

INTERVIEW II

DATE: July 18, 1990

INTERVIEWEE: GERRI WHITTINGTON

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Ms. Whittington's residence, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

G: You were saying that you went with him [LBJ] to California.

W: Yes, to San Francisco and Los Angeles.

G: When was this?

W: I don't know. I don't recall the date. It was early in the administration. I don't remember why he went out to San Francisco, but I think he went to Los Angeles for some fundraiser for the governor. What was his name?

G: Governor Brown?

W: Yes. Mrs. [Jesse] Kellam's funeral, that's before that. I remember going to the Ranch at that time.

G: For Mrs. Kellam's funeral?

W: Yes.

G: What do you remember about that?

W: Well, the only thing I remember was Mr. Kellam and I remember he used to come to the Ranch. He was the head of the television station. That's the only thing I remember. I remember going to Mrs. Kellam's funeral because President Johnson took the staff

Whittington -- II -- 2

wherever he went. I remember "Stardust" being played at Mrs. Kellam's funeral.

G: Then you went to California, is that right?

W: No, that was before he went to California. I just threw that in. That was on phase two.

G: Tell me about the California trip there. He had a fundraiser in San Francisco, is that right?

W: I don't know why he went to San Francisco. I didn't go with him to the fundraiser but I think it was a fund-raiser.

G: He dedicated the Irvine campus of the University of California while he was out there. Do you remember that?

W: No, I don't remember that.

G: Do you remember anything about the 1964 Civil Rights Bill and the Senate invoking cloture to stop the filibuster?

W: No, I don't. I don't remember anything specific about that.

G: Anything on the signing ceremony of that bill?

W: No. I think it was in the Rose Garden. I think it was, but that's vague in my mind. Where is--yes, 6/19. It says "fundraiser," but I didn't go to the fundraiser with him. I stayed at the hotel.

G: How about going to New York to open the World's Fair?

W: I went with him. I was carrying the black box.

G: You were? Tell me about that trip.

W: We went to New York to open the World's Fair. Then we went to Roosevelt Raceway and I don't remember what we did there. Then we came to Atlantic City. We took a

Whittington -- II -- 3

helicopter to Atlantic City. But I don't remember anything specific about it.

G: And you were carrying the black box?

W: Yes.

G: Was that the only time you ever carried it?

W: That's right. And I kept the diary. I was the only secretary on that trip.

G: Did he usually have a military aide carry the black box?

W: I don't know. I think he did [inaudible] and Commander Shepard [?].

G: [Inaudible].

W: Yes. I think he was promoted to captain.

G: He went to Appalachia after that, to West Virginia and Kentucky. Do you remember--?

W: No, I didn't go with him on that trip.

(Interruption)

G: Let's see. You were saying you went to New York with him one time.

W: Yes. We stayed at the—where did the Kennedys stay? We stayed at the Carlyle.

G: What do you remember about that trip?

W: Well, he met a man, Mr. Anderson. I think he was down here as secretary of the treasury.

G: Robert Anderson?

W: Yes.

G: Do you remember anything about the meeting?

W: No, I wasn't in on the meeting. And he didn't dictate anything on the meeting.

[Inaudible]

G: Then he went to fundraisers in Detroit and Minneapolis.

Whittington -- II -- 4

W: No, I didn't go with him.

We went up on *Air Force One* and there isn't much I can tell you about that. But we stayed at the Claridge and I sat on the floor while he was on the stage. He never said anything about the convention while we were coming back to Washington.

G: Is that right? Why not?

W: Well, he was in a private part of the plane and I wasn't in there. And I think he had some men--secretaries of the various cabinet [offices]--in there with him.

G: Did he ever express doubt about seeking reelection that year in 1964?

W: No.

G: He never did?

W: No.

G: You assumed that he would run again?

W: Yes. And in fact I was surprised when I listened to the speech and he said he would not run again.

G: In 1968?

W: Yes.

G: Anything on his choosing Hubert Humphrey to be the vice presidential nominee?

W: Yes. I remember he said Hubert Humphrey talked too much. I remember he said he was well-liked.

G: Anything on the President's relationship with Robert Kennedy during this period? Robert Kennedy resigned as attorney general to run for the Senate from New York.

W: No. I recall that Robert Kennedy came to the White House and they had several

Whittington -- II -- 5

meetings. Robert Kennedy came to the White House several times. They had several meetings but I don't know what they talked about.

G: No specifics.

W: No.

G: Did you travel with him any during the campaign?

W: No.

G: You didn't go on any of the campaign trips?

W: No. I must have went on some of them but I didn't travel too much with him. I think Marie traveled with him a lot, Marie Fehmer. I don't know what her married name is.

G: Any recollections of Walter Jenkins leaving the White House staff?

W: Yes.

G: Tell me about that.

W: I remember that President Johnson was away. He went on some trip.

G: He was in New York I think.

W: Yes. And I wasn't with him. The headline was the next day in the *Washington Post*. President Johnson was in New York. It was a concern to everybody around the White House. I remember Juanita Roberts--did you interview her before she died?

G: Yes.

W: She was with him a long time and she knew most of the things about him.

G: Anything else on Jenkins leaving?

W: No.

G: Did the staff change?

Whittington -- II -- 6

W: Moyers assumed his duties. Bill Moyers didn't move into his office.

G: Who moved into his office?

W: I think Mildred Stegall was in there and it remained like that. He had the office in the corner of the White House. He had a big office.

G: Which corner was it?

W: The corner next to the EOB [Executive Office Building]; the corner next to the driveway between the West Wing and the EOB. That was where Ralph Dungan was when I worked for him. And I used to see President Johnson walking toward the President's office with both hands in his pockets and his head down.

G: When he was vice president?

W: Yes.

(Interruption)

G: You were going up to the Capitol, for what?

W: I think the civil rights speech.

G: The voting rights, the "we shall overcome" speech?

W: Yes.

G: Tell me what you remember about that.

W: I don't remember anything. Isn't that funny?

G: Did you ride in the car with him?

W: Yes.

G: What do you remember about the ride?

W: I don't remember anything he said. I don't remember--I think he took--of course Mrs.

Whittington -- II -- 7

Johnson went. And I sat in the balcony and I was up there by myself. The balcony was full but I was the only person from the President's office.

G: How did you react to the speech?

W: I thought it was wonderful.

G: Anything else that you remember about that occasion?

W: No.

G: Did he say anything to you on the way over or on the way back?

W: No.

G: He just took you over there. Let's see, that was in March, is that right?

W: Yes.

G: March 15. Anything else on the Voting Rights Bill?

W: No.

G: Did you ever go to Camp David during this time?

W: No.

(Interruption)

W: He didn't say anything to me about that. But I remember I was very happy about that.

G: This was Head Start?

W: Yes. A lot of events I don't remember because I wasn't focusing on them.

G: He went out to meet with President Truman in Kansas City.

W: I didn't go out there. But I remember President Eisenhower coming to the White House.

G: Was this after the assassination or later?

W: After the assassination.

Whittington -- II -- 8

G: What do you remember about that?

W: It was way after the assassination. I just remember President Johnson had a long meeting with him. I was so very glad to see President Eisenhower in person. Johnson was over in his bedroom.

(Interruption)

W: The day he [Adlai Stevenson] died the news came to the White House and I remember President Johnson coming along with Bill Moyers and Okamoto to his office. President Johnson was looking down--because I was sitting--my desk was facing the White House Garden and I could see President Johnson and when he came out of the White House and came up the long walk.

G: After Stevenson's death?

W: Yes.

G: And he did go to Illinois for the funeral.

W: Yes, but I didn't go.

(Interruption)

W: He appointed him a Supreme Court judge.

G: Tell me about that.

W: Well, I don't remember anything he said, but Thurgood Marshall was at the White House with his family. Attorney General Clark was there. What was his first name?

G: Ramsey.

W: Attorney General Ramsey Clark was there. I remember we took some pictures. And *Jet* wrote a long article about that, *Jet* magazine.

Whittington -- II -- 9

G: Anything on the signing of the voting rights bill at the White House?

W: I don't remember that.

G: Or home rule for the District of Columbia?

W: Yes, I remember that.

G: Tell me about that.

W: I don't remember anything important about that. But Walter Washington was at the White House, and you know he appointed him the first--

G: Mayor.

(Interruption)

W: He called me in and he said, "I spoke to Lloyd Hand about you and he has a place in his office for you."

G: Did you--

(Interruption)

W: He exposed his secretaries--President Johnson exposed his secretaries to a lot. He exposed me to a lot. I went to a number of dinners.

G: State dinners?

W: Yes. I didn't go to the dinners but after-dinner entertainment. I enjoyed them so much. And then I met a lot of people I had read about.

G: You said that you were invited back to the White House.

W: Yes, I was invited--oh, he took me on one boat ride.

G: On the *Sequoia*?

W: Yes. And I think that boat ride was for some African president. I don't remember what

Whittington -- II -- 10

president it was.

G: Do you remember anything significant about that evening?

W: No.

G: Anything else?

W: He introduced me to the African president. He said, "This is my secretary." I had just been to the State Department for a day or two before this boat ride that was scheduled.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II

June 28, 2005

Geraldine (Gerri) Whittington
White House Secretary

Interview I: June 5, 1990

Interview II: July 18, 1990

The Library is making these interviews available without a signed legal agreement since no heirs can be located.

Researchers are cautioned, however, that copyright privileges have not been transferred to the government. The interview may have copyright protection and researchers are responsible for obtaining permission from the copyright holder for further use of the interviews. See 36 C.F.R. § 1254.62.

From e-mail from John Davenport on 6/27/05

This is in response to your request for guidance on making the oral history (OH) interview of Gerri Whittington available for research. For the reasons set forth below, we believe you may make the OH interviews available for research.

Background

Gerri Whittington was a former secretary of President Lyndon B. Johnson. She was interviewed in 1990 as part of the LBJ Oral History Program. Ms. Whittington provided information regarding her duties as the president's secretary and other information that she was able to recall. We understand that all interviewees in the OH program were made aware of the library's intent to retain possession of the interview and that the interview would be open to the public for research. We understand further that most interviewees would subsequently execute deeds of gifts for the interviews, without imposing any access restrictions. Ms. Whittington was aware of the Library's intent to make her OH interview available for research. Unfortunately, Ms. Whittington was in poor health at the time of her interview. She died before her interview was transcribed and before she executed a deed of gift transferring all rights and interests in the interview to the United States.

Authorities and Analysis

NARA is authorized to accept materials from private sources relating to a former president of the United States. See 44 U.S.C. §§ 2107(4); 2111. Generally, records and other documentary materials in NARA's holdings are available to the public for research unless there are access restrictions. See 36 C.F.R. § 1254.1(b). Some donated materials may have restrictions on their use and availability as stated in writing by the donor. See 36 C.F.R. § 1256.30.

Regarding the Whittington OH interview, it is clear that the interview is part of NARA's holdings pursuant to 44 U.S.C. §§ 2107(4) and 2111. As such, the interview may be opened for research unless the donor has imposed written access restrictions. Although Ms. Whittington never executed a deed of gift for her interview, she was made aware that NARA intended to make her interview available for research. There is no written record, nor is there any other indication, of Ms. Whittington's objection to the proposed use of the interview.

Conclusions

Given that (1) the majority of OH interviews are available for public use without restrictions; (2) Ms. Whittington was aware of and never objected to NARA's intent to make her OH interview available to the public for research; and (3) NARA has statutory and regulatory authority to make its holdings available for research, we conclude that the LBJ Library may open the Whittington OH interview to research.

Although we reach the conclusion that you may make the interview available for research, please note that the copyright status of the interview is still unsettled. Accordingly, when you make the interview available to the public, we recommend that you put researchers on notice that the interview may have copyright protection and that they (the researchers) are responsible for obtaining permission from the copyright holder for further use of the interviews. See 36 C.F.R. § 1254.62.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

John E. Davenport, Sr.
Assistant General Counsel
National Archives and Records Administration
301-837-1645
301-837-0293 (fax)