

Nicholas Hobbs Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 12/18/1968
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Hobbs was the Director of Selection and Research for the Peace Corps, 1961–1962, and a member of the President’s Panel on Mental Retardation, 1961–1962. In this interview Hobbs discusses setting up and staffing the Peace Corps; issues with the Peace Corps; Peace Corps relations and association with the CIA; the President’s Panel on Mental Retardation; biological versus behavioral research; Panel organization and criticisms; Russian research and the possibilities for the United States; Panel recommendations; and the effect of the Panel on the field of study, among other issues.

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Nicholas Hobbs – JFK #1
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Oral History Interview

with

NICHOLAS HOBBS

December 18, 1968
Nashville, Tennessee

By William McHugh

For the John F. Kennedy Library

McHUGH: Doctor, could you just sketch what your involvement in mental retardation was prior to the Kennedy Administration?

HOBBS: Well, did you know that my first contact was with the Peace Corps?

McHUGH: No. That's very interesting. I didn't know that.

HOBBS: Should I start on that, perhaps?

McHUGH: Well, we could very well start with the Peace Corps.

HOBBS: That's how I got appointed to the President's Panel on Mental Retardation.

McHUGH: Very interesting. How did you happen to get involved in the Peace Corps and when?

HOBBS: Well, President Kennedy announced the Peace Corps, I believe, on March 1, 1961, if memory serves. I was called about March 15, March 12, somewhere in there, to ask whether or not I would be interested in being Director of Selection for the Peace Corps. So I went to Washington, saw Mr. [R. Sargent] Shriver, and actually went to work on the 13th. I never saw Mr. Kennedy in relationship to the Peace Corps work, but his influence was palpable. The times were electric, really. The idea was so clearly identified with him, and it was one that created an immense amount of enthusiasm and conviction on the part of those who were committed to it. But I recall very well how much general skepticism there was about Mr. Kennedy's proposal for a Peace Corps.

McHUGH: Do you recall who in particular was expressing the skepticism or what group?

HOBBS: These are from memory many years later, but I remember Times magazine had a caption saying, "They may do more good than harm." And Saturday Review had some perfervid expression to the effect that it was ridiculous to imagine that these pony-tailed Albert Schweitzers, or something like that, living in mud huts would do much for a world aflame.

McHUGH: Did you find much of this skepticism in the government itself?

HOBBS: Yes, a great deal of skepticism, and one of the bigger struggles was to have it as an independent entity in the State Department. There was a great struggle to have it brought under one particular section of the Department of State.

McHUGH: Do you know who, in particular, was opposed to autonomy?

HOBBS: No, I don't. No, I couldn't. I think it was Mr. [David E.] Bell, but I'm not very sure. I was not involved in those negotiations at all. I remember Mr. [William O.] Douglas, though, was one of the strong proponents. Of course, he was chairman of the National Advisory Committee [the Peace Corps National Advisory Council]. He described it in a marvelous phrase, "An idea born of a warm heart and a bright conscience," which I thought was very good, and someone should attribute the inspiration for that to Mr. Kennedy.

McHUGH: So did you begin working for Sargent Shriver directly?

HOBBS: Directly.

McHUGH: I see.

HOBBS: Director of Selection for the Peace Corps, started on March 18th.

McHUGH: Did you also have a research function? Or is that something you can tell later?

HOBBS: Yes. One condition I made for going into the Peace Corps was that there be research on the selection process so that we could validate whether or not it was any good. And that was no problem selling to Mr. Shriver at all. He was convinced of its value ahead of time.

McHUGH: What did he tell you he wanted?

HOBBS: Well, just help in selecting the best possible people for the Peace Corps.

McHUGH: Did he have some particular aims clearly in mind himself at that time?

HOBBS: About people, kinds of people?

McHUGH: Well, kinds of people and also for the Peace Corps itself.

HOBBS: Yes, I think they were fairly close. I don't think I can add anything to what is generally known about the aspirations for the Peace Corps.

McHUGH: How did you begin to organize your work?

HOBBS: The first step was to get in some national advisors. We got about twenty, twenty-five topflight people in the area of selection and, rather specially, in the area of selection for foreign service. They came in within ten days after I was there. That was one of the first steps. There were two crucial issues around the selection process. Is this relevant, of interest to you?

McHUGH: Yes, yes, very much so.

HOBBS: I like to talk about this. I'm not sure how much it has to do with Mr. Kennedy.

McHUGH: Well, it's Mr. Kennedy's Administration.

HOBBS: Absolutely, right. Well, one issue was whether or not there were going to be interviews of applicants. There had been promises of interview panels, selection panels all across the country. I was opposed to that because of problems of uniformity and political favor and the general unreliability of the interview as a predictive device. So the selection procedure was established without interviews.

McHUGH: Is that so?

HOBBS: Right. I think it's turned out to be a quite remarkably successful selection operation. There was one expectation that was not borne out. Between

March 1 and March 18, thousands of letters were received inquiring about service in the Peace Corps. I don't know in total how many, but literally thousands. I've heard the figure twenty thousand. I wouldn't vouch for that, but this was certainly bruited about at the time. With that many applicants and with just a few hundred positions open, there was need for some way of winnowing the large number of people. So a fairly elaborate battery of tests was developed and administered by the Post Office all over the country in a very short period of time.

McHUGH: Who prepared this test?

HOBBS: Well, I did, and the Educational Testing Service at Princeton helped. And it's interesting the way it actually operated. Because of the commitment to the Kennedy Administration, the Educational Testing Service was willing to accept a contract on my oral assurance that they would be paid, about forty or fifty thousand dollars if I remember correctly, and went ahead to produce the test, got them out, and got their contract signed quite a bit later. That's sort of illustrative of the spirit of the first months of the Administration.

McHUGH: Could you say generally why you thought that the interview was peculiarly unreliable as an indicator?

HOBBS: Well, all of the research evidence on the interview shows it to have about zero predictive efficiency, except in a very special circumstance. We subsequently followed up to test this conviction or to test, in the Peace Corps, the results of research outside. We did a study at the University of California at Berkeley where we got very well trained psychiatrists in the student health service there to interview volunteers and make predictions about their success in Africa. Every volunteer was interviewed by at least two psychiatrists who made independent predictions. The correlation between pairs of psychiatrists was zero. They couldn't agree. The correlation between psychiatrists' predictions and actual overseas performance was also zero. So there was just no predictive efficiency at all.

McHUGH: Did this research in any way overlap other areas of general employment? Or was it just applied to the Peace Corps?

MCBBS: No. I don't think so. Well, we found, of course, that these thousands of people didn't actually apply for admission at the beginning so that the test. . . . What happened was that the Peace Corps appealed to a very select type American anyway, usually educated, college graduates. So the elaborate screening apparatus that was developed was not appropriate and was rather quickly abandoned on the research evidence that the tests were not making any difference, that just a few of them, notably language learning, were holding up, because we were dealing with such a select population already. They'd already been self-screened so that the screening tests had no real function.

The second issue that, I think, was fairly crucial to the success of the Peace Corps, I remember it as an internal struggle of some consequences. Well, my position differed from that of others. The issue was whether or not there would be Peace Corps contingents from particular universities or particular states. You may recall in the past we've sometimes had medical units overseas from particular schools, universities and so on. That model was proposed by the Associated Universities of Indiana under the leadership, in fact, of Father [Theodore M.] Hesburgh at Notre Dame. The proposal was that there be an Indiana project in Chile. I opposed the idea. Harris Wofford was one of the early people in the Peace Corps and one of Mr. Shriver's major advisors. He had also been an advisor to Father Hesburgh. Wofford was a strong champion of the proposal. I disagreed. I felt that there should be no non-functional admission requirements to the Peace Corps, such as living and going to school in Indiana or anything else, you see. It shouldn't have any. . . .

McHUGH: Regional identification?

HOBBS: Or any special, non-functional qualification. A boy from Alabama ought to be able to go to Chile if he wanted to, whether or not he was enrolled at Purdue or Notre Dame. Mr. Shriver--we all had a great hassle; it was a lot of fun--Mr. Shriver decided in my favor, and we required the Indiana project to accept qualified applicants from all over the nation. I think that was an important decision. I think the Peace Corps would have had grave trouble if it had done otherwise.

McHUGH: Why was Father Hesburgh in a position to--well, this ultimately had to be accepted by Sargent Shriver--but to make a suggestion that seemed to limit it to that small area?

HOBBS: Well, it seemed a very reasonable suggestion. It's a completely sensible arrangement, but it would not have been a very wise one, I think, in the long concept of what the Peace Corps should be like. And Father Hesburgh was especially interested in Chile, and Notre Dame was a member of the Indiana Association of Universities, and Father Hesburgh and Sargent Shriver were very close together anyway.

McHUGH: What generally was your estimate of Harris Wofford as an advisor?

HOBBS: I think he was superb, a very bright, very dedicated guy, and certainly one of the major architects of the Peace Corps. There were many policy differences, naturally, among a very able staff, and this is just one that happened to go one way rather than the other. I think he was a person of immense importance in the building of the Peace Corps.

McHUGH: Could you just outline, perhaps briefly, what some of the major policy differences were, as you recall them?

HOBBS: Well, this one I remember particularly because I was so much involved in it. The issue of whether there were to be interviews or not was another that I recall because of my central role in it. Let me see, whether or not there would be the special training, physical fitness programs in Puerto Rico, the Outward Bound idea.

McHUGH: I guess that's not really a fair question.

HOBBS: I hadn't thought of this.

McHUGH: What were the major problems in putting the research operation together?

HOBBS: Oh, I don't think there were any very great problems except I had to leave because of commitments back here. That was my only frustration in it.

McHUGH: How long were you there?

HOBBS: I was there full time about a year and then about half time for about six months, nine months.

McHUGH: Was your staff and budget adequate for what you needed?

HOBBS: Yes.

McHUGH: I gather from what you say that Shriver was very interested in this aspect of the selection that you were working on.

HOBBS: Oh, yes.

McHUGH: Was there any particular concern about congressional reaction to things that you were proposing?

HOBBS: Yes. There was a lot of concern about the Congress because there was a lot of skepticism in the Congress. Here, Bill Moyers played such a brilliant role. Mr. Shriver and Bill Moyers went to see just about every congressman and senator personally, face to face, for breakfast and other times. It was a remarkable performance I thought. So that there was a great deal of concern. I think, on the whole, congressional reaction was remarkably positive.

McHUGH: Do you remember any outstanding cases that were difficult to deal with, of opposition?

HOBBS: I couldn't really contribute substantially there. I don't think so.

McHUGH: Could you say whether there was any concern by the Bureau of the Budget as to research activities that you might be involved in?

HOBBS: No. I think it got pretty good support. I think one of the things that helped a good bit was Mr. Shriver's very obvious competence before Congress. I remember there was a major hearing--I think it was a Senate subcommittee, Senate committee, I don't know which one--on the Peace Corps that lasted for about three days. Mr. Shriver took about fifteen top assistants there with him; I was among them. And in those three days of questioning by the committee, he had to turn on only one occasion to an aide for information because he had all the information available himself, including the exact dollar amount of the contract with Educational Testing Service for the selection tests. But he would do that in every field. Just a remarkably able guy.

McHUGH: Could you comment generally on the staff relationships at the Peace Corps while you were there?

HOBSBS: Well, they were turbulent and highly effective. I think the atmosphere was superb. People worked day and night, seven days a week. The lights were on all the time. There was great enthusiasm. There was great openness. Generally, a no holds barred kind of situation. We had very little ad hominem type argument at the time I was there. But there were tough sessions when people argued their points of view, and decisions were made one way or another.

McHUGH: Did any people leave because of this turbulence?

HOBSBS: No. Well, yes, one or two fellows left, but I think these were personality sorts of things. I don't remember anybody leaving because of a disagreement on policy.

McHUGH: Were there any major substantive disagreements?

HOBSBS: Oh, golly, this gets very vague now. I remember a big hassle about whether or not there would be set up a Peace Corps reserve, for example. We were going to select people after being in training, and our people weren't in favor of it. We were going to use performance in training as part of the selection procedure. Volunteers would be "admitted" to the Peace Corps after training. But some people wanted to assign failures to a reserve. [Interruption]

McHUGH: Why was this felt to be particularly undesirable?

HOBSBS: Well, it seemed phony to set up a reserve and then not ever call anyone from it. We finally decided not to do it. I think that was wise. The idea was to not send someone home from training in disgrace, having not made the Peace Corps, you know, after three months of training. So you go back to reserve, they never are called. And that took a week of arguing back and forth, and it was finally decided not to do it.

- McHUGH: Who was particularly instrumental, other than yourself, in making the decision?
- HOBBS: I was opposed to it, I remember that. I can't even remember who was for it now.
- McHUGH: Were there any problems of size? Was size your concern?
- HOBBS: No. There were real problems of getting enough topflight volunteers at first. And there were just the normal problems of organization, and starting a new program, it seemed to me.
- McHUGH: What were your relations with the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]?
- HOBBS: There was some apprehension that we might be identified with them. I never had any great amount of contact. There had been set up for foreign service officers a selection program. This was not the CIA or. . . . There had been a selection program set up for foreign service officers that did not have a research component. It went on for several years, and they had no basis to support it, you see. So it was killed by the Congress.
- McHUGH: When you say research component, do you mean research as to its effectiveness as an ongoing . . .
- HOBBS: They had no data to back it up. They had a procedure set up, largely psychiatric interviews, and thus it was terribly vulnerable to attack. So it was attacked, and it just folded.
- McHUGH: What especially about the CIA was their concern?
- HOBBS: The obvious concern that the Peace Corps was an espionage apparatus which, you know, it was constantly alleged to be--and probably still is, for all I know.

McHUGH: Was there much pressure on Peace Corps people for them to take assignments of this sort?

HOBBS: No.

McHUGH: That was not a problem?

HOBBS: No. This was a clean, clear policy in the Peace Corps.

McHUGH: All the time you were there, anyway, that was not a problem?

HOBBS: No. There were allegations from overseas and from all around, but there was no basis for it. You could pretty well counter it, I think, by the kinds of things Peace Corps volunteers did.

McHUGH: Did the volunteers make reports, particularly about the conditions in the areas they were working in?

HOBBS: Not for policy purposes. They didn't make reports, but they were encouraged to write so that the Peace Corps could get information that was relevant to its own program planning. But not with respect to the Department of State.

McHUGH: This was nothing that the CIA would attempt to use or anything like that, that would be available to them?

HOBBS: No.

McHUGH: Was there any concern about some of these new people who were presumed to be amateurs, vis-a-vis [Warren W.] Wiggins?

HOBBS: Vis-a-vis what?

McHUGH: Well, people in the State Department particularly.

HOBBS: Oh, I guess so. I don't know much about that. I understand that there was a good bit of commentary, maybe friction, around the decision of Peace Corps representatives not to join the American compound and to send their children to local schools and not to the American schools, that sort of thing, but you've heard all that. There's nothing I can really add.

McHUGH: Did you have any serious policy differences with Sargent Shriver?

HOBBS: No.

McHUGH: What about relationships you might have had with people from other agencies?

HOBBS: Almost none because--well, I had some with Civil Service Commission and the Post Office Department. These were very helpful, just extremely valuable. They did a beautiful job.

McHUGH: You said that you left because you had commitments back here. Had you expected--well, I presume, then, that you did not expect it would be a permanent job in any sense?

HOBBS: No. I accepted it for six months, as a matter of fact.

McHUGH: When you left, were you satisfied with the state of these areas that you were working in?

HOBBS: Yes, very much so.

McHUGH: Were there any particular problems left that you were concerned about?

HOBBS: Well, just problems of staffing. I continued to work at them until we got a replacement, both in selection and in research. That was the only thing, just routine operating problems.

McHUGH: Did you leave any recommendations as to . . .

HOBBS: Never.

McHUGH: Did you have any future, any other subsequent contacts with . . .

HOBBS: Yes, I stayed on as a consultant for a couple, two or three years, had occasional contact. It was in that relationship, you see, that I got acquainted with the Shrivvers. Then it was toward, I guess it must have been '62, the latter part of '62, that the Panel was set up. I forget. But I was still around and in and out and was asked to be co-chairman of the President's Panel with George Tarjan. I declined simply because I had so many things here, and I didn't think I could do a good job at it, but did stay on the Panel as a member. I think that work was very important; it resulted in these buildings [The John F. Kennedy Center for Research on Education and Human Development of Peabody College].

McHUGH: I think--was it [Lawrence E.] Larry Dennis replaced you or took the position you had had at the Peace Corps?

HOBBS: No. Lowell Kelly.

McHUGH: Did you feel that was a good selection?

HOBBS: Oh yes, very good.

McHUGH: I guess we should move on to the President's Panel.

HOBBS: Right.

McHUGH: Could you say generally what your involvement in mental retardation had been prior to the President's Panel?

HOBBS: Well, the Kennedy Center here at Peabody grew out of many years of interest in building a strong program in behavior science and education in the South. And to do that, what we have done largely is to try to identify major national problems to which behavior science and social science and education could be responsive, and to try to develop programs in those areas to meet major national needs.

McHUGH: Why did you think this should be directed towards the South particularly?

HOBBS: Well, I'm from the South and had always had a sort of commitment to work in the South. I was educated at state expense here.

McHUGH: Had you, say, during the fifties, had you had any contact with the Kennedys or the Kennedy Foundation?

HOBBS: You mean before the Peace Corps?

McHUGH: Yes, before, well, yes.

HOBBS: No.

McHUGH: Do you know how you were first contacted--well, you said you had known the Shrivvers, and then they asked you to be on the Panel.

HOBBS: Right, right.

McHUGH: Did you know exactly what you would be doing?

HOBBS: Wait a minute, let me tell you, I didn't finish this thing about the Kennedy Center. You see, we started in 1953. We decided that we would like to move into the area of mental retardation because there was just this great wasteland. No one was doing anything. So we got one of the first training grants that the National Institute of Mental Health had ever made outside of psychiatry in a special area. So we have been training research psychologists and behavior scientists for that field for fifteen years now, you see. It was because of this that they asked me to be on the Panel.

McHUGH: Did you have any hesitancy about accepting at that time? Or did you know exactly what your duties would be?

HOBBS: No, I had no hesitation about being a member. I declined to be co-chairman simply because of time pressures.

McHUGH: Could you say generally what were your relations to the National Institute of Mental Health up to the time . . .

HOBBS: Oh, I had been on a number of committees, the training committee in psychology. . . . I guess that's about all.

McHUGH: Did you feel they were pulling their weight in the field of mental retardation?

HOBBS: Well, they were doing the only thing that was being done. Everybody was neglecting it, of course. They did respond to our request for a sizeable grant in 1953 long before mental retardation became--well, before the Kennedys quickened the national conscience in this field.

- McHUGH: Was there anyone pushing you to go in this area in particular, to get into mental retardation?
- HOBBS: No. We've gone into a half a dozen areas here at Peabody where there was great social need. This was just one of them.
- McHUGH: Was the National Institute of Mental Health at that time supporting behavioral research?
- HOBBS: Oh, yes.
- McHUGH: As well as biological research?
- HOBBS: Right, right.
- McHUGH: Could you say what the role of the Shriver was at this time when you came to the Panel?
- HOBBS: In the Panel?
- McHUGH: Yes.
- HOBBS: They were the prime movers of it, I think. No doubt the President was very interested and extremely well informed, remarkably well informed, but nonetheless, it was Mr. and Mrs. Shriver who were the prime movers. There's no doubt about that. And the Kennedy Foundation.
- McHUGH: Were you aware, particularly, of the work of the [Wilbur J.] Cohen task force in the transition period?
- HOBBS: Yes, I'd heard about it and knew something about it, but was not really informed about it in detail.

McHUGH: Did you have any reason, from your own knowledge, to believe that the Kennedys might do anything unusual in this area of mental retardation?

HOBBS: Well, nothing I can add. You had the Foundation, of course, their interest, their family involvement, and so on.

McHUGH: And when you joined the Panel, how many of the Panel members had been chosen at that time? Do you know what percentage?

HOBBS: None of them, I think. It's sort of clear that [Robert E.] Bob Cooke would be involved, and George Tarjan, and a few others that were also clear. But I participated in helping decide who should be on it.

McHUGH: Can you remember who, in particular, you recommended?

HOBBS: No.

McHUGH: You mentioned George Tarjan and Robert Cooke and the Shrivvers. Were there other people that were particularly influential in the selection process?

HOBBS: I think I suggested Lloyd Dunn and [Leonard S.] Cottrell. That's all I recall having had any . . .

McHUGH: Generally, were they receptive to those recommendations?

HOBBS: Oh, yes.

McHUGH: Was there anyone who was recommended who was particularly controversial or felt to be . . .

HOBBS: Not that I recall.

McHUGH: Now, when the Panel began, was it your expectation that you would be assessing the role of the different agencies of federal government in the area of mental retardation?

HOBBS: I don't know that I could answer. I think this was recognized that it would be a part of the task of the Panel. And, of course, it was not unrelated to the development of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

McHUGH: Yes. Generally, what did you feel was the government's role in mental retardation up to that time?

HOBBS: Well, it had been minimal in the federal government. Mental retardation was considered to be state government problem. And the whole nation, of course, had just left this as a backwater. The Children's Bureau had put some money in to diagnostic clinics, mental retardation evaluation clinics.

McHUGH: What about the Office of Education?

HOBBS: I think it was doing next to nothing.

McHUGH: Was there any particular reason for this that you were aware of?

HOBBS: The office was generally a dormant place. They had a person in mental retardation, one or two, and they had some studies and kept statistics, but it was a fairly sterile operation.

McHUGH: At the time the Panel was set up, a study on mental subnormality had been done, or sponsored, by EARC [National Association for Retarded Children] was still fairly recent. Was there any feeling that another study would be superfluous?

- HOBBS: Were you thinking about the--well, the Gladwin- [Richard L.] Masland thing had been done. I guess I wasn't even aware of, or I've forgotten about the NARC study. I can't recall that.
- McHUGH: At any rate, you didn't feel that a new study would be superfluous.
- HOBBS: No.
- McHUGH: What were the goals originally set up for the new study?
- HOBBS: To assess the national situation and to find means of doing something about it, I'd say, in both the public and the private sector.
- McHUGH: Was it the understanding of the Panel members, in general, would you say, that the purpose of it would be to generate legislation?
- HOBBS: Yes.
- McHUGH: For you, was this year's deadline particularly a problem?
- HOBBS: No, I think I generally agree that in an area like that you can do about as well in a year as you can in two, where you've got a lot of knowledge already.
- McHUGH: Was there much opposition to that period of time among the . . .
- HOBBS: I forget. I don't remember. I was involved, but somehow I'd gotten involved in other things, too, that were capturing my attention more.

- McHUGH: Was there ever a concern that there were too many people representing the biological side as opposed to the behavioral side of the thing?
- HOBBS: Well, that's a kind of constant struggle. I don't know, that's so familiar all the time, and I don't think I can add any light to it.
- McHUGH: Is that something that's been a continuing problem, would you say?
- HOBBS: Well, I don't know. I don't really regard it as such a problem. It's just the way problems get solved in a democracy.
- McHUGH: Some of the Panel members felt that work in mental retardation would be too narrow an approach, that there ought to be more of a basic scientific approach. Do you remember that as a particular problem?
- HOBBS: Yes. Afraid I can't add much to that. The Panel did. . . . The resolution of this biological, behavioral, and educational approach was fair enough in the Panel, it seemed to me. The recommendations, as I recall them, were broad enough to recognize the importance of cultural factors.
- McHUGH: When the report was written up, there was some hesitancy about some of the data that were available on--well, there was doubt whether the data really supported the effects of cultural deprivation, wasn't there?
- HOBBS: That's true. Not much research had been done by that time. But Susan Gray, here at Peabody, her research was coming out, and since then, there's been a great deal of research which I think fairly well corroborates the position that cultural factors are extremely important.

- McHUGH: Do you remember the first meeting of the Panel? Do you have any particular recollections of the first meeting?
- HOBBS: No, I don't. I remember two meetings where Mr. Kennedy was present. I imagine that was one of them, but I can't really be sure. The only impression I have of that is that he did seem to be well informed and made some humorous remark about Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver] to the effect that she kept him straight, kept him busy at this task, and it wasn't going to go unattended or something like that. I don't remember how it was. Very pleasant, friendly, and affectionate.
- McHUGH: Could you comment generally on what you felt the importance of Eunice's role to be?
- HOBBS: Oh, she's a prime mover, I think. I have great admiration for her and think she was just the person who kept mental retardation front and center. I gather she's annoyed people from time to time, but I just have nothing but admiration for her.
- McHUGH: Originally, I think, the Panel was broken down into a group that worked--well, they had what? Behavioral sciences and Biological sciences. Now, later on they decided to change that. Why was that?
- HOBBS: I don't know. I don't remember that to tell you why. I'm sure it was very important. You can see my memory now is fuzzed by time.
- McHUGH: Did you feel, generally, that the people, as they were assigned to these different task forces, were well chosen?
- HOBBS: Yes, I thought it was a pretty good Panel, you know. It was really remarkably wide ranging and. . . .

McHUGH: Were there any segments that were not represented that you felt might have been included?

HOBBS: No.

McHUGH: Did the absence of representatives of labor, in particular, concern you at all? You know that this was voiced as a concern?

HOBBS: I don't remember. It may have been, but I don't know. Anything like this, you always get hundreds of groups that would like to be involved. I don't recall.

McHUGH: Were you particularly aware of pressures from other people to be involved, or to increase the size of the Panel?

HOBBS: No, I'm not. I just had been on two other national commissions where I was a little bit more central and this was a constant matter.

McHUGH: Not during this period though, I assume?

HOBBS: No.

McHUGH: Do you remember what appeared to be the major problem for the Panel at the beginning?

HOBBS: I'm really terribly vague about this panel, you know. I'm terribly sorry. I felt I could do better.

McHUGH: Well, I guess that interviewing you at this distance in time. . . .

HOBBS: I'd gotten into other contacts at that time and was doing this. I'd come back here and was working on the Kennedy Center here. That was the thing that was forefront in my concerns.

McHUGH: Were you satisfied with Leonard Mayo's work as chairman generally?

HOBBS: Yes. I know there was a lot of criticism, but I don't know who could have done it without a lot of criticism.

McHUGH: What type of criticism generally was this?

HOBBS: Oh, lack of expeditious handling of matters and lack of sufficient concern for education, those sorts of things. But I don't really. . . . The one issue that the Panel, I think, didn't address itself to as thoroughly and as openly as it should have is the issue of family planning. That issue was essentially skirted.

McHUGH: This was out of deference to the religious sensibilities of the President or his family?

HOBBS: I don't know the whole thing. I wasn't right in the heart of it, but obviously it's a crucial matter, and it was not dealt with in a forthright way. There was some discussion of it, but. . . . I think Leonard Mayo was--some people felt he should have been a more vigorous leader in that regard, but that's just blaming other people for what the Panel itself was not willing to do for some reason. I don't share this condemnation of Mayo.

McHUGH: But it was accepted, it was decided that that would be the way to proceed at the time?

HOBBS: I think so.

McHUGH: Generally, were you satisfied with the amount of cooperation you were getting from government agencies?

HOBBS: I thought so.

McHUGH: Were there any that were particularly hard to deal with?

HOBBS: Not that I know of.

McHUGH: What about the role of the National Institute of Mental Health? Some people felt they might have been more involved.

HOBBS: I just can't say. You see, I've always been very pleased because they kept pouring money into Peabody. As long as that was happening, I was just . . .

McHUGH: Into what?

HOBBS: Into this Center here.

McHUGH: Do you remember, I think when the report was finally drafted, there were some differences between the behavioral and the biological scientists. Do you remember any particular problems?

HOBBS: No. One thing that I think is important to record, it seemed to me that Mr. Kennedy was--his concern about the relationship between the United States and Russia was evident both times that I saw him in connection with the Panel. He mentioned it in the group meeting, I believe, and then, at a later meeting, in the Rose Garden, on the porch. It just happened that Mr. Kennedy and Mrs. Shriver and I came together, and she introduced me. And he asked if there was work in mental retardation in Russia that could be, somehow, used to bring Russian scientists to the United States and United States scientists to Russia. I told him about some of the things that were going on in Russia. But, you know, it was rather striking that in the context of a ceremony having to do with mental retardation that obviously a governing concern was his interest in relationships with Russia. It seems to me to be worth recording. Maybe the only thing worth recording out of everything I've had to say.

- McHUGH: Did you feel that--well, did you express any optimism about this problem to the President?
- HOBBS: Only in the context of mental retardation.
- McHUGH: That there could be an exchange possibly?
- HOBBS: Well, that there were people who could benefit from exchange. I didn't know anything about the possibility.
- McHUGH: Did you feel that they had data from their research that would be helpful to you?
- HOBBS: Oh, yes, no doubt about that.
- McHUGH: You felt that they were doing good research in . . .
- HOBBS: Excellent research.
- McHUGH: Oh, is that so? That's interesting. Can you say what areas, generally, you felt they were doing . . .
- HOBBS: Well, in two areas--three areas: biological; and in the area of conditioning, and in the area of comprehensive care. All three.
- McHUGH: Was that work generally accepted in the profession as being of very good quality?
- HOBBS: Yes.
- McHUGH: You did not feel that they were bound particularly by the theories of [Trofim D.] Lyssenko in . . .
- HOBBS: No, I don't think so. They did have a strong emphasis on [Ivan P. Pavlov] Pavlovian conditioning, but there was good research.
- McHUGH: You felt the research was good, and it was accepted in the profession as being good research?

HOBBS: Yes.

McHUGH: That's very interesting. I think there's been a tendency to downgrade the research that they were doing. Did you go overseas yourself?

HOBBS: No.

McHUGH: You did not.

HOBBS: I'm referring, of course, to the behavioral work, and I don't even know about the biological, the genetic work, whether that was still being influenced by Lyssenko. I just can't judge that.

McHUGH: Well, was there any follow-up to this conversation with the President at all, do you know?

HOBBS: Not that I'm aware of. Doubtlessly, there was, but I. . . .

McHUGH: Were there any recommendations that you felt were particularly--well, what shall we say--undesirable or difficult of fulfilling?

HOBBS: Gee, I don't recall. I recall being opposed to the recommendation, at first, that there be established these research centers. As I recall, I didn't think they could be manned, staffed, but . . .

McHUGH: You mean, you felt there weren't the trained people to . . .

HOBBS: Right. And I think I was wrong.

McHUGH: There were people, in other words?

HOBBS: Well, it turned out to be that there are people. [Horace W.] Ted Magoun suggested it, I believe, that these research centers be set up.

McHUGH: How about the factor of limiting them to ten or to twelve? Was that particularly controversial?

HOBBS: No, I think that made it something manageable, and I believe that there could still be more later.

McHUGH: Did you disagree with, in particular, any recommendations of your panel? I don't know if you want to refresh your memory on. . . .

HOBBS: No, it seemed to make sense to me.

McHUGH: How about the staffing of the research centers? That was not funded. Was that a particular concern?

HOBBS: It is now being funded, so that was a concern at the time. I don't remember anything that-- really, I'm so sorry. Time has smoothed these things over. I don't think I'm going to have much to add to this now.

McHUGH: What about the recommendation for regional centers of genetic counseling, did that seem a realistic, given the state of the art at the time?

HOBBS: I've always thought so. Yes, I think so.

McHUGH: Was there any particular opposition to that?

HOBBS: I don't recall.

McHUGH: What about the institute of learning, that was something . . .

HOBBS: That was a great idea. I'm sorry that never worked out. I remember Mr. Shriver was very enthusiastic about that, and so was I. And I don't know why it didn't fly.

McHUGH: You don't remember anyone that was particularly opposed to it?

HOBBS: No.

McHUGH: Were you at the White ^{House} Conference on Mental Retardation?

HOBBS: No. You see, my interest was already diminishing in reflecting my commitment here, and not getting involved as co-chairman, and so on, reflected a real shift in what I had decided to do. So I was in with it, but really not nearly as centrally as. . . . I didn't go on any of the trips, I didn't have any major part of any of the writing, and so forth.

McHUGH: I was going to ask if you were concerned about any changes made by the Bureau of the Budget, but if you were not . . .

HOBBS: No, I was not closely involved in that.

McHUGH: Did you feel that HEW [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] was preparing adequate plans for the implementing of recommendations? Was that something you were aware of particularly?

HOBBS: Well, I went on to NICHD after that. I went on the Council. My only disappointment there has been that the behavioral component of the work has not been nearly as strong as it should be.

McHUGH: Do you know why that is?

HOBBS: Well, I think it's because of the organization of the NICHD. They are not organized to make an attractive offer to a top behavior scientist, even today.

McHUGH: Well, in what way exactly does the organization affect that?

HOBBS: The developmental program, where you get most of your behavioral work, is headed by Dwain Walcher, a physician who is a person, I think, of fairly limited competence. He's doing, I think, a pretty good job in his area, but the psychologists would be under him, and they've never been able to attract a really topflight person.

McHUGH: Well, would you say, then, that--well, with a change in leadership might that change?

HOBBS: It might.

McHUGH: Were you satisfied with the choice of Robert Aldrich as the . . .

HOBBS: Yes. I wish he had stayed longer. He's a very exciting guy.

McHUGH: Why?

HOBBS: He has a very broad view of human development, a man of ideas and energy and not afraid to make decisions. I thought he was a very good choice.

McHUGH: There was considerable opposition at the beginning from NIH [National Institutes of Health] on the establishment of an institute of this sort which was not dealing with a disease. Were you . . .

HOBBS: I was not involved in that. I was aware of it, not involved in it.

McHUGH: Are there other areas that you were involved in that you might want to comment on that we haven't discussed?

HOBBS: I don't think so. We've had a fairly central role in some of the beginnings of the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Head Start program through research that we have done here at Peabody as a part of this general strategy of trying to think what does society need, so that we've been doing work on the effects of cultural deprivation several years before, under Susan Gray. And her work has been acknowledged by Mr. Shriver as one of the major sources of the idea for Project Head Start. He's said that several times in public speeches. And I've seen the staff study that was done for him. They were looking for something in this area in this staff study. Exhibit number one is Susan Gray's research.

McHUGH: That was one of the things I did want to ask you about because I believe there have been differing opinions expressed on this as to whether the work of the Panel actually was the starting point for that.

HOBBS: Well, I'm not sure, I don't know about the Panel. Now this was independently of the Panel on Mental Retardation.

McHUGH: Is that so?

HOBBS: Right.

McHUGH: I see, I see. The work that they had done or was done for them on cultural deprivation was something quite different.

HOBBS: Right. The staff study was done, I think, by [Joseph G.] Joe Colmen in the Peace Corps and others for this one area of the problem, that is, was there any research to give you hope that intervention could change intelligence, functioning levels, the ability to perform in school.

McHUGH: Was this idea resisted by congressmen, do you remember?

HOBBS: I don't know. I just don't know.

McHUGH: I would think it would have been a rather new idea. Well, do you have any overall comments on the work of the Panel?

HOBBS: No more.

McHUGH: Okay. Well, I thank you very much for giving us your time, Dr. Hobbs.

HOBBS: It's a very pleasant experience to reminisce like this, to have someone think it's important!