

John Shattuck on Lister's "objective approach" to human rights

And so, I think what George had contributed—and I got to learn this in the course of getting to know him over the next several years—what he had contributed in the early stages of the Human Rights Bureau and the State Department's work on human rights was above all having as objective a view of human rights violations and criticizing friends and foes alike, and thereby I think achieving a number of important positive developments for human rights, for foreign policy in general. First of all, as George always liked to say, "Being a human rights critic is the best way to get over 'clientitis.'" Clientitis in the State Department is inevitable, where people become associated with the countries with which they're working, whether at the top levels or lower levels, whether as ambassador or down below. But if you are in fact being objective and relatively critical of that country, you are not going to fall into that clientitis problem. Second of all, I think taking this kind of an objective approach was a good way of projecting American values and improving in some measure the way American foreign policy was perceived in different parts of the world. Third, I think it was a very good way of connecting foreign policy with civil society, particularly NGOs, non-governmental organizations, who were inevitably at the forefront of efforts to struggle for human rights in other countries and sometimes those could get overlooked in more standard kind of diplomacy. So, these were all contributions that George was making.