe the teamwork.

TANTON: Well, I think actually Roger and I were quite a good team. We had our differing strengths and weaknesses. I think I'm probably a more highly organized person than Roger is, and Roger's a more verbal person than I am. He'd been a national champion debater at Oberlin. He was quick on the uptake and the repartee, and was a very good person to work

with the media. But he was down there in Washington, immersed in the middle of all the day-to-day conflicts. I was much more removed from the fray and could sit back and reflect a bit more on where we were going and what the next pieces were that needed to be put into place. Early on, I developed a practice of carrying a little notebook in my briefcase in which I wrote down ideas as they popped into my head. Then on a Monday (which has been the day I've taken for my outside work ever since I went into medical practice) I would call Roger, pretty much every week, and we would go through our respective checklists and try to just generally see how things were going. One of the things that I think was most helpful to him was my serving as a sounding board for personnel and staffing decisions. We would often sit down and talk over the staff people we had, asking how they were getting on, analyzing their strengths and weaknesses, considering what posts we wanted to fill, and whether somebody could be shifted from one position to another, or whether somebody should be let go. How do you manage the internecine warfare that always goes on in an office? Questions of that nature. We had, I believe, a mutual respect for each other's intelligence and commitment. We both had the sense to back off at times. I often deferred to Roger, especially in matters of political judgment. I considered myself weak in that area. I'd follow his lights and instincts as to how fast and how far to push things.

I might mention one other thing that comes to mind here, and that is the politics of all of this, in conservative and liberal terms. I think that many people see the restrictionist side of the immigration movement as being conservative. I have a great disdain for those two terms because I think there's no set of prescribed or proscribed issues that tell us what's conservative and what's liberal.

(End of tape 2, side B)

(Begin Tape 3)

Q: This is Otis Graham, and we are continuing the first interview with John Tanton on April 20, 1989.

TANTON: There was this idea that immigration restriction was conservative and being open to immigration was liberal. I think one reason that FAIR succeeded as well as it did is that this, in fact, is not the case. I would say that of our early, first five board members, if you asked all five of them to make a statement as to whether they were liberal or conservative, probably Otis and Sherry would have said they were liberal. I would have said I was centrist. Mr. Swensrud would have said he was on the conservative side, and Bill Paddock would have said he was centrist, as well. I think if you looked at the life histories of all of us, you would have found that this was true. As far as Roger goes, you would certainly say he was liberal by anybody's definition. He'd been working on the environmental movement and so on. So one reason that we succeeded is that it was not a rock-hard conservative group, which would have carried us off probably into ridiculous and untenable positions. It was, in fact, a centrist group that had some staff and some board that were a little bit on one side of the center, some a little bit on the other. But it was a reasonable group that knew how to compromise, was not ideologically bound, and thus was able, I think, to deal with this very sensitive and central issue in American history.

Q: I'm interested that you've indicated that the board members tended to be centrists, grouped around a moderate center, and you seem to have indicated that the staff — after all, when you run an ad for a job in a restrictionist immigration organization, people select themselves to walk in your door. You're telling me that the experience was that you didn't attract angry, radical people but you attracted a different sort of person?

TANTON: Well, of course, Roger was in charge of hiring the staff, and he would naturally tend to hire people who reflected his view of the world. But your point is a particularly good one. Let's say we had been a conservation organization and wanted to get a new public relations person. There are dozens of conservation organizations around, so one might run an ad and find somebody at any one of them who was ready to move on. There's a big pool of people to draw on who understand the basic conservation and environmental issues. But we had a new subject and a troubling one for a lot of people. There were no other similar organizations to which we could go to find staff members. So it was very hard trying to find people. That problem is only now easing up, as the issues become more acceptable and,

as we'll see as we go along, other organizations have been set up. These now give us a larger pool of people to draw from to fill staff positions. In hiring an issue person, we're usually looking at young people, coming out of college. They're at the time in life when they tend to have a certain vision of the world and of the future. They often feel strongly about ideological things. Also, you don't want to hire a hack. You don't want to hire somebody who will grind out press releases on any subject at all and try to make them have some feeling. You'd rather find people who are committed to your issue, well-educated persons, ones who will be able to fill a number of jobs, as most of us will have to do in our lifetime. If you need field work done, they can do field work. If you need copywriters, they'll do copy writing. But it was very hard because there was not a large group of people we knew about who were schooled in this issue.

Q: I want to ask now about friends and opposition. First, about friends. When you came to town, you must have had some sense of who might rally around your cause. Some people did come forward and help you. Some didn't. You must have been somewhat surprised. But I'd like to have you reflect back on friends, on the people and the groups that came forward and became allies, either tacitly or aggressively.

TANTON: Well, initially, rather than wanting people to come forward to help us, I guess we wanted to come forward and help other people. One of those persons was certainly Senator Alan Simpson and there was also Congressman Romano Mazzoli. As I mentioned, both of them had served on the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy, which reported toward the tail end of the Carter years. They had become educated on the issue and, in the 1980 elections, the Republicans won control of the Senate. So Democratic Senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi, who for years had blocked any action on illegal immigration out of deference to the planters in Mississippi, was ousted as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee — the committee that considers immigration matters. I think he retired from the Senate altogether at that time. But anyway, he was no longer chairman of the Judiciary Immigration Subcommittee, and since the Republicans were in charge, Senator Simpson became chairman of the subcommittee instead of Senator Kennedy, who would otherwise have had it. Senator Simpson was dedicated to doing something about immigration. So we began to try to contact his staff and work with him.

Even before that, Senator Huddleston from Kentucky, a Democrat, had been working on immigration. So we had become acquainted with him. I recall very well one time when Roger and Mr. Swensrud and I piled into a taxi to go over to Senator Huddleston's office. Sidney, who had gotten in the middle seat of the taxi, said, as we jostled our way out, the same thing that Mr. Justice Holmes did when he saw a comely lady on the street when

he was ninety years old: "Ah, to be eighty once again!" [Laughter] He had a good sense of humor. So certainly those two politicians, and also Congressman Mazzoli, were people whom we tried to support.

We thought when we went to D.C. that, given our environmental and population interests, the environmental and population organizations might come to our aid, but that didn't prove to be the case. The population groups, as the U.S. birthrate had gone down, had largely come to focus on the problem overseas. The conservation groups never had really gone through the transformation I had, when I said I wanted to work on causes, rather than effects. They were still trying to save this wilderness or put out that brushfire without looking back upstream to the population problem. As Thoreau wrote, "There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root." One group that did help us was the Environmental Fund. It had been formed in the '70s. One of the board members there was Bill Paddock, who was by now on our board. Another was Garrett Hardin, one of my heroes from some years before. The Environmental Fund helped us raise some of our early money, and Bill Paddock arranged for me to be appointed to the board of the Environmental Fund. I guess that would have been in about 1980. So that opened a whole new set of doors.

So on going to D.C., we did not find a great coterie of friends who were interested in supporting us. Rather, we found ourselves pretty much alone and seeming to go against the American grain—in this country in which immigration has played such a role in the past—in trying to make the topic an acceptable one for discussion. As a matter of fact, Roger used to phrase it that way: "one of our goals is to make the discussion of immigration a legitimate topic for thinking people." Another way that I had phrased it was to say that there were three stages in the immigration debate. The first stage was the Statue of Liberty phase. When you brought the topic up, you immediately had Emma Lazarus' poem quoted to you, and that was a sufficient answer for any possible argument that could come up. As the contradictions became larger, we moved into phase two which was the "Yes, but" phase, when people would say, "Now, I want to make sure that you understand I'm not racist, nativist, or mean, but I've been thinking about immigration, and maybe there are some important points here. For instance, what about the effects of the brain drain on the countries of origin?" Then the third stage, which I think we still have yet to move into, is one in which it's accepted as a legitimate topic and you can discuss it without being accused of things, or without first excusing yourself for being concerned about immigration policy.

Q: With your mention of Simpson and Mazzoli, it's in '81, isn't it, just about '81, when a legislative vehicle emerges sponsored by Simpson and Mazzoli, and FAIR attaches itself to that in the role of a friendly, but not entirely

uncritical, advocate of that legislation? We might discuss that and have you reflect on FAIR's role as a friend, but as a critic at the same time, and speak of the critical decisions that FAIR had to make as the '80s go along.

TANTON: Well, our first legislative battle, where we really got our feet wet, as I mentioned, was the Refugee Act, introduced in '79 and passed in '80. Our main effort there was to try to put an overall ceiling on the number of refugees, and we partially succeeded in that. It was set at 50,000 a year, but the President was given power to admit numbers beyond that in consultation with the Congress. The second effort, still one of our existing legislative goals, was to put a sunset on the legislation so that it doesn't just run on forever. Rather it would be like, say, a Department of Agriculture bill. A program might be adopted for four years, and then it expires and has to be looked at again. Immigration legislation, in general, tends to run on in perpetuity. We tried hard to get a sunset on the refugee bill, and nearly succeeded, but we just didn't have enough firepower to carry the day.

When the Simpson-Mazzoli Bill was introduced we began to see the line-up of opponents and proponents. I suppose we might say a few words about opponents. I'd say the chief opponents of doing anything on immigration are tradition and inertia. It's always very hard in our system to change something. The scales are heavily weighted toward the person who wants the status quo. If you stop and think about it, to pass a bill you must succeed in the subcommittee in both houses, then on the full committee in both houses, and then in the full chamber on both sides. So that's six different places where you have to succeed. Then you very likely will have different versions passed, so it has to go to a conference committee, where the conferees for each house have to vote separately. So that's eight places where you have to succeed. Then the conference report goes back to the floor on both sides, and there's two more votes. So that's ten. Then you have to secure the President's signature on it. So that's eleven "yeses" in a row that you have to have to get something passed — almost as bad as trying to bowl a perfect game, where you have to get twelve strikes in a row! To succeed in killing a measure, you only have to succeed in one place out of eleven. It's very much easier to kill something than it is to pass something. So the legislative system is stacked against getting something done.

Another "opponent" is the traditional character of the United States as a nation of immigrants. I think this is actually not a very well examined phrase, because virtually all countries are nations of immigrants. It's because our beginnings in immigration are so recent that it becomes a more or less sensitive topic.

But there was not any pitched opposition at the time Simpson-Mazzoli was introduced. The ethnic groups and the church groups that

came to oppose us later on in the decade weren't really that radicalized at that time, or the issue hadn't been joined enough that they'd made the policy decisions that later brought them into pitched opposition to the things that we were doing.

Q: How does the legislation move? Well, I might ask two questions. FAIR is not entirely happy with Simpson's basic legislation, his bill. Do you remember the distinctions between what we wanted and what we were apparently going to get, even in his own proposal?

TANTON: One of the hot topics was amnesty. I think that was probably one of the most difficult issues that FAIR ever had to wrestle with. We were, of course, concerned about the multiplier effect of amnesty. If you let some people in, their relatives will eventually come — one way or another. We were also concerned about the legitimacy of it. Here we had people standing in line around the world following the rules, waiting for a chance to migrate, and we were about to give special status to those who broke the rules, cut the line, came ahead. That rankled. And we were concerned about the precedent, because we knew that other countries around the world had declared amnesties and subsequently declared other amnesties. We had debates back and forth. Then there was the political realism, of course, to the whole thing. We had all these migrants here. They were probably not all going to be sent back home, so how should we deal with them? Then there was Senator Simpson's firm commitment to the idea of amnesty. We had worked well with him, so that also moderates what you might do and how hard you might want to knock heads on this one issue. We actually went back and forth for, I would say, a year or more, the staff and the board, without a firm decision ever coming out. I can recall writing one paper on the topic to try to bring it to a head. By the time the board and staff finally made up their minds on it, it was already too late to really influence the debate. It had gone along too long. It was accepted by then that there would be some form of amnesty. The only questions were the dates and how it would be administered.

Q: Would you reflect on the very important strategic question, it becomes tactical sometimes, of an organization living in Washington inside the beltway trying to influence legislation as a responsible and moderate player? Your membership, and I want to ask a bit about this, may have wished rather sharp cutbacks and curtailments and a legislation with ceilings and no amnesty and a harder line than staff inside the beltway felt possible. Were there compromises that had to be made from that perspective? The board has to chart some sort of course which is both effective, with compromise, and has the support of the membership, and which, in fact, is, in their view, right and in the correct direction. This must have been a

steady source of difficult decisions?

TANTON: Well, it was, and I'm not sure we managed it as well as we should have. I periodically had the idea that we should develop some sort of a policy manual where we would write down what our policy was on the education of foreign students, on the brain drain, on amnesty, on migration of relatives, and so on. We never did that. I guess we ran a little bit looser ship than that, and to this day we don't have a lot of firmly worked out, written-down, highly debated policy positions.

Q: Do I understand you to be saying that if the board writes down policy positions, it controls the staff too closely? Was it FAIR's decision at the board level to let Roger and the staff have a little bit more running room for digression than that?

TANTON: I'm not even sure it was a decision. I think it happened that way. One of the problems with public interest organizations in a place like Washington is the theory that the board sets the policy and the staff implements it. In fact, the staff is there all the time, talking with each other, and it's very difficult for a board even to find out what's going on, and then beyond that to have enough time to develop policy positions, for instance, to get them written down and adopted and so on. So serving on the board of a group like this is not an easy task if you take it seriously and want to do a good job at it. It's very hard to actually control things. The control usually passes to the staff in many of these organizations.

Q: When you are asked by anyone whom you represent, whom do you speak for, how do you answer? Is it just a paper organization or is there somebody out there? What are the answers that FAIR was able to give in the early and mid-'80s, and how did you relate to those people that you claimed to represent?

TANTON: Well, you want to claim a large membership when you're asked that question in Congress. So one of our early programs was to try to develop membership. How do you do that? I recall well that one benefactor thought the way you would do that was by running a newspaper ad, and that person actually gave us the money to run a full-page ad in the nationwide edition of the *Wall Street Journal*. That ad, as I recall now, cost about \$42,000 for a single insertion! That struck us at the time as a terrible waste of money, and that proved to be the case. I think that we only got a hundred replies or so from the thing. But interestingly enough, one of them was K.C. McAlpin who subsequently became a staff member. K.C. was in business in Texas at that time and was a reader of the *Wall Street Journal*.

As it turned out, the only really efficient way to reach large numbers

of people is through direct mail. So, as I mentioned earlier, we tried direct mail in 1979-80, but got buried in the 1980 presidential campaign's mail. It wasn't until after that, 1981 as I recall, that Roger met Matt Gallagher playing softball, I think. Matt was a young businessman trying to get started in the direct mail business. He had some experience. He became our direct mail marketing consultant and helped us develop a program over the next eight or nine years. First of all, it involved acquisition, that is, mailing to cold lists to test the response, hoping to break even. FAIR only rarely did that well. We usually had to subsidize our direct mail program to find members. But we felt we had to do it, if for no other reason than to have some members behind us. When we were asked the question of whom we represented, we had, in fact, some citizens that we represented and people who would write letters, we hoped, when they were asked to do so.

The other parts of a direct mail program are special appeals, usually mailed quarterly, in which we highlight some hot event that's coming up and encourage people to send in an extra contribution; and renewals. To run a direct mail program requires some computer services. We were all pretty wet behind the ears in this area. We made a bad decision in the computer company that we started up with. It was one that was designed to provide constituent mail services for Congressmen. It worked fairly well at that, but we spent a lot of money and a lot of time trying to make it work for direct mail, and trying to get our early word processing system to work it. We finally gave that up, I suppose about 1983. But the direct mail program gradually grew. It did not have wholehearted support on the board. Whenever we came to a budget pinch, cutting direct mail was a convenient way to save quite a bit of money because it is expensive to run. But then that would impair our longer term prospects of building members and the fundraising that can go on with those members.

Another way of relating to members is by newsletter. We started the newsletter about August of 1979. I recall very well one lunch that we had in Washington in 1982, during the year I spent down there. One person who attended was Al Bruen, a chap who gave us some advice. He mentioned on our way out from lunch that Charles Colson's Prison Fellowship got 70% of its revenues by including a business reply envelope in the newsletter. It wasn't a big pitch for money. It just made it easy for persons who read the newsletter, and felt moved by what they saw, to send a contribution. It was easier than having to go find an envelope and figure out the address, add the postage — here was an envelope already filled out! I made the suggestion that we start this, but it didn't seem to go anywhere. So I actually designed the first envelope, got it printed up and added it to the newsletter. To our great amazement, thousands of dollars came rolling in without our ever having asked for it. I think that it's brought in over a hundred thousand dollars a year since then. So that one idea has probably generated a million dollars in revenues since then.

Q: Would you describe from your memory (I see you don't have notes here) the arc of membership growth of FAIR over the first ten years of its existence?

TANTON: I can't pick the yearly numbers out of my head, but I did look at them in the summary chronicle of events that Gerry Mackie prepared as background for this oral history series. I suppose that in '85 we were somewhere around fourteen or fifteen thousand, something like that. One of the problems, of course, is whom you count as a member. How much does one have to give and how frequently? I think we ended up deciding ten dollars over two years would qualify one as a member, rather than a lapsed member.

Q: I'm sure all organizations face exactly the same thing. Do you know, as chairman of board, who are your members? What are they? Where are they?

TANTON: Well, some members are more active than others. One thing members tend to do is write letters to us. You have to answer their letters if you hope to keep them as members. So we early on had a field position — we've always had a lot of trouble with that post — to keep up a correspondence with the members and with luck find some activists among them: those who seem more highly charged than others and who will do such things as send in clippings from the local papers so you can keep track of what's going on, or who, on request, will write letters or notes or even perhaps make phone calls or send telegrams when some sort of legislative alert comes up.

Q: You finished the decade, the first decade of FAIR's existence, with, as I recall the official figures, around 50,000 people. There are obviously periods of surges of growth. What is your memory of when there was a surge in public response, in membership? What is the message coming in from the membership? They obviously are joining because they are enthusiastic. What are they calling for? Are they in any sense out of line, or are they calling for something that FAIR isn't doing yet? What's the dialogue, or lack of dialogue, with that membership mass?

TANTON: We were always a little bit afraid of the field or the members, in the sense that you know that in any membership organization there are some people who go off the deep end, whether you're on the right or on the left side of any particular question. We were always concerned that one of these persons would get hold of the stationery, present themselves as FAIR, write a demagogic letter, and spoil the things that we were doing. Let's be frank about this: people tend to give money to things that they care about, not things they're neutral on. So while we were centrists, one of the tasks

in direct mail is to design an appeal that is not bland, but is still responsible. You want to appeal to a person's emotions but to do it in a way that's still respectable. The task of a group like ours is to raise the money where we can, which is where the feelings run high, but spend it toward the center in a responsible fashion. We have, through the years, had a lot of trouble and discussion in our direct mail campaign. We have written letters that we thought would appeal to conservative lists, and letters that we thought would appeal to liberal lists. But in general, I think, our response tended to come from the more moderate ends of these lists. We were unwilling to write the kind of appeal that would get responses from the far end of the political spectrum, because we didn't share those beliefs.

Q: Two questions. First, if you held back, out of belief, from writing immoderate, emotional appeals to sentiments that were unattractive, but which exist in America on any difficult question, then one would think that other organizations would spring up in the immigration field, other restrictionist sentiments would be mobilized? Did that happen?

TANTON: Yes, it eventually did. There was a staff person for Senator East, who was certainly quite a conservative southern senator, who was interested in immigration and who finally retired from the staff and set up a group called the American Immigration Control Foundation or AICF. His name is Palmer Stacey. Their appeals were very much more strident. They would, for instance, take a stand against any form of amnesty. Since they were not a player in the legislative process, they could afford to do that because it didn't make any difference what they said. They raised the money, but I don't think really spent it effectively on the issue. We knew we had to live with everything we wrote. We didn't want somebody reading back to us in a Congressional committee something that we didn't want to live with. Again, trying to be reasonable and moderate, and realizing that you can't operate inside the beltway unless you're willing to compromise, and knowing you're not going to get everything you would like — all this keeps one pretty close to reasonable boundaries, I think.

(End of Tape 3, Side A)

Q: As you manage this organization as chairman, do you have guiding principles and general rules that you try to keep in mind as you go forward?

TANTON: Well, there was one little mnemonic device that we came up with in looking for new board members. We called it the three W's. They stood for work, wisdom, and wealth, and the rule of thumb was that any good board member should bring at least two of those things. I must say

that thanks to you, Otis, after awhile we added a fourth W, which stands for wit, because your outstanding witticisms helped to lighten up some of the board meetings!

Another thing that I tried to do was to figure out what my proper role was. Sometimes I would draft papers when I couldn't get an issue moving otherwise; when somebody else didn't seem to quite have the same idea, or the same grasp of a topic that I had. But I learned early on that the way to make an issue move is to get the person who's going to be responsible for it to write the paper. That way it becomes part of them. They'll write it in the way they understand it. In that connection, one thing Roger and I did was spend a week on a sailboat in the North Channel of Lake Huron. I believe that was in the summer of 1980, at a time when we really needed to write a case statement for FAIR to pull things together. We had the time to work on it out there, and were successful in getting it written.

One other principle that I've followed is to promote from within and to work with people I already know, instead of going out on the open market to find new persons. We mentioned earlier the difficulty of finding people committed to the immigration issue. There are just not that many around. It's very helpful to deal with people that you already know, whose strengths and weaknesses you're already aware of.

Here's another principle that we learned early on. When we started off, we thought that we would be able to raise the funds to support this battle in the parts of the country where the immigration issue was the most acute — for instance, in California and Texas and Florida, and that we would spend our money in those same areas. We soon learned that the first half of the equation was right but the second wasn't. Because the problems of immigration had already become sufficiently acute in areas like California, the political system was already compromised there. Politicians could no longer take stands for fear of back pressure from the immigrant populations. Look at it: people who moved this issue were Huddleston from Kentucky, Romano Mazzoli from Kentucky, Alan Simpson from Wyoming. Where did the opposition come from? It came from Barney Frank of Massachusetts, from congressmen in California, from Claude Pepper in Florida — people who were subject to political pressures from the immigrants themselves. This was also true in the earlier years of immigration reform. Remember the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952? Senator McCarran was from where? — Nevada. Representative Walter was from Pennsylvania. I think a fairly general principle in working on immigration is that the action won't come from, or in, the heavily impacted areas.

Another thing that always comes up in public interest groups is the idea of forming coalitions. We were seduced by the idea, too, and tried a number of times, especially in the early '80s, to pull together a group of organizations to work on the immigration question. It always proved difficult. Other organizations had their own agendas. If you wanted one of

them to sign some sort of a policy statement their whole board had to fight it through and agree on it, and it was always difficult. The wording would often need to be changed a bit. So we finally learned that the way to really form coalitions with other organizations was not formally but through direct mail. Do a mailing to their membership. Find out which of their members agree with your message and sign them up directly as members of FAIR. Of course, as happens with people who are politically and socially active, many of us belong to a variety of organizations.

We also learned early in the game why single interest organizations are the rule. It's not because the people who are in them are narrow minded and think that the world turns around a single issue, but rather because the more issues one includes under one roof, the greater the chances are that some members will object to one of these items and drop out. Look at the FAIR board: we all really came together around the population question. I'm sure if we had gotten into other areas like gun control or zoning or policy in Central America or international trade, protectionism, any one of a great number of things we could mention, if we'd tried to include those on the same agenda with immigration, the whole thing would have fallen apart because we would have disagreed on these other issues. That's not bad, that's just human nature. So we continually try to form coalitions, but they're not among organizations but rather among individuals, who happen to agree on one issue and may disagree substantially or even profoundly on another issue.

The question of chapters also came up in this business of working with members, or working in the field. As I mentioned earlier, we were with some reason really afraid of trying to set up chapters because they might go off half-cocked and spoil the whole effort. But the other reason for not having a substantial chapter effort is that immigration, unlike, for instance, the environmental question, is largely a matter of national policy. Immigration policy had long since been preempted by Congress and by the courts, and there was not really a whole lot to do on the state and the local levels. So you can't maintain a chapter unless you've got something for people to do. That was one reason why we remained predominantly a national organization rather than a state and local organization.

We had the usual problem of deciding at what level any particular issue should be handled. In theory the board sets the policy and the staff executes it. While that's a nice broad principle, when a specific case comes up, the question is always whether it's something the executive director should decide and act on, or is really something for the board to decide. I think that such difficulties were largely resolved through good will. We never really had any substantial disputes about people going beyond their bounds, and since we knew each other and liked each other, most things were handled by negotiations and consensus. I don't recall that we ever had any real knock-down, drag-out fights about the staff's going too far in some

areas. What's your recollection of that, Otis?

Q: It might be worth observing that you, apparently, made a decision (I've never heard you declare this as a John Tanton insight) that the board, at least this first ten years, should have a great degree of continuity. You had a board which didn't rotate off every three years and churn. It didn't churn. That must not have been an accident. That must have been something that you decided would be a good idea so that we would know one another and build that moral and intellectual sense that we did know each other?

TANTON: Well, that's true. You may not remember, but one reason that we were able to get Sidney Swensrud to come on our board was that he had been on the board of the Association for Voluntary Sterilization, and they had a rule that rotated everybody off every three years. He had just been rotated off, so we invited him on. I just don't believe in this idea of automatic rotation. There are some reasons for it. If you have people who are ineffective or a problem, it gives you a polite way to let them go. But good people are so scarce, and particularly so in the immigration area, that we would have been very unwise to drop people off. I don't think that we've had any bad fallout from this practice. I don't think we've had any instances where we wished somebody had gone but hung on.

Q: I remember that the board was always small. It was five, and then it went to seven, then it went to nine. In fact, this might be a good time for you to mention the additions to the board. We had some new recruits, and they did make their own contributions. It might be a good idea if you would tell us how you ran into the people that you felt ought to be added to the board?

TANTON: Alright. But I might first just mention a couple of other management principles. Another question that comes up frequently in public interest organizations is whether to use consultants or whether you should try to bring people on staff to do things. The advantage of consultants is that if you don't like their performance, it's much easier to let them go. The advantage of having a person on staff is that for any organization like FAIR to succeed, it must build a certain critical intellectual mass. You need a certain number of people in the office, program people, half a dozen perhaps, who are able to think and write and talk, who regularly bump into each other in the hall and can exchange ideas on a moment's notice. You can't get that out of a consultant. One needs both arrangements. Our direct mail, for instance, was done with Matt Gallagher as a consultant, but he spent a lot of time in the office. In some of the other areas we sometimes took staff on specifically to help build the critical intellectual mass of the organization.

Another principle here, one that's applied in my life in general, one

that illuminates your comment about the board's not having much turnover, is that persistence is necessary to see results in life. If we look back at some of the earlier immigration reform efforts, for instance the one that took place in the early 1920s, from 1921-24, you'll find that the group that worked on it and put it together folded their tents and disappeared into the night after the bill passed. Well, one of the other characteristics of the immigration field is that the opposition is there persistently pecking away, day after week after month after year. If you're not there to defend the gains that you made, you'll come back in ten or fifteen years and find that the beachhead has eroded. You'll also find that an unsympathetic history of your efforts has been written by your opponents. That's one reason for giving FAIR's founders a chance to tell their own story via these interviews.

When we started out, we hoped that we might be able to work for five or ten years on this and quit, but we soon came to the realization that there would be no end to this problem as long as its basic causes — rampant population growth and dire circumstances in the sending countries around the world — as long as those conditions continue, a long-term effort would be needed to try to keep up our end of the bargain.

I guess the last principle that I would mention is not taking credit and always taking blame. I think that's a good one in life in general. I'm sure that as we go on through this interview, I'll mention some projects which, according to my recollection, I thought up and got started. If you were to ask Roger, he might think that he was the one. I'm sure we've both had this experience, but we never let credit and blame become issues. Someone once said that you can get a great deal done in life if you don't worry about who gets the credit. I also recall the saying of Lao-Tse, the Chinese philosopher: "He leads best who, when the job is done, finds his people saying, 'We did this ourselves.'" So I think that in making an organization like FAIR go, it's good to be willing to take blame for things that go wrong and to be very chary about taking credit. What is the saying? "Success has a thousand fathers; failure is an orphan."

We were going to talk about other persons who joined the board as we went along, and of our thinking on board size. Another organizational principle that I brought with me from ZPG is to have only one level of board management; that is, not to have a big board of 20-30 people which then requires an executive committee of five or six to get some work done.

Q: Had that been the ZPG model?

TANTON: Yes, and it was a big problem because the executive committee really ran the organization, but had to secure the agreement of the board. So they'd have big board meetings twice a year and try to sell these people on something they really were going to do anyway. [Laughter] It was very inefficient. So Roger and I both wanted to keep the board small enough so

we could have one level of management. But the board also needed to be large enough so as to provide training for succession.

Early on I had been alerted to the problems of succession by a friend, Horace Huffman, Jr., who ran Huffy Bicycle Corporation, a big corporation. One of his main principles of management was to start early looking for successors, to avoid ending up with people who hadn't been well trained for their jobs. I was chairman of FAIR for the first seven or eight years, and I didn't mind — and actually enjoyed it — for four or five years. But then I began to wonder who was going to succeed me. I could remember board member Thad Rowland telling me that I should be there forever! But I didn't feel that was the right idea. [Laughter] I thought that succession was necessary, and that we should be training people. I knew also that once a person got to be chairman, he or she would take board membership differently and more seriously, and would increase his or her level of involvement.

Q: Had you ever read, or in any other way learned of the experience, for example, of Margaret Sanger at Planned Parenthood? She lived a long time, and David Kennedy has written a biography of her. The main point of that biography is that the talents that made her a brilliant leader in the first twenty years were exactly the talents that made her a bad leader in the second twenty. But she didn't remove herself. There was no succession. This is a classic example, in the population field, of a leader, who has the early charismatic qualities, not yielding at a second stage where other talents are required.

TANTON: Well, I was, of course, very much aware of that. I had been in the Sierra Club during the era when David Brower was there. Brower accomplished tremendous things, such as keeping dams out of the Dinosaur National Monument and The Grand Canyon. But he then became a problem and nearly killed off the club with his unorthodox ways. So I was very much aware of the problem. Another friend, Ed Harte — husband of Janet Harte, who subsequently came on our board — a very competent businessman, at one time agreed to become president of the National Audubon Society. Part of the agreement was that he didn't take the job until he knew who both his successor and his successor's successor were going to be! [Laughter] Ed wanted them in training, so he wouldn't get stuck in the job for lack of a successor. The chap who took it after him was a very busy man. I believe that Ed did the job for five years, and this fellow, knowing he was going to take it, freed up his life in that time so that when it came his turn, he was ready to go. This sort of planning is very important. And to have succession, you need a board that's larger than five.

We felt that we needed a larger board for a number of reasons. We needed some board help with fundraising. Also, if one board member

couldn't come to a meeting, you're down to four, and that's a pretty thin group for running a complex operation. One of the first people that we added to the board was Thad Rowland. Thad came to us, interestingly enough, through direct mail — he'd received one of our mail pieces. Thad is a very activist and forward person. He wrote in saying he was setting up a foundation and wanted to donate some money and wondered if we would like any of it, and if so, why. [Laughter] So we responded, of course, and invited him to a meeting. We got to know each other and he seemed 'simpatico'. He also came out of the population movement. So he joined the board.

I forget the exact dates now but Bill Paddock, who was an original member of the FAIR board, was nominated for president of the Environmental Fund, which was going to be a fulltime job. So he resigned from FAIR, and his wife, Elizabeth Paddock, who had been his co-worker for years and co-author with him of some books, took his place on our board.

One of the things that we set up in the early years was an advisory board. There were several reasons for doing that. Some advisory boards are strictly for show. They are only a set of names on the letterhead to help reassure people, but we wanted more than that. We certainly had some people who never came, who never gave us advice. But we did have an actual functioning advisory board. It met twice a year. We presented them a serious topic on which we needed and wanted advice. One reason for doing this was to give us a chance to look at new people whom we didn't know well but who'd been suggested for regular board membership. We wanted to see who rose to the occasion. Who were the most interested and articulate persons? One person who attended those advisory meetings several times was Sally Gamble Epstein. Sally was from Washington and had worked in Planned Parenthood and population matters for many years. She was also on the board of the Pathfinder Fund, an international population group centered in Boston.

Another advisory board attender was Janet Harte from Corpus Christi, Texas. Janet had also been very active in Planned Parenthood. Another person was Dorothy Blair of Naples, who also had been an enthusiastic Planned Parenthood supporter, and had been active in the conservation movement, supporting the Collier County Conservancy. All three of those people attended the advisory board meetings, subsequently visited regular board meetings, and were then invited to join the board of directors. All did so. I believe the last person to be added was Governor Lamm, after he left office, I believe, in 1987.

Q: That's Dick Lamm of Colorado?

TANTON: Yes, he was governor of Colorado. He had called FAIR about 1981, I would think, after he'd seen some of our materials. He spoke with

Roger, offered his services and has really been invaluable through the years. For instance, when William French Smith was appointed Attorney General, the first week he was in office Dick Lamm got in to see him and took Roger along to introduce the two, and to begin the Attorney General's education on the immigration issue. Smith was a very helpful person in those early years while he served as Attorney General until, I think, about 1984.

Lamm, as an elected official, was able to get through to Senator Simpson and to others when we couldn't. He could place calls to the White House. As a writer and a politician who often took unpopular and controversial positions, he had great standing with the press. He wrote many articles which were generally well received, or at least widely printed, and did a great deal to help elevate the profile of the immigration issue.

Q: Is it accurate to describe Lamm as a young, aggressive, energetic liberal, and self-taught on the issue? You didn't have to bring him along, I take it?

TANTON: Well, Dick had been president of Zero Population Growth before I was, in about '71-'72. I first met him at a ZPG annual meeting in Estes Park, Colorado where we occupied the podium together. After talking about the population problem, we had a great joke-telling session, as I recall. So we had been in touch for a good many years. Dick has been very helpful. He worked with Father Hesburgh of Notre Dame. He knew the people who enabled us to put together several of the open letters to Congress that we published. He knew Gerald Ford. He was able to get through to former President Carter, and so on.

Q: This is a very prominent national politician who has become a friend and an ally. Did you see his interest in the immigration question as something he saw as politically important for his future, or was it something else that brought him to make such exertions on behalf of FAIR?

TANTON: He also came out of the population and environmental fields, and he understood the implications of population growth for Colorado. You may recall that at this time there was an initiative in Colorado to prevent the Winter Olympics from going there. I suppose that was in the late '70s. So Colorado was an environmentally aware state, and Dick was a population person. I'm sure he didn't see the issue as a political plus for him. Most people ran from it. It was probably a political minus. But I have a great respect for the man. He's always done what he thought needed to be done and let the chips fall where they may. That's one reason why he was so widely covered in the press. It's unusual to find a politician who can take unpopular stands and survive. What was there about this man? Well, I think the people of Colorado respected his integrity. He was governor of the state for twelve years.

Q: It's a growing organization and when you grow and it's new and your executive director is new, everybody's new, there are administrative problems. I gather there were administrative problems in the office at FAIR, and, in fact, you left your practice for a time and moved to Washington. Why don't you go back to those years and that situation and discuss that?

TANTON: Well, by 1980 my medical practice had grown quite a bit. We'd added another partner. There were three of us now, and it was apparent that we needed to add one more person. We found someone from that year's class of residents, due to finish training about July of 1981. Well, a little light went on in my head then. I knew that the new person coming into practice would have a bit of a hard time getting started, as it always takes a while. So it occurred to me that I could take a leave of absence when the new person arrived and "lend" my practice to him. This was a big step, as I had the largest surgical practice in northern Michigan at that time, built up over 16 years.

Q: Is this a wise move medically, I must ask?

TANTON: Well, it certainly was not a wise move financially, anyway. [Laughter] I talked it over with my wife, and we decided to take a leave. I was 47 at the time, perhaps a good time for a little mid-life hiatus. I had taken off big blocks of time before, chiefly for travel. Why not do it again? It seemed to me that if I didn't do it at this time, the opportunity would pass. After the new fellow had been there for a year and was established, he'd be pretty busy and wouldn't be able to assume my practice. So we decided to go. Our younger daughter was still in high school, so she spent her junior year in high school in Arlington, Virginia. It was a good experience for her, too. On September 1, 1981, we loaded a good share of our worldly goods into a U-Haul and headed off for D.C. I recall clearly that we just barely got up the hill outside of Petoskey when the truck broke down. [Laughter] We had to go back and get a different one. I wondered at that point whether someone was trying to send me a message!

Q: Your motive, I take it, your purpose in going at this stage is not that there is something uniquely critical in Washington, but that this was a good idea for your own life?

TANTON: Well, it was that, but we were optimistic at that time that the bill might actually pass in 1982.

Q: Simpson-Mazzoli?

TANTON: That's right, because things had been going along reasonably

well. According to our understanding of the problem, we didn't see any way that Congress could put off dealing with it any longer. Well, they did manage to find a way to put it off! We thought that another two hands in Washington (Mary Lou was going to work for FAIR also) might maybe even provide the margin needed to make the difference. So the year that I spent in Washington, from September '81 through June of '82, I actually worked two-thirds of the time for FAIR and one-third of the time for The Environmental Fund. I was paid \$2,500 a month which covered most of the costs of living there, but not much beyond that, since we had to rent a fairly expensive place. Concerning the Environmental Fund: I'd been on their board since about 1980, so I was able to spend my time back and forth between these two groups. FAIR picked up two-thirds of my salary and the Environmental Fund the other one-third of it. My assignment was mainly to travel and raise funds, and I did a lot of this in the course of that year.

But it made for a kind of organizational, hierarchical crisis when I arrived on the scene, because Roger was going to have the chairman of his board working in the same building. We weren't quite sure how the lines of authority should run here! I recall vividly, when we walked in, that Roger offered me his office for the year. Well, that was obviously not the spirit of the thing. We worked out a nice arrangement whereby I served as a staff member and followed in the chain of command like anybody else. I went to the staff meetings and just —

Q: *You had an office in the —*

TANTON: I had an office right above Roger's, as a matter of fact, on the third floor. Being on a higher floor in the building we had then on "P" Street was not a particular benefit! [Laughter] It worked out quite well. I was just another staff person except when the board met, and then I changed hats and was chairman of the board for that period of time.

(End of Tape 3, Side B)

(Beginning of Tape 4)

Q: We are continuing the Tanton interview on April 20th. This is Tape 4, Side A.

TANTON: During the 10 months that we spent in Washington, Mary Lou served as a lobbyist for FAIR. She received a modest stipend, maybe several hundred dollars a month; I don't recall exactly what it was. She worked on the House side on the Hill and, I think, really proved effective. She enjoyed it a great deal. We lived in Arlington, and our daughter, Jane, went to high school out there. She benefited from the experience as well. So it was a good thing for our family, and I think perhaps it was of some benefit to the organizations too.

One of the things that happened during the course of that year took place in the spring of 1982. I was being shown around San Francisco by a FAIR member, Bonnie Hawley. We stopped by the San Francisco office of Senator Hayakawa. It was there that I met Stanley Diamond, who ran that office for the senator. We talked a little bit about the immigration question. The senator disagreed with us on that topic, but I had already learned of his interest in bilingualism and that he had introduced a constitutional amendment to make English the official language of the United States. We talked about that a bit. That's another whole story that should be told some time, one that led eventually to the formation of U.S. English.

Q: It's part of the FAIR story though, is it not, in this sense: you had brought up with the FAIR board for discussion on many occasions the possibility that the themes we were raising — population increase, environmental degradation, injury to the disadvantaged Americans, the main topics that FAIR had always made it's themes — you had raised the question of expanding these to include the matter of cultural division. But the FAIR board and the FAIR staff had been very wary of that. Would you like to indicate how the history of FAIR and the history of U.S. English are connected here in this regard?

TANTON: Well, one staff person who was interested in this subject was Gerda Bikales, with whom I had worked on population and immigration issues for many years. Gerda herself was an immigrant to this country, and had learned to speak English when she came here as a teenager. We talked for some time about the bilingual question, which I had encountered quite frequently in my year of traveling. I often ran into people who would say, "Well, I don't know how I feel about illegal immigration. They do the jobs Americans don't want to do, don't they? But I'll tell you what makes me mad. It's going into the voting booth and finding ballots in languages other

than English!" I had been interested in language and communication for years. I had read Senator Hayakawa's book, *Language In Thought and Action*, as a college student, and had gotten a lot out of it. When the question came up of whether we should broaden FAIR's bundle of issues — taking a look at cultural division and bilingualism and the changing composition of the American population and what that might mean — there was a great deal of resistance, as you say, to getting into what seemed like dangerous territory. So we arranged for Gerda to take six months off from her other duties to study the bilingualism question. She wrote a 180-page paper, which concluded that it really was a problem and that someone needed to do something about it. So in the Fall of 1982, we took that conclusion back to the FAIR board to ask if they wanted to add bilingualism to their bundle of issues.

Q: I think I remember the meeting. Wasn't it on Long Island in New York?

TANTON: I don't recall the location. There was one meeting on Long Island. That was one that I ever missed. It was at Bea McClintock's place.

Q: Then we continued the discussion in your absence because it was a very large and continuing discussion.

TANTON: The net result of it was that the FAIR board decided, "Thanks, but no thanks." They had enough on their plate. I was then presented with the option of either just giving up on the issue or doing something about it separately from FAIR. Well, I had already learned something about how to set up a new organization. I knew about direct mail and that sort of thing. Reluctant to quit, I met with Senator Hayakawa, who was about to leave the Senate. He was agreeable to trying to pursue this matter after he left office. He had the list of donors to his campaign. I was able to go back to some of our original FAIR donors and raise a bit of seed money, and we also got some help from FAIR. They lent us some office space, lent us Gerda for a while with the understanding that if we got up and going, we would repay these advances. I contracted with Matt Gallagher, our direct mail person, to develop a test letter. I recruited a couple of the Senator's friends, Stanley Diamond and Leo Sorenson, to be first board members with Gerda and me. We dropped our first mail, I think, in June of 1983, and, I believe, made direct mail history at that time. The first letter came back with about an eight to ten percent return, which is about eight or ten times higher than one usually gets! So we knew we had a live issue then. It was clear that this was one that people understood and felt strongly about. Things went forward from there.

Q: This may be a good time to discuss your larger activities. This is an

interview aimed mainly at the immigration reform effort, and obviously FAIR, as an organization, is at the center of it. But anybody listening to this tape and reading this transcript will realize you are a man with many irons in the fire at all times. You launched U.S. English in 1983. Would you tell us if that's the extent of your cloning of, or creation of, or nurturing of institutions to do the total job? Was there a problem at FAIR of jealousy or of a feeling that their chairman, Dr. Tanton, whose attention they want 100% of the time, was wandering off in another direction, and spreading himself a little thin?

TANTON: Well, I don't think that jealousy is quite the right word, but I do remember Sidney Swensrud, in particular, being concerned that I might get to spending too much time on other things, and that FAIR would suffer as a result. I recognized that as a possibility, but I thought that setting up U.S. English would turn out to be a supportive move for FAIR, as it has been. It's turned out that the list of donors that U.S. English developed has proved to be an excellent list for FAIR to mail to for recruits, better than any other list, as a matter of fact.

As to my personal organization for all these outside activities, I mentioned before that I've always set aside Mondays, ever since I went into practice in 1964, for such outside work. I got the secretarial part of the work done by talking my medical office helper/secretary, Donna Pikur, into spending her Mondays, at my expense, doing the typing, filing, and mailing and that sort of thing. That went along fairly well until FAIR was formed in 1979, but then the work load began to grow very substantially. So in the spring of 1980, I recruited Kathryn Bricker as a full-time assistant. She had been the first executive director of the Little Traverse Conservancy, which you may recall I had also helped organize back in the 70s. Kathy and her naturalist-husband had gone off to live in the Canadian bush the winter of 1979-1980. Mary Lou, several friends and I skied in to their cabin in April of 1980, while there was still a lot of snow, in order to offer her this job. [Laughter] She decided to take it, and came to work for me in probably about May or June of that year.

Q: *In Petoskey, to manage what might be called your many activities?*

TANTON: Right, and we actually set up a separate office. I rented space from the medical clinic for which I worked, and we got the necessary typewriters, filing cases, telephones, and so on.

Q: *Did you have a name on the door?*

TANTON: Yes, we called it the Conservation Workshop. FAIR began to help pay the expenses of this office, because I now had a full-time employee

and was working chiefly on the immigration question. When we decided to move to Washington for year of 1981-82, Kathy and her husband, Jim, who have no children and are quite the free spirits, decided, on my invitation, to come along. Kathy and I occupied the same office on the third floor at FAIR during that year. She served as my arranger of trips, did my secretarial work and that sort of thing. She's a very competent and energetic person. She grew steadily as we got into this arrangement and took more and more responsibility. Finding Kathy Bricker was a big event in my organizational life in terms of being able to get more done. We both moved back to Petoskey in June of '82, where we established my office. Kathy served as my assistant for several years before moving back to Washington in 1988 to help out with U.S. English.

Since I had been involved over the years in starting a number of organizations, each of them a separate group which required separate accounting and separate filings with the IRS, I got the idea in about 1979 of setting up an umbrella foundation, out of which a number of projects could be run. This really took form when we returned from Washington in 1982. We called the organization simply "U.S." The idea was that we could have projects under it that had U.S. in the name. The first one that we set up was U.S. English. Since we didn't know initially whether U.S. English would be successful or not, and since we had an established foundation with all of the proper accounting and so on already set up, it was simple to start it off as a U.S. project, just as a corporation might start up a new project to see if it would work. The agreement was that if it worked and got big enough, and if the project wanted to go off on its own, it could do so with our blessing.

Q: Did you have a model for this you were following, or were you making this up?

TANTON: There is a foundation in San Francisco called the Tides Foundation where they've done something similar to this, but, I think, in substantial measure, I invented it myself. When we wrote our application to the IRS for a 501 (C)(3) status, we wrote our charter very broadly. The IRS accepted it. It's worked out well from that standpoint. Through the years we've added a number of projects, none of them as big as U.S. English. There's one project called ProWild which helps promote the idea of game ranching. We have projects in Kenya and New Mexico. Another project supports studies of hawks, owls, eagles, and ospreys — the great birds of prey in northern Michigan. We set up the solid waste recycling project for our area. It's called Recycle North, and it still runs as one of our projects. Then we had a number of cultural efforts in the area. I mentioned some of these earlier: the language courses, the Great Books discussions, the American Foreign Policy Association series. [A description

of these activities will be appended to this oral history.] These are run as little projects of U.S. All in all, there are about sixteen projects that in one way or another are run out of U.S. Some of them are quite small.

Q: *Seems a handy umbrella.*

TANTON: It's a very useful tool. If you want to get something done in life, it's nice to have such tools in your kit. The most recent project we set up deals with the use of road salt. It's a terrific problem in some of our northern states because they keep the roads clear in the wintertime by salting them — very heavily. This causes billions of dollars worth of damage, not only to the roads and bridges, but also to the ground water and the trees along the highway, not to mention the cars.

A chap interested in the road salt problem got in touch with me. He wanted to work on the problem, but he didn't know how organizations are run and he had no money. I was able to supply the organizational experience and some funds, so we plugged his project in and will help him as best we can with it. We'll try to give him advice and support along the way.

Q: *Let me ask a question. It sounds as if you are on the verge of being regarded as a philanthropist rather than whatever you might have called yourself before. Do you have a source of funds other than the expertise of Kathy Bricker and your own managerial skills? How do you fund U.S.?*

TANTON: Well, the answer is yes. I have run into some people through the years who, as some philanthropists do, support people rather than projects. There are some people who have liked the things I've worked on, who thought they were worth doing. It may seem hard to believe, but some of these people actually gave money to U.S. for me to spend on whatever suited my fancy. Warren Buffet was one of these persons. For a three-year period, from 1983-1986, he gave us about \$90,000 a year that we were free to spend on such projects as we thought were appropriate. Those were to be primarily related to population, immigration, and language. We've received monies from other people that I've spent on these projects too.

One of my functions as chairman of FAIR, as a person who was removed from the day-to-day battles that staff must fight, was to be a student of how social change takes place, and what institutional arrangements are needed to achieve change. For immigration, one very important part of the puzzle is the courts. The immigration statute is the second longest title in the U.S. Code, second only to the IRS code in length. In addition to that, there's a great deal of case law that's been made through the years through cases being decided in the courts. We knew that if we weren't active in the courts we would eventually lose this battle.

In the early 1980s, we made an effort to start a litigation program. We retained Joe Zingerle, an attorney in D.C. that Roger knew, to develop a litigation strategy. But the relationship didn't work out very well. I think this was largely because of the consultant's role that we spoke of before. Joe wasn't located in our office and so didn't have the benefit of hearing the daily conversation. That early effort at starting a litigation program failed. Several years later, after the state of Texas lost the school case in the Supreme Court in the spring of 1982, we again decided that we had to be active in the courts. We felt that it would take a separate organization to do so. The litigation effort that we needed was so big that it couldn't be mixed in with everything else that FAIR was doing.

Q: Now, you have on the staff Roger Conner, a lawyer, though he's not practiced law. But you have some staff members who are beginning to gather legal expertise at night?

TANTON: Staff member Barnaby Zall was attending law school at night. He finished in about 1984. Another chap, Dan Stein, now currently executive director, came on the staff in about 1982, several years after Barnaby. He, too, was attending law school in the evenings, and about 1985 passed his bar exam.

Q: So you've got at least three staff members who are attuned personally to the importance of legal issues and the litigation issue? Your board, as I recall it, was of a divided mind about how much energy to put into litigation, which is very expensive stuff.

TANTON: That's correct, but we managed to convince them that we needed to do something. So the structure we settled upon was a so-called supporting organization, rather than an entirely independent group. We called it the Immigration Reform Law Institute, or IRLI. It was structured in such a way that it could operate under FAIR's tax exemption but have its own board, appointed initially by FAIR's board. One of the lessons that I'd learned at ZPG is that when one spins off independent organizations, they sometimes go off in an unanticipated direction, never to be seen again. That happened to the ZPG Foundation. It went off in a different direction and was lost to the movement.

Q: So what was your formula for trying to keep some control?

TANTON: We tried to keep control of IRLI by making sure that the FAIR board was the ultimate authority in appointing the IRLI board. IRLI was given a separate suite in the FAIR offices. Dan Stein became its executive director. In their first couple of years, the small staff worked away with

varying degrees of effectiveness at various projects while they were learning how immigration law worked. We had very young attorneys, of course, and, in the law, experience is very important. But the organization survived, and served to demonstrate the need to be active in the courts. IRLI is now just beginning to come into its own.

During the year that I spent in Washington and worked on fundraising, one of the people that I met was Kellum Smith, population officer for the A.W. Mellon Foundation in New York. I wanted to talk Mellon into funding some of our academic activities. Kellum said that they did not fund politically active organizations. At the time, we were running our publication and research efforts out of FAIR. It seemed that what this unit put out might be thought to be not quite independent enough; outsiders might see these publications as just serving the interests of the organization, rather than fairly assessing the issues. So it was decided that we should set up an independent and more academic effort that would be removed from the daily fray, one where the phone wasn't ringing all the time, and where the staff could undertake more serious long-term projects, producing publications of substance, even books. These then would be useful to the immigration reform movement in general. I wrote the first description of such an organization and listed fifteen or twenty projects that it could undertake. But there was a dispute on the FAIR board, not so much about whether this was needed, but about whether we could afford it. Where was the money going to come from? But we nevertheless did find some money. We actually donated several of our board members and donors to the Center for Immigration Studies, as it was called — Gene Katz became one of their important donors. Liz Paddock left the main FAIR board and went over to the Center for Immigration Studies board. We subsequently hired a retired foreign service officer, David Simcox, to run CIS. But that's another story in itself. CIS has gone on to be quite successful, and is completely independent of FAIR. It has, in fact, produced a book and a good many papers and monographs.

So as we were trying to look at the overall task of reforming the immigration law, we realized that it was perhaps a little bit like trying to roll up a rug. In order to get the job done, and end up with the rug in a nice tight roll at the other side of the room, you have to run back and forth in a coordinated fashion along that rug to keep the whole effort moving smoothly; and if one rolls at just one corner, the rug — or reform program — will end up skewed to one side. Forming IRLI and CIS were part of an effort to develop a balanced program — a neatly rolled rug!

Q: Or you need many hands rolling it at several points. That's quite an explosion of organizational creativity. Does that exhaust the topic, or have you forgotten something else in the way of innovation that you'd like to mention now?

TANTON: Well, there's one other group that should be mentioned. In the spring of 1982, when it seemed as if we had a chance of passing a bill, there was a need for more lobbying efforts. As a tax exempt organization, FAIR had certain limits on how much money it could spend on lobbying, roughly no more than 20% of our total income. We found a donor who was willing to put up non-tax deductible money to support the lobbying. So we set up an organization called the FAIR Legislative Task Force (the FAIR LTF). In IRS terms it's called a (c)(4). Contributions to it are not tax deductible, but they're not taxable as income either. All of the money, 100% of it, can be spent on lobbying. So we obtained space a few doors away from FAIR's offices on "P" Street. My wife, Mary Lou, and a black minister from California named Leon Ralph, whom our new donor recommended, came to work for us. So did Bob Park, a retired Border Patrol Agent, who later joined the U.S. English Board. K.C. McAlpin, the businessman who had joined FAIR when he saw our ad in the *Wall Street Journal*, and whom I had met on one of my swings through Texas in the fall of 1981, left his job at Diamond Shamrock Corporation and moved to Washington to work for the FAIR-LTF. There were several other people, as well. We had, perhaps, six or eight people in that office who added to our lobbying power during 1982. That's the last organizational addition I remember. I think this shows that it's not as simple as it might at first seem to mount a national effort. To use an analogy with a workman's toolbox: to get this job done requires more than just a hammer or screwdriver. It takes five or six different types of "tools" to complete the job.

Q: I have a feeling every time I ask if that's the last organizational structure you created, and I think it's the last, you come up with another one that you forgot. So let's ask again, thinking back, is that the last organizational creativity, or did you find some other structure that you needed?

TANTON: Well, actually there was one other thing that we ended up calling the WITAN, which is an old English term for the councils that used to advise the 15th century English kings on matters of the state. (The full word is "witenagemot".) I think this was started in the fall of 1984. We decided that there was a need for yet another forum.

Q: John, when you say "we", is that the royal we, or is there sometimes an actual we?

TANTON: Well, most of these were real plural "we"s. I frequently talked, as you know, with Roger and bounced ideas off him. There were other people I talked with, as well. So the "we" usually denotes a group of people, though not always the same ones. In certain cases, I developed a new idea; in others, it was someone else.

Several of us decided that it would be a good idea to have another forum to which we might be able to bring people of note and who might not want to associate formally with FAIR, but who might be interested in talking and learning about our issue — new potential donors, foundation people or individuals, prominent journalists, politicians and so on. So we began having these so-called WITAN meetings, for which I would prepare the agenda, the background materials, and the subjects.

Two of the early ones were hosted by Governor Lamm in the governor's mansion out in Colorado. I remember very well that Warren Buffett and his main associate, Charles Munger, a businessman from Los Angeles, came to one of those.

Q: How would you characterize the larger subject that all participants understood to be the subject of these WITANS?

TANTON: They dealt in general with population, immigration, and assimilation and language-type questions. We were trying to find ideas on the overall structure of the movement, on whether there were any new organizations that were needed, or ways in which issues should be presented, tied together or separated, things like this that would be of help. The WITANS also served as an early warning system. They were part of an effort to look four or five years down the line, attempting to anticipate what issues might be coming.

One realization that did develop out of the WITAN was an appreciation for the imbalance between rights and responsibilities that seemed to be developing in our land. Many of the problems we were fighting seemed to come from people asserting brand new constitutional "rights," like language rights that we'd never heard of before, or challenges to immigration law based on some newly asserted right. These often came with no corresponding sense of responsibility on the part of the same individual to make a contribution to society. Out of this perception came the idea for yet another organization which is still in formation, and which has been named the American Alliance for Rights and Responsibilities. It looks as if it will finally come together now in the spring of 1989. So the WITAN did serve as an interorganizational place to vent and vet ideas, to discuss hard topics, to plan optimistically, and to move things ahead.

Teddy White, the journalist, attended one of those meetings. He joined us for a border tour in San Diego. I think that would be in the spring of 1987, and that was his last trip. He died several days later — with an article on the immigration question in his typewriter. That was a big loss to the reform efforts, as he was coming around to our point of view.

Q: Isn't it fair to say that three of America's very great journalists, who were never concerned with such questions twenty years ago, have in the last few

years been very interested—and you've had some contact with, I think, all three of them; they would be Teddy White, Walter Cronkite, and Eric Severeid.

TANTON: Right. I've never met Mr. Cronkite but I've met with Eric Severeid several times. He's written a number of articles, and all three of them spoke out quite strongly on the immigration and language questions.

I mentioned the border tour we took with the WITAN. Taking people on tours of the border is one way FAIR hit upon to illustrate dramatically the illegal immigration situation. The best place to see this is at San Diego. We developed a good relationship with the border patrol there. They would take us out late in the afternoon to see the general lay of the land. We looked over the area called the Soccer Field, right down on the border. We could see people collecting on the Mexican side, cooking their meals, getting ready for the dash into the United States when the sun finally went down. Then we would go back out with the border patrol at night and use their infra-red night scopes to watch people cross and to see the mounted border patrolmen apprehending them. Some of us went up in the helicopter and also got that view. It's a very dramatic and telling experience, so much so that we set up a regular system of border tours in order to give people this experience.

(End of Tape 4, Side A)

Q: As one who attended frequently, I recall that among the difficult issues the WITAN had to decide was how to answer our opposition. The issue was sharply focused when the opposition became, toward the middle of the decade, the church, or the churches, religious leaders, people from churches both Protestant and Catholic, who were mobilized on the immigration issues, particularly by the Central American situation and the Salvadorian refugees. There emerged something called the Sanctuary Movement. Their interests were quite in collision with ours. FAIR's sense of how to deal with the Sanctuary Movement had to be debated, and it was a complicated question. What is your recollection of how that issue emerged and how we dealt with it?

TANTON: We felt from the beginning that the Sanctuary Movement was a front for other concerns, and that what many of these people were really concerned about was U.S. policy in Central America. They were actually exploiting refugees to make foreign policy points. They were at odds with the Reagan administration's policy, and the Sanctuary Movement was a tool that they'd found to try to embarrass the administration. I think that the basic idea was that the U.S. was responsible for the situation in Latin

America, and that this justified Latin Americans coming to this country. I believe in academic circles this idea is called the dependency theory.

Q: Certainly a thing called the dependency theory is very strong in academic circles, and it does suggest that the U.S., in complicated ways, is responsible for a lot of the misery in the underdeveloped world.

TANTON: You may recall that at one of our WITAN sessions we brought in a chap by the name of Larry Harrison. I guess you weren't at that meeting?

Q: I was, if it was the meeting in Utah.

TANTON: No, it was the one in Middleburg, Virginia.

Q: I missed that one.

TANTON: I believe your brother Hugh came instead. Larry had written a book challenging the dependency theory that we just discussed. It was called *Underdevelopment Is a State of Mind: The Latin American Case*.

As I've said, we felt that the sanctuary people had interests that went far beyond the issue of the illegal entry of people from Latin America. We once had one of their proponents come to a FAIR Advisory Board meeting in Washington. Do you recall that?

Q: I recall it. We had a good, heated debate, an open and candid debate, about sanctuary.

TANTON: Right. One of my main recollections from about 1983 is being in Washington for a board meeting when the McNeil-Lehrer Show called up, wanting somebody to debate the Reverend William Sloan Coffin on the sanctuary issue that evening.

Q: Surely you didn't agree?

TANTON: Well, I did, as a matter of fact. For some reason, Roger and the other usual TV people weren't there or weren't available. The producer talked to me for a bit to see if I had sufficiently vexatious and controversial things to say, to make for a good show. They decided I did, so I was invited to appear. I got a great kick out of the experience. I still have the video tape at home.

I might mention another organizational principle here. I was not trying to make a career out of working on immigration, but for someone like Roger Conner, it was a career. He was making a name for himself in Washington circles. So it was quite important that someone like Roger get

the lion's share of public appearances. I think it's appropriate for someone in the chairman's role to step back and give the main opportunities to other people. It can really make a difference in their reputations as they move through a life in the public eye.

Q: Would you estimate the percentage of public appearances that you made as contrasted with Roger and other staff members?

TANTON: Well, Roger and the other staff members did far and away the lion's share of them, simply because they were on the scene. I was sequestered in northern Michigan most of the time, and it was very difficult for me to get away for public appearances. I like to speak in public, and have done a lot of it in the course of my public-interest life, but most of the opportunities went to people who were available on a day-to-day basis.

Q: Now, the sanctuary movement, obviously, is a way of saying that America's refugee and asylum policies should be radically revised to make them more open and more accepting of political refugees from Central America and elsewhere. So how did FAIR see this question, the one that had been raised by the Sanctuary Movement, and how did you respond?

TANTON: This was really three complicated questions: two First Amendment ones of free speech and the separation of church and state, and the Thoreauian question of passive resistance to unjust laws. In part, our response was that at the time of the debates over the immigration issue, the sanctuary people were nowhere to be seen. They had not done what they could have to change what they saw as bad law by legislative means. We thought you had to do that first to earn the right of civil disobedience. After all, one of the things people were fleeing from in Latin America was man-made law rather than legislatively-passed law. How did it make sense for the Sanctuary Movement to take the law into its own hands? One of the problems that the people were fleeing from was people taking the law into their own hands.

Q: I framed the question wrongly. At the level of civil disobedience, which was what sanctuary was, there is an answer to civil disobedience. But were they — after the question of civil disobedience — demanding that America's refugee and asylum policies be radically altered, the legal policies, toward what is a refugee? Is a refugee anybody from El Salvador, for example, who can make it to Texas?

TANTON: Well, I'm sure they would have liked to have had the provisions changed, but to my knowledge, and I may be wrong in this, I don't think they did much conventional work to change the law. They made sure they

got plenty of television coverage. They trotted so-called refugees around the country to speak to various willing congregations in San Francisco and Boston and elsewhere, often in such good English that one wondered how they'd acquired it. But as far as actually trying to change the law, or file lawsuits that would have changed it, I'm not aware that they did much of that. It was largely a publicity stunt, and I think the reason is that they weren't really concerned about the refugees. They were concerned about changing the Reagan administration's policy in Latin America, its support for the Contras and things of that nature. We, of course, took no position on that, but objected to using immigration as a tool to make some other ancillary point.

Q: At this time, particularly with the Sanctuary Movement, the emotional level of the discussion over immigration, if possible, goes up. Immigration is always an emotional issue, but the moralism and the emotional element increased. Is there something you would say at this point about FAIR's engagement with an organized opposition, or is that the wrong phrase? How would you characterize the opposition? And over time I'm sure it changed.

TANTON: Well, I've spent a lot of time wondering about the opposition. How is it that reasonably intelligent, well-educated people can look at the same situation and come to such different conclusions? A book on this that I found particularly helpful was Thomas Sowell's *A Conflict of Visions*, chapter two in particular, in which he posits two different views of the world, admitting that they overlap both within the individual and as to issues.

One view is the "constrained" view of mankind, which basically sees man as being born a savage that needs to be civilized and brought into society. This view does not expect the ideal and sees, as did the framers of the Constitution, that governments were instituted because men were not ideal, and there was a need for restraint in human affairs.

The other side Sowell characterizes as the "unconstrained" view, which would be the Rousseauian view that man was born free and is everywhere in chains. This view holds that man is innately noble, that it is human institutions that are basically at fault and need to be changed. It holds that we should strive for the ideal, and if there are social costs like the killing of millions of people in Cambodia in order for the ideal government to be brought into place, that's unfortunate, but a cost that can be easily born in pursuit of the ideal. That side does not believe in trade-offs, but rather looks for absolutes and perfection. Sowell acknowledges there are gradations of these attitudes along issue lines and within each of us as individuals. I have found it a helpful framework.

We began in about 1986 to study some of our opposition groups to try to learn exactly what their underlying philosophy was. Rather than try to

characterize the individual groups, I'd like to talk a little bit about some of these underlying ideas, because I believe that ideas rule the world, and that the pen is mightier than the sword. I have all along seen the immigration battle as really a skirmish in a wider war, a wider war of fundamental ideas that finds some groups lining up in opposition to us on such things as the question of limits to population growth, or on the language issue and so on.

In the fall of 1988, I wrote down what I thought some of these basic differences were. [A copy is appended.] The first one had to do with my own belief that we live in a world of limits and boundaries, however difficult these may be to pinpoint. That's the basic perspective of one interested in population problems. It's opposed, for instance, by the Julian Simon and the Ben Wattenberg school that feels that people are the ultimate resource, and there's no limit to resources, and we can just pump things up forever. I think that is the main point of division between our side and the other side.

Next, I listed my belief that the nation state is still a valid concept. Just as we have local government and state government and just as we acknowledge that there's a need for some sort of transnational mechanism, whether it's the U.N. or something else, to deal with transnational problems like global warming, CFCs in the atmosphere, or acid rain. So there is a need for a structure of government at the national level. Even if one theoretically doesn't like national governments and nationalism, the fact is that there are very few nations in the world that are going to cede their sovereignty to some global authority. This is especially true of those new nations that have only recently become sovereign with the post-World War II decline of colonialism. I believe the validity of the nation state is also a point of difference between the two sides in the immigration debate. I believe that, in academe in particular, there is a certain type of ill-defined globalism. There is an ideal that holds that all mankind should somehow fit into one scheme. I just don't think that's a workable idea, even if it is an ideal for some people.

A third idea I wrote down is that I do hold to the metaphor of "the melting pot." I hold that as a country we should be trying to efface, or at least to minimize, our differences and accentuate our similarities, so that in the face of all the diversity we have, we can get along better with one another. There's been a strong movement, an amazing movement actually, since the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964. We started out prohibiting the inquiry into race, religion, creed, or national origin in hiring, and now, twenty-five years later, we've come full circle to the point where we require it. I've not yet figured out exactly what happened to the idea of integration but it's certainly been replaced now with the idea of separatism and maintaining one's ethnic identity. We've lost a lot of the sense of national unity — the idea that we're a country of people trying jointly to manage ourselves and get on in the world, not just an address for disparate groups

that happen to be lodged in North America, and who live out their separate lives with little interaction with one another. I think this is another point of difference between our side and the opposition.

Yet another dealt with the idea of diversity. The phrase, "our strength is in our diversity," is one of the chief cliches of our time. It rolls easily off the tongue without much thought. I think diversity is fine, and it enriches our lives. But I also think that commonality is fine and enriches our lives. We need some things in common. One of the great debates today is whether we should have a common language. There doesn't seem to be a debate over whether we should have a common currency, the lack of which is one of the problems in the unification of Europe. Someone once calculated that if one took a hundred dollars and went through the currency exchanges for each of the twelve EEC nations, when you came out the other end, you'd only have \$47.00 left! One of the problems that drove the thirteen colonies to union was that each one printed its own paper money, so that currencies had to be exchanged as one travelled from one of those early states to another. No one argues that we shouldn't have a common set of weights and measures in the U.S. Do we want to measure in millimeters in one state, inches in another, and cubits in the next, pounds in one, and stones in another? Of course not. So we need some commonalities. The debate is about how far to go in the common direction. Conversely, how far should we hold back from commonalities in order to maintain our individuality? What's needed here is not all one or all the other, but some sort of intelligent balance. Obviously, we would have a great deal of difficulty running this country if we couldn't speak to one another in a common language. It would be real diversity if each one of us had his own separate, private language, but it wouldn't work very well in terms of trying to run the country economically, socially, or politically.

Another point of departure is this question of culture. I think that there is such a thing as an American culture, however difficult it may be to define. But it's certainly popular in some circles to regard America as not having a distinctive culture. Hence, to say that one is not a hyphenated American but just an American doesn't convey any meaning as far as those people are concerned. I think that's an incorrect view. For instance, the United States is the most philanthropic society on the face of the earth, and most of the work that FAIR and our opponents do is supported by philanthropy. Few, if any, other cultures have developed the idea of public philanthropy as strongly as we have here.

Another particularly sore point for me is the business of name-calling. I've always tried to stay away from this. I believe that it's not a substitute for debate to attack an opponent personally, to impugn the person's motives, or make the individual appear in a poor light. Rather, we should deal with the issues themselves.

These are some of the main points on which I differ with our opposition, and it seems to me that the battles that we fight here are really conflicts in a wider war.

Q: It's interesting that you do characterize the opposition in terms of ideas and cultural values when many people would begin by pointing out that certain economic interests are at stake. Your perspective on it is a different one and illuminates things that are sometimes not seen. Isn't it true that a cluster of questions having to do with cultural values — language, outlook, and the claims of a common culture as against diversity — are issues that were troublesome within FAIR, tactically? They were there in the atmosphere. They were implicit in the issue. But FAIR began, as I recall it, deciding to stress population, economic impact, resources, and environment. This whole cluster of so-called cultural questions simmers out on the edge of the debate for a while and then breaks in. What was your own view of it? What was your own role in leading the organization to think about how and in what way to address or not to address this basket of cultural issues?

TANTON: Well, I had been interested in cultural issues for some time and had noted that around the world there were many instances of division, often bloody division, along cultural, racial, ethnic, and language lines. For instance, in Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority certainly don't get along very well together. There are problems in Belgium between the French speakers in the south and the Flemish speakers to the north, and problems in Canada between the French speakers and the English speakers. Throughout India there have been conflicts between Sikh and Hindu or between Hindu and Muslim. All around the world and back through history, we find such conflicts. Look at Israel, and the conflict between Arab and Jew — and Lebanon, with Christian confronting Muslim. There are certainly plenty of instances of different groups of people who don't get on well together. Since immigration was changing the mixture of groups in the United States, I thought a reasonable question was how well this was all going to work out. Would we be spared the same type of conflicts?

One of the people who did some early studies on this was Leon Bouvier, a demographer at the Population Reference Bureau. Leon is about as flaming a liberal as you can find, but was still interested in the question of demographic change, not from the sense of trying to prevent it but rather from the sense of trying to anticipate problems and do something about them in advance.

Here I might mention my physician's training and perspective, because what we are talking about here is early diagnosis, social diagnosis. It's really the same problem the physician faces in the patient who comes in with a cough. Is this a symptom that should be taken seriously, or is it

something that should just be treated with aspirin and subjected to an expensive workup only if it doesn't clear? The dilemma is that if one can make the diagnosis early, then the treatment required will probably be less damaging, less costly, and not so debilitating to the patient. On the other hand, one may end up treating many conditions that did not really require it. In contrast, if you're a less astute diagnostician and let things run along until even the most dotty of physicians can figure out that the patient is ill, by that time the disease will be far advanced. Then the treatment is going to require severe and expensive measures and even then may not work — the patient may succumb. So looking at cultural questions is an attempt at early social diagnosis, trying to envision problems so they can be prevented, or at least mitigated, so that early treatment can be applied.

One way in which we attempted this was through the institution of the WITAN. I recall clearly the meeting that we had at San Diego, the one which journalist Teddy White attended, where we raised these cultural issues for the first time. I had written a memo for that meeting to begin framing some questions, pointing out that, as Leon Bouvier's studies of California had shown, twenty or thirty years down the line the state would have a retired class composed chiefly of non-Hispanic whites, and a working class that was largely Hispanic and black. The question was whether the latter would be willing to support the former financially through taxes for Social Security, medicine, etc, as the former will then be retired and in nursing homes and so on.

Q: Wasn't it to some extent Teddy White's feeling, among that of other people, that, while this may be a reality, it was simply something he did not think we should talk about, or that he and others felt very uncomfortable with?

TANTON: That's correct. It's obviously a very difficult topic. It contains all sorts of land mines. I also raised the question in relation to the Sierra Club — that is, the cultural values that led to the conservation ethos that's typified by the Sierra Club, and its success in the legislature in setting aside natural areas, wild rivers, greenbelts, and that sort of thing. I would say that those are values that are characteristic of American society. We could probably trace their roots back through Western Civilization. If we look at the conservation ethic of some of the countries from which large numbers of immigrants are coming, we don't find the same sort of respect for the land and our fellow creatures that has developed here. We certainly don't see this in many of the southeastern Asian cultures or in Latin America. They don't have the same sort of conservation ethic we have here. So the question is: What might happen if these conservationist values go into a minority political position? Would past victories eventually be reversed? Would we eventually get to the point where people didn't prize

such a simple matter, it would be no problem. One of the first reactions to bringing these matters up is that you "shouldn't ask the question, this is a prohibited area." There is a strong taboo against talking about cultural differences. I guess if there's one thing that characterizes me, it is that I have never been subject to that sort of sanction, and am even drawn to proceed in areas that are particularly difficult, if I feel that they need to be explored. As a single example, if it were felt that current patterns of immigration were leading to division along language lines, one thing that might be done, as Senator Kennedy has proposed, is to give credit or points toward an immigration visa for a person already able to speak English. That is an example of a way in which, looking down the line and seeing a problem, one might take steps to alleviate it. One might also find that there was too much concentration in the immigrant stream among certain language groups, and that this was leading to re-ghettoization in certain areas. If so, the policy might be changed — not so that there was less, but rather more, diversity in the immigrant stream — so that we wouldn't have such concentrations of certain language groups. This might provide more of an impetus toward assimilation, or at least acculturation — to use the new, and perhaps more accurate, word.

(End of Tape 4, Side B)

Q: The issues we've been talking about in the last few minutes have broken through into public discussion but not through the immigration question and not through the activities of FAIR. As I remember it, they break through and they involve you. This means that, in an indirect way, they involve FAIR. They break through in the fall of 1988, wasn't it, in connection with U.S. English's activities? Would you discuss this incident and its implications and consequences?

TANTON: Well, we mentioned earlier the WITAN meeting in San Diego that Teddy White attended, where we first raised some of these questions. The following meeting was held in Middleburg, Virginia, six months later. I had drafted a memo on population, environmental and cultural questions for the San Diego meeting and redid it for the one in Middleburg. When I wrote this memo, I was not trying to be particularly cautious or definitive. Following my usual practice, I included everything that might remotely pertain to the topic, including some speculations that would have been better left out! Somehow, the memo fell into the hands of the opposition.

Q: Let me ask, before you describe that process — this is a memo setting out an agenda for discussion?

TANTON: Right, the idea was there are some controversial issues that needed discussion. Rather than have the WITAN meet with no preparation, my idea was that somebody should serve as the interlocutor and write down items to stimulate the discussion, sending this out in advance to give people a chance to think about the issues before they arrived. I also provided them with some other background materials to read. My memo was written for a group of people who were already initiated into immigration, population, and language issues. It was not written for people off the street who'd never heard any of these ideas before and had no background in them. It assumed a good deal of knowledge of the subject.

Q: And you were framing questions which are in the public mind and are in the public discussion in an informal way?

TANTON; Yes, they were in the public mind but not really in open public discussion. These topics seemed to be cropping up at cocktail parties, around dinner tables, and in other informal situations. But few people had as yet found the language or courage to talk about these things in open discussion.

Q: And this memo finds its way outside the circle of those for whom it was intended?

TANTON; Yes. The Middleburg meeting was in the fall of '86, if memory serves correctly. After the success of U.S. English — and its California initiative campaign, Proposition 63, in California in the fall of '86 — the opposition to the Official English movement (which was basically composed of the same groups opposed to us on the immigration question) mustered its forces.

Q: What was the nature of the initiative in California?

TANTON; Proposition 63 made English the official language of the state of California and gave standing to citizens to sue in defense of that. When it garnered 75% of the vote, the opposition decided it was time to pull themselves together. They had this memo in their possession, and when we. . .

Q: They?

TANTON; They being the opposition. We're still not sure who was involved or how they got the memo, but when U.S. English qualified Official English initiatives in Florida, Arizona, and Colorado for the 1988 ballot, the opposition decided to mount a campaign, particularly in Arizona, to try to knock at least one initiative off. Part of their campaign included releasing this memo and trying to use it to tarnish me, and hence U.S. English, and thus the initiatives. They tried to show that I was racist, nativist, mean, a Nazi, and anything else that they could think of.

Q: They claimed that the substance of this memo represented Tanton's very principles and beliefs?

TANTON; That's correct. So in the wake of all the brouhaha, the executive director of U.S. English at the time, Linda Chavez, resigned. The vote in Arizona was projected to be very close. It seemed to me that the opposition's plan was to release the memo three or four days before the election, when there would be no time remaining to respond to it. So I decided that I would resign from U.S. English to break the story three weeks ahead of time, in hopes that the crest of the controversy would pass by election day. As I've thought about all this since then, I've regretted resigning. I think that it was basically a mistake. I believe that it added to the seeming credibility of the charges against me. The initiative won in Arizona by 11,000 votes out of 1.1 million cast. I console myself by thinking maybe my resignation did have some beneficial effect. It was a battlefield decision.

Q: Is it accurate to say that this episode is but one leading example of a long standing problem for FAIR as an activist group in immigration reform — that the opposition, and many others, would constantly ask what are the motives of the restrictionists? And FAIR's answer always was, upfront, that our goals are a legal system that is enforceable, that this is a population question, an environmental question. But there's always the allegation that the motives are subterranean and the motives have something to do with an ethnic or a racial dislike?

TANTON: Whether the opposition believed their charges or not, they knew such charges are very difficult to counter in this society. They're very effective. How does one disprove charges of racism? They've been used so much now that I believe they're starting to lose some of their punch. It's gotten to the point where if I like coffee and you like tea, the reason must be racism. A fascinating and related topic is what's going on at college campuses and across the country today with regard to this idea of racism. That goes beyond what we can cover here.

Q: This affects U.S. English and we want to talk more about FAIR and the immigration reform movement. Perhaps this is a good time to redirect our attention back to what Roger Conner, the FAIR staff, and the FAIR membership would say is their main battle, that is: the struggle to pass a law or a piece of legislation that adequately addresses the large problem of illegal immigration. Would you reflect back on the long legislative battle over the Simpson-Mazzoli, then Simpson-Rodino bills, and bring that story to a culmination?

TANTON: One of the problems in immigration policy is that there is no sunset on the law. The numbers that are authorized go on forever, until the situation gets so bad that finally the Congress is forced to react. This could be contrasted, for instance, with the agriculture program, which is debated and agreed upon and given a certain life. Perhaps it is authorized for three or four years. There are periodic re-authorizations, appropriations to be made, and so on. Congress has a chance to see how the plan is working. At the end of the set period, it usually hasn't worked as well as hoped, so there's another debate, the old law expires and a new one is passed. But that's not the way our immigration law is managed.

In immigration policy, as problems build up, constituencies build up. As problems get worse, these make it simultaneously harder to solve them, harder to take steps that would clearly resolve them. We end up with even more compromises being made as special interest groups build up even further. So we tend to end up with compromises that are only partial solutions, ones that address the conditions that existed years before when the debate started. But these tend to be obsolete by the time they're

adopted because new conditions are evolving. So one of FAIR's goals throughout the years has been to get immigration legislation to include a sunset clause of some sort, so that it must come up for periodic review and can be addressed before conditions deteriorate badly. It's rather like having a periodic physical, if I may go back to my physician's perspective once again. With such a checkup one has a better chance of picking things up a little earlier. If you don't check for ten years, by that time a condition may be well beyond the point where anything reasonable can be done about it.

The Simpson-Mazzoli debate started off as an effort to reform all of immigration, both legal and illegal. As I mentioned before, the immigration statute is the second longest title in the U.S. Code. This proved to be an absolutely massive job. It also seemed fundamentally irrational to be talking about modifying the rules for legal immigration when they were being widely flouted. So for both that reason and to reduce the scope of the job, Senator Simpson narrowed the focus to dealing just with the breaking of the current law, that is, with illegal immigration.

One of the great debates was how many illegals were in the country. Our response was that the number was not as important as were the trends and the causes. If the causes of illegal immigration lay in the high rates of population growth and in the dire economic and social circumstances in many of the sending countries, and if these were all projected to get far worse over time, then it looked as if pressure for illegal immigration would probably grow apace. To argue about exactly where we were on the ascending curve didn't make much sense. The point was to understand that there was a rising curve, and that we needed to address the problem. We were only partially successful in trying to get people to focus on this concept.

Another great debate was what to do about the people who were already in the country illegally. Our initial point of view was that if it became illegal to hire illegal aliens and these persons were not able to find jobs, many would repatriate themselves without any government action. The opposition, of course, held up the specter of massive round-ups, deportations, and so on. The question of what to do about persons illegally in the country came to be one of the central ones. It's one that stymied FAIR for quite a while. We were at first unable to come to a solid policy position, and by the time we finally did, it was too late to influence the debate. It had already been tacitly assumed that there would be an amnesty. The question became one of what the conditions of the amnesty would be. As it turned out, in the final stages the amnesty almost lost in the House of Representatives. The vote, as I recall, was 211 to 215. Had the amnesty failed, it's likely that the whole bill would have gone down.

Then there was, of course, the debate about what effective control measures might be. We had been saying that there were three types of measures you could take to deal with illegal immigration. The first was

measures within our country, such things as employer sanctions, such things as area control, as the immigration service calls it, where they actually apprehend people who have entered illegally and remove them from the country. Some such interior measures are necessary. We can't have a situation in which if you get in, you're home free. But trying to catch people once they're here is far from easy or ideal. There are civil liberty problems, appeals to the courts, vast expense, and so on. Additional and better measures are needed.

The second type of measure needed is a better job at our borders and ports of entry. Let's make sure that when the State Department issues visas overseas, they screen out people who are not coming to visit but coming to stay. Let's try to prevent people from entering illegally in the first place, so that we don't get to the point where the court system is involved. Border enforcement is better than interior enforcement. It's still not too attractive or palatable to the American people.

The third approach is try to fix the conditions in the country of origin so that everybody's happy and satisfied where they live. When people have enough food, education, employment, opportunity, and freedom, there is little impetus to move. But we've been trying to promote such changes through foreign aid programs for the forty years since the Second World War. We still haven't had much success, or even agreed on how to go about it. And such work has an imperialistic tinge to it, which is also not acceptable.

To control illegal immigration, we probably need some of all three categories. We need to take the pressure off in the country of origin, we need to do a better job at the borders and ports, and we also need to have some efforts within the country to apprehend illegal aliens when those first two measures are not completely successful.

Q: In reviewing the issues in the legislation, you've spoken of FAIR's position on amnesty, and the degree to which we're having to compromise on amnesty. The core of the bill, of course, is the effort to reverse the Texas proviso and to make it illegal to hire illegal aliens. This requires a system of employee verification or identification or whatever word you want to use. Would you discuss FAIR's handling of that issue, its recommendations and how the legislation finally resolved this point?

TANTON: If we're going to make it illegal to hire illegal aliens, then the employer must have some reasonable way to tell who is eligible to be hired and who isn't. The opposition painted a dire picture of having to carry around a plastic identification card, raising the specter of Nazi Germany and of people being stopped on the street and asked for identification. We did not and do not advocate that, and as an alternative we came up with

the idea of some sort of telephone call-in system, much as is used for credit cards, to see if the social security number presented was valid. Keep in mind that when you apply for a job, you don't actually have to show your social security card, you just have to give your social security number. If you've memorized it, that's perfectly fine.

Well, it turns out that only about a quarter of all possible social security numbers have been issued. (There are 9 digits in the social security number, allowing just one short of one billion numbers. The total U.S. population is about a quarter of this. About that many numbers have been issued — randomly selected from the total number available.) Earnings are reported on many numbers by multiple persons, rendering these numbers suspect. I recall the story about a wallet that Sears once put on sale. In the plastic picture holder, where a sample photograph is commonly displayed, they had put in a dummy social security card. Some forty thousand people from all around the United States reported on that social security number! So if we can do nothing more than make it easy for the employer to check and make sure that the social security number has at least been issued, and that it was issued to someone whose name is the same as that of the job applicant, and that the number is not one that has a record of being abused, that would be a first step toward making sure that the applicants are the persons they say they are and are probably not using false documents.

The second part of the identity question was whether job applicants were in the country legally or not. A whole series of documents, ranging from birth certificates and baptismal records to military discharge papers, were ultimately authorized to try to address this question. For persons who were green card holders, our call-in system would also have checked with the INS to see if these people were valid.

So there are two parts to the I.D. question: Who is the person applying for a job, and is this person authorized to work? The I.D. question is not completely resolved. The current system is troublesome but it's a step toward answering these important questions. If you can't figure out whether a person is entitled to a job, then you can't have employer sanctions. If you can't have employer sanctions, then virtually anyone in the world who can get here can obtain a job, and that will tend to reduce the standard of wages and conditions in this country to the world standard. In the end, that's what we were trying to prevent.

Q: So FAIR was interested in a workable identification system for employees, and a compromise is struck which is not perfect from FAIR's point of view. Documentation is accepted, as I recall the legislation, which was easily falsifiable. But there was a system of review and reporting so that down the line, if the system of loose documentation proved inadequate, we might get a better system. So there's a compromise on I.D. and there's a

compromise on amnesty.

Two other issues were: the pressure to have a separate, large inflow of labor for agriculture, for the growers, and the question of an overall ceiling on numbers. Would you have any observations on how either one of these finally presented itself in legislative form, as we came down to the end of the battle?

TANTON: The growers' lobby has always been one of the strongest ones in Congress. I guess ultimately the question was whether the extent to which the need to grow vegetables should determine national immigration policy, and whether the availability of large supplies of cheap, docile labor forestalled the development of new ways of growing and harvesting vegetables. There was a period of time, when Cesar Chavez was in his prime, when the United Farm Workers virtually shut down the agricultural machinery research program at U.C.-Davis because they were inventing ways to harvest grapes and tomatoes and beans which did not require many hands in the field. This is a complex social part of the question, but the growers proved they had tremendous political strength. They were able to include in the immigration bill a so-called seasonal agricultural worker (or SAW) program, which is really a second form of amnesty. As I recall the measure, it provided that anybody who could demonstrate that he had worked in the fields for ninety days in the previous couple of years was able to qualify for permanent residence. But these people didn't have to stay in agriculture — they could go off to the city, which is what we anticipated most of them would do.

Then there was something called the replacement agricultural worker provision (RAW), whereby the growers could replace by new infusions up to 90% of the work force, if they left the fields. We viewed this as a third amnesty.

These were all very touchy points, and I can recall very clearly a meeting the FAIR board had at Airlie House in July of 1986, when things were coming down to the wire. As a board we had to instruct the staff where the breakpoints were on this bill — where we would turn to opposing it. One of them was the whole amnesty question. Within the staff, this elicited the only knock-down, drag-out fight I can recall in the whole ten years between, basically, Roger on one hand and K.C. McAlpin on the other, representing opposite factions of staff as to how far we should compromise on amnesty. The other great question was the agricultural worker provision, and whether or not we would play the brinksmanship game of letting the bill containing it get through the House — it was not in the Senate bill — and then whether, in Conference Committee, we could rely on Simpson to knock this provision out. Simpson, I think, seemed to us at that time stronger on some points than on others. This did not seem to be one on which he was particularly strong.

There were several provisions in the bill that were in our favor. One called for a periodic study, every three years, of the impacts of immigration on the population, resources, and social structure of the country. The first of these was due in 1989 and was not produced on time.

Q: That provision is not an accident. It was substantially the work of FAIR, wasn't it?

TANTON; Yes, that's right, and so was another provision which called for a study of the physical structures that would be necessary to control the border. Again, that study wasn't really done well by the government, as a result of which FAIR did its own study. This ultimately ended up as our border security study, which came out in early 1989.

Q: Well, let's see if I understand the picture in the summer of 1982. Making legislation is a strange business and an unpredictable business.

TANTON: Somebody once said that there are two things that a person with a weak stomach shouldn't watch. One is the making of sausage, and the other is the making of legislation!

Q: Well, we're making legislation in the summer and fall of 1986, and the law is moving toward passage. The question for FAIR becomes whether this is a law which, at some point, becomes a bad law and one that we should oppose, and one our members would want us to oppose in their name, or whether we are getting the very best deal that the American people and our members could get. As you describe it, we did not really like the amnesty provision at FAIR. We did not think the identification was wholly adequate. We disliked the special agricultural program. We did not get a ceiling, but we certainly did get a basic system of employer sanctions and the hope of studies which might lead to a better immigration law. This is a very close call for the organization, and we hope that Simpson, at the last minute in conference, can get us a better deal. How did it all work out? Looking back on it, what are your observations as to whether we might have handled things differently?

TANTON: Well, keep in mind that our opposition had killed bills in 1982 and 1984 because they didn't like them. We certainly were at the point in the summer of '86 and at our October, 1986 board meeting (which was a couple of weeks before all the maneuvering came to a head) of wondering whether we should try to kill the bill. Did we want to throw everything out and start over again next year?

There were two factors you haven't mentioned that weighed strongly on my mind. The first was the likelihood that the Senate majority would go

from Republican to Democratic, so that Senator Simpson, who'd been the champion of this legislation since 1981, would likely find himself in the minority position and unable to move legislation unless the chairman agreed. The new chairman would doubtless be Senator Kennedy, who was certainly not favorable to our point of view. So a window of opportunity was probably going to close, and that weighed heavily on us.

Another factor was that we knew that Roger was tired, and after having worked on this nearly eight years, since January 1979, the prospect of having to go back and start all over again in 1987 was a daunting one indeed. We also had seen that with Jimmy Carter's original 1977 proposal for amnesty, the date that was proposed to begin amnesty was, I believe, 1971. This had all seemed too much and too radical back then. So people dug in their heels and resisted, and the proposal died. But the problems didn't go away, and now we were faced with an amnesty with a date of 1982 or 1983, covering many, many more people.

At some point one has to make some decisions and move on. That was a very important consideration to me. We'd had endless debate about whether employer sanctions would or wouldn't work. Would it cause discrimination or wouldn't it? Would more border patrol facilities and agents restrict the flow or wouldn't they? At some point you have to stop debating and run the experiment. I thought we had debated all this long enough. It was time to go ahead, cut the best deal we could, and find out if employer sanctions would work. If they did, why great. If they didn't, then we'd at least know that, and would have to go on to something else.

I've often thought back to Senator Sam Ervin's insistence on a Western Hemisphere quota in the 1965 Act. If he had not pushed that through, then all of the people who were coming from that region would have been coming legally, and our debate would not have been over how to control illegal immigration, but whether we should limit the legal flow by instituting a ceiling. Then, once a ceiling was in place, it would have taken six or eight years to find out that it alone didn't work. Only then would we have confronted the illegal immigration question. So by getting the western hemisphere ceiling adopted, Senator Ervin moved the whole immigration debate forward two decades.

Similarly, I thought it was time to move on. It was time to start having the debate about legal immigration, but we couldn't do that until the illegal question was addressed, if not solved. It seemed likely that the debate over legal immigration would help clarify our country's mind on where we wanted to go with immigration policy as a whole. So it was a hard call. In political things, a lot ultimately comes down to personalities, and many of these were about to change to new or unsympathetic ones. I think there was considerable unwillingness on the part of the FAIR people to go on fighting this same battle forever. At some point you say, "Enough already! Let's settle this and go on to the next topic."

Q: Are there other memories that you have which didn't necessarily fit into the narrative so far?

TANTON: I just have a few other things. One is that FAIR's part in the passage of the Simpson-Mazzoli Bill cost us eight years of effort and eight million dollars. That's actually how much we spent during that eight years. That tells you a little bit about why organizations tend to concentrate on a single issue, as we talked about before. It is tremendously expensive in terms of time and effort and money to try to influence the ponderous system of government in a country of 240 million people. So, if one is going to take on two or three or four issues, it requires an effort that's two or three or four times as large.

I also wanted to mention Barnaby Zall as a person who's been very helpful through the years, especially in designing some of our organizations, such as the legislative task force with its C-4 status. He helped me to set up U.S., Inc. with its special status, and also to set up IMMPPAC, a political action committee. He's been very good from that standpoint.

I have one recollection in particular of Roger that I wanted to put on the tape, and that was of tagging along with him the time he negotiated the lease for our second office on "P" Street. I can vividly recall going over there with him late in the day to meet with the landlord, and watching them negotiate back and forth, waving their arms, jumping up and down, shouting about what the prices were going to be and how much money the landlord was going to put into the building to get it in good shape. I thought then how good it was to have a real fighter on our team! That was certainly not my favorite type of activity; I generally like to avoid confrontation.

I also recall the celebration after the bill passed the Senate in 1984, when champagne was broken out. I think there was even a direct mail letter written about how we had won. But in our youthful exuberance we forgot [laughter] that there was another part to the whole puzzle called the House! It turned out that the celebration was quite premature.

I also recall one of Roger's characterizations of dealing in the world of ideas and of bringing out a new idea: that the first response of many people is to say, "I never heard of it before." And the second response after they thought about it for a bit was to say, "It's anti-God." And the third response after they'd realized that the idea was right was to come around and say, "I knew it all along." It's been fun through the years to come to such perceptions of human nature, both our own and that of others.

Q: Let's try to recapture the situation at the end of 1986. Finally a long legislative struggle is over with a certain resolution. Now, a new phase is ahead. How did you look at it at the time? What were the organization's prospects? What happens next? What's the future for the immigration

reform movement?

TANTON: Some people thought that we would founder, having apparently achieved our goal. It was like the question of what happens to the March of Dimes after the vaccination for polio has been developed. But we recognized that that wasn't our case, because the bill that had been passed addressed the situation as it had existed in 1980, and we were already into 1986. As I mentioned before, those trend lines indicated that the problem of illegal immigration would continue to grow. So on the illegal immigration issue, our task was to see that the very complex bill was implemented. Such things as the telephone call-in system needed to be tried, the appropriations that were authorized had to be made, and additional agents were needed on the border. In particular, we needed to pump up the litigation effort, at least on the defensive side, to meet our opposition, which we knew would take to the courts, as they have so often in the past twenty years to neutralize social policy. We thought there would be a big battle in the courts.

Then in addition to following through on illegal immigration — and remember my criticism of earlier reform movements that folded their tents and disappeared into the night after their legislation was passed — we began to look at the question of reforming legal immigration. I wrote papers during 1987 trying to identify some fundamental points. At the January meeting in Tampa-St. Pete in 1988, we actually adopted a statement to guide our efforts toward the reform of legal immigration.

(End of Tape 5, Side A)

TANTON: The points were basically these. First of all, we wanted Congress to adopt a statement on the purpose of immigration policy. There isn't one in the law now. It's not like the Full Employment Act of 1946 which states its objective as full employment, or the Wilderness Act of 1964 which defines wilderness and the rationale for setting some of it aside. If the purpose of immigration policy is to be family reunification, for instance, then let's debate that and see whether it's a legitimate goal.

Our second goal was to set an overall ceiling. Here's our population concern coming in. We felt there should be a "budget" for immigration as there is for other programs. None of this business of just adding more and more. There are limits to the number of people that we can assimilate and pay the settlement costs for, and if you want to have more out of category B, why then, let's have less out of category C.

A third objective was to end the family-preference migration system. We felt this form of nepotism was no longer defensible.

The fourth point was to replace family preference with a system that took the national interest of the United States into account, and tried to bring in people who were needed in our labor force or could otherwise make a contribution to this society. And also, perhaps to add an English language requirement or credit for admission, so that we would help forestall such things as division along language lines in our country.

The fifth point was to have better longitudinal studies of the success of immigrants and of immigration as a whole, which would then provide the basis for the sixth point, which is periodic review and sunset of immigration legislation so that we would be forced to come back and look at it from time to time, before it gets too far out of whack.

The seventh point was to charge adequate fees for immigration services. In a time of fiscal stringency, it seemed logical to have the people who were getting the tremendous benefit of legal residence in this country ante up the three, four or five hundred dollars it requires to process their applications. The eighth point was legal standing for citizens to sue to enforce immigration law. As it currently stands, persons seeking immigration benefits have standing to sue but there is no one but the Justice Department to represent the public interest, and we didn't think too highly of their representation in many instances.

Q: Isn't it true that at this point FAIR once again opens up a subject that had been thought to be closed and undiscussable? The organization knew that the border was porous and not well managed, but didn't talk a great deal in the early days about the police side, the enforcement side. Isn't it true that, as 1987 and the next phase opens, some people on the board — you? — decided that it was now time to talk seriously about how to improve the management of the border?

TANTON: Well, that is true. Sidney Swensrud, in particular, and Thad Rowland and I felt it was time to figure out exactly what physical structures would be needed to secure the border. In fact, such a study had been provided for in the Simpson-Mazzoli Bill. We had worked to include a clause calling for it, but the government did not do the study, so FAIR went ahead and did one of its own, in an effort to move things forward. This also goes back to the second point in my three-point scheme for controlling illegal immigration: action within the country, at the border, and in the country of origin. Let's do the best job we can on the border, recognizing that this is just part of the overall question. So money was appropriated within FAIR, and we went ahead and did the studies over the next year. We hired Buck Brandenmuehl, who had recently retired as head of the Border Patrol. He traveled the border and talked to sector chiefs. We produced, I think, a very credible document. We came up with the idea of a sunken fence along the border that we thought would help in those high

directorship. It was a time for gathering our energies, trying to get started on the enforcement of the Simpson-Rodino Bill, while looking for new themes and directions.

Q: So you found your constituency more sophisticated than some people might have thought? They did not expect any quick victories, and the organization didn't experience any rapid slippage of any size?

TANTON: No, it didn't. We had about the normal amount of staff turnover, which is always a problem in public interest groups which are staffed chiefly by young people. The Federal government in Washington is, in fact, mostly staffed by people under the age of thirty. I'm sure the average person in the outback would be horrified to learn this. It's the young ideologues, just fresh out of Harvard and Yale, who head down to D.C. to change the world. In three or four years they get a little experience and then move on to more conventional endeavors. This is true of the public interest world too. It's the young people who are enthusiastic, footloose, have the energy, don't need much pay, but who also don't have much in the way of experience.

Q: Throughout this interview you have emerged as a person with many irons in the fire. You used a phrase, "Immigration reform is but a skirmish in a wider war." Would you comment on John Tanton's activities that are connected to immigration reform as this ten-year period of FAIR comes to an end?

TANTON: Well, the education I had in the agricultural districts of upper Michigan and in chemistry at Michigan State University was heavily focused on things scientific. It was short on metaphysics. I've often felt that is a deficiency. I've spent a good deal of time in recent years trying to patch up my background in this regard. That's one reason why we started the Great Books course in Petoskey, and why we're interested in the Foreign Policy Association Study Great Decisions series. I've re-begun my study of German, both as a general discipline and to learn more about etymology. I've also become interested in the wider war of ideas, about which Thomas Sowell wrote in his *Conflict of Vision*. The new organization that we're starting, the American Alliance for Rights and Responsibilities, will deal very much with the philosophical basis of society and with the concept of a social contract. All of this, as I see it, is heavily influenced by the ever-increasing population. We are all interested in individual options and liberty. But it seems that as we stuff more and more people into the same physical space that we're going to realize more and more that the right to swing one's fist stops at the end of the other fellow's nose — and the other fellow's nose is going to be a good deal closer in the future than it

has been in the past. All this will be juxtaposed to substantial environmental problems, such as global warming or acid rain. These are going to put strictures on the economic growth that has been the great social salve that has kept some groups, in some measure, from each other's throats. As long as the pie gets bigger, we don't have to argue so much over who gets what share. I am afraid that we're entering a time when the pie is not going to enlarge as rapidly and that tensions between groups are going to escalate. Now that groups are coming to play larger roles in society, rather than each individual's standing on his own two legs and merit, I am concerned that we may be heading into a time when there is going to be heightened group conflict. I think the next couple of decades will be very testy ones in mankind's history.

Q: Do I hear that the wider struggle is an effort to reorganize ourselves morally and intellectually for an era of limits?

TANTON: Yes, I think it's that and that it's an effort to explore the whole question of values. There's a fairly high-profile movement in the universities nowadays called deconstruction which, as I understand it, really contends that one can't say anything definable about anything, and that nothing makes any sense. That description probably goes a little too far, but I think that society does need a set of values. We are not, in this day and age, going to satisfy ourselves with received knowledge and rules from some Higher Power. But I think that we can't say on the other hand that anything goes. That approach has just not worked out very well for our society over the last few years. We'll have to rediscover the roots and values that support a society. And, of course, there's a great debate developing now on Western Civilization and whether or not it should in some measure be de-emphasized in university curricula, like the one going on at Stanford at the present time. This is a very fascinating era that we're living in. What's the old Chinese curse? "May you live in interesting times!"

Q: At the end it seems appropriate to ask about this history of FAIR. It was your initiative, I believe, that led FAIR to open negotiations with a proper repository for its papers, to interview early leaders in the movement — yourself, Sidney Swensrud, Roger Conner — and make these available ultimately to the public, to the researchers. Why a history?

TANTON: Well, for one thing, I'm interested in history. I've read a fair amount of it, and I'm also aware of Santayana's dictum that those who do not learn from history are condemned to relive it. I saw that some of the original people who put FAIR together were moving on to other things. Roger Conner has left the organization now. Some board members have

left. I wanted to set down the reasons why we brought FAIR into being, both for the edification of new staff members so they could understand our background, and also to answer that oft-asked question about motives. We all came out of population and environment backgrounds and are not the unsavory types sometimes alleged.

Also, the older history of immigration reform is not without its seamy side, if one look backs to the early years of this century and to the "Know Nothings" of the last century. This is a new era and a new type of reform movement. I was eager to have us tell our own story rather than wait to have it told by some unsympathetic or hostile person later on, someone who had no publicly recorded statements by the founders to serve as a source. We wanted to put our ideas down on paper.

These are the main reasons we thought it important for members of an organization in a highly sensitive area like immigration policy to record for posterity their views of what the world was like at the time their organization was active; why they did the things they did. We wanted to avoid any "historicism," by which I mean having our actions today interpreted and evaluated in the future by the conditions of the future, not of today. We wanted to set down the conditions under which we were operating, the problems of our time, and the reason the things we did seemed rational to us in this age. I hope we've succeeded in substantial measure.

(End of Tape 5, Side B)

END OF INTERVIEW