

INTERVIEW I

DATE: February 15, 1969
INTERVIEWEE: THEODORE M. BERRY
INTERVIEWER: STEPHEN GOODELL
PLACE: Mr. Berry's office, Office of Economic Opportunity,
Washington, D.C.

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- G: Mr. Berry, it's my understanding that you're from Maysville, Kentucky, that you hold a law degree from the University of Cincinnati, that you have been involved in public affairs in government in Cincinnati. From 1929 to 1932 you were the public welfare investigator. From 1939 to 1942 you were the assistant prosecuting attorney of Hamilton County, Ohio, and 1956-1957 you were the vice mayor of Cincinnati, that you've served as the director for the United States Department of Interior in Ohio, and that you have been the director of the NAACP and a delegate-at-large to the National Urban League in 1957 and 1959. That's about as much as I have on your biographical information. If there's anything you'd like to fill in, please feel free.
- B: Well, thanks very much. It is true I was born in Maysville, Kentucky, but my family moved to Cincinnati when I was very young, about five years old. So I am an Ohioan by residence, by education, and much of my experience and activity has been in Cincinnati. I think probably for the record of this interview, I'll establish my identity clearly because both posterity, if there is any involvement,

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I am a person of mixed blood, sometimes referred to as a Negro, sometimes as a colored person, and sometimes in more current language, they refer to it as black. But as you may observe I'm not black in color.

I was educated in Cincinnati schools, graduated from Woodward High School, and was the first Negro student to be valedictorian of the high school graduating class. I went on to the University of Cincinnati, graduated, and also won some prizes there in oratory and in debating, and then on to law school. I graduated from law school in 1931, at that time winning a corporation law prize which was offered by the bar association of the state of Ohio.

You mentioned in that summary that you have that I worked as an investigator in the welfare department. This was at the same time that I was in law school. Fred Hayler [?], who died not so long ago, within the past month, had been the YMCA secretary at the University of Cincinnati in my undergraduate years. When I was in law school he became the welfare director of the city of Cincinnati. This was at the depth of the Depression, between 1929 and 1931, and I used to visit with him and raise some questions about the economic opportunities that were nonexistent in the Cincinnati community, particularly for Negroes. As a summer project he made it possible for me, at the end of my freshman year of law school, to come in as an investigator to do a survey of job opportunities for Negro workers in Cincinnati, which was sponsored then by the Chamber of Commerce and the Council of Social Agencies. The project wasn't finished in

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the summer, but it was arranged that I could be a part-time student or worker. So I launched into social welfare work, because during the Depression the relief situation was so acute that the welfare department kept its office open at night. So I worked a swing shift. I went to law school in the forenoon and then came on to the welfare department, worked a night shift until at least nine o'clock, and then I had the facilities of the law director's office for my night studies for law school for the next day.

I remained there three years until I finished law school and passed the bar. Then I resigned and went into the practice of the law. I was engaged in civic activities. My first year out of law school I became the president of the Cincinnati branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the youngest president they'd had up until that time. And [I] was active in the program in trying to implement the philosophy and purpose of the NAACP in establishing basic civil rights for Negro citizens that were considerably more absent than they are even today.

I entered public activity when I was appointed to become the assistant prosecutor of Hamilton County in 1939, where I served for three years, took a leave of absence to accept a post in what was then known as the Office of Facts and Figures, which was the forerunner as a government agency to the Office of War Information. This was during the war. I had been very active in the national movement to secure more meaningful involvement of Negro citizens in the war effort. This had brought me into some national prominence

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and through the sponsorship, or at least the encouragement of the Pittsburgh Courier, Archibald MacLeish appointed me to the position of morale officer in the Office of Facts and Figures.

Well, that was a very short tour of duty because I became disillusioned, disappointed with government bureaucracy. I remained in government service exactly six months. I left Washington that time with a feeling that I didn't want to come back to government service again unless I came either as a member of Congress or as the representative of a very strong lobby that could influence some legislation and some public policy.

I returned to my position as assistant county prosecutor, but in coming to Washington under the Roosevelt Administration I had committed a bit of political heresy in my home community, because it may be recalled that Hamilton County, Ohio was so heavily and predominately Republican that I don't believe President Roosevelt carried Hamilton County at any time during the four terms that he served as president. Hamilton County was predominately Republican. I was a Republican appointee to the prosecutor's office. So when I returned in September of that year, after the November election of 1942, I was notified that the position that I occupied was being abolished although the appropriation and a number of slots for that office had already been determined and made. But that was a fact of life, and so I came back and was without a position, and I had to reactivate my law practice because my junior associate had then been drafted into the service and there was no one in the office

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while I had been in Washington. I remembered very distinctly talking to one or two of the judges after that experience, and I was told that for all purposes I was politically dead in my community, that it would be advisable perhaps if I looked for some other place to re-establish myself as a practitioner.

So I set about to prove that I wasn't dead politically and so at the end of the following year, 1943, I was re-elected president of the NAACP and served for another six years. In 1947 an election was held in Cincinnati in which an issue was put on the ballot which was politically adverse to the Negro community. We had been electing members of the council under the proportional representation system and it had been the only system by which Negro representation had been elected to public office. The Republican organization proposed to abolish it, and I became an independent candidate for council on the issue of retention of proportional representation. I lost that election, but it did project me into the city political life. I lost the election but the issue of retention of PR was saved. So in 1949 I ran for council again and was elected. At that time we took office in January, and I served from 1950 through 1957 and was successfully re-elected each time with an increasing number of votes until the point in 1955, in that election I was elected to serve as vice mayor, by my colleagues, not by popular vote.

Well, the facts of life are that the fact that a Negro for the first time had become vice mayor became a matter of considerable discussion in the white community. In the fall of 1957 a special

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election was held to change the system of electing councilmen. PR [proportional representation] was again up and it was repealed. It was repealed on the issue that if they didn't change the system, if Berry was elected again, they attributed to me that I would insist upon being made the mayor and that they had to change the system. The system was changed, and in thirty days thereafter a general election was held and I lost under the new system. It was a city-wide plurality at-large election of nine men. Just the mathematics of the vote, the Negro vote and white vote, made it difficult, and I was not re-elected. I was out of council for four years. My constituents and a number of citizens prevailed upon me to stand for election again in 1963, and I beat the system that was set up to eliminate me from council and I was re-elected.

Now this is the beginning of my association with the War on Poverty, because it was in, I think, the message of the President to Congress in the early part of 1964 that he announced, proclaimed the War on Poverty. I had just entered council on December 3, 1963 and I read that message. Then later, as you know, the bill was introduced in 1964. I, in keeping with the spirit of the message, began a series of hearings--because I was then chairman of the welfare committee of the city council--to focus the community's attention on the problems of poverty in Cincinnati and in Hamilton County. Those hearings covered a period of approximately six weeks, one or two days a week. It did focus a lot of attention on the problems

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that existed among senior citizens, among female heads of families, problems of hunger.

Out of that series of hearings I kept pressing the issue that Cincinnati ought to ready itself to be in step with the national policy when Congress enacted this bill. Of course, there were those who were skeptical as to whether Congress would enact the bill. The idea was sort of downgraded, that it was being made a political issue. But nevertheless, as a result of these hearings and as a result of some resolutions I introduced in council, the council did authorize the assembling of a task force under the leadership of the Council of Social Agencies to convene all of the interested institutional organizations and groups. As a result of this they came back and recommended the formation of an interim agency. By that time--I believe the act was enacted in August of 1964--we were ready in a sense that the community had been sensitized.

After the bill was enacted I then moved to take the language of the act and to interpret it from the point of view of the local community's responsibility, [and] drafted the articles of incorporation for the establishment of a nonprofit corporation, consonant with the language of the act. There was a rather sharp debate in the council on whether or not we should move to make a public agency or a nonprofit corporation. I won that issue because I said that I felt that the conduct of the program should be as far as possible without political overtones or influence, coupled with the fact that I felt that it should be formulated and conducted by an organization that

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was county-wide or at least metropolitan-wide. Our community was typical of practically every urban community today: a central city and a multiplicity of satellite, small corporate bodies all within a county government or county area. We were a metropolitan area because we also included many of the people in the northern cities of Kentucky that were across the river from Cincinnati. The population had spilled over into Clermont County, another semi-rural county that was adjacent but it was part of the whole metropolitan area. So we drew a nonprofit corporation that was potentially [a] metropolitan area to serve the metropolitan community. As a result of that a corporation was established and then we moved to formulate some proposals.

In December of that year, 1964, I came to Washington with a briefcase full of proposals and presented them to the then-incipient Community Action division of OEO. I had no idea at that time of ever being involved in this.

G: Excuse me. May I ask who at that time was at the head of that incipient Community Action?

B: Well, I think it was Jack Conway, but I never met Jack Conway at that time. The man I met and with whom I spent two days was Bill Bozman, who is now my deputy. He was a program analyst and he spent two full days going over our proposals. This is the first time I was really surprised that they would take the time to go over it, because I expected that they would receive our proposals and say, "We'll review them and let you know." But I was invited to stay two days and the

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proposals were gone over very carefully. Some questions were answered by long distance telephone, [questions] raised with reference to some aspects of who the delegate agencies would be. But at any rate, when I left I told Bozman that I appreciated the consideration that had been given to our proposals and went on back to Cincinnati. Approximately two weeks thereafter we did get notice that we were included in a number of cities that received grants.

About this same time the National Urban League held a conference here. It was probably in late December; I'd have to check the dates. But the National Urban League held a conference here in Washington called a Community Action Consultation for the purpose of focusing community leaders on the role that communities might play in the War on Poverty, in the Economic Opportunity Act. I attended that conference and I don't recall whether it was before or after I had brought down the Cincinnati proposals, but it was very close.

At that session Sargent Shriver was invited to speak and he spoke. There were questions and answers and then there were a number of questions that were aimed at Sarge that seemed to impart the idea that this was a federal responsibility, this War on Poverty. I got up in the course of the discussion, not intending to defend Sarge but to refocus the attention. I said to the gentleman who had raised this question--I think he was from Los Angeles--something to the effect that it's a misunderstanding about this legislation if you're thinking that it's a program in which the federal government is

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charged with the responsibility of coming out to your community and laying something down on the table for you and saying, "This is what you might do or have." I emphasized that every community would get out of the War on Poverty what it was willing and able to put into it in terms of ideas, imagination, organization, and it was a community responsibility. As I said, it was the first time that the federal government was making an offer to communities to do something for themselves.

Well, evidently the sequence of this, what I said evidently sounded a note with Shriver because I learned afterwards that when he left he wanted to know who I was. I had met Shriver some two or three years before that when President Kennedy invited me to the White House to attend a luncheon honoring President Senghor of Senegal. I had been active in the Kennedy campaign of 1960 and I happened to meet Shriver at the White House. In his usual very personal manner he acknowledged the invitation and said something about, "Well, when are you coming down here to Washington to join us?" I said, "When I'm invited." Beyond that I had not seen or had any association with him. Well, in January of 1965, which was the year of inauguration, my wife and I came to Washington for the inauguration.

The day after I returned home, which was on the twenty-first of January, my secretary informed me that Mr. Shriver had called. I returned his call and he said that he had tried to reach me while I was in Washington during the inauguration unsuccessfully, and he said that he would like to talk with me and inquired whether I could return

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to Washington for a conference. Well, I told him I had been away for three or four days, there were some obligations, but I would try to arrange my schedule.

But to make a long story short, I did return to Washington. It was at that time--and I think this was on January 22 or 23--Shriver made an offer, at least he invited me to accept the position of director of the Community Action Program, which was responsible for the administration of Title II of the act. I frankly demurred. I said, "Mr. Shriver, this takes me by surprise. I'm holding a public office in Cincinnati. It is a responsible position. I'll have to talk to my family, my law partner, a number of people." In the characteristic and very inimitable manner of Sargent Shriver, he never took no for an answer. He said, "Well, I can understand that. Let's recess for two hours." He looked at his watch and he said, "You may use the phone, talk to your wife, talk to your law partner, anybody that you feel necessary. Think it over and let's get back together at six o'clock." I think this was two or three o'clock in the afternoon.

Well, I did make several calls. I called my wife, called my law partner, called Charles Taft, who was my associate in council, and under whom I had been vice mayor; he had been mayor of the city. He was my colleague in the council. Then I called Roy Wilkins, who was a very close friend and the executive director of the NAACP. I called Whitney Young, who was director of the Urban League, and a number of other people just to get their feel of this.

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Well, again to make a long story short, I returned to see Mr. Shriver and I said, "If you have the courage to make the offer, I have the guts to accept the challenge." So I came on board as a consultant. A few days thereafter Sarge was saying that he wanted me to get on board as quickly as possible, that they were right in the throes of a terrific operation. He knew about my work in developing the Community Action Agency in Cincinnati, because following the establishment of our Cincinnati agency I was elected the first president. This was set up with three representatives from the council as part of the nonprofit corporation. Being chairman of the welfare committee, I was honored by being the first president. I came down as a consultant two days a week in the beginning and then stepped it up as I could rearrange my affairs. Finally on March 1 I came down here full time, and on March 8 the President announced in one of his current [?] that he was sending my nomination up to the Senate. About thirty days thereafter I was confirmed. But I was serving intermittently. Well, from March 1 I was on full time.

G: Did you have to go to the Senate?

B: Yes. Being a presidential appointee, I had to be confirmed by the Senate. I did go to the Senate committee--I've forgotten the subcommittee that handled it; I think it was a subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Labor and Education. It was not an extended hearing. They inquired about my background. I gave it to them, particularly my more recent identity in connection with city government and its involvement in implementing the Economic Opportunity Act.

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Well, I've been here then since that time. I resigned from my post in the city council the same date that the Senate confirmed, so that there was an orderly transition and an official divorcement of the two separate positions. And I've been here ever since--a hectic one at that.

G: May I ask, to go back to the time at which you held the hearings in Cincinnati--I guess that would have been the summer of 1964, at the same time that the bill was being reviewed in the Congress.

B: That's right.

G: Was there any contact at all made between I guess what would then have been the task force and the city council? In other words, did you make your conclusions, your hearings available to them?

B: The hearings conducted in Cincinnati were not made available to any agency here in Washington. They were purely local and they were reported in the daily press. Whatever intelligence may have come to the task force, it was by reason of their own clipping service. But there was no direct communication, except when the act was passed I did make contact with Bill Patrick, who was on the task force with Jack Conway. Their offices were then down in the old Court of Claims Building at Pennsylvania and 17th. Bill Patrick had been a member of council of Detroit. I knew him very well. In fact, I was the principal speaker at the launching of his campaign for election to the city council of Detroit in 1957, the same year that I was defeated. I knew him and I made contact with him to let me know what was emerging from the task force as a guide to what

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communities might do. There was a conference called, which I think was chaired by Dave Grossman and Sandy [Sanford] Kravitz, part of the task force. I learned about it and came down at my own expense to sit in, to hear the discussion, the explanation of what was going on. It was all very evolutionary at that time. Other than that, I was just trying to get filled in and keep abreast of what was developing, because it was very fresh green and in its development stage.

G: You mentioned that you had helped to put together the first proposal from Cincinnati. I gather this would then reflect your own ideas, your own interpretation of what community action was. You said that the emphasis as you understood it was certainly to be local rather than federal.

B: Yes.

G: Could you describe the kind of program proposal that you put together, the very first one?

B: They were very heavily related to existing institutions. We had a proposal in the package that involved the Urban League in the development of a tutorial program in a substandard school system which was in Lincoln Heights, an all Negro community in the suburban areas of Cincinnati in Hamilton County. There was a component that was developed by the board of education. It had a dental service component for poor students who were in need of dental service and it would expand. One of the things that was discussed when I brought the package down was the maintenance of effort of the local community, that the federal grant was not in effect to be a subsidization of an

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ongoing program but would add onto it, and that the local community would guarantee that the level of effort already existent [would be expanded], that what was to be done with the funds was really an expansion.

There was a proposal which would involve the training of welfare workers, which fell within the category of Title V under the act rather than Title II. There was a social service component which contemplated the development--which later became a very pre-dominate program in OEO or CAP--of neighborhood service units under the sponsorship of--not the Federation of Settlements because they had not established it, but there was a settlement house organization, two or three of them, that wanted to take the responsibility of extending their settlement house program into other areas where they had not been able to do it under the limited resources. These were some of the elements. I don't remember them all distinctly. But they constituted a variety of programs. But they were closely related to existing institutions to enable them to expand their services. There was a proposal in the package as I recall from a family-planning organization.

The Cincinnati program was geared to the Community Action Agency not being a program-operating agency, but to plan, to coordinate, to be the fiscal agent vis-a-vis the federal government, be responsible for the fiscal surveillance of the grantees, of the delegate agencies. But that programs would be actually conducted by existing institutions that had some prior experience and competence,

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and to enlarge and to bring those services more directly to those who had not been getting it, because many of the institutions were located in areas that were no longer the target areas of the community. This was the focus of the Cincinnati proposals at that time.

G: May I ask you, you indicated that you had followed the progression of the bill through Congress, and that you had read it and this helped to provide some sort of guidelines for the proposal that you finally put together. Can you recall your own impressions generally, your total impressions, of the act itself? Did you feel that this was going to provide for the unconditional war that President Johnson had announced? In other words, were you satisfied with what actually was the proposal in the act?

B: Frankly, I was very interested in the possibilities that were within the act for communities to do more than they had been able to do with the limited resources of the traditional red feather charity appeals that prevailed and with the limited resources that were being funneled solely in the area of public assistance in the welfare institutions. It seemed to me that it afforded a great opportunity for doing more than had been done. I must in retrospect acknowledge that I didn't have any perception of the relationship to what Congress was making available for it or the magnitude of the problem as a national problem. I knew it only from my own local community, and I felt that it had great possibilities. I still do.

G: May I ask also, although it's not within the scope of Community Action, one of the criticisms that has been leveled at the poverty

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program since the very beginning is that it did not contain a job creation proposal, that it provides for job training but that at the end of the pipeline after the training there perhaps wouldn't have been any jobs. Was this a consideration in your mind at the time, do you know?

B: At the time, no. Because I must confess, my focus at that time was as a public official in a local community. I was looking at Title II. I soon became aware of the relationship between Title I, particularly the Neighborhood Youth Corps. About the same time that the Community Action Agency was being developed there was already existent in our community a citizens' committee on youth. Between the citizens' committee on youth and the board of education, they both moved into the direction of qualifying for programs under the Neighborhood Youth Corps, which was in Title I. Right from the very start you were moving in the direction of proliferating programs. When our agency was approved I urged the citizens' committee-- because there was a section in the act of certain communities being given a preferred treatment or preferential status if they were coordinating their efforts and seeking applications through the Community Action Agency. I said, "Here is an opportunity to pull these programs together."

When I came down to Washington subsequently, the Neighborhood Youth Corps program was still waiting; it hadn't been funded. We'd been able to get our Community Action Agency funded, but there was a long delay. Here was an area which very early indicated to me

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the importance of federal agencies coordinating their efforts in the delivery of the programs at the community level, which was, as I read the act, what was being sought.

I don't know whether I've responded fully to the thrust of your question. But my attention to it was what the possibilities were in qualifying and in implementing programs which were authorized under Title II, and I did not know the extent of the funds that would be available. I think there was some advance publicity that developed as to the formula for allocation of funds, how much would be available for the state of Ohio. We were trying to get our fair share of that quota allotment.

Now on the question of job development, as distinguished from job training, I think it very soon emerged that this was a very important aspect. I certainly became aware of it, because after I had assumed office here I frequently challenged my staff when they brought grant proposals to me, particularly in basic adult education, grants that were being made in the southern communities for agricultural workers to offset this literacy lag that we had. I frequently asked, "Given our grant that will treat and provide basic education to X number--a hundred, two hundred persons--are we generating for them an end product of frustration, or are we assured that there will be some coupling of this training to further industrial or skilled training with the end product of possible employment?" This is still one of the problems that I think our work-training programs have related to them.

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I just recently came back from a trip to Mississippi and the expectation of these trainees--you know, we launched a tremendous program under STAR in Mississippi. It was the first program. It was sponsored by the Catholic diocese in Mississippi. It was able to bring together both Protestants, white and Negro, into a nonprofit organization which undertook to set up training facilities in some eighteen training centers throughout the state that would ready these people for further training and also equip them for possible types of employment. The optimum of the goal of that has not been yet achieved. We are now, in the last year, trying to link that training program to the Concentrated Employment Program, which is the responsibility of the Department of Labor. Even at this moment there is a gap between the utilization by the Mississippi Employment Service, who is responsible for implementing the CEP program in the Delta area of Mississippi, and their use of the STAR program graduates, the people who have finished their basic education in STAR, of being willing to include them in their further training and also referral.

The most recent case, of course, was when the Baldwin Piano Company, that's got a facility in Greenwood, Mississippi, that was ready to increase its enrollment of workers, both white and Negro, wanted to use STAR graduates, those who had finished the STAR program. [Baldwin] wanted to employ them, but under the CEP program they had to get referrals from the Employment Service and the Employment Service, for reasons which don't clearly identify, was finding some excuse for not accepting the STAR trainees as their referral people.

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Still some bridge building, some gap filling [is needed] in the operation of a program which is trying to couple an OEO-CAP funded program to a Labor Department program, and at the same time produce the end product of gainful employment with all of this use of federal funds. Of course, as you probably know, the Concentrated Employment Program as it is being implemented has as part of it job development as well as manpower training, so that the two can meet in the end.

G: To shift back to Community Action, again going back to 1964, were you aware or were you familiar with the precedents that existed in the form of the Ford gray areas, demonstration projects, or the experiments that were held under the Juvenile Delinquency [and] Youth Offenses Control Act, under Attorney General Robert Kennedy?

B: I was aware of them because I tried to keep abreast of the current material. I knew about the Ford grants in the cities of New Haven, Oakland, Philadelphia, and a number of others. I knew of them but I was not intimately involved or acquainted with any of the people that were working in it. Cincinnati wasn't so favored, so it was something that was part of my academic reading.

G: When you came to Community Action, when you came to OEO in March of 1965, what were your duties as you understood them at the time?

B: Well, at that time the most urgent and the top priority of effort was to identify and as quickly as possible qualify communities for grants. We had, I think, some two hundred and sixty-five million dollars. I may be in error; I'd have to check my records. But Congress had enacted the legislation in August, had made an

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appropriation I think in October. And I learned upon arrival that at the request of the President, he didn't want OEO to make any grants before the election lest it be charged that the War on Poverty was merely a political gimmick and that it was being done to favor the election. So no grants were made by OEO until November 24, I believe it was, of 1964, after the election.

When I came aboard in March I think the second or possibly the third round of grants had been made. There were applications from all over the country. It was a centralized operation, very hectic. We had not reached any point of decentralized or regional offices. We had very hurriedly outstationed Community Action personnel in certain areas where we thought regional offices would be ultimately approved, but they were outstationed personnel of headquarters, to be more closely related to communities. We had a number of them, applications from various and sundry groups that did not conform to the language of the statute of what Community Action was intended to be. So we were concerned with qualifying those agencies, quantifying their proposals--they seemed to be making sense--and making grants, so that we would have shown at least a record of having reasonably, prudently, consistent with the legislation, used money that Congress had made available. So half the fiscal year was gone when I came aboard in March. We had practically one quarter remaining to obligate [?] something like more than 50 per cent of our appropriation. It was a very hectic operation.

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One of the two critical issues that were on the table, so to speak, was qualifying the Community Action Agency for Cleveland. The other was a very hectic operation with reference to the city of Chicago. The city of Chicago had brought down literally, figuratively I would say, a bushel basket of proposals, wanting them all funded. This was a case of the big hog getting to the trough first and wanting it all, and we had to make some judgments. We had to sort of hold back. First of all, was there a properly constituted Community Action Agency? And secondly, to quantify at least these proposals that we couldn't just go overboard merely because they asked for it, that they were all going to be funded. And believe me, the city of Chicago was trying to use all the pressure it had politically and otherwise to get as much as they could. There were problems that arose with other big cities of wanting to get large grants and we had to keep also always reminding the Director that our legislation called for an equitable allocation of these funds between rural and urban.

G: I want to get to that point later.

B: And we made a number of planning grants. Many communities were not prepared; many, many communities did not have the sophistication or the resources that a city like New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, that could turn the wheels of their council of social agencies to generate a lot of proposals that would command dollars. So that in the early days--and it was very shortly after I came aboard, because it had not been finalized; while it bore the date of February of 1965, it was

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in draft stage--[we drew up] our first issuance on the guidelines.

It was in draft stage when I came aboard and this was part of my task, of reviewing and at least recommending to the director the final content of the guidelines that would help communities to qualify for OEO Title II grants.

G: If I might interrupt, I know these guidelines were complicated and detailed, but generally could you elaborate a little bit on the kinds of criteria that were set up for funding?

B: Well, we drew the guidelines in a manner that administratively interpreted what we felt the language of the statute meant. The format of our guidelines addressed themselves to the kind of grants we could make, and who was eligible and how these organizations might be brought into being. They could be a public agency or they could be a private, nonprofit agency. We brought attention to the matter of the participation of residents, both in representation on the boards, the policy-making bodies at the community level. And we tried to spell it out in understandable ways. Then we dealt with the types of programs, the eligible programs that we could fund. They covered a rather broad spectrum, because the language was very general. We included, of course, remedial education, employment training, job training and counseling, health, vocational rehabilitation, housing and home management, consumer information education, legal aid. We were identifying areas of service which later developed into national emphasis programs. But it covered a rather broad spectrum because the language was broad.

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G: That brings to mind two questions: one, was there any thought at the time, back as early as 1965, of putting together these national emphasis programs? You said that the programs that came up covered a very broad spectrum. Was there any feeling that to make these effective and coordinated in the communities that perhaps there should be something along the lines of the national emphasis programs?

B: Yes, very early. Of course, the first national emphasis programs-- and the ideas were pretty well germinated and jelled with reference to Head Start. This was going to be the major national thrust. It was conceived of, as we frequently said, "If the nation's attention can be focused upon the effects of poverty on young children, if we can get the educational institutions and private institutions interested in this, and if they will take the idea of involving parents, it would, in effect, by the sponsoring of a Head Start program, be Community Action in microcosm. From that base of the involvement in education and in health, parental involvement, uniting of organizations, both health and educational, in a joint effort, it would lay the basis for extending this concept into other programs, particularly where communities had made no effort at even starting a Community Action Agency. Because in the summer of 1965 there were Head Start grants made to single-purpose organizations who would undertake the job of implementing a Head Start program where there had not even been a beginning at establishing a Community Action Agency. This was pretty well in the works when I arrived. In fact, one of the first meetings that I attended while I was still in a

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consultant role was at the White House, meeting Mrs. Johnson and her acceptance of this national sponsorship of the Head Start program.

This was a mammoth undertaking. In retrospect, and I think history will probably recognize that the launching, the implementation of the Head Start program exceeded all expectations of traditional bureaucrats, government agencies, in the launching, implementing and actually servicing of the number of children that were served in that first summer's program. But as we proceeded with both the day-to-day work of reviewing proposals coming from communities in our own program planning section--which at that time was headed by Dick Boone--we did conceive of programs that were initiated through our research and demonstration funds that as we conceived it, if they were successful, might be replicated, packaged, replicated by getting them accepted by communities to extend it.

G: Was this the building block approach?

B: Yes, that's right. While many communities came in with tutorial education--there was a heavy orientation toward education in the beginning--there was a modicum of at least the beginnings of the idea of the multi-service center or system, community neighborhood service system. It came in various forms in various communities. But I have frequently referred to it as probably the most indigenous national emphasis program in the sense that it was not one that we conceived in Washington, but by the very spontaneous manner in which it came in various forms from all over the country, that this was an instrument which local communities felt would meet some of their

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needs or enable them to attack the problems in the target areas. Out of that has developed this whole matrix of what we call the neighborhood service center. I refer to it as a neighborhood service system because it takes various forms in various localities. It needs a good deal of improvement in many areas, particularly in our rural areas.

The second national emphasis program that emerged--

G: Legal services?

B: --was legal services. This was another one that was in its very incipient stages when I first came aboard. I can remember our first conference on the law and poverty held over in the State Department building.

G: Was that the HEW conference?

B: No, that was one that was held before I came. That was sponsored by HEW. We had only a very peripheral role. But we held a national conference in August of 1965 I think it was. This was the year in which we were trying to get the American Bar Association to give its support and endorsement. There had been some preliminary working papers developed. I remember Sarge giving me these his first round. He said, "I want you to read these and be familiar. It's something that's developing. We don't know where it's going to go, but I'd like for you to give it attention." So legal services became our second major national emphasis program.

Foster Grandparents was a program which was conceived in our shop. Dick Boone, I remember him coming into my office--his office

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was right next door here--and we discussed it. It was first funded out of our demonstration funds. It had a very novel approach to the whole question of child care, particularly foundlings in institutions. It was going to serve two purposes, provide forms of employment for older persons and transferring their natural love and affection for children. It caught on in many institutions but I don't think that it has been expanded as far as it could have been, given the constraints, the demands, that emerged as time went on, with the result that our Foster Grandparents still nationally is funded at a level of about ten million dollars, which has been taken over, transferred, spun off as you might delegate it, to the HEW and the Administration on Aging, and Public Health Service, the Children's Bureau there. There are three agencies that are involved in that.

But again, responding to your question, we were considering programs not as national emphasis programs, but as experimental design of programs which by their very nature would command the interest and attention and the willingness of communities to implement them. Well, this got mixed up, you see, in the question of other interests. If it struck someone's idea, this is something that ought to be pushed gung ho. The congressman might like it and it got more national push than sometimes communities were ready to accept them. And then we got involved in this whole question of congressional expectation. Congress--we're looking for quick results, and if a program appeared to be popular and good, they wanted to put more money into it.

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G: Like Head Start.

B: Yes. Head Start was nationally acclaimed and so we found at one time there one-third, nearly one-half of our money was committed to Head Start. Many communities were saying, "Well, now, why do we have to go so heavy for Head Start? We can use some of this money." You may recall in our history--what was it, 1966?--Congress earmarked our money, saying this is the way it must be spent. Many communities were unhappy with this. This sort of modified the local emphasis that was very clear in the act.

G: That was what I was going to get at.

B: And as administrators, we tried to point out that this, in our judgment, was not the best way to go. We felt that we ought to give more integrity and meaning to local responsibility, local initiative. We had to fight hard to keep a reasonable amount of our Title II money available for local initiative. Of course, when you get into a national emphasis program, bureaucratically and administratively you build up an internal lobby within your own agency that justifies why more money should be committed for that program. And the national emphasis program that gets there first, gets the head start, is always able to generate more advocacy for building on, expanding that program than others that are second, third in the line.

Now, talking about national emphasis programs, Upward Bound was an experiment with our demonstration money. We tried it, I think, with thirteen institutions the first summer. Most of these

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institutions were Negro or black institutions. There were some colleges up in the Northeast. But that first year's experience validated our theory, so much so that in the next year we were able to go out and try to enlist under Dick Frost--he really did a tremendous job of opening the eyes and the minds and the interest of the staid college institutions to begin to marry the gown with the problems of the town, in terms of motivating, helping poor youth who had low academic achievement to begin to get a sense of their own capability, [and developing] the interest of these institutions in them. I think we haven't reached the end result of the potential in Upward Bound. We're just beginning to get the hard data of the success story of the retention, of the number of youngsters whose academic achievement was raised, who entered college, who've continued.

Just last fall I participated in the ceremony recognizing the first four Upward Bound college graduates, those who had been so motivated that they had finished their college work in three years. High risk students. One of these chaps had been in juvenile court, who was considered to be just for all intents and purposes lost. But they reached out, got him, he's graduating and now going to be a mathematics teacher in a high school. I don't think the end result is yet in sight, and I do hope that with Congress having determined that Upward Bound was to be transferred from this agency over to the Department of--I don't know which department it's going to be in.

G: They've named two at two different times, I think.

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B: I hope they don't lose the thrust of it, so that we get the real product confused with our whole output of college graduates. It's a tremendous program and we launched that because we felt it could be a national emphasis program because it was so closely related to the established college institutions. It had to be linked with them, against the wishes of most of the college institutions; they did not want to be tied to the tail of Community Action. And yet we sold them on the idea that if they were going to do a job, they ought to relate to an organization or an institution in the community that had access that could reach those kids that needed to be reached. So in most cases the college institution that receives the grant is committed to a program of working with Community Action Agencies in identifying the kids that needed the service of the Upward Bound program.

G: Mr. Berry, you mentioned earlier in this interview that one of the first objectives in the construction of the guidelines was to interpret the words of the act and to make it clear to the communities what was meant. Were there people at OEO or within Community Action at the time who had been involved with the task force from February to March of 1964 and who had actually had a hand in the construction of the legislation?

B: Yes, there were some on my staff who had served on the task force. Those that come to mind, there was Richard Boone, David Grossman, Fred Hayes, Sandy Kravitz. Now Bill Bozman, who is now my deputy and who succeeded Fred Hayes--Fred Hayes was my deputy until he left

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two years ago--Boz came on after the task force, after the act was passed. But I think those four--I did name four--were on the earlier task force along with Jack Conway. There may have been others. There was a chap whose name--Shays [?] I think his name was, I've forgotten the spelling even. He may have been. But there was quite a change. But those four stand out in my recollection as having been with the development at its early stages. As to whether they had any precise role in the language of the act, I don't know, but they certainly were in on much of the action.

G: Did they have any disagreement as to the intent of the act, or was there a consensus that had developed?

B: Well, as I perceived it, as among those four, and as reflected in the staff work, there was a general consensus that Community Action as a mechanism was to be an organization locally conceived, with an involvement and a participation of government, private agencies having had a prior concern and involvement with problems of the poor, and as the language said, maximum feasible participation of the members of the group and the areas to be served. So that resident participation was a clear mandate both by act and by the development of our guidelines.

G: There was no number determined at that time to interpret maximum feasible participation, was there?

B: No, but in the early guidelines there was suggestive language, as I believe, saying maybe some ratio of one-third/one third. Jack Conway very soon came up with a three-legged stool as a symbolism

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of the three legs of government, private institutions, and private citizens, residents. Somewhere in the first draft of the guidelines of February of 1965 I think we made some reference to the percentage or the number. It was flexible though; it was still leaving a wide range of judgment to the local community in the manner in which it would be put together. As I recall, in one of my appearances before the Conference of Mayors I think in the summer of 1965, I stated that our posture was not one of a rigid formula, but flexibility consonant with the community's good faith effort to arrive at a workable organization with representation of these three basic elements in the community. I don't find the citation, I might.

G: The emphasis was on flexibility and no formula though?

B: That's right.

G: Would you think it fair to say that Congress tried to impose a more rigid criteria?

B: Well, subsequently you may recall there was an effort to insert in the language that at least one-third of the representation on the boards of Community Action Agencies would come from the representation of the poor.

G: This takes away the flexibility. Does it have any effect in the community in terms of the representation of the poor?

B: Well, when you make a mathematical formula it makes it sometimes difficult in some communities to meet that formula and still have a working organization. There were many communities that developed rather large representative bodies, and in the 1967 amendments there

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was a provision that said that no Community Action Agency should exceed fifty-one in number. Well, it required us to implement that, to require Community Action Agencies to restructure and eliminate a lot of people whose interest had been generated and had become involved, and the community had some hard decisions to make as to who was to go and who was to remain. That put tensions and strains on local community response to it.

G: As I recall, it was in 1965 that Sargent Shriver made, I think in Chicago, a speech where he coined the use of the phrase "the doctor-patient relationship" in trying to explain what involvement of the poor meant and what Community Action meant. Did you find that Community Action was misunderstood in that first year?

B: Well, I don't know that it was misunderstood, but it was interpreted in different ways by different groups. Those who had political experience, background, and political interest thought of it as something that [to] many communities it meant that the government would control the situation.

G: You're talking about local government?

B: Yes. But because there was a heavy movement in the direction of establishing nonprofit corporations as the vehicle, that was in part due to the fact that the language suggested that a Community Action Program or Community Action Agency might be a municipality, a combination, a county or even a multi-county structure or organization. In order to accomplish this with so many political subdivisions, many communities opted to establish a broader

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structured legally-constituted body, in most instances with the encouragement of the political units within them. In my own community, when we brought the Community Action Agency into existence it was done with a resolution of recognition and approval from the city government, from the county government, from the board of education, and the county government in each of the counties in which we were going to attempt to serve. So that it has quasi-official authority. It very soon emerged, particularly in large urban communities. There was a heavy push for the application of maximum feasible participation. There were representatives of the poor who said that maximum feasible participation meant what the words suggested: maximum meant majority.

There were some elements in some communities that were pushing very hard. I can remember very vividly my trip to San Francisco to try to straighten out the controversial issue with Mayor [John Francis] Shelley and the emerging western edition in other target areas. In my speech out there I said that maximum feasible participation meant an involvement and representation of those to be served by the program. It did not connote dominance or control by any particular element that made up the total mobilization, that there was a sharing of relationship, a sharing of power, and in the spirit of arriving at a consensus would have a meaningful involvement of all groups.

G: Do you think that this was possible to do?

B: I think it was possible to do, and it has been achieved in a number of communities. But in San Francisco I remember very distinctly,

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in the question period a fellow got up and said, "Well, even if your guidelines suggest a tripartite arrangement, it doesn't foreclose us from our efforts to get majority control," and I had to frankly say it did not foreclose. But I did suggest that it probably would not be the most desirable, because once majority control was obtained by the representatives of the poor it might discourage the kind of participation that was necessary to make it a viable organization in which the total resources of the community were to be mobilized. And there was a question of whether the majority of the poor could command the input of the resources necessary to make a viable, working Community Action Agency. I think my assumption was proven out, because while they finally got the Mayor to agree on a majority control, majority representatives on the community action board of the poor, it went through a year or two years of agonizing trying to accommodate themselves to it. It didn't get off to a good start.

G: I'm thinking back, I think it was in 1965, that the first--this may be the wrong word to use, but the first confrontation between city hall in Chicago and the Woodlawn Organization occurred. Is that correct?

B: I think it was in 1965 or 1966. This was an issue raised. TWO [The Woodlawn Organization] was an organization on the south side of Chicago that had been excluded from the Community Action programming and they were seeking direct funding. This was a confrontation. I remember the then-president came down and testified at one of the congressional hearings on the difficulties they were having. [He said]

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that the poverty agency in Chicago was not willing to recognize indigenous organizations but was superimposing its progress center as its own idea of what the community ought to have, which they contended, and I think rightfully so, was not within the spirit of the act to subvert indigenous, viable organizations.

G: Did you find this to be the exception rather than the rule?

B: It was an exception. Chicago is an exception.

G: I agree with you, having lived there.

What I'm getting at is what has been suggested as one of the internal contradictions of Community Action, and that is to polarize the elements rather than to bring them into consensus or into harmony. I'm wondering what the attitude was on the part of the officials here in Washington regarding that kind of polarization or any kind of difference of opinion that might develop between city hall and the other organizations.

B: Our position was not to foster polarization, and most of our functions and efforts during those hectic days of assisting communities to get an understanding of what we regarded as Community Action, was trying to encourage the traditional decision-makers to be open, to arrive at an accommodation of this desire, this acceptance of the word as it was spelled out in the act. By those groups in the community, particularly in the big cities, there was already the seeds that had been germinating in the whole civil rights movement. We were trying to interpret to slow-reacting communities that the day was at hand when they should be willing to sit down and to share some of the

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seats in the decision-making process. At the same time, we were also trying to interpret to this new emerging power that wanted to confront that confrontation in and of itself was not necessarily community action.

G: Do you think that it could have been productive though, or was there the feeling among people in the organization of Community Action here in Washington or out in the outlying regions that felt that confrontation indeed could be productive?

B: I think there was, yes. Not confrontation of the violent type--

G: Excuse me, I want to interrupt. I think the tape is ending and we'll continue this on another tape.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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