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## Linowitz, Sol M. oral history interview

Don Nicoll

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## **Interview with Sol M. Linowitz by Don Nicoll**

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

### **Interviewee**

Linowitz, Sol M., 1913-

### **Interviewer**

Nicoll, Don

### **Date**

May 5, 1999

### **Place**

Washington, DC

### **ID Number**

MOH 102

### **Use Restrictions**

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### **Biographical Note**

Sol Linowitz was born in Trenton, New Jersey in 1913 to immigrant parents. His father was a successful fruit importer. He went to Hamilton College, and studied philosophy and German. At Hamilton, he met Elihu Root, who advised him to go on to law school. He graduated from Cornell Law School in 1935. Linowitz has had a distinguished career since, serving as a successful lawyer and chairman of the board at Xerox. He later served as US Ambassador to the Organization of American States, Ambassador to Middle-East peace negotiations, and was a co-negotiator of the Panama Canal Treaty. He also practiced law until his retirement in 1994. He was a close advisor to Edmund Muskie during his presidential campaigns and his tenure as Secretary of State.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Interview includes discussions of: family background; the value of education; Hamilton College; Elihu Root; Cornell Law School in 1935; first encounters with Ed Muskie; Ed Muskie as a law student; Muskie's humor; meeting Muskie after law school; and Muskie's development as a politician.

## **Indexed Names**

Hitler, Adolf, 1889-1945  
Linowitz, Bob  
Linowitz, Dave  
Linowitz, Harry  
Linowitz, Sol M., 1913-  
Linowitz, Toni  
Muskie, Edmund S., 1914-1996  
Nicoll, Don  
Root, Elihu, 1845-1937

## **Transcript**

**Don Nicoll:** . . . [we are in the office] of Ambassador Sol N. Linowitz at 1875 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. on the morning of May 5, 1999. The interviewer is Don Nicoll. Ambassador Linowitz, you were born in Trenton, New Jersey, and were your parents Native Americans or had they immigrated to the U.S.?

**Ambassador Linowitz:** They had immigrated to the United States from what was Austro-Poland really. They came at the beginning of the, at the end of the century and they came for the reason so many others came, to find refuge, to get away from what life was like at that time, and lived first in New York City where my father and my mother both studied English and had some odd jobs and then moved to Trenton, New Jersey where I was born.

And they, from the outset, I think, made us understand the value of being Americans and the great respect and awesome feeling that you have to have when you compare what their life was like when they came here and what it would have been if they had not. Anybody who's lived through the Holocaust years has got to reflect on the fact that fortune took them away from danger when, had they stayed they would have, my whole family would have been wiped out.

**DN:** Were they in an area that was subject to pogroms at the time?

**SL:** Yes. This was an area which shifted from Russian to Polish to Austrian. That's, it was that kind of an area and the pogroms were in full fury and when they came it was really to escape from the kind of life that they saw for themselves and their children before they came here. That's, I'm now talking about my parents' parents when they made the move. And it was their insistence that when their kids came over and went to school and started to learn things that they never would have been able to do in the old country. It was always with a profound sense of gratitude for the fact that they had been able to escape when they did.

**DN:** And were they much interested in politics and government in the United States?

**SL:** Not so much in partisan politics as in politics, i.e., democracy as against any other form of government. They tried to give us an understanding of what it was like as they learned from their parents, as they themselves experienced to be in a country where you couldn't do the things that we were doing and taking for granted in the United States, so to that extent they were political but not in terms of a partisan.

**DN:** Now you had siblings?

**SL:** Yes, three younger brothers, and like the pattern which was set by the two older ones of us, I have, they're all, three younger, as I say. My brother Dave is a professor at the University of Illinois, a CPA and worked in various government missions and commissions. My brother Bob is here in Washington. He practices law and he focuses particularly on environmental and zoning arrangements. And the youngest brother is Harry who is also a CPA and he's here in Washington and he's just retired.

**DN:** So you were each encouraged to go on and get further education beyond high school.

**SL:** *Sine qua non*, that was the thing. Without it you're not going to get anywhere. And my mother and father both, particularly my mother, stressed that you're only half a person if you're only half educated. And that the one thing they can't take away from you, and you can carry with you no matter where you go was an education.

We lived through the Depression years and when I went to college, for example, it was rough, it was. My father had lost whatever we had and I knew I couldn't get any help at home so I had to collect assorted jobs, everything from selling Christmas cards, to waiting on table, to taking care of the arrangements for furniture in the various dormitories, an assortment of odds and ends; the local representative of the *New York Times*, for which I owe a deep debt of gratitude because they never ran anything I ever gave them. But it was that kind of experience and my brothers had the same sort of. . . . We were told that what you did to assure that you are an educated person is the best investment you can make.

**DN:** Now you went to Hamilton College and worked your way through, and your majors at Hamilton were not the conventional approach to the practice of law.

**SL:** No, my major was German and my minor was philosophy. Particularly as I look back, ironical and almost bitterly ironical that at the time I was majoring in German, Mr. Hitler was undertaking his vicious campaign. And I somehow never made the strong connection. I knew it was happening but it was removed from my life and I didn't see it as part of what we were going through here at home, so. . . .

**DN:** Were your main public policy concerns at that time domestic, economic concerns? Or did public policy impinge much on you as an undergraduate?

**SL:** Not so much at Hamilton, Don. I was there for a liberal arts education. If I spent time using, whatever of it was available to me, then it would be let's say to be sure I was reading the

right books, that I was learning poetry, that I was doing the things that go into a liberal arts education. And I don't have a strong feeling of being concerned about, as I say, what was going on in Germany or what was happening in terms of the bread lines in the United States. That came later.

**DN:** And from there you went to Cornell. What made you decide to pursue the law?

**SL:** Well, there's a little story I tell about Elihu Root. Elihu Root as you know was Secretary of State, Senator, Secretary of War, a very great statesman and lawyer. And I used to read to him on Sundays. He lived his last years on the campus at Hamilton, and I used to go over, there was something called a National Youth Administration, NYA which would pay you so much an hour for doing various things. And in my case the thing they asked me to do was to read to Elihu Root, Jr. on Sunday afternoon, Senior, on Sunday afternoons. For a long time I saw myself as a conduit, words on a page into his ear and one day he suddenly stopped me when I was reading to him. He said, "What are you going to do when you leave Hamilton?" I said, "I don't know, I can't decide between a rabbi or being a lawyer." And he said, "Be a lawyer, a lawyer needs twice as much religion as a rabbi or a minister." And it had an effect on me, you know, it was a moment when I was really unsure and when he said that sort of almost pointed me in that direction. So it's hard to know what the influences are, but that was one that was very strong. And I had been building in my anticipation for the future a preference for being a lawyer, but I wasn't sure that that was right for me.

**DN:** What was Cornell like in 1935?

**SL:** Well, not very much like it is today. It was an uncrowded campus rather than the multi-building campus that it is today. It was a place where you really had a feeling you were at a microcosm of the world, you had all kinds of races and creeds and different areas of study so that the scientist, the doctor, the school teacher all had a place on campus, and it prepared you for that kind of life off campus.

**DN:** Even though you were in the law school, you felt very much part of the university.

**SL:** I did indeed. I was helped by the fact that my wife, whom I met at Cornell, was an undergraduate at the time and we went together for a good part of the time when we were at school, and when she graduated in 1939 we got married. That was almost sixty years ago.

**DN:** A very successful union.

**SL:** Yeah, you don't last for sixty years unless it's pretty successful.

**DN:** Now Ed Muskie arrived a year after you did at Cornell.

**SL:** At the law school.

**DN:** At the law school. Do you remember your first encounter with him or early encounters?

**SL:** My first encounter was not an encounter. My first encounter was to watch this hulking, brooding, quiet, uncertain figure, to himself a great deal, a loner. And I was taken with him, I think, because I was editor in chief of *The Law Review* and I had the feeling that he was a smart man, smart fellow, but I didn't know how to evaluate whether or not he had the makings of going on the editorial board of *The Law Review*. But I found him interesting and, so the first time I really ran into him it was to talk with him about the law quarterly, *Cornell Law Quarterly*, and whether he wouldn't be interested in trying out for it. And he had first indicated, "Oh, I'm not good enough for that," that sort of thing, and I said, "Well yes, others will make that decision, but I would urge you to try out for it just to have the experience," and so forth. He, and I can't now recall whether or not he actually went out for the, I don't remember him coming on the board but I remember the conversation about it and then I sort of remember it did not happen. I'm not sure, he may have, but I'm not sure.

But that was the beginning of an acquaintance. I watched and I noticed that he did not have friends and he was taciturn and it was very hard for you to get a real feeling of what he was thinking. The school was small enough so that you would know in due course just about everybody in the law school, and he fell into that category and did it with that same inward looking characteristic that characterized him. I think that he first began to come through to me as a guy I really liked when I, and I decided he had a sense of humor, not always the same as mine, but it was. . . . It indicated a lightness about him that I welcomed.

**DN:** Do you remember what kind of humor that he had?

**SL:** It was almost pratfall humor. And then there would be pun humor, and he'd roar. He'd be the guy who would be most amused by what he had said. And you couldn't help liking his reaction, it was so honest and so strange sometimes.

**DN:** Now you were busily engaged as editor of *The Law Review* and as an upper class student in the law school. Did you have a chance to observe him at all in class in his response to the faculty?

**SL:** No, because see he was a year behind me and so therefore we did not cross in a curricular relationship. I did see him in his activities, involving faculty and so forth. There was something interesting about Ed that I remember thinking about. He found it hard to reach for people. You had to come to him. And I think his attitude was not to push himself in any way, not to expect that people will welcome his presence. He was somebody who felt that at a school like Cornell with so many, as he said, smart guys around, he wasn't going to be making much of a dent. I remember talking to him about that. But as I say, when he loosened up and time went on and he became better known and more appreciated, I think he relaxed a good deal more and was, in the last year he was there, I'd already left the law school of course, I remember one time I came back because my wife Toni was still at school and I used to come back to the, while she was finishing up. And he was talking about going back to practice law in his little town in Poland, in Poland, in Maine and that he was eagerly looking forward to it. He thought that would be fun, that would be interesting, and so forth.

**DN:** Did you and he ever have a chance to talk about the background of your respective parents? The fact that his father came from Poland. . . . in those days?

**SL:** Yeah, yeah, not extensively, sitting around and going into great detail and so forth, but the fact that we both saw this country the same way, that we each felt a debt, we owed a debt to this nation for having given our parents the opportunity and given us the opportunity. He could get almost maudlin sometimes as we talked about it, but it was not a long extended, it was we both knew what the other had come from and that was I think one of the reasons for a lasting bond between us.

**DN:** After you graduated from law school and went into practice and Ed went back to Maine, did you have . . . (*Tape stops*)

[NOTE: The interview was interrupted at this point for Ambassador Linowitz to take an urgent telephone call.]

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