INTERVIEW III

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INTERVIEWEE: CLIFFORD ALEXANDER

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Mr. Alexander's office in Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

F: You're the new head of the EEOC. Now tell me what you found.

A: I found a number of things through various techniques that we use at the commission: pervasive discrimination in all parts of this country, contrary to the popular myth of it existing solely in the South, but all over the place concerning certainly blacks, Chicanos, females. Actually, in the area of discrimination against females, some of our rulings in that area were of greater significance at the time, seemed to be, than those against blacks. Of course, [there was] greater resistance from the outside community as it was not as "fashionable" then to be on the side of protecting employment rights, or pension rights, or right-to-work rights on behalf of females in those days.

F: Is this a conscious discrimination or is this sort of an unthinking, unfeeling thing that people never are alert enough to realize in many instances it exists?

A: I think it fits into both categories. Let me talk about the result. Be it direct, basic bigotry, stated and overt, or somebody that really doesn't think they've got those vices, the result

on the individual is the same. They don't get the job or they don't get the promotion. So from the legal point of view or from the point of view of the complainant, both matters need to be corrected.

I think, when it came to female discrimination, that much of it was quite overt. Yes, people thought of it perhaps as, well, we just never thought of that. "But they did think the negative. They thought the exclusion through pretty carefully and thought of it as more or less a male club that they wanted to run. The same would be true in many instances, and is still true unfortunately, when it comes to blacks and Chicanos. When it gets to certain levels of management, still there is no inclusion of minorities at that level. That is a rather conscious decision. It is not a stated decision any more. The stated verbiage from most major companies today is "We are looking for qualified ones" and "The young black has a better opportunity than the young white," and so forth. But when you look at the people thirty to forty-five in this society who have certain training and experience, their opportunities are still far less significant than those of their white brothers.

F: I know you disclosed a survey that reported discrimination against blacks in the ethical drug industry.

A: Yes.

F: Now, why did they go to certain industries?

A: What we had to do, when I headed EEOC, we got from each of the

companies, under the provisions of the law, their own employment statistics, which indicated by industry just what in the various nine categories of employment the census uses the total number of employees would be, what the total number of females would be, and males, what the total number of blacks, chicanos and American Indians would be. We then looked at the given industries and tried to isolate some that were particularly venal, if you will, in their practices via those statistics. And then [we would] go beyond that to look at the complaints we had, look at the history of the industries, look at the supply of minority talent available, and try and have a meeting or a public hearing to go into some depth with those industries as to what their problems were. At the end of the conference we always tried to do this: make a useful series of suggestions about what they might do.

We picked the drug industry because within the drug industry, the overall statistics were horrendous; yet you had in the industry some companies that were doing very well and some that were doing literally nothing. The point that we were able to make from that was that the old saw about "I can't find any" was disproven by someone in their own given industry.

We held that meeting in the Executive Office Building and also had, and I thought this was important because we had no power of enforcement, the Food and Drug Administration present, those who had some authority over the given industry. We did the same thing with the utilities industry, we had approximately a

hundred heads of utilities. Where again, despite its quasi-public nature, you had basic exclusion of minorities in employment and to a lesser extent but certainly, still an exclusion of females.

F: Now this was not a conscious freezing out like you've got in the building trades, for instance? This is just a case that you just never did anything.

A: Actually, no. There was also some conscious freezing out. Much of it was not doing anything, but a good bit of it still in many of the companies and many of the utilities was a very polite interview but never let them in the door. The disparate treatment, to attach a sort of legal terminology to it, the treating of an entire group differently than the majority group would be affected or would take place if you failed to reach out the same way to the minority group as you did to the majority group; i.e., if you are hiring people that are referred by your present all-white work force, and that all-white work force gets it from its all-white neighborhood, its all-white church, its all-white social clubs, the same kind of treatment for a minority group means that someone on behalf of the company must reach into the black community, to use that as an example, to stimulate that community to have its people come forward and want jobs. Because if you allow it to stand with the all-white work force referring its friends and acquaintances, then without any necessarily overt act of any kind, you're just going to get a string of white people walking in the door and there'll never be an opportunity.

But some of the companies were still barring people as they came through the door. Some of them were still having different sets of qualifications. Some of them were imposing a cultural bias because they didn't like the accent of the chicano, or they didn't like, say, a southern accent in the North that a black was utilizing. That would sometimes keep people from getting jobs.

This came out in other things. We did a few major public hearings in Los Angeles. I remember talking to one of the industries there about what kind of voice was useful in the media. It was someone from NBC. We got the testimony from that individual from NBC that their most successful general public affairs show was the "Today" show. What I asked them, after they had talked about this certain kind of midwestern voice that's important, was "is it the Joe Garagiola voice? Or is it the Barbara Walters voice? Are these the voices that the average chicano or black ought to emulate if they're going to be successful?" The obvious answer is that it doesn't relate to a specific kind of voice. They have in their own minds that "we want a neutral voice that will not offend this, that, or the other group." Whether it offends the group, it's pretty clear that it doesn't from the success of many of their programs. The Gomer Pyle voice, is that the kind of voice that is useful, or is it Redd Foxx in "Sanford and Son"? It just is not important, and it is discriminatory if they establish a stereotype in their own mind of what kind of voice ought to be

useful and will attract an audience. In the process of establishing that, they keep out large segments of people. And by the way, even with the midwestern twang, there are lots of blacks and chicanos who have affected that kind of accent anyway because that's where they live and that's how they've been brought up. So you can still include those groups even if you are going to use that criteria.

F: I've been struck in that particular industry with the fact that while you are getting now both blacks and women, particularly, you still have not developed the national black male personality. You've done better with the woman that you have with the male.

A: That's right. Absolutely.

F: You can switch to Washington and get a black or you can switch to Chicago and get a black, but you don't get it out of the home office. You stay with the Walter Cronkites.

A: Absolutely. And we held two hearings on that specifically in New York and in Los Angeles. The problem was the same in the TV industry. Their numbers were terribly low at all levels. They reacted only to external pressure, and their reaction to that external pressure was to put somebody on the local news or on the local program for the local audience. Nine days after we held our public hearings in New York, CBS hired its first national reporter, Hal Walker. It was only after the pressure of those hearings that you even had anyone reporting on the Cronkite show. The numbers are a little bit higher today, but they're still not significant. There is no national talk show that is hosted by a black.

F: I remember the Nat King Cole fiasco.

A: I don't think his show lasted six months--again, with someone as prominent as he was.

F: One of the cliches is that entertainment and sports are a road to opportunity, but has that also had a reaction in that you tend to think of them as sort of high priced entertainers and nothing beyond that?

A: I think the most violent objection to it, particularly in the world of athletics, is the use of black flesh. "Run around and entertain us, but don't put us in positions of ownership, don't put us in positions of managers." As you know, organized baseball never had a black manager. When you broaden it in television, none of the close to nine hundred commercial and educational television stations are owned by blacks.

F: I'm thinking of Hollywood, too.

A: Hollywood is the most exclusionary of all, not only in ownership, where there is none, but in the entire mechanism of distribution of motion pictures, the production of motion pictures. The one experiment that a man ran on his own was Melvin Van Peeples and "Sweet Back." He did the whole thing himself, and he made some money off of it, but that was against great odds. But the companies themselves, again after our public hearings there in 1969, felt some pressure and the Gordon Parks of this world and a few others got their specific kind of black film. That's fine; it's entertainment and so forth, but the general pattern is not there yet.

And when you look at the upper level management of those companies, there are no blacks or chicanos included in it. So it's not anything that has been built into our system. It's a particular spore based on a certain kind of pressure that's brought at a given time.

F: Could the EEOC do anything about that beyond just letting them know that you didn't approve?

A: Not really. We sort of gummed them to death if we could, but we had no enforcement powers. We did hold the public hearings, as I mentioned. We investigated individual complaints and had a responsibility which I think we met of maintaining that confidentiality in those investigations. We attempted to conciliate and develop what are known now as affirmative action plans where companies would do something over a period of time to correct a problem. We were successful in some instances, but not nearly as many as were needed. The big thrust was never utilized in the federal government. That's the capacity that came actually in another area, the Labor Department, to cut off a contract of a discriminator. That was not utilized.

But President Johnson understood, I think, one thing that his predecessors, and certainly his successor, haven't gotten clear in mind, and this is that it is important to include--and he did this in government--blacks in positions where they had power and authority. I remember his talking about appointing Andy Brimmer and wanting very much to have Andy in a position where whites were

coming to him to borrow money. That's how he oversimplified the role of the Federal Reserve Board. But, in mind, Bob Weaver's, obviously, and Thurgood Marshall's [another]; you're placing people in positions of real power and authority where they can make some substantive decisions and judgments that will change the society.

Now the private sector, particularly corporate America, has not taken that step yet, despite that example. The government has backed off of that as an important issue, certainly, but the main thing is that the corporations that were on the edge of this and started hiring in large numbers still have not taken the next big step that is really going to call for the inclusion of blacks in white corporate America and, therefore, in the capitalistic system.

F: Did Johnson give you any instructions when he appointed you to this? I know he was not one for high-flown theorizing, as you've just mentioned. He tended to pull things down to almost a man in the street sort of example.

A: We talked some about my going over there. When I first went over there I wasn't that enthusiastic about it, or when the idea first came up. Then, by the time he appointed me, I was very enthusiastic about it.

F: Was this part of his selling?

A: I think some of his, but I think a fair amount of mine in wanting [it]. Though a White House role is a once-in-a-lifetime, it's not you running your own operation, as I saw it. You are working for

a person, and you ought to be carrying his ideas out. It's fine for me to have mine, but if he will adopt those and then let me take them out as his, that's what a White House aide ought to be doing. Now as a head of an agency, you have given responsibilities under the general tenets of the law that set you up, and I think that having that was something that I very much wanted myself.

F: He never did give you any "don't rock the boat" instructions.

A: Never did, for which I was particularly grateful. I'm sure that there would have been others that would have liked to. I had people from the Hill call me about this and that appointment, and I told them that "I'm doing it on merit" and we had a big job to do and a small stick to do it with. And I never got the next call from somebody in the congressional liaison office at the White House with the pressure. And I always appreciated that.

There was a black man, for example, who raised with White House aides the possibility that the public hearings that I held in 1968 in New York were going to create riots in the street and a horrible situation. I got a call from a white man over in the White House, who called me laughingly and said, "I've got this. What should I do with it?" I told him what he could say for me to the black man who reported it, and it's not something I'd like on your tape. He laughed, and that was the last of it. What he was doing was telling me what had been said to them.

At the time I think I got a reputation for fairly frank talk and pushing the business and labor community to do what they

should do under the law. I never once, from Johnson or Johnson representatives, got a message that "Cliff, you're to lay back; you're to take it easy" or "This is my favorite industry, and I don't want you touching them."

Now I would be fairly sure that somebody from those industries, because we touched a lot of people, called the White House and said, "Who's that crazy s.o.b. you have over there," but if such calls took place they were never transmitted to me. And for that I've always been grateful. I was able to run my commission. You have enough pressure anyway from trying to run a place, and you have four other commissioners with ideas, and you hear directly obviously from labor and industry yourself. But it would have been a tough external pressure.

I know the President understood this was an independent commission that was bipartisan in nature. And that there were five commissioners, and that only three could be of one political party. It was something that Nixon has never understood, but Johnson did. He thought of it as something of great significance and always did little things to help back it up. The one public statement that I remember, though he made mention of the commission and its work several times in speeches, was [when] he used the occasion of the anniversary of the commission to make a huge plug for greater funds for us. On one occasion, when he was cutting back in all of the budgets, he allowed me to get through a 105 per cent increase in our budget. That was a nice gesture.

But to get it beyond the gesture stage to dollars, I talked to him about the problems that I was going to have with John McClellan, who was in charge of that on the Senate side. There isn't a thing that I could say to John McClellan that's going to convince him of the worth of this.

F: He probably isn't even going to listen.

A: That's right, and LBJ called him up. Whatever he said to him meant that we got about 40 per cent more that year from McClellan, and he just sort of laid off during that hearing.

But that was the nature of the involvement. When asked to do something, he would do it, or he would use the work that we were doing in a given statement to help push to open up areas of employment opportunities for the minorities and for females.

F: The unions, who are of course one of your targets in this, have one semi-legitimate standard to fall back on and that is: they've got their apprenticeship system, et cetera, et cetera. So they can argue that the people you're pushing are unqualified. How do you crack that?

A: It depends on why the apprenticeship program got started. As we both know, several of them got started to preserve their relatives. We had, again in the West Coast hearings in IATSE, the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees, a situation where they had on the application: "Who referred you? Are you related to anybody?" It was right up there for everybody to see.

They had an instance of a lamp operator at those public hearings,

again public testimony, that the apprentice for that lamp operator--all a lamp operator does is move a big huge lamp on the set from side to side-that apprentice has to work longer than it takes to train a jet pilot to learn how to move a lamp back and forth.

The whole system is obviously discriminatory. Its genesis wasn't directly to keep chicanos and blacks out; it was to include relatives and those in an in-group. But unions aren't running clubs and shouldn't be running clubs. So when apprenticeship programs had no rational connection with the job to be done or the length of the training had no rational connection, we'd attack them.

The other thing that happened, and this isn't all unions--some obviously tried to move with the times--but the other thing that some unions would do would be to set up a whole new bastard area of apprenticeship. They came up with the strange concept of the pre-apprenticeship program. Now, by definition, I assume an apprentice is somebody that doesn't know anything, and you're teaching him to do a job. Now pre-apprentice was where they'd throw these minorities, and the minority over there wasn't even guaranteed of getting into an apprentice program. It was getting some of the pressure off the back; establishing something that really didn't necessarily do the job; not building into even that pre-apprenticeship euphemism they'd come up with the guarantee that that would lead either to apprenticeship or to a job eventually. So one continually had those problems with unions.

But at least from the nature of the complaints we had, 18 per

cent of our complaints related to unions and close to the other of the 80 related to corporations, and there were a few against employment agencies. But the vast control over jobs, of course, is with the companies. I have never tried to say that the unions are better or worse than the corporations in the area of discrimination. They both still have a number of pernicious practices.

But we did spend a fair amount of time looking at the union discrimination. We did not want to overemphasize it in the general media. Discussion did overemphasize it at the time, because you had the horrendous example of the construction industry where these crafts were violently opposing in their language and in their acts. But the effect again of all that violently opposing was exactly the same as the polite corporate executive who has all the lingo down but still doesn't employ or doesn't promote.

F: It's the same business as being hit with a rock or being hit with a glove which has got a bat inside it.

A: Yes.

F: On the commission itself, did you have any problems as chairman?

A: Oh, sure. We had four individuals who were commissioners in their own right, and they felt certain responsibilities. I think they sensed some frustration as a result of the way the commission was structured and the power it didn't have. They were set up as commissioners on the assumption that eventually there would be a cease-and-desist [injunction] power and they would then have the capacity either to hold hearings or to supervise hearing examiners.

But since we didn't have that power, their responsibilities were limited, and they were reviewing, often, opinions rather than supervising hearings. That meant that the utilization of their time was not as great as it should have been. There were the normal problems that might be construed as personal or political of keeping your fellow commissioners informed.

F: Were there any hard and fast sort of schisms or line-ups in the commission?

A: They weren't hard and fast. They would float some. There were a couple who were more conservative, particularly in the female area, and we managed to outvote them. But those were three-two votes, and those were hotly contested issues. But the commissioners as myself were presidential appointees confirmed by the Senate, and they obviously had a right to their opinions. I think it was done in a sense of humanity and good will, though the arguments were many.

F: Was this on a Republican-Democratic basis?

A: No.

F: Was it on a geographical basis?

A: No. One of them, Luther Holcomb, who is a Democrat, was against me on the female issues and was generally with me on the race issues at that time. I think his thinking has changed somewhat on that. He is a Democrat; he happens to be from Texas, but that had nothing to do with it. So is Lyndon Johnson. I think sometimes I would have Elizabeth Cook, who is a Republican and from Chicago, not as

forward looking as I would necessarily like on the race issue. Or I'd have Vince [Vincente] Ximenes--

F: Who is he?

A: Vince Ximenes, who is a commissioner and from New Mexico. He was the other vote against us on the female issue generally.

F: Was that sort of a machismo outlook?

A: I don't know. We discussed these things. I think, when one considers those times, it wasn't talked about as much, and I felt we had an obligation in trying to carry it out to resolve some of those issues, which we did in 1967-68.

F: Could you talk pretty frankly with each other?

A: I think we could. I tried to go personally to them and talk about issues, because their frustration was understandable to me. I saw myself as having the administrative authority to run the commission. And, you know, you run the staff, and here they are, presidential appointees with authority in seeming substance, but then part of the substance isn't there, no fault to them. So I think it's very important to keep them up to date. Because they were giving speeches and talking with groups and going to seminars and trying to educate and giving technical assistance to major corporations on how to go about it. I felt, selfishly from the commission's point of view, that, from their various backgrounds, they had a lot of knowledge that they could contribute. You know, at some points they would not like the attitude of this part of the staff, and I tried to resolve it. Because I felt that the staff worked for the entire

commission and, though I had the hire-and-fire responsibility, at no time should they. Because I felt some may go out and disagree with a given commissioner. But they're human beings too so those frictions sometimes came up.

F: Did you press for cease-and-desist power?

A: Oh, yes. And so did Johnson. And we didn't get it. A couple of years. It just didn't come through. Then as I left--

F: Was this a kind of conservative Republican-southern Democratic block?

A: That's right; that's what stopped it. Then Nixon came up with the funny money scheme, which is now law, where the commission can bring lawsuits, which is unlike any other administrative regulatory commission. They just don't have the authority they had. This was in 1969 that he raised that issue, really to cloud; he and John Mitchell really clouded the whole thrust for cease-and-desist. Because you were starting to pull in some of the Republicans who realized, even from the business and labor point of view, that it would be useful for the commission to have that power because there were many cases that were in sort of a state of limbo. And if there were authority to rule one way or another, certain trends and tendencies could be set out, and then a company would know what was expected of it. Now it is dealing with confidential decisions and confidential conciliation agreements that could not be properly under law circulated from company to company. So they had really to guess what was the real opinion of the federal government in this. So I think some of the companies, although they weren't as vocal as they might have been, wanted

cease-and-desist. But I think Nixon really wanted nothing much to happen there and decided to go the court route which is just too long and involved. Filing a lawsuit and waiting for its results three or four years hence is not the way to enforce individual complaints of employment discrimination. Nobody else does it; no state commission ever has.

F: You've got people like you, Andy Brimmer, Robert Weaver, and others scattered around. Now then, you've got something like downtown New York, the financial district, which has been pretty much lily-white. Do you get together and figure how you're going to attack this problem, or is each person working his own independent operation?

A: I would guess that each is working his own independent operation.

F: In the hopes that the total effect will get through.

A: I think that each of us, to a greater or lesser extent, stay involved--some of us with group dimension. That isn't their first bag, their first interest. I think it's far different to be on the Federal Reserve Board than it is to head a commission that is concerned day by day with employment discrimination. I would imagine that Bob Weaver stays in touch with the problems of New York, though I don't know for sure.

F: Could you bring pressure to bear? You revealed that the New York financial district was one of the worst offenders. Could you bring real pressure to bear on them to improve the situation?

A: We tried to with, again, limited success. We tried to get SEC to do something about it, and they hemmed and hawed a little and did

a little something. The numbers changed dramatically again after our hearings because they felt the public embarrassment. I thought that was important, once we had the facts; not just the scattergun public embarrassment; but once you had the numbers, had the statements of companies, and there was a failure performed to at least place [the facts] out there for people to evaluate.

F: Just under the white light of publicity in the thing.

A: That's right, and that did change what happened with the New York Exchange. They have a black man on as a member of the board of governors now, and there are far more employees than there were. It's hardly solved, but it's not the lily-white bastion it was in 1968 when we held our hearings.

The New York Telephone Company, where we held our hearings and talked to them, hired some six thousand minority employees in a period of a few months after our hearings. Those things took place and they only took place, I think, not because they were ready to do it. They did it, just as the CBS example, after the heat of the publicity was on them.

F: Did the New York Times sort of react with surprise when you showed how few blacks it hired?

A: Oh, yes. They were the surprise of hurt and righteous indignation.

F: Did they have any leg to stand on?

A: Not a leg. Again, they went out and hired about five or six reporters within the next six months who were black, but they still don't have a leg to stand on.

I think much of my concentration wasn't politically a very sensible thing to do, but I think from the point of view of getting the minority story told as well as important power centers to go to minorities, I stressed the media a good deal--the New York Times, the New York Post--in those New York hearings, the various networks in both the New York hearings and the Los Angeles hearings. Because not only are there some real jobs involved, and important jobs, but here were a group of whites picturing what is going on in chicano America or black America or female America. Their picture was being transmitted for whites and blacks to evaluate. They were deciding who "my" black leader was and putting he or she on the ad day after day. They were making a decision as to what was the most predominant issue that affected my life. And they were all white, who were making these judgments and decisions. They were exclusionary for an obvious, publicly apparent reason that they worried about how a black face would affect their white audience. And that kind of overt bias was certainly something we had to get at.

F: On something like the New York Times in which you are not confronted--that is, the great general public can't read a by-line and tell whether it's white, black, or plaid, how does such a generally liberal organ have such a poor record?

A: They have because they're not really liberal. When you look at the management of the Times, it is basically a family company. They have their own internal kinds of jobs; some go to Jews who own some of the company; some cannot be Jewish jobs, as they see

it, because they don't want too many of their own within it. The bias that has permeated the Times management has been there for some time. It is a traditional paternalistic attitude toward blacks; the same [paternalistic attitude] that the Times has been accusing the South of for years. That doesn't make the accusation any less relevant or proper, but they needed to turn the spotlight inwardly and still do. You've never seen a regular columnist who's black in the Times; you've never seen an editorial writer at the Times. You go to the Sunday magazine and a hundred or so employees, and I understand, as of today, that there isn't a black in that part of the New York Times.

I need not tell you but these are just vital ways of getting ideas across, communicating with people, correcting misapprehensions, or from a platform for the latest polemicist. And not to be chosen by the management known as [inaudible] Times. Let some of the blacks get involved in that choice, not only of those who speak to and about them who are black, but of the whites who do that. The judgments in the magazine section--you know, whether a Pat Moynihan is going to come out with some of his trash on black America or a Jensen or someone else--that is, again, all being made by whites. The creation of heroes, the creation of spokesmen and spokeswomen in a given area, is made by a small cloistered group of white folks who happen to be sitting in a city that is largely black and Puerto Rican right now.

F: Have a good number of your black and Puerto Rican spokesmen pretty

much been annointed by the white community and not really have any clout among their own people?

A: I think may have been, yes. I think that there are fortunately many others who are genuine leaders in the sense of either having been voted there and speak for a group or because of what they have done, there is an interchange between the group they claim to represent and the group itself. It doesn't really bother me, frankly, that much that they pick a few, and they might be right occasionally. There is insufficient judgment to make that choice. If we were discussing the value of the dollar or NATO, and you found somebody who had no knowledge of it nor real interest in it, that would be misleading us a great deal if we were American business people. Or it would be misleading us as Americans about our security if somebody was writing about NATO and had no concept of what the hell it was all about. And that's exactly what they've been doing with white and black in this country for the longest damned time.

Now there are several white reporters on the Times or the Post or the Chicago Tribune or any of these papers who have a competency and have exhibited it, to go and see these facts. There are, however, certain parts of black America or chicano areas where it would be good to have that perspective. It is also, I think, important to get over some of the biases of this country to send black reporters into what are thought of as all-white settings, to have them cover NASA, to look at those things that have been

the lily-white bastions in this society--the Defense Department and so forth. That I think is a very important thing.

It is also important to have them in the management of these newspapers so that placement of a story . . . Very often a white, mostly white, sometimes black, reporter does a good, thorough job, and it doesn't either see the light of day or it is changed. I've heard stories out of the New York Times, and I don't mean to beat them up too much because the newspaper industry is perhaps the most biased of all--

F: Well, of course they're on top of you.

A: But you take the Times where a copy person changed "black," referring to black Americans, to "Negro," because that's what that [paper] said ought to be done.

F: That style book.

A: That took a great deal of emphasis out of a certain person's quote and also put some words in his mouth that he didn't want there. When he talks about blacks, he talks about blacks, and doesn't mean to say Negro or colored or something else. Those kinds of things happen day by day. When the editors are all white, as they are at the Times, when the management is all white, as it is at the Times, or the Washington Post for that matter, or the Washington Star for that matter, it has a grave effect on what we as Americans hear. It's a distorted effect. And while many of those papers that I've mentioned are doing important work at uncovering matters and are speaking editorially about civil liberties problems, the point

is to practice what they preach. And that's what they're not doing in most of the papers in the country and certainly in all the networks in the country.

F: All right. Now I'm a white company and, for whatever reasons, good or bad, I hire a certain number of blacks, and I meet federal guidelines. In other words, I have made my peace with tokenism. How do you keep it from stopping at tokenism in which I'm within the law and I've got my showpieces?

A: Well, the oversimplified but I think very important starting point is that the individual employees that have been hired must be thought of as individuals, not that "We hired this black, and that's it. We've taken care of those requirements." And then that individual is judged according to talents, ideally, and is moved up with the same rapidity. And that people are brought in to start at middle level and upper level management just as whites are, that everybody who is black and chicano and female doesn't have to start at the bottom; [that] there are a number here who are out here to train[?].

Then another important thing has to take place. And I think it's important that we all realize--and more blacks have to realize--that there are white managers out here who are committed, do want to do the job, have started to do the job, but their level of sophistication isn't quite where it ought to be. What's happening with them nowadays [is that] some of them are having complaints raised either at the federal government or the state government. As soon as a

complaint of discrimination is filed that white manager who basically is committed but then gets a complaint filed--someone exercising their legal right to charge discrimination--takes that personally. And it affects how that manager deals with minority or female employees. It affects how that manager talks to, perhaps, the supervisors. Because they say, "Hell, I believed in this stuff. I've done all that needed to be done, and now they're complaining. I'm having to spend my time in investigations and doing all this stuff when I ought to be out doing the job. They're really inhibiting me." That level of unsophistication, if you will, about the many and myriad problems that people face out here, I think, is the next major stumbling block that we're running into now with those who have fulfilled their "commitments." And it comes down to, again, evaluation of an individual. If you look at an individual and that individual is working for you, and that individual complains, you take a look at it. If it's no good, you treat it as one that's no good. If there is something there that you can learn from, you change it. You treat it as a business problem.

There are many companies that, unrelated to the individual manager, have within them a systemic kind of discrimination that has been set up, and it's going day by day; it is impersonal, but it just has that effect on the minority employee. It may be a test; it may be an educational prerequisite that is unrelated to a job; all of those things may be there and nothing that the manager put there, and it goes on day by day. Now, if somebody complains and raises one of those issues that we can presume, for this example, are valid, the

thing to do is to correct it quickly. And certainly, whether the complaint is valid or invalid, [the thing to do is] not to personalize it, not to go after that individual. Because generally, if that individual only personalizes it, when that manager transmits his personal feelings to subordinates, then it gets generalized, and it's "All these blacks are going to create trouble." I've heard this many times: "If we hire one, what if it does not work out? What are we going to run into then?" Some people are just using that as a device not to hire, but some genuinely are trying to figure out what is going to happen. But their level of sophistication obviously is quite limited if that's the way they think.

F: To shift the tone a little bit, I ran into a reference that you and Ed Weisl, Jr., must have gone with Lyndon Johnson on a trip to New York just before his March 31, 1968 address.

A: I guess we went to the President's Club, if I'm not mistaken, which was the fund-raiser there. I think both [of us] as New Yorkers, LBJ took us up there. We knew a number of the people. He did not discuss his speech and that he was going to step down at that stage.

F: This caught you totally by surprise?

A: It really got me. Absolutely.

F: You had the feeling that night in New York that this was a candidate?

A: I had the feeling he was a candidate certainly an awful good one, from what I could see, you know, when he was working a crowd like that, because he had a lot of friends himself in New York. He had many more contacts than the average New Yorker would have guessed

that he had in New York; so he was with friends. But he was also with, as I saw it, people who could be helpful during the campaign.

F: Considering the alternatives, would you have considered that Johnson did have the black vote?

A: Considering the alternatives, the question would have been to check the sanity of any black who didn't vote for him. Yes, I did. Not being facetious, he would have had 95-6-7-8 percent of the black vote. I don't think there was any question about it.

F: There was nothing in that New York trip in his mood or manner that indicated that he was just going through the motions?

A: What I saw--there was a dance that was a part of that--was that he got around a good deal. Mrs. Johnson was there and at the table with a number of people, meeting and greeting. This was not a reticent, in-the-corner, contemplative president by any means. I did not see it there. There was a smaller party before. I really was too busy doing I forget what for him there to even notice him. Maybe he said to us, "Go talk to everybody and don't hang around me," I'm sure that's probably what he did-- So I don't know if any of that was indicated in the smaller, pre-dinner gathering. But certainly it was not present [later].

F: Where did you pick up the news?

A: I picked it up watching television.

F: You were watching the speech that night?

A: Yes, and I didn't really believe it. You know, it was funny, I forget who I called, but I talked to some of the people whom I used to work

with there, trying to figure out if maybe there was something clever about it or something political that we missed here.

F: Did he ever talk with you about political potentialities for you?

A: Yes. We talked about that.

F: What you ought to run for?

A: Actually, one time, in one of those rare flukes that I have a picture of because it's just he and me in the office, where I had been asked to run in 1965, it would have been, for attorney general in New York, a firm offer. As I saw it, it was very flattering; it was literally the eleventh hour, and I rushed over to talk to him and tell him this offer had been made and [I'd] do whatever he said. He was enough of a politician not to say one way or another. But what he did say was certainly gracious: that he thought I'd be a great candidate, but that I needed to really think it through and whatever I did he would be supportive of it, which was a lovely thing. I have the picture [taken] as he's looking at the ticker in that office. I don't have a picture of that meeting; I have a picture of the next meeting when I came over and told him I wasn't going to do it. I think I would have made a different judgment if I could have won. But as I evaluated it, [with] Louis Lefkowitz who was still attorney general, the only question was whether he would beat me by 800,000 or 600,000. It's hard to say.

F: He was a pretty good incumbent to take on.

A: He was a heck of an incumbent. My family doesn't have any money, and though I had some potential resources, there wasn't the money

to put up a campaign. But even with it, I think I would have lost. I was not interested, and never have been, in the exercise just for its sake, just to go run.

But on other occasions I think I mentioned to him that I'd thought of running for things, but nothing of long, involved conversations where there was advice involved because it never reached that stage with me, where I was actively after a given job.

F: Did he ever talk to you from the other side, as he did to some other people, about "until you run for office you haven't been tested"?

A: No, I don't think so. And I think that maybe why he didn't was that very often in relation to dealing with the black community, much of that probably was thought of as political. I often was involved in bringing the black elected officials in, and it was very clear where I went for ideas. The people I tried to get to see him were of the political stripe. This was my simplified definition of leadership until I could find out something else had to do with whether they would be held accountable in a few years. Obviously he dealt with many others who had large organizations. But it might have been that he saw me so much dealing with that political end of black America that I never got that speech from him. I got a couple of others.

F: Was there any courting by the RFK people as Robert Kennedy began some maneuvers against Johnson to get an illustrious black like you sort of separated from Johnson?

A: No, there wasn't. I think they probably knew they couldn't do it. I stayed in touch always with a number of the people that would be considered the Kennedy camp, but I've also always made it clear,

particularly to them, how I felt about LBJ. Now my own personal feeling after he decided not to run was that I did want Bob Kennedy to be the nominee. I made that clear, though it was rumored that I was going to go and have a top post in his campaign, which I did not do. I felt it was more important to try and run the EEOC. But anyone who would ask would know that that was my choice until he was killed.

I've heard President Johnson talk not too kindly of Robert Kennedy. I'm not naive about it.

F: Did you ever observe the two men together?

A: Yes, I think I did--not in any intimate gathering. I'm trying to think where it would have been. It was at a couple of the bill signings. That's where I saw them.

F: What did they do? Just rub each other the wrong way?

A: I think Lyndon Johnson, with all those antennae out that a given politician of his note would have out, probably in an area--I didn't know him when he was vice president--was getting the signals and hearing them and he said, "That's the enemy." Also Bob Kennedy is a different man than John Kennedy. Bob Kennedy as an attorney general spoke with more authority than the usual attorney general, who speaks with a fair amount anyway. I can imagine some of the conversations between two proud men were not the happiest and involved some orders.

Then, too, this is a problem with all aides: that they take what they know to be some friction, and then they go escalate it by exaggerating it, not necessarily purposefully, but go out, and then

the story gets told again and it's really something. And those stories get back. Washington is still a small town, and then something gets in the media, and President Johnson used to read the papers and he could see those things. And I guess when he had more time to read them during his vice presidency, he probably saw a lot of things that looked like Robert Kennedy stuff--and stuff that I can't verify--that Robert Kennedy didn't want him on the ticket. And it certainly couldn't make him feel too sanguine toward him.

He wasn't a man to hold a grudge though, which was a good thing. He would be able to vent his spleen immediately upon somebody. If he missed, he missed and he'd go on to other business, which I think was a good thing. I never got the concept of the man really--for example, he'd be aggravated at Martin King on Vietnam, but that never held over to this area, the area of black rights.

F: He never let these occasional irritations or even animosities keep him from trying to get on with the job?

A: I never sensed that at all. I think, unlike this President [Nixon], I don't know him, but what he [Johnson] tried to do was he really did see himself in history. That was a predominant motive. Now somebody who sees that as a motive, I think, goes after doing as much as you can in the given period of time that you are there, and that doesn't allow for sitting around and reviewing and trying to get hold of somebody.

F: In September of 1968, the President sent you to the Swaziland independence ceremony. Tell me about that.

A: That was a fascinating experience. I think, too, this is a pretty good story on him. I think the State Department had named a white to do it. And I'm sure from the time that I was notified that this was LBJ personally, because I didn't get much notice to go do it.

F: He never did give you much notice to do anything.

A: Not too much, as the press will testify, the way they ran around.

But I think he saw it as important that the country be represented by a black at the independence ceremony of a black nation in Africa, one of the last to gain its independence.

F: A black nation wouldn't look on this as a kind of tokenism?

A: It was very interesting. I think that, one, they're generally underestimated in terms of what they know about you. I found a lot of people knew a great deal about me. I think that when we talked with people there, once we got over the preliminary stuff, they started judging personalities. And then, if they figure that there is any real interest, being black can be an asset. There is more brother-to-brother kind of talk. It isn't an overriding one, but it can be.

I was approached while in Swaziland by the black underground from South Africa, which adjoins it. And actually going back through Johannesburg, the racist ambassador--and there's no other word for him--tried to give us the impression that South Africa was all right and [tried to] have an integrated cocktail party for us, which we ducked. We ducked the police there, too, and went to a place that was illegal for us to go to, Soweto, and saw

one of the worst slums I've ever seen in my life. I've seen them in this country, and they all look like paradise in comparison to the outskirts of Johannesburg. That wasn't part of the independence ceremony, but the black South Africans approached me.

F: It was part of the experience.

A: It was part of the experience.

F: On the physical level, how did you get there? Commercial? Did your wife go?

A: Yes, we went commercial. The way we came in [was]: we went to Greece for a couple of days; then we came to Uganda for a day and a half; then to Johannesburg; and then there's a short flight over to Mbabane, which is where you land in Swaziland. Then going out, we went back.

It was very fortunate that I did take my wife with me. That was the important part of it, to do that. She was of great help throughout the entire [trip].

F: Let's talk about Johannesburg a minute. Was there a sort of official state meeting by the South Africans?

A: The South Africans had come to the conclusion that they were not going to have any trouble--this was their neighbor. Obviously, there would be a lot of black ambassadors coming from black Africa to the ceremony. So they had this special room where we all were to meet and be kept for a few minutes before we took our plane to Swaziland. They did not want their overt racism and their segregated washrooms and all that other trash to continue to affect this

ceremony. The reason I knew as much about it, I was there following the injustices there, but I was being approached under a tree actually at the Royal Swazi Inn, being called rather like a spy tale, [and asked] if I would come out and meet two men under a tree in front of the hotel, which I did. And they filled me in on some of the racist practices of that government and those that we as a nation were involved with, which I tried to correct, without much success, when I got back here: the fact that in Pretoria our embassy shared space with the police station--you can imagine a black nation being subverted by these bastards, that any of its leadership would walk into what was the police station to talk to our people; that the first time we'd had a party where we included blacks, they did not have any liquor at that party, these kinds of paternalistic gestures; that the embassy itself was lily-white; that the blacks who were hired that were from the country were paid on a different scale, on a South African scale of pay. All of these kinds of things that we in a great democracy were perpetuating out there.

They mentioned to me that if I had a moment I ought to see Soweto, when I then got in the car with my wife, the man who was in charge of Johannesburg--not the ambassador; he was in Pretoria--told me we couldn't go to Soweto. It was against the law; I'd be subject to jail. I said, "I want to go there." He said, "You can't go there." I said, "I've got the rank of ambassador and I'm ordering you as an ambassador." He said, "I'll have to report you to Washington," and that you couldn't do this. To make a long story

short, they had to take the flags off our official car to go into this area. And then you understand why nobody would want this seen. It is the worst rural slums in the world. If you've seen urban slums, it's the worst of the urban you could pile together--mud streets, people jammed one on the other, no sanitary facilities, crowded. But that's where the black worker sits there today, because they can't own property or rent property in the city of Johannesburg.

F: Does it kind of fuse into there, or is there almost a line of demarcation?

A: There's a line of demarcation, and it's a very clear one. They have railroads that segregate it that take them into town, and they come out of the segregated portals to go to their segregated entrances. I understand that GM and other American companies have segregated entrances often at their plants; some of them have black and white drinking fountains which of course are illegal here. Obviously many of them pay differential scales. But if you ride through Johannesburg, you see all the sparkling signs of American industry. We've had a few apologists who they've managed to con into going over there, but it just is a demeaning, degrading operation that, if we had any sense of justice in our government, we would do something about. And it would, I think, be to tell American industry they've got a year to get out of there unless they pay exactly the same, unless some of these practices are corrected. And that pressure I think would correct them. I think it's missing the economic point

to think that we don't have a grave impact on the economy of South Africa.

F: Has the State Department just been too tender in this thing?

A: They're not only tender, they're parties to it. They send just the kind of animal that the South Africans want to see: a white bigot from America. So they fit in very well.

F: They say, "You folks know how to handle the situation."

A: That's right. "You've been doing it a while yourselves; let's all get together," and it goes on. I understand that our white industrial types who go over there are often better than the people in our official governmental party, and they're no bargains. They're going in to perpetuate the segregated situation. It's just a horrible, horrible thing.

But back to the more positive, which was the independence, where you saw a seventy year old king, King Sobhuza, who, in this new stadium, got the pretentious, royal handing over of the flag, or whatever they did, to him. And he responded in the King's English, and then he gave a speech in a couple of the native tongues there, and then went on and had a tribal dance with some of the people. This is the interesting intermixture of various cultures at all levels, with such, I found, interest and dignity. And the other ambassadors that one met from all over the world was a fascinating experience.

F: It must have been tremendously impressive.

A: Very, very impressive.

F: Did these people make a beeline for you to tell you what was wrong in South Africa, what was wrong in Rhodesia, what was wrong for everybody in Swaziland? Or could they get at you?

A: Actually, it wasn't a beeline. It was the underground from South Africa that talked to me about that--the people that wanted to talk about America. I'm always happy to talk about my country, because I try and talk about it as I see it. I'm happy to talk about my country because it is mine, and there are many jobs potentially that we have; and we do, at least generally, start to examine our problems. I could play the one-up game because there are lots of countries, namely Great Britain, in this world that are much worse than we are in this issue, and yet far more protected.

F: When you lay it on the line, of all our faults, which are several, as you and I know, does the fact that you do lay it on the line, does that tend to be more impressive than if you gave more of a chamber of commerce approach to it?

A: I think so. I think the State Department generally makes a grave error in sending chamber of commerce types over, as they more often than not do.

F: In other words, there is an understanding?

A: Oh, sure. Because you're demeaning the listener. We, because of our size and "greatness," they read about us, our magazines are around the world. Through athletics and other things people are communicating. And while we may not be able to name the king of Swaziland, they all know who the president of the United States is.

They generally know more about our structure of government than we know about theirs. So they can spot a phony. Human beings can spot that anyway. And I think there's a certain ingenuousness about anybody going anywhere and saying that this is the land of milk and honey and everything's perfect. Anybody knows that you don't have 210 million people in one location and not have problems. It would seem to me, if we want to sell, as obviously we do from time to time, our concept of government and those things that make this at least a worthwhile experiment in this country, that it is important to talk about where our failings are. You know, that's what our balance of power business is all about--that we have procedures to get at some of them. Sometimes it works; sometimes it doesn't. But the listener generally--at least in my experiences overseas, there and other places, has been that frankness is greatly appreciated. And you often learn a good deal about their country by being frank. If you give them the chamber of commerce speech, they're going to give it to you, and you'll know just as little as you did when you started the conversation.

And that's true of people who come here when you meet them at parties. I remember going to a party with a couple of liberal South African reporters here. If that's liberal, which they think it is there, they're light years away from where we are. That doesn't make me feel any better, but it does give me some evaluation. Talking frankly, they came on with their accusations: "That's fine, I admit that. So what! You're telling me something I know

already, and I'll tell you some more about that, if you want to know who did. Let us talk about what I saw there. And is it still true that you don't rent nor can a black own anything in the city of Johannesburg? Is that still true?" And I would try to give them one or two other areas. "Is it true that that's the worst part of the land, and what are you giving them there? They're 87 per cent of the population. Do they have a vote? Let's get that fundamental. I'll give it to you: Up until 1965 we didn't have much of one in the South, but we've got it now. We've got some people in legislatures, and there will be more. We've had a lot of problems getting there, and there will be set-backs, too. But you're just talking about a totally different setup."

And the same has been true in London, the few times I've been over there. They think they invented civility there, which is lovely and pleasant to go over there and stay. But don't be a Pakistani or West Indian. Not there! Not if you want a decent job. Not if you want decent housing. It just doesn't quite work that way. You can be a black American and have some bucks in your pocket, and you'll get all the same treatment that a white American would in most instances. But when you see some of that in that city, which I have, they've got some very, very severe problems.

That doesn't make me feel any better that we're where we are, that much in advance of them, but it seems to me that if you get into that dialogue, and they haven't really, because the English tend to deal with our white nobility over here; but even with this

problem area, if they did talk to us sensibly--some of us who have been involved in the struggle here--they could miss some of the problems we've had. Not because they're more advanced, but because they are so far behind us in their thinking that there is some constructive, creative thoughts taking place here.

But it seems to me that--when I used to follow it; I don't anymore--but when I'd look at those State lists, I'd always get them after the fact. I tried to get this in the White House, but we never could get them to send us the lists of who they were sending over. One, because they weren't including many blacks on these nice junketeers around the world, and, two, very often it was the State Department's concept of who would give a safe speech. And that isn't, to me, what's required at all.

The first time we went to Europe--it was the year before I was ambassador to Swaziland and I had to pay for it or maybe it was two years because I was at the White House--the embassy knew I was coming and they had different things set up. Even though it was a vacation, it was interesting to me to talk to people. But what I found was--this was London, Rome, and Paris--our embassies knew so little about black-white in their own country. At best they had the international issue of Time magazine. The State Department was not transmitting black newspapers; it was not transmitting other than the banner headlines about a riot; none of the subtleties of issues. Whereas they might know a good deal about the CIA and the State Department, or even know a hell of a lot about Vietnam, they

knew nothing about black and white. They were soaking it up with questions. These were our folks. Their questions really showed me how little they knew, just the most naive kinds of things. People out of touch for three years were just blank.

F: Oh, Lord, the way that things went in the sixties, if you were three years out of touch, you were just in another century.

A: And as you know, to me, and they said this, was that most of the questions asked of them about their country related to black and white. And they were as ignorant as the questioner. And, of course, the State Department, by its own wisdom, always managed to send the few blacks it had some place other than Europe. You just look at EUR statistics over there, I think it was in Lebanon or some odd place and there were two blacks in all of Europe, one was an ambassador. And that's absurd. The basic problem is they needed many more, but you don't send them all to Africa, because they're not all interested in Africa. From our own personal point of view as a country, we should be having those who, at least from letters from home, would be getting some picture of black and white. Because I think it still is, in a continuing sense, the most important issue.

F: Did you get the feeling in Swaziland--this is after the April riots here, for instance, and of course, we've had overt problems since Watts and Detroit and Newark and so on--that they thought we were coming apart or a feeling they thought we were groping toward something?

A: I didn't have any sense that I can remember of us coming apart. I

think there was always a curiosity--this is a general recollection, not a specific one--about where we were in the country, a curiosity that I was a black ambassador from this country--

F: They're not about to send one here from Africa.

A: --and a curiosity about the White House. Then I think about the different roles that we were playing. I think too there were I remember, not by name, a few of the people who were ambassadors from black countries had come here to school. Because, as you know, the black colleges serve as a training ground for some of them. And obviously they keep in touch with their old schools and classmates, and I imagine come across once in awhile. There is a great desire to come here. I know some Swazi officials did in fact come here--had not been here, and came here a year later. I think with many of the black Africans, and I think I'm probably melding that trip with other conversations I've had, there is a desire to be affable and work with blacks sometimes. There's no automatic love until they see, from their point of view, what are you going to do for them. If they're interested in commerce and you bring a skill, lovely! If you're in the diplomatic world, lovely, because that will get you over that hurdle and one more because there is the brotherhood. But if you're coming there to b.s. with them, they've got enough of those in their own country. If you're coming with an empty pocketbook that needs filling up, who needs you! That's a self-serving kind of approach that to me is quite appropriate for them.

F: I was thinking we might finish this up, but I wonder. Maybe I'd better come back. We've got the Income Maintenance Commission, and we probably ought to talk about that at some length.

A: I don't know if we need to at any real length, because I think the fact that it was started and the concept was there before this administration came to pass is important.

The only important aspect, I felt, I dissented from the general recommendations because I thought that we should in this country be willing to guarantee income, at least at the poverty level for a family of four and then have the gradations that would build in incentives to keep the percentage up to X number of dollars beyond that. I think there were two or three of us who dissented from the overall commission report on that. At the time the figure was $3550 for a family of four. It's well beyond that now. Mine was premised on--you know that's a very low poverty level anyway; that's bare subsistence--and based on the basic humanity that you ought to do that for a family of four. But the only reason was that that was the only way to overcome having a welfare administrative super structure. The recommendation that came out of the commission, $2400, left intact I forget exactly but I think about a dozen welfare structures, because in order to get to the level that they were already at in California or New York, or where it may have been, you still then had to have administrative hierarchy. One of the most important things in income maintenance was not to have, as I saw it, welfare snoops looking under beds and paying sixty

thousand people to be in your welfare department. It would be much better to eliminate those and [have] that saving instead go directly to people. And unless you got to that poverty level, you weren't going to do that.

The half-and-half approach was not even--certainly not the way the legislation was eventually drafted--without all the negative aspects of forced work, you weren't really solving the problem by any means. And it seems to me we can afford a few wastrels just like we have in Lockheed and General Motors and elsewhere, people who hustle and scramble to see to it that people automatically get money, not because of their pride or lack of knowledge they don't even apply for what they have. Another very important point and I think we tried to get this across, but we never did and Nixon certainly didn't, although I think he should have--was to get across the point that most of the people here are white. This is not a black issue; it's an issue of poor people; it's an issue of human dignity--black, white, red, brown, whatever. And the old Lyndon Johnson line: "You're making taxpayers instead of tax eaters out of them"--that's very important to human dignity. But this is a very basic American problem, and we are very far behind the rest of the world in this. Most other "progressive," industrial countries have that.

F: I don't want to get into a long discussion with you on this, but it seems to me that one thing the Johnson Administration accomplished, we've been sort of entranced by the gross national product, and it's

going up. And you and I go up as beneficiaries of it, but there was one group that always remained at the bottom and didn't move, which made the gap greater. And I think we finally discovered it.

A: Yes, that's true. Again, you see what happened two years ago, when for the first time more people were in poverty at the end of that year. In those Johnson years we discovered it, and then some of the programs were geared to it, and the numbers in poverty and certainly the percentages were lessening. But then it turned the other way.

F: You were a member of the EEOC until 1972, and you quit in 1969.

A: No. I was chairman until May of 1969.

F: But I mean your commission ran until 1972.

A: But I quit.

F: But you quit. That's what I was getting at. Why did you quit so early? Or do you want to make another tale out of that?

A: That's a full tale. That's really related to the late Senator [Everett] Dirksen and a public hearing that I had where he thought I was harassing businessmen. And the upshot of an hour and fifteen minute conversation was that I said, "If it is harassing businessmen to tell them that I needed to enforce the law regarding employment discrimination for blacks, chicanos, and females, I plead guilty to that. These are the kinds of things we're trying to do." And he wanted to know what business of mine it was that blacks or females ought to be on boards of directors or vice presidents of companies. I told him I was surprised at him, it seemed to me

that that was what equal employment was all about--equal in all senses and everywhere all over town. He went back and forth, didn't like my responses. It may have been a setup, I'm not sure, because he said that he might have to go to somebody to see to it that I'm fired. This was a public hearing, and Ted Kennedy came in and said he hoped nobody felt threatened. But the next day [Ronald] Ziegler was asked about Dirksen's remarks and he said, "Well, Alexander is a Democrat, so he's going to be replaced anyway."

Now this is a bipartisan commission. So after that, the only question whether I'd be fired--they couldn't fire me as a commissioner. So what I did was quit and blast; talk about Mitchell and what he hadn't done; talk about Nixon and what he wasn't doing; the Justice Department that had not filed a single pattern of practices case; talked about their failure, that this part of the law was not among their priorities.

F: Was the climate completely turned about?

A: It was completely turned about very quickly and politicized, most importantly. As I've mentioned to you, as your questions brought out earlier, there wasn't a pressure from the White House, a political pressure, yes, in the day-to-day politics of the agency, but not a Democrat saying, "You will do so-and-so," or a given president saying, "You're going to do so-and-so because it's politically expeditious." That started to set in. They put pressure on my successor, who is there now, when he was out on the West Coast in

the hearings, if he wanted to become my successor that he better ease up on his questioning of witnesses. This dealt with our sworn obligations to enforce the law, and I'd taken that seriously, and was going to continue to. I'm not now. I'm not in that position now, but I was going to as long as I was there.

Then there was another important thing. And that was that when I came there and people did know that I had some interest in politics, several people said, "Well, I hope you're not using it the way that your predecessor, Frank Roosevelt, has, as a political stepping stone." I gave my word to a number of people that I would stay on as chairman as long as it appeared to be necessary. I'd been in two years, which was more than twice as long as any of my predecessors. It was important to stay on longer, really, and it should not have been the kind of job [gained or lost] because you're a Democrat or a Republican. Incompetence, fine. But that charge couldn't be made, because we investigated five times as many cases and conciliated a dozen times as many each year. It just escalated by multiplying. So we were doing our job, but we were doing it too well, is what it amounted to.

Anyway, I quit before I was fired, mainly to give me the forum to state what I felt was wrong.

Then Clarence Mitchell and some other people approached me about staying on the commission--I wanted to leave completely in May--because they said, "You're going to give him two appointments . . ."

F: This is the question: do you turn it over to the rascals?

A: Yes, and I said, "I'm not useful being here, and it's frustrating. I've got people on a sort of wailing wall for employees, and the poor man, since he has been here, has had a hard enough time anyway. But if I'm there just to listen to complaints and powerless to do anything about them, I'm not only frustrating myself, but all those people." That was understood, but I stayed. Then they tried to force me out.

The first public speech that Jerris Leonard, the head of the civil rights division, no less, in the Justice Department, the speech where he said here in Washington that I should leave. That's his first plug for black America [inaudible] bigot. (Laughter) So that gave me another opportunity, which I took advantage of, to let the world know what I thought of him and what I thought of those kinds of threats. And my punch line was to leave them in a state of limbo, saying, "I don't know when I'll leave. Let me make sure that you understand I'm not leaving now for that very reason." And so I did stay on until the appointment came up in July. And to show how inconsistent they really were, the person whose term came up was reappointed. He was a Democrat, Luther Holcomb from Texas.

F: I was real surprised at that.

A: Luther is conservative and had [John] Tower's backing, but all it indicated was the nonsense about Democrats and Republicans wasn't there as long as you came from a certain philosophical background,

as they saw it. They may or may not have read Luther properly, but at least they thought that since John Tower was in back of him--

F: Well, Luther stands well down in that Dallas area which is, of course, a Republican bastion, financially and otherwise.

A: Yes. But that sort of took some of the steam out of the argument that they were replacing all Democrats, which they couldn't do by law anyway.

F: Just certain Democrats.

A: Just certain Democrats. The commission by law says that there are five commissioners, and only three of them can be Democrats. I'd irritated them, too, when they first came in, because the history--and we were guilty of this in the Johnson Administration--of the commission had been these changes. And I said that I was going to continue as chairman until I was replaced; that it was very important that there be a continuity. You know we really had finally gotten some things going, finally gotten enough offices out there, finally gotten directors in the regional offices who were outstanding individuals who would be working as a team. We even had them competing with each other to complete investigations and to get the word out. It was a place where you could go on a given Saturday and people were working, not because they had to, but because they needed to get some work done; that esprit was there, and we tried to maintain a sense of fairness in dealing with people. We dismissed about a third of the complaints that

came in there, and we'd get them from the chicano community because we were paying too much attention to the blacks, and from blacks because we paid too much to the females. You expected that. I hope the commission staff took it with good grace and it should have, because we were in this business where high emotional problems were involved. But, anyway, we were starting and it was headed upwards. And then they banged it over the head.

F: Did you get the feeling that there was a conscious attempt to dismantle the Johnson program in this?

A: Oh, yes. Very conscious. The failure to bring any pattern of practices is conscious. I wrote to [John] Mitchell about legislation and heard back several weeks later, "Don't call me, I'll call you." That was the end of that. This was legislation that had been up before, and it was a matter of proper inquiry, obviously. The most pernicious thing they did which affected a few blacks over there who fortunately later on [inaudible] was to take people in the civil service category that I was automatically sending up for promotion and use the Civil Service Commission to block their appointments [and] to really freeze the agency so long as I had anything to do with it. I hope I'm not being too hypersensitive. I think it was not so much me, the human being, as "he's a problem because he was from the other camp."

But you take something like the CIA with a [Richard] Helms. There are plenty of examples within the Nixon Administration of the maintenance of people who had connections with previous administra-

tions who theoretically could do a job. And I had developed a record in this field of doing a job. But it was a job I felt I had to do forcefully, and that was not in keeping with their approach to, as they saw it, white America. This was to be a subordinated issue as far as they saw it. They made it that way. They would play on the black community, which fortunately never took the bait of putting more money into these things. It was a natural progression. We started out with three hundred and fourteen people to enforce this around the country. There's no way you couldn't expand just to handle the complaints they get. But that has nothing to do with the capacity to issue cease and desist orders; to have the power and not to have to worry about all these complaints because you can resolve them quickly; and to also see to it that a number of companies, once they knew there was an ultimate weapon, that they would themselves, as properly they should, investigate these complaints and clear them up on their own. Nobody really wanted to ask them; they just wanted to get the problem over with. They set that back immeasurably. We're going through an era now where EEOC is filing some court cases, but that's got to be standardized. One jurisdiction will come out with this ruling; the 9th Circuit will say this; and the 5th will say that. My profession can confuse an issue more than any other, and if you had orders like you do in many other areas--FCC or the Federal Power Commission or NLRB--the point is that once those get out and people read them,

that's what they are expected to do, and they go do it. But right now, with the Justice Department that way plus the overall tone that has changed. Johnson created it. Sometimes Kennedy was for it, but not as much as Johnson was by any stretch of the imagination. The tone and the emphasis and the escalation is a result of Johnson.

F: He's the one that laid it on the line.

A: He laid it on the line. I heard him with a group of white businessmen; he was as forceful with them as he would be talking to a black political crowd. That's the ultimate test. It's all well and good for me to sit in my living room with a bunch of brothers and talk about how I'm discriminated against. As I saw that commission, the important thing was for me to sit down with those white business people, and in public hearings, and talk about how we were discriminated against. And far more important to that role, when Lyndon Johnson got into the White House and got a group of businessmen and talked about hiring as the major problem as he did so often, that took on greater meaning than if he'd talked to blacks about the problems they already knew about.

F: Right. Thank you.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview III]

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June 30, 1983

Professor Michael L. Gillette
Chief of Acquisitions and
Oral History Programs
The Lyndon Baines Johnson Library
Austin, Texas 78705

Dear Professor Gillette:

Thank you for your letter of June 21, 1983. I have not had the time necessary for a thorough review of the transcript of my oral recollections. I have found certain inaccuracies in those parts I did review.

I do however want you to grant permission for you to utilize my recollections. I would appreciate your informing anyone reviewing the material that I have not reviewed the material.

With best wishes.

Sincerely,

Clifford L. Alexander Jr.

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Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of Clifford L. Alexander, Jr

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Clifford L. Alexander, Jr. of Washington, D.C. do hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of personal interviews conducted on November 1, 1971, February 17, 1972, and June 4, 1973 in Washington, D.C. and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recordings shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcripts.

(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.

(4) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Donor Clifford L. Alexander Jr.

July 18, 1983
Date

Archivist of the United States

July 29, 1983
Date