

INTERVIEW I

DATE: DECEMBER 10, 1985
INTERVIEWEE: LEVETTE J. "JOE" BERRY
INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger
PLACE: Dr. Berry's office, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

G: Let's start with some biographical information. Where are you from originally?

B: My father was a public school superintendent, and the first twelve years of my life we lived in small towns northeast and west of Dallas. Then we moved to San Marcos when I was twelve, and I went through high school and college there. After I finished college--I finished when I was only twenty, I was kind of pushed ahead in my younger years, and after I finished in 1930 I taught school one year and coached football and athletic teams out at Sonora, Texas. I then went to San Benito for three years and to Weslaco for one year.

Then I came here in 1935 and got my Ph.D in 1939. I stayed one year as an instructor, and then I was offered a job at Bryn Mawr College in suburban Philadelphia. I stayed there thirty years. I came here in 1970 as chairman of the microbiology department. I was chairman five years. When I reached sixty-five I had to give up my administrative duties, and served full-time as a professor until 1980. Since then I've been half-time. I've retained my lab and I've had research grant money which will go to 1987.

G: Go through 1987?

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B: 1987, and I might even quit then.

(Laughter)

G: A lot of people tell me they've retired but it just didn't take.

(Laughter)

B: Well, I am retired, but I'm not even sure I'll retire when the grant money runs out. I may continue to teach part time.

G: Did you play football in high school?

B: I played football in high school. We had an outstanding team; we tied one game and lost the rest. We lost seven games.

(Laughter)

We only played eight games, and it's a blessing.

G: I've heard that you were an end, is that right?

B: I played end in high school. Then I went out for football as a tall, skinny, little guard of a hundred and forty-five pounds and about six two, I think, when I was sixteen. And I went out at Southwest Texas [State Teachers College], and, oh, I had a wonderful time. They just beat me up all the time. But they were good to me at the same time. And then my sophomore year I played in various positions, but if they had lettered one more man I would have got it. But then when I was a junior and senior I played and lettered, and in my senior year I was an all-conference end.

G: You must have put on a little weight by then.

B: I put on some weight by then and I'd grown another inch, and I weighed about a hundred and eighty my senior year. I had gained speed. I was a slow runner when I started out, but I worked hard at trying to pick

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up speed. Oh, I loved football, I enjoyed it. We had an outstanding team my senior year.

G: What was your major at San Marcos?

B: Chemistry. I was a chemistry major. And then when I came over here I got into biological sciences. That was my minor at Southwest Texas.

G: I was going to say, you must have had to back up and do a little retooling.

B: Well, I had taken some courses here in the Zoology Department in summer school, which helped fill in. In fact it was on the strength of my summer school work that they offered me a teaching assistantship to work on my Ph.D.

G: How would you compare the two schools? You're the first person I've talked to that has experience in both places.

B: Well, in the 1920s Southwest Texas was a very spotty university. We had some excellent teachers. The chemistry teacher I had, the math teachers, the biology teachers--I had an English teacher or two that meant a great deal to me. I took some courses in physical education and the football coach taught them, and he was a fine teacher. I had a good course in history. And I had some awful courses. I think you can get bad courses in any school. I've had some bad courses at the University of Texas, when I was going to summer school particularly. But academically UT in the last half of the 1930s was a better university than Southwest Texas. I don't know today; we get graduate students occasionally from Southwest Texas and they are all right, they're well prepared. And I think it's a very fine school now. I

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wouldn't hesitate--in fact, our grandson was going to go there this fall. He lives up in Washington State and he went home for the summer and found a girl and he just stayed up there, and is going to college up there.

No, I'm proud of Southwest Texas. I think Lyndon helped it enormously, no question. He provided money, buildings, and I think prestige. The fact that the president of the United States came from that school has meant a great deal to Southwest Texas. And they are rightly proud of this one alumnus.

G: When did you first become aware of Lyndon Johnson at San Marcos?

B: I guess my freshman year. I was unaware that Lyndon dropped out a year and taught at Cotulla. I thought he was there all of the years that I was, because we started the same time, about, and we finished [at] the same time. But I knew Lyndon from the start. He was a tall, gangly man; he was built very much like I was when I was a freshman. We were tall and skinny and kind of clumsy. Lyndon was one of the most poorly coordinated men during his college years that I nearly ever knew. He was totally unathletic. I don't think he could have been a participant in any sport. It says [here] something about him playing baseball. Well, I have no recollection, because I went out for baseball in my freshman year and then didn't make the team. But nevertheless I went out, and I don't remember Lyndon going out. Then after my freshman year, that would have been 1926-27, they banned or stopped baseball at Southwest Texas.

G: Was there a reason for that?

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B: Economic, primarily. All of the teams in the Texas Intercollegiate Athletic Association, TIAA, banned baseball. It was a conference agreement.

G: The story is that Boody [Alfred] Johnson got him to go out so that he could qualify to be a Black Star and that LBJ said that he wasn't getting enough out of it for what you had to put into it.

(Laughter)

B: No, I think that's undoubtedly correct. You mentioned the Black Stars. I was made a member my sophomore year, early on in my sophomore year. As a matter of fact, we were on a football trip to North Texas State [College], and one of the men, Frank Arnold, whose name is mentioned in your summary here, told me about it. Now, of course, I had no idea it existed, and he asked me if I'd like to be a member and I said sure.

Well, it was kind of a silly organization. We would meet out in the pasture, oh, maybe once a month or once every six weeks, and build a bonfire and tell dirty jokes, and if someone urinated within thirty steps of the bonfire they had to run the belt line.

(Laughter)

Then once a year we would go up to Wimberley and have a chicken feast, and usually a coach and his wife or two coaches and their wives would chaperone us, and we'd spend the night, take our girls along. I don't think anyone ever slept with a girl in those years.

(Laughter)

G: Where'd you stay?

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B: Under the stars. Well, there were some cabins; the girls slept in them. There were two cabins that we could borrow from friends. But the boys slept outdoors. There wasn't much sleeping, because we horsed around most of the time, played around, had a lot of fun. That was the highlight of all the Black Star activities. And the other thing: they would decide on which member would be nominated for a captaincy of the athletic teams, or class officers, or positions of quote, unquote, "importance," on campus. And for most of the time, the members were really quite popular people on campus, the boys on campus. Everyone liked them, and they would usually be elected, but at least we wouldn't divide our forces, so that the Black Stars were usually elected to these positions.

I never did know who told about the Black Stars, because it was a secret for quite a number of years, and then Lyndon found out. And maybe it was Boody Johnson that told him; I didn't know this. But we had a member that would tell about our meetings, and I never did find out who the squealer was. But it was all kind of silly, because it never amounted to much to my way of thinking. I was not very defensive about the Black Stars; I didn't care whether it lasted or not. And I know that Lyndon, I think quite successfully, broke it up. He destroyed the Black Stars. In one of the first national articles about Lyndon, it was Time magazine, his ability to destroy the Black Stars was one of the major things that he talked about in that article. So I think it meant a lot more to him, successfully destroying

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the Black Stars, than it did to any of the members, because we kind of laughed about it and took it in stride.

G: Do you know anything about his being put up for membership?

B: No, that must have happened before I was a member. It must have happened my freshman year. Boody was a senior my freshman year, so I never knew Boody Johnson very well; we were never close friends. We had mutual friends. And so did Lyndon and I have mutual friends. Many of my very good friends were extremely fond of Lyndon, but nothing brought us together. We were never in classes together. I was a scientist and he was interested in history.

Professor [H. M.] Greene had a great influence on Lyndon. I couldn't stand him. I never had a course under him, but he was a slovenly appearing man, chewed tobacco in class and spit in a tin can, which impressed me as something less than dignified and professorial. I knew one of Greene's sons. We were in graduate school one year together, and he was a fine man. I was very fond of the Greene boy. But I didn't have much regard for Professor Greene. But Lyndon and Professor Greene got along quite well, and I think Greene had an influence on Lyndon.

G: Tell me what your impressions were of LBJ personally in those days.

B: Well, I'll be candid. Let me preface my response by saying that we were never thrown together in any businesslike way. That is, we didn't work together on any campus activity, and since Lyndon was not an athlete I didn't get to know him in that way. I happened to sing in the glee club all four years I was on campus, and I sang in the

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quartet my last two years. That was a lot of fun. It was very educational. We traveled the state, we stayed in homes in these towns all over the state, and that's an education in itself. Lyndon was not in the glee club, so I didn't get to know him there. But my impression of Lyndon was that he was a kind of wheeler-dealer. I never knew what Lyndon thought nor where he stood. And I think he learned many of his political skills when he was a student at Southwest Texas.

I guess I've never much liked politicians. I never know what a politician really thinks, and my philosophy of life is that you never hide your own beliefs. You stand up and be counted on issues, and Lyndon would kind of hide his feelings. When he was destroying the Black Stars, he was never visible. He manipulated his friends and had them do all of the dirty work, and he pulled the strings from behind the scenes. And as I say, I don't like that kind of person. So we were never friends; we were never thrown together, and his behavior and mannerisms did not appeal to me, so I guess basically I didn't like him very much. Not that we were hostile to each other. We would speak, and we were always sociable and congenial, but down inside I just didn't have very high regard for him.

G: Can you give me any specific example of his string-pulling or manipulation?

B: Well, there were a lot of rumors about Lyndon during his college years, and I have no evidence of the rumors, but there were some dishonest things that he is reputed to have done. He worked in the dean's office for a while, and then he worked in President [Cecil] Evans'

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office, and he had access to information that was supposedly confidential. And I heard secondhand things that Lyndon spilled to his friends that he should not have told them. He was quoted as the source of the information. But this is all secondhand knowledge and I don't know how much faith you put in secondhand knowledge. I would say that Lyndon was not a very popular man when he was at the college. No one quite trusted Lyndon. I knew an awful lot of people, and he did, too, but in my circle of friends--I said earlier that we had mutual friends and we did--I don't think he was a very popular person.

G: Did he date much that you know of?

B: I was never aware of his dating. I have read that some people said that Lyndon was quite a ladies' man, but it was never evident on campus. If he was popular with the girls, he must have been very secretive about it, for he was never squiring a girl around on the campus. And his dating activities must have been pretty well secretive, or something.

G: Did you know Carol Davis [Smith]?

B: Well, I'm sure I knew--I knew everybody, practically--but I can't place her.

G: You didn't work on the yearbook or the newspaper or any of those?

B: I was the sports editor of the yearbook my senior year. And it was kind of hard, because we had a good team and it would have been boastful of me to write it up, I think, and relate who the people were that had done well on the football team. But the rest of it was easy, and I enjoyed being the sports editor.

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G: LBJ got lampooned in the yearbook once or twice that I recall.

B: Well, I think it reflects a general attitude toward him, the majority attitude, with a strong minority support.

G: Did you call him Lyndon or Bull?

B: I called him Bull.

G: Was that common in your--?

B: Everybody called him Bull. And you know what the second word is.

(Laughter)

That was the reason he was called Bull. Because that was the impression he gave. I'll say it: he was a real bullshitter if there ever was one.

(Laughter)

G: You mentioned that he had access to confidential information, and the rumor was that he would use it, I guess. Did he control the patronage to any extent that came out of the President's office?

B: I think he did, yes. I have very little doubt that he did. He did it quite adroitly, though, so that it was mostly by inference that you knew that he was behind the scene, pulling the strings. But his friends were favored.

G: Well, those jobs were kind of important in those days, weren't they? I mean, there were a lot of people working their way through school.

B: Oh, yes, they were important. I had a scholarship for four years because of my position when I finished high school, and then also for my last two years I was a teaching assistant in the freshman chemistry

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lab. That paid me money, and then I made money singing in the quartet; we would get a few dollars a month in our travels. Then I worked every summer as an iceman; I peddled ice. And I would be able to save enough money to cover all of my clothing and spending money.

G: You carried ice around San Marcos?

B: Yes.

G: Red Grange did the same thing, I think.

B: Well, that's the reason I did. I thought if it was good enough for Red Grange, it was good enough for Joe Berry.

(Laughter)

And I was pretty lucky, I guess, because the electric refrigerators came in about the year after I quit, and that killed the ice business.

G: Well, it took a few years to kill it, I guess.

B: Yes, it took a few. No, that was a good job in my youth. It made me a strong man, and I was pretty strong by the time I finished carrying ice all summer for four summers.

G: What was the average order that you had to hoist on your shoulder?

B: Oh, anywhere from twenty-five to a hundred pounds. And then you had to handle three hundred-pound cakes of ice, blocks of ice. And I could pick up a three hundred-pound block of ice without any trouble. I was finally a big boy.

(Laughter)

G: That's not bad for a man weighing a hundred and eighty.

B: Yes. Well, I had very strong arms and shoulders.

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G: I can imagine. Were you ever on the student council? Were you elected to class office, and so on?

B: I was president of my class every year I was there. Now, that's contrary to what you have in your notes.

G: Well, I thought--

B: My memory is faulty. Maybe I wasn't, but I know I was president my freshman, sophomore and junior years. And I may not have been president my senior year; I may have refused to run. I'd been president so long, and it didn't amount to anything. (Laughter) Yes, I think I was on the student council one year, but again it didn't amount to anything and didn't make much of an impression on me.

G: Do you know anything about the stories of LBJ's manipulating the elections to the student council?

B: No, no, but I'm not surprised. I think that was his kind of behavior pattern; he was a manipulator and tried to control [things].

G: Did you notice anything else on this list that strikes you as not accurate or not the way it happened?

B: No, I think I mentioned the two things. As I say, I don't remember whether I was president of the senior class or not, because it didn't amount to anything. I remember that Lyndon was a debater and he was a successful debater, quite skilled, and I think that brought him more prestige than nearly anything he did.

G: Yes. Well, what was the status of the debate team?

B: It was obscure, but everybody was aware that there was a debate team and that Lyndon was a member and that he was one of the scheduled debaters.

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- G: Do you remember them being honored after returning from a successful trip? I think they beat Sam Houston [State College] in a debate.
- B: I don't remember, no. This didn't make any impression on me.
- G: Do you remember how the editor of the paper was chosen? There's some controversy over whether he was appointed or whether he was elected or whether it was sometimes one way and sometimes another.
- B: I have no recollection of how the editor was chosen. No, I don't. I'm sorry, but I don't. I don't know.
- G: Did LBJ ever sell you socks?
- B: No. Never did try. I didn't know he was a sock salesman.
- G: He is supposed to have sold Real Silk Socks to a lot of folks.
- (Laughter)
- B: I wouldn't be surprised. People at that time, you know, would do anything to make a nickel.
- G: You lived at home, I guess.
- B: I lived at home; I was not in a dorm, that's right. That took something away from my college experience. But it was economical and I went there because of economy.
- G: Sure. You say you don't remember him going to Cotulla, though, that one year.
- B: No, I don't. I read that in the [Robert] Caro book [The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power]. But I had no recollection of it.
- G: Apparently he certainly did do that, though. All our evidence--
- B: Oh, I don't think there's any doubt about it. He's right. And he did some wonderful things when he was there, as recorded in the Caro book.

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And if these statements about his generosity are true, then I certainly take my hat off to him, because that was a marvelous act of generosity.

G: Physical courage is kind of an important attribute to men that age. Did he have a reputation one way or the other for physical courage or the lack of it?

B: Well, his reputation on campus was that he was chicken. And, no, he didn't have physical courage. That's the reason he wouldn't stand up and be counted. He was a manipulator and he hid behind the scenes. He would not participate in any sports, maybe because of his lack of coordination, but he certainly had the size. And when we were in college there were an awful lot of little boys on the football team. This Blackie [Merrell] Blackman, who's mentioned in here, couldn't have weighed more than a hundred and thirty-five pounds, and he was a star football player.

G: He was captain of the basketball team, too.

B: He was captain of the basketball team. He was a good athlete. He was beautifully coordinated, but no one would look at him today at the university level. He couldn't carry water; he'd be too little.

G: He must have been a guard, at that time.

B: Yes, he was a guard and an excellent guard. That is, he was beautifully coordinated, a good dribbler.

But no, Lyndon was one of the big boys on campus as far as height and weight were concerned. He and I were built very much alike.

G: In those days you would have been considered a very big man.

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B: I was the second largest man on our football team my senior year. We had one tackle who weighed a hundred and eighty-five pounds, and I weighed about a hundred and eighty, and then we had another tackle who weighed a hundred and seventy-five, and that tackle was an all-conference tackle. We had three all-conference men our senior year, and the next one was our quarterback, who probably weighed a hundred and sixty. Kind of a short and stocky boy.

Certainly I know my senior year I couldn't make any college team in America today. I was too little.

G: On the line, by fifty pounds, by today's standards.

B: That's right. I don't know what's happened to make boys so big today.

G: I think it's the orange juice.

(Laughter)

B: It must be. I didn't have much as I was growing up. (Laughter)

G: Did you ever know LBJ to get into a fight or a confrontation which could have led to a fight?

B: No, no. I didn't know of [any]. I think it would have been rumored around campus, and people would have found it amusing if he had. Are there contrary reports?

G: Well, there is one, and I haven't been able to get it confirmed or denied.

B: Well, my memory--that was a long time ago, getting on to fifty-five and -six years and -seven years, nearly sixty years. And I don't recall him being involved in any kind of controversy, because that was not the type of behavior that you'd normally expect of him.

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G: Did you ever hear him talk about his ambitions or goals or dreams or anything of that sort?

B: No. No, but when he went to Washington as the secretary to [Congressman Richard] Kleberg, I think he went about the time that I married, and I remember we drove from San Benito to San Antonio our wedding day, and drove through the King Ranch, and I made a prediction, which my wife has quoted many times, that Lyndon Johnson would be president.

G: Is that a fact?

B: That's a fact. It's an honest fact. I just knew that he had the skills as a politician, the ambition and the drive, to be a successful politician. And that prediction certainly came true. I guess he had the greatest political skills of nearly anyone in this century. He has to go down as one of the most gifted politicians this country's ever had. And if you admired that talent, and certainly I admired it, because I'm just the antithesis of it, being the world's worst politician, but Lyndon was certainly a skillful politician, and while I don't particularly admire that kind of ability, I respect it because that's what makes our government run.

G: Did you have any classes with him, or did I hear you say that you didn't have any?

B: I don't recall ever being in a class with Lyndon. Now, maybe we were in a freshman English class, or we had to take education courses and maybe we were in an education course, but I don't recall being in a class with him.

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G: Did he have a reputation for scholarship?

B: No, he didn't. I think Lyndon was kind of mediocre, is my recollection. He was a C-B student. That's the way I remember his reputation, but that is only by rumor, no facts to back it up. I've heard rumors also that after he gained prominence he changed his grades.

G: Well, I don't think he did, because several authors have tracked them down and discovered he was just under a B average across the board.

B: Well, the rumors must have been fairly accurate, and I'm glad the other rumor is false.

G: I think he has been quoted as telling the story another way, but the written record is different.

What about LBJ's relationship with the President? A lot of people have remarked on that. Were you able to observe any of that?

B: I knew that he was undoubtedly Evans' favorite student. And I think Lyndon had a lot of influence on the President, a great deal. Maybe for the good, maybe for the worse, I don't know. But everyone on campus recognized Lyndon's influence with President Evans.

G: Did you know his cousin, Ava [Johnson] Cox?

B: Well, again, yes, but not well, not to make any comment.

G: This is hard for me to resolve in my own mind. A lot of people say that he was not very popular, and yet he was a successful campus politician, and I don't know how to reconcile the two things.

B: Well, as you said before we started, a number of the men on campus--
(Interruption)

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B: --have since worked for him, but as you know there are many men who like to be led. They want a strong leader, they want someone to point the way, and they are marvelous lieutenants. And Lyndon had some men on campus that he could dominate, and he did. He told them practically everything, and many of these men ended up in prominent positions in his administration and, well, throughout his political [life], their careers, their lives, were built around his patronage. And they ended up well off financially and in fairly prominent positions. But they were his slaves, in my judgment. Now, I don't know this; I must qualify that dogmatic statement, because I don't know this. But everything you can hear about Lyndon, this was the way he acted, and the people who were his closest friends, I am quite sure, were terribly dominated by Lyndon. They must have worshipped him. They were devoted to him.

I know a man right now, and I won't mention his name, but a man now who worked for Lyndon practically all of his life. I was dancing with his wife at a meeting at Southwest Texas [State University] last March, and I was asking about the relationship between her husband and President Johnson, and she told me that her husband was totally dominated by President Johnson. She said, "I don't know why he did it. I don't know why he put up with it. As far as I was concerned, I wouldn't have stayed there for five minutes. But he adored the President and was glad to be his servant." And I think that's the kind of friends he had. This is a very fine man that filled that role for the President, and I don't want to elaborate, because he's too

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easy to trace, and you probably have interviewed him. If you haven't, you should, and off the record I'll tell you who it is.

G: I'll ask you who it is off the tape.

B: Is it too simple to say that his friends were the sort of people he could dominate, and those he couldn't dominate were not friends, is that too simple?

B: That's the impression I have, except there are a few people who liked him and were not dominated by him. I don't know how close the relationship was. Some of them shared a dorm or lived together in a dorm and got to know Lyndon well enough to take him as he was, but not be dominated by him. In fact, several Black Stars liked him.

G: Well, Boody Johnson liked him, I think.

B: Boody Johnson liked him, Ardis Hopper liked him. I'll name Ardis Hopper. He was captain of the football team my senior year. Have you interviewed Ardis Hopper?

G: I have not; I'll have to look at our list to see if we have.

B: He's in Houston. I had lunch with him the day after Thanksgiving.

G: I'll have to get his address from you and his phone number.

B: I can give you a telephone number.

G: That's great.

B: And you really should get in touch with him.

G: Yes. I have not, but the man who runs the oral history department very well may have, but we'll just have to look.

One of the things that LBJ is supposed to have done when he got into a position of being able to do it was to rechannel a lot of the

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funds that had previously gone exclusively to athletics into debating and other things. What kind of an impact did that have on the athletic program?

B: Was that supposed to have happened while I was in school, or after I was finished?

G: Well, I believe it would have been about your junior or senior year, I suppose.

B: I was totally unaware of it. It didn't influence anything the football team did. We had the same equipment and the same shoes, that is, the same kind.

G: The same travel and so on?

B: The same travel. There was no curtailment on any athletic event that I was aware of.

G: There's a story that persists about LBJ being kidnapped by the Black Stars at one point during an election. Do you have any recollection of that?

B: No, I have no knowledge of that, and I think I would have known about it, since I was a Black Star.

G: Sure, one would think you would have.

B: I probably would have been an active participant.
(Laughter)

G: You would have approved?

B: Not really. (Laughter)

G: How did the Black Stars react to LBJ's anti-Black Star activity?

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B: Oh, I think there was frustration, without any doubt. We were frustrated because we had no secrets anymore, and the exposure of the Black Stars was embarrassing. I think we all had maybe a kind of a guilt feeling for having tried to manipulate behind the scenes through the years. But it's hard for me to put it in total terms. I can only give you my personal feeling, because it didn't matter. I never thought it was maybe an honorable way to play the game at the college. So while I was very fond of the fellow members, we were all very close friends and backed one another as well as we could in all activities, it was basically kind of a silly organization. I've used the word silly repeatedly. Maybe it's like most fraternities, only they're a little more structured.

G: What did you know of the rival organization that LBJ was putting together?

B: The White Stars?

G: The White Stars.

B: Nothing, only that it existed and I knew who the members were.

G: So they were trying to be as secretive as you had been.

B: Yes, that's right.

G: Let me just throw some names at you and see what kind of response--

B: Okay.

G: --some of these people elicit. Vernon Whiteside.

B: Oh, I knew Vernon. He was one of the wittiest men I've ever known; he was the funniest guy. I knew he was a White Star, and he was a track man, and a very good track man. I have seen him several times after

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I've been back in Austin--we're very good friends--and laughed about the college years and how silly we were.

G: Willard Deason.

B: Bill Deason I was very fond of. He was one of my favorite White Stars. I have a lot of respect for him. He was a good student, a very friendly person. He was not nasty in any way. I haven't seen much of him; I've seen him only once or twice. I've wanted to have lunch with him because I would like to reminisce with him. I saw him about a year ago and we had a long talk. I'm fond of Bill Deason.

G: Frank Arnold.

B: Well, Frank was the guy that asked me to be a Black Star.

(Laughter)

G: So obviously you liked him.

B: [Inaudible] Well, he was a wonderful old lumbering guy who couldn't pass freshman English. But he was a great guy, wonderful fellow.

G: Ox Darby [?].

B: Ox, I never knew very well. He was a senior when I was a freshman. He was the guy who I used to play against often when I was a freshman on the football field, and he used to knock my block off.

(Laughter)

Put me back on my back, because he was an ox. He was a big guy. He must have weighed close to two hundred pounds then. He was a friendly man. I was very fond of him but, as I say, I never knew him.

G: Boody Johnson is an obvious one.

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B: Boody Johnson again, he was a senior when I was a freshman, and I didn't know Boody very well. He was never very friendly to me.

G: Elmer Graham, did you know him?

B: Yes, but I can't place him. No, I can't come up with any comment about him.

G: He was LBJ's debating partner, I think.

B: The name rings a bell, but I couldn't put a face to the name.

G: Sure. Let's see here. Bill Shoup[e?].

B: Bill Shoup. Bill was a good old boy; again, we didn't have much in common. I liked him and we got along very well, but we weren't close friends.

G: Let's see. Dee Russell [?]

B: No memory of him.

G: Let's skip through a couple of pages here. [C. E.] "Curley" Doyle.

B: I knew Curley. He was a bit older than I. He was the best diver in San Marcos, a very coordinated, skillful guy. He was not an athlete; I don't think he lettered in anything.

G: Where did he get to do his diving? Was there a pool?

B: In the San Marcos River. Yes, there were various places.

G: Vann Jones [?].

B: Don't remember him.

G: Mylton Kennedy.

B: I remember Mylton. Again, I liked him; he was a nice person, I got along with him. But never very buddy-buddy.

G: Robert Comb [?]

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B: No, can't come up with anything.

G: John Barron.

B: I knew John more after I left Southwest Texas. He became a county [school] superintendent in Cameron County, Texas, down at Brownsville.

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B: No, during our college years we were just friendly acquaintances, never any friction, never very close ties.

G: Well, how about Ardis Hopper? I haven't asked you about him.

B: Oh, I was extremely fond of Ardis Hopper. He was one of my real good friends on campus. We were together four years on the football team, and he was a good captain our senior year. We used to swap trousers; we could wear the same clothes.

(Laughter)

That increased our very limited wardrobe. (Laughter) Oh, he's a great guy, had a fascinating career. He became a lawyer and an FBI agent and worked for Ethyl Corporation for twenty-five years, and then he practiced law and is just about ready to quit practicing law. He's seventy-seven.

G: Dick Spinn.

B: I knew him reasonably well. He was a fine boy, wonderful guy, very bright and hard-working, courageous football player. Wasn't very big but he had lots of courage, hard-hitting, great guy. Cheerful, even disposition.

G: Albert Hartzke.

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B: No real memory. The name rings--you know, it's a familiar name, but I can't put name to face.

G: How about Hollis Frazer?

B: Same way.

G: Jay Poth.

B: Yes, I knew him, not very well, and I liked him. Thought he was a nice guy.

G: Did I ask you about Wilton Woods?

B: Well, if you didn't I still don't remember much about him.

G: How about Horace Richards?

B: Same way. I don't remember much about him.

G: Felix Brandt.

B: I remember Felix; he was a great big kind of rawboned guy, serious person, scholarly. I liked him; I didn't know him well, we weren't buddies.

G: LBJ always said that he lived in that room above the President's garage. Do you have any memories of that?

B: Yes, he did.

G: You can confirm that.

B: That's right. That I can confirm.

(Interruption)

G: Did you have contact with LBJ after he went to high public office?

B: No, I saw him only one time in San Antonio. I had research money from the air force, and when Lyndon was in the Senate and was chairman of the Armed Forces [Services] Committee, there was a conference in San

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Antonio attended by a number of scientists that the air force was supporting. Lyndon was the banquet speaker. And after the banquet I walked up to him and he remembered my name and said, "Hi, Joe, old buddy. How are you?" And was very friendly and nice, but it was a crowded occasion and we didn't have any real conversation, just a brief handshake.

G: I see.

B: But that was the only time.

G: You were not among those that got asked to the White House.

B: I was not asked to the White House, I think for obvious reasons.

(Laughter)

The color of my star was--

(Laughter)

G: You were the wrong color star.

B: I had the wrong color star.

G: What can you add to the reputation that some people credit him with for exaggerating his role in things: what he paid for his clothes, his success with the girls, and that sort of thing?

B: Well, his nickname was Bull. (Laughter) I think most of us took his braggadocio with quite a bit of salt. I think he tended to exaggerate and aggrandize himself. But I don't know that I want to be quoted as having said that, even though it's on the tape.

G: How was he able to dominate the people that he did dominate, do you think?

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B: It's a good question, a very penetrating question, and I can't pretend to answer.

G: Do you think it was strictly psychology? I mean, the chemistry?

B: I think it must have been the psychology. He could sell them on an idea and then make them do his will. And I don't know, how does any dictator reach the goal of domination that Lyndon had over many people, and other dictators have had over their followers?

G: Well, there doesn't seem to have been much neutral ground where he was concerned.

B: No, that was true even when he was a student. He had to be the chief; he had to rule, or--there wasn't very much neutral ground; that's right. Interesting guy.

G: Was there active dislike? I mean, you said that you didn't care for him very much, but were there students who really disliked him actively?

B: Oh, yes, I think quite a lot of people actively disliked him. Quite a number. I don't know what the vote would have been had he been up for a popularity contest, but he wouldn't have had many votes.

G: Other than his loyal--

B: Other than his loyal, small minority. He didn't hold sway over a very large part of the campus.

G: You would think that sooner or later somebody would have walked up to him [who] disliked him and offered to punch him in the nose. But apparently that was not the case, or at least not often the case.

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B: No, that kind of violence was not very common on our campus. Very few people had fist fights. There were two or three ruffians who liked fisticuffs, at least claimed that they did. I never saw any of them engage in fist fights. They claimed to have knocked somebody's block off. There were only two or three like that.

G: What would have been the penalty for getting caught doing something like that?

B: It depends on who the victim was.

(Laughter)

It could have been applause. I don't know what the penalty would have been. I don't think it would have been very severe. Texas was still pretty much a frontier mentality then. If you resorted to fist fights I don't think anyone ever cared very much.

G: What did the girls think of LBJ, that you know of?

B: None of my girls liked him. (Laughter) No, I can't answer that. That's a very, very hard question.

G: You say he was not known to date a whole lot.

B: He was not a ladies' man. He did not have a reputation for being a ladies' man, and there were those who did. Boody Johnson, you mentioned and we've mentioned, was quite a ladies' man. And, well, some football players were.

G: The girls outnumbered the boys considerably, I think.

B: I think that's right. Happy environment.

(Laughter)

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G: So it shouldn't have been hard to be a ladies' man if you had set your mind to it.

B: No, that's right. Yes.
(Interruption)

G: You were talking about Ella SoRelle [Porter].

B: Yes. Ella was a cheerleader; I believe she was editor of the Gaillardian [Pedagog], the yearbook, and she was prominent on the student newspaper. She may have been editor, I'm not sure.

G: That would have thrown her with LBJ quite a bit.

B: She was with LBJ quite a bit, yes. I read in Robert Caro's book some of her remarks, and I think her feelings toward LBJ were similar to mine. There was no great admiration for him, and maybe less than admiration. But I don't want to quote her, except indirectly. We never really discussed him. Ella and I never dated. She dated one of my very dear friends, George Vest, who was captain of the football team my junior year. He finished during my junior year. George was a very fine man. I knew him when I was coaching down in the Valley. He coached at Donna, and I coached at San Benito, so we competed on the football field with our teams. But I never really talked to Ella, I guess, very seriously about people or anything; we were just good friends.

I wish I could come up with more insight that would be of some value, but--

G: Did you ever eat at the same table where LBJ was eating that you recall?

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B: Yes, I think The Bobcat was a little joint at the foot of the hill, run by Leland Coers. Leland's older brother, Hoss he was called, and I can't even think of his real name. But, no, I think I've eaten sandwiches or hamburgers--

G: That was the student--

B: That was the kind of student hangout. The only one up on the hill. He had a monopoly. (Laughter)

G: What could you get to eat there?

B: Oh, hamburgers and a sandwich, Cokes, potato chips, just fast foods. It was all right.

G: Was Prohibition effective in those days?

B: Yes. The only booze you could get was bootleg. You could get home brew and you could get bootleg whiskey, but if you wanted it you had to go to New Braunfels to get it.

G: Where the Germans were.

B: Where the Germans were. They made some very good home brew, and their whiskey was not bad. I would hate to drink any of it today. (Laughter)

When you didn't know any better, the only whiskey you'd ever tasted, I guess it was not too bad. We didn't drink very much. It wasn't a sappy bunch of young people.

G: I thought the Black Stars might have gotten them a case of beer from time to time.

B: No, no, we didn't. We didn't do that. We were a sober bunch. Being mostly athletes, we tried to take care of ourselves.

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(Interruption)

G: We were talking about the use of sources that Robert Caro has made in his book. Perhaps you would care to comment on the way he used your quotes.

B: I told you off the record that I had felt that Caro had quoted me on statements that he, as I remember, said he would not quote me by name. But he didn't quote me as having said anything I didn't say. I have very high esteem for Caro's skills as an interviewer; I started out refusing to make any kind of remarks that were anything but laudatory about LBJ, and he led me along so skillfully that I kind of opened up and told him my true feelings. The quotes in the book from people I know seem to me to be consistent with their attitudes as I remember them at the time. I think he did a very fine job of the college years. His treatment of some of the faculty members, Professor Greene particularly, which we've already talked about, was quite interesting, and the influence that Greene had on Johnson seems to me to be accurate. So, no, I think Caro wrote a good book, and as far as I can judge, accurate for the sources that he used.

G: I think that puts it pretty succinctly.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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