

Elliott Abrams on Lister's work in bringing activists into the State Department

What was most valuable about working with him was, first of all, he did know a lot of people so that he would make sure that they came to the state department. He would provide a different take, sometimes, than we were getting from the embassy or from the regional bureau and the department, as to who was who and what they were up to. He also—I mentioned Latin America, but he knew people from all over. He knew the Eastern Europeans and he knew the South Africans and he knew the Asians and he would bring people around. He had this guy named Kim Dae-jung, later president of South Korea, who he wanted to bring around, and the Asia Bureau did not want to let him in the building. We had a big fight before the guy was actually permitted to enter the State Department. That gives you a sense of how George was really fighting the establishment within the building. This happened in a few other cases too, where a regional bureau would say, “We should not receive this person,” and they wouldn’t receive the person. Frequently, we’d work out a deal where they could be received in the Human Rights Bureau.