INTERVIEW II

DATE: May 19, 1982

INTERVIEWEE: HYMAN BOOKBINDER

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mr. Bookbinder's office, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

G: Let me ask you a few more questions about the operation of the [War on Poverty] task force, Mr. Bookbinder. What sort of records did the task force keep? Did it keep any sort of records of its discussions or its policy decisions at all?

B: I'm not sure what was retained. There were obviously a lot of these quickie memos that each of us would bang out on our own typewriters without carbons. This was pretty much before the very extensive use of Xerox machines. We did have some reproducing equipment, but this is almost twenty years ago and there's been a revolution of paperwork, as you know.

In my own case, it's an interesting question you ask because I myself am confused about what I did in those hectic, final days when I was leaving. Actually, when I decided to leave--it was an agency by then but not too different from the task force days--I did the inevitable. I said, "I've got to go through the papers and see what things that are very personal I'll take and things that are appropriate for me to have." [I had] probably mixed with the official materials items like my doctor's certificates and medical records. But the inevitable happened. Even though I gave the agency a couple months' notice that I would be leaving, I waited until the last few days. I never did get back to do a thorough review of the files. I know my secretary handed me some very personal things that she had.

So I never did [go through my files]. In all these years I've been wondering whatever happened to those many files I kept in the early years of the agency, which would include also whatever I had retained from task force days, because it wasn't that there was a clean beginning of OEO as such. Many of us, by the time the agency had gotten its authorization and appropriations and we were fully legal and authorized, by that time most of the people who became the officials of the agency were already in place. [They were] either on detail from their respective agencies or volunteers with an understanding that this would mean that if they cleared civil service or presidential appointment, they would be there. So the records are combined. I do remember that just a few years ago I asked somebody, as the agency was moving from one title to another title, CSA, *et cetera*, whatever happened to the old files. I was told there is a custodian for all the files, there is a librarian working somewhere. So I don't know what it is, but there is somebody that has responsibility for all those files.

In this stream of consciousness here, let me just say now that I'm sure that the records of the early days are not very good. There was no central authority for it, but I'd be surprised if each of the main characters of that early period didn't retain a good bit of his or her own materials, and I suppose it's collectible. There is a memo I may have mentioned in an earlier conversation, one that we used to kid about, written by Paul Jacobs, and I think Pat Moynihan and a few others, in the very early days, a memo to Shriver. I was quite surprised the first time I saw it; it had things like teaching young men to dress better and so on. It was so out of character with the Paul Jacobs I knew. It was about personal demeanor and so on. Such memos could be very fascinating.

I'm sorry I wasn't really very responsive to that question.

G: No. That's helpful.

B: I just don't remember whether anybody felt the responsibility for it. I must confess that in those days or weeks or months--I don't know how many months that I went by the title of executive officer--I'm sure that I should have done more about having a sense of history and done something about it.

G: Let me ask you about the assignment of papers and the presentation of papers on various subjects. I understand that that's one of the ways in which the task force would work. Someone would prepare, or a group of people would prepare, a paper on Manpower or Community Action or something like that, and then it would be discussed more generally. Do you remember that function?

B: I know that it was going on, but even though I was called executive officer, as I told you in the first session, I came in just enough too late to be involved in the very early processes of the substantive divisions. So I was really handling more the daily paper, meaning paper like the thousands of letters that were coming in offering help or asking for jobs or asking for help. While that was going on, [I was] having to keep the process going because of the absolutely fabulous, fantastic public reaction to what we were doing. [It was] mostly positive, but some negative. We haven't discussed this in any way yet, but I got so bogged down with that that I'm afraid I just can't tell you how the things were done. But some of the names we did mention, the Horowitzes and the others. That was essentially the process that you asked about.

The political parts of the process were going on, too. Shriver was getting signals from this member of the Congress or that one about "you'd better have something in there about"--whether it be rural programs or education or literacy. There was a constant

traffic of ideas and input that we had to be sensitive to in order to get legislation that was finally balanced so that it could get the maximum support.

G: Were any measures excluded or eliminated because it was felt that these programs would not appeal to Congress or would not pass?

B: I have a general feeling that the answer has to be yes, and maybe an emphatic yes, but I can't at this moment document it. Sure, oh, constantly throughout this whole period--and I guess the cynics would look at it cynically; I don't--every now and then there was a comment made or a judgment made that this won't sell, and this won't go. So we weren't only discussing right and wrong, we were discussing what was doable or not doable.

G: Bill Kelly perceived three stages in task force composition in terms of the types of people who were working with the task force, early on being theoreticians, then planners, more or less, and finally people who were operationally oriented. Did you yourself--?

B: Well, I suppose Bill, being a very good and thoughtful process man, would give the process that description. I think it's almost inevitable that those are three things that have to be part of any process. If he meant to imply that there was a sharp division, that up to a certain date we were theoreticians, then we were developers, then we were operational, no. All three were going on in many ways at the same time and many of the same people were involved in all. I'd like to feel that to some very modest extent I was a theoretician. I think I helped develop the program and then I had to help operate it. So that, conceptually, though, surely we went through an inevitable process as described by Kelly.

G: Was there a problem maintaining communications between the leadership of the task force and the various working groups after Shriver became involved with the legislative

phase, and [Adam] Yarmolinsky had that serious automobile accident that put him out of commission? Did you ever feel that it was leaderless at one particular time?

B: Well, I don't want to sound too flippant when I say the following, but I'll just say that in a way from day one until the very end, one could describe the process as leaderless, even though in Sargent Shriver you had a charismatic, active leader. But again it's impressions I'm having now rather than specific recalls. Even we who admired Shriver and tried to be as supportive as possible, we would also make remarks, "That madman, he doesn't know what the hell is going on, doesn't sound like what he said yesterday." There was confusion surrounding it and a feeling that, you know, "Who's really going to put it all together?" There was some of that. Yet at the very same time I've got to say that there comes to mind another general impression, which is, my God, that Shriver, at times, and Yarmolinsky, at times, and [Jack] Conway--I mean at different times they were the number-two people both in the task force and early OEO years--they were involved in everything. My God, how many agencies had situations where every single day we met at eight o'clock in the morning, at nine o'clock in the morning, whatever? For an hour or two, the top fifteen people would just go over everything. We'd all participate actively in anybody else's business, kind of a collective leadership, a kind of group therapy almost, a combination of therapy and management.

But overall I think I've got to give the effort a pretty high mark. We had a vague mandate, but nevertheless--to eliminate poverty in America--we were clearly very, very highly motivated, all of us, whether the motivation came from a personal loyalty to Shriver, or to loyalty to a general commitment to social justice, *et cetera*, which I guess comes closer to my motivation. Then there were people that really knew social

programs, knew government programs and did what they could.

Let me perhaps be a little more responsive . . . maybe you didn't include that in your question. We always had a problem of communications with ongoing agencies. I don't mean just whether a letter or memo went on time, but we were talking different languages. It's true, and one doesn't have to be happy about it, but, understandably, existing agencies wondered whether their own programs, their own mandates, their own areas of responsibility were suddenly being challenged, especially when you had an eager beaver like Shriver as the symbol of a new program. Then not only Shriver but many of us--I have to include myself, I have to try to be honest with myself--were speaking with such overwhelming global terms about "the new world we're going to create, the new this and the new that. We've had enough of this and we've had enough of that." I think we scared the daylights out of people. You remember that conversation I told you about Patton, James Patton? While I admired that advice that "the best thing to do is every now and then clean house and kick them in the ass," that could also be overdone, I guess, and to some extent we overdid it. So that you had even good people, I mean the really good people like Willard Wirtz and other Labor Department people about whom generally it had to be said that their ongoing motivation and interest in the poor was as good as ours, but as I say, even the Labor Department felt, "My God, these upstarts, these young kids coming in, they want to take it all away from us." So in that sense communication was difficult.

G: Let me ask you about the decision to put OEO in the Executive Office of the President. Do you know how that came about and whether there was any--was that Shriver's doing? Did he convince the President to do that, or was that Bill Moyers?

B: I don't think there was any real problem. I don't recall any real problem. Surely it was Shriver's idea. Shriver wanted to be close to the White House. In the task force, we operated on the premise that we needed this, because we did recognize from the beginning this may be--I think I've said this before--perhaps our supreme achievement. We knew that a major goal of ours had to be not only the creation of new programs that would be doing something new and useful, but the stimulation of every existing government office to review their ongoing programs. After all, their ongoing programs had potentially much more manpower and resources to do a job than we could ever have, and that unless these things, this prodding, were done in the name of the President, as a part of the Executive Office of the President, it wouldn't be as effective. So we surely operated that way. I know there was a time--I would have to go back to records for exactly the time and who the characters were--Budget Bureau and ongoing agencies resisted it. I don't think Johnson ever really resisted it. There was a time later on when I think he was perfectly willing to get rid of it, during the Vietnam days. But we just went along. Of course, the first speeches, the first legislation, all of them put it in terms of the Office of the President.

G: In retrospect, do you think it should have been a cabinet-level department?

B: No. No. I don't think I ever felt that way, and I don't feel that way now. I think it could have been a better, a more wholesomely received part of the Executive Office of the President. But I see no reason why it should have been a separate [department], because as we defined then and have been trying to define ever since, the elements going into a successful effort to reduce poverty do in fact require a half dozen other existing departments.

G: Do you recall the fate of this proposed cigarette tax?

B: No. Was that to be thrown into the funds, the poverty funds? It rings just a tiny bell, but I don't think it ever had serious acceptance or I would have remembered more about it.

G: What was Shriver's attitude toward Community Action? Do you recall?

B: Yes, I think I commented briefly the last time. I think like most of us he was basically enthusiastic about it. It was a dramatic idea, it had aspects of Peace Corps philosophy and motivation in it. But he had mixed feelings nevertheless, as I did, as many of us did, as to the extent to which you can upset the present establishment, work against the present establishment at the community level and try and get something good out of it. Therefore we fluctuated to some extent, we compromised. I've seen some decisions over the period of time both in the task force days [and] out of the first year of Community Action that were seemingly contradictory decisions. To some extent they were politically motivated. You know, how far can you get in a certain place? But as I look back on it now, although I had those feelings to some extent even then, maybe it's a classic case of a good idea being implemented to some extent in such an extreme and literal way that it became counterproductive. I would say it's a good idea to mobilize the people themselves, the objects of the effort, as well as every private agency and every private group committed to social justice and so on. Get them involved, don't look only to the government, but do get the government involved too. The idea still sounds very, very good.

But to repeat what I've said to you once before, there were at least some people both at the national level and surely at the local level who really had something close to sort of social revolutionary goals in mind. They were so persuaded that the system is

rotten, they were so persuaded that the welfare of the very poor will never really be relieved until you make fundamental changes in our society. And then they would have various definitions of fundamental changes. Some would go as far as saying that "the capitalist system is wrong." It won't do it. Well, Shriver, in private meetings and to some extent publicly, had to agree that although he found it difficult to agree with Mayor [Richard] Daley and with other leading mayors, who for other reasons were not the most popular people in our ranks, on substantive program ideas, he had to agree that you can't have a federal agency and a federal mandate and federal resources subsidize and promote a revolution against the mayors of our cities. And I did tell you, did I not, about that very first memo I ever saw?

G: Do you recall who wrote that?

B: It was either written by or with the knowledge of people like Dick Boone, Eric Tolmach--does the name Eric Tolmach mean something to you?

G: Yes. He was from the Labor Department.

B: It was in that group that that stuff emanated, but I just don't remember now, and I don't know whether you found that initial memo or how far back you've gone--

G: I'd love to see it.

B: --but it was part of a big black book, I remember, among the first things that were being produced. I think it was probably in the period between authorization and appropriations that much of this stuff was being produced. But whatever the language is, and I may be inaccurate in the way I'm portraying the substance, but the essence of it, I'm sure I'm right, it was in effect a call to a political revolution against the city halls of America. And I know I had a fit over it.

G: So at least there was recognition within the group that people had different ideas about how Community Action would work?

B: Oh, yes, sure, surely. Now, as you know--you must know by now, having seen all the characters--any number of people have tried to put down the history as to who first used the words, what was the first use of the phrase--I'm confused now about what it was. But I have maintained--and it could ultimately be a reflection of the fact that I was not involved in some of those early, inside theoreticians' meetings, because I was not. But I continue to believe that for many, many weeks, maybe months, there was just an innocent acceptance of a phrase that by itself nobody could object to. The phrase sounded like motherhood. I could be wrong.

G: You mean maximum feasible participation?

B: Maximum feasible participation, Community Action. You know, sure, how can you not be for "maximum feasible"? The word feasible made it a realistic, doable thing.

G: In looking through the legislation and the reports, "maximum feasible" was used elsewhere, too. It was a phrase, maximum feasible something else.

B: Was that phrase included in the old New Haven, the Ford Foundation program, the predecessor program?

G: I don't know. I don't know.

B: Then of course, when it came down to it, the big battles were over what is "maximum feasible" and what is "participation" and "one-third."

But I don't know whether you mean to ask me before we're through, but let me answer my own question here. As I look back over that period, with all the chaos and difficulties and so on that developed, I'm glad we went through that period. Surely,

there's a greater good that can be defined from that period than evil or confusion. Not that much harm was done that we should be sorry we did it, because in the course of it--there's no reason why at this point I shouldn't give you my bottom line about the whole poverty program. My bottom line about the poverty program is that if we did nothing else, if that whole effort, that whole call, that whole appeal, the whole effort did nothing more than help five, ten, twenty, maybe a hundred thousand people in this country--and I wish somebody could make an accurate estimate of that--but if thousands of Americans were helped in the course of that period to get a better understanding of the potentials of the democratic system, the potentials of our particular American system, learn how to use it and to become part of it, as many of them did--some of them are now members of the Congress, some of them became mayors, many of them became very respectable members of United Ways--I think that's a major, major contribution that we made to a better America. I have no doubt about that. And, sure, there are people who try to do a social kind of cost effectiveness; I don't know what the tools [are that] one uses really to measure how cost effective [the program was]. I have a feeling it's a pretty good story there.

G: It really provided an apprenticeship for a whole new element of political leaders.

B: Yes, it did that, and it also helped put the problems of America in a more realistic context. Yes, we had problems, but we also had a country that could be made to care and we had a system [which], while not as responsive as it ought to be, can be made to be more responsive, as it has been.

G: At the time the program was being set up and the appropriation was being passed, how did you yourself see community participation or participation by the poor?

B: Well, I had mixed feelings from the beginning, but emotionally I was as responsive as the next one, I guess. It's a good idea, you know, because what we have to do for the poor--I know this is going to sound like a cliche again, what I'm going to say, because there are a lot of cliches involved in all of this. I did believe and I still do believe that an important goal had to be at the time, as it must be today, to give poor people, disadvantaged people, no matter how you look at them, our target group, not only that extra income and that extra opportunity to provide their own income, but to try to bring them into the system psychologically. [They needed to know] that they counted for something, that we were interested in what they thought, even if there was a certain amount--I hate to use the word, but I will use it--of phoniness involved. I think there was some phoniness involved. Maybe not a conscious phoniness, but some of the most ardent supporters of the idea of involving the poor, requiring that at least a third or at least 15 per cent or at least 50 per cent of the poor participate, those people didn't really have, I believe, that much confidence that from the poor would really come those marvelous, ingenious ideas that would get them out of poverty and solve the whole problem. And, then, to some extent they were manipulated.

Having said that, I still say the basic idea was sound, as long as you didn't expect too much from that process and as long as you didn't give the poor people themselves [veto power over programs]. That is, those who were there only because they were poor people, not as people who had teaching experience or something else, but they were there only because they were poor. You couldn't give them veto power over programs, because some of them had some bad ideas, clearly. So it was perfectly all right to try it, and we tried it even at a national level.

This doesn't merit more than a tiny footnote in the history of the program, but when involving the poor became a standard aspect of our program, I had the general assignment, both in the end of the task force days and in the first of the OEO days, to mobilize the private sector and institute a series of advisory committees, so that through the advisory committees we could get the different sectors of the community [involved]. [This was done] not only for what I gather you want to discuss next time, for political purposes, to get their support. There was that, but I want to assure you now, and we can discuss it further next time, this was not one of those cynical things, "Let's pretend we want people's advice so we can get their support." There really was more than that; it was also to get their participation in the program.

I suggested at one point, "Hey, we were saying that every community has to have a committee of poor people. Why don't we have a national advisory committee made up of poor people so that poor people from different districts would also come together occasionally and exchange experiences and insights and have a group of them?" And we called that the Community Representatives Advisory Committee--yes, CRAC--Community Representatives Advisory Committee. I think later on after I left they may have changed that name. We had some twenty or twenty-five people who were selected by as many local poverty programs as individuals who were showing a particular skill in articulating the needs of the poor and who were already involved, either as volunteers in their own program or maybe even as paraprofessionals in some of the funded programs. I must tell you that psychologically, emotionally, for me it was the most gratifying thing I did in the whole period, even though at this moment I can't think of a single idea or policy recommendation that emanated from that group that was of any

lasting consequence. But the fact of their involvement was for me personally a very gratifying thing. I think [it was] a very useful thing, too, to help set a tone.

Let me tell you one of my favorite anecdotes. Do you want to take time for an anecdote?

G: Sure.

B: An anecdotal index of the kind of great emotional satisfaction one can get out of being involved in this kind of a program. At the very first meeting of this group, which I guess had to be not task force days but early OEO days, we got this selection of people and they came to Washington. Shriver sort of opened the meeting and had to rush to the Hill on appropriations or something, and I remember I chaired the meeting that day. We went around the room; we said we'd start the meeting by just going around the room and asking each person to take five or ten minutes to give us just a quick, quick picture of the community they came from and the nature of the problem. And we had all kinds. We had rural communities, big city ghetto, inner city type of programs, Indian reservations, textile mills.

Anyway, about the fourth or fifth person that I called was a Reverend Bread, I think Scott Bread was his name, an Indian living on a reservation--or was it off the reservation? I don't know. I guess off the reservation. He took about ten minutes and described poverty in the Indian community that he knew. It was such an eloquent and moving business that when he got through there was a stunned silence, and then I went to the next one. The next one was a rather older man from a New England textile village that was shut down, the textile plant, and I thought he was going to describe that. Instead he said, "Mr. Bookbinder, I can tell you about my problems here, but we just heard the

Reverend Bread tell about Indian poverty. I don't even want to tell you my story. I think we ought to take the rest of the day just to ask ourselves, 'What can we do about his problem?' Let's at least try to solve his problems."

And as I'm telling you now, I'm getting goose pimples again telling you that story. It was such a, you know, if you took a hundred Hollywood script writers and said, "Write us a nice, emotional, sentimental story about how people care for one another," they couldn't have made up a more moving thing than what we heard coming right from the depths of that man's heart. I remember--

G: Did anything come out of it? Did any of the suggestions--?

B: Well, no. I said before that nothing ever came out that changed policy, but what we got was, well, what I like to think the whole country was getting bit by bit over a period of time was a greater understanding, a compassionate understanding, of what the nature of our problems was. And these people did understand. I thought it was wonderful that they sensed the size of what had to be done and had put each of their problems in perspective.

There was sort of a funny sequel to this. We shouldn't take the time, but I like to tell the story, so I will. When that meeting was over--it was not open to the press at that time--a reporter from the *Washington Post* who has since died, a marvelous reporter called--with an E, a woman reporter, I'll try to think of the name.

G: Eve--

B: Eve Edstrom. That is right. She came to ask me what had happened at the meeting, because it was an interesting idea. And I told her some of this, and I told her this story about the Indian's condition. Then I said to her, "You know, it reminds me of that

marvelous Egyptian proverb, 'I cried because I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet.'" And she was moved by that comment, and in the article the next morning in the *Post*, she told about the meeting and quoted me as saying, "Bookbinder said that it reminded him. . . ." I got to my office about eight o'clock that morning and there was already a note on my desk from a colleague of mine, a marvelous man, Gottlieb, David Gottlieb, the Job Corps Gottlieb. And the note was "Hey, Bookbinder," he says, "that's not an Egyptian proverb, it's an Indian proverb. Don't we have enough trouble with those Arabs without giving them more credit than they deserve?" (Laughter) That made my day.

G: That's great.

B: But anyway, that committee, by the way, the CRAC committee, as I say I cannot say that it made any contributions to policy, but it's my way of saying to you that the involvement of the poor had a meaning and a significance that goes beyond the specific roles or the specific achievements that flow directly from their participation.

I remember a day that Vice President Humphrey came by. I don't know whether the record yet indicates this, but after his election in 1964, he asked me to serve as a special assistant to him, working in OEO but serving as a special assistant to him. I had known him for quite a number of years, and I did that. You know about his role in the poverty program. He served as sort of chairman, at least presiding officer of the inter-agency coordinating committee. At my request he decided to come by at either the second or third meeting of this CRAC committee, and his people had told me [it was] a very busy day, he's coming in for a five minute drop-in. I said, "That's good enough. That's fine. They'll be very pleased to see the Vice President of the United States, and he

can say a few words to them."

When he came by with the inevitable aides and Secret Service, I merely introduced him to the group. He said, "No, I'd rather listen for a few minutes." You know, this man had this reputation of always making long-winded speeches. He sat down next to me and I have photographs of that--I don't know whether it's one of those on my wall, but it was a fantastic--oh, that's the group by the way. That's the CRAC group up in that corner, that picture. I'll show it to you later. But Humphrey sat down next to me and just started to listen, and he listened, and he listened. After about fifteen or twenty minutes, I see him motioning to one of his aides, so I lean over and I apologize, "I'm sorry. I know you can't stay." He says, "Oh, don't apologize to me. I just told them to cancel my other meetings." And he stayed for two hours with us, listening for a while, but then he started to ask them questions and he participated in this. He was absolutely attracted to this group of poor people, intelligently, sometimes stumbling for words, but relating their experience.

So as I look back on this development of "participation," in hundreds of American cities, their involvement provided the first time that the head of the local bank or the president of the board of education or others from the establishment, no matter how motivated they had been before in general terms toward philanthropy and doing the right thing, for many of them it was probably the first time they'd ever sat in a room with somebody who'd never graduated from public school, somebody who was on welfare. And it had to do a lot of good in this country.

G: Did the composition of that group change from year to year or did it--?

B: Our group?

G: Yes.

B: Yes, there were some changes. I remained in the program for only four years, so I'm not quite sure I know what happened later on. In addition, if you're interested in doing it now, I'll tell you the other kinds of committees that we formed. I did talk to you about the Public Officials Advisory Committee, did I not?

G: Yes.

B: So you know that we did that. That was innovative and that was picked up, I am told, by other standing departments in government. Of course, in these last twenty years there's been a lot of developments for which we don't at all seek to claim any credit, so don't misunderstand what I'm saying. But the whole idea of intergovernmental relations and the need for exchange between governors and mayors, I mean, that's standard now in government. We didn't create that, but what we did create--at least at the time, I was told that it was the first time that in one single room, related to one program, we'd have sitting around the table several governors, several mayors, several city council chairmen or city managers or their top representatives with an exchange of views, which was kind of a useful thing for us to do.

But in addition, we found it very useful to have a labor advisory committee, and the major thing that emanated from that was motivating some unions to become contractors for Job Corps. In the building trades for example, the Operating Engineers now run, still run Job Corps centers.

G: How did those work out? I want to go into that in more detail.

B: The Job Corps centers?

G: The ones that were union-operated?

B: I really must say that I have been operating on the premise that they must have worked out fairly well, because they're the only ones at least that have come to my attention in recent years from general reading, where the same sponsorship is there. Now, I can't believe that administration after administration would approve programs that were not proving themselves. There, of course, the important thing is that with such a heavy proportion of black enrollees in Job Corps, and with the decades' old problem of whether blacks can get into the building trades, to the extent that this program helped break down those barriers and secured qualified black people to be in the building trades, it's got to be considered a very, very major achievement. Now, how many and how cost effective, I just don't have the information to give you a ready response on that.

We also had a women's advisory group; it was even before "women's liberation." We thought that the greater involvement of women's organizations both in relation to Job Corps but also general programs was important. We had that. We had religious groups' activity that wasn't exactly like the others, but we tried to involve religious groups. We had a business advisory committee that was quite remarkable for business groups to come to a social program and to see what they could do and make recommendations on summer employment and a lot of other things. Was there anything else? I think there were one or two others, but I just this moment don't recall them.

G: That's quite a few.

B: And at the end, we had this clumsy title, we called it the Office of National Councils--the initials were O-N-C-O. They called me "ONCO Bookie" at one point. Oh, National Councils and Organizations. Yes. Office of National Councils and Organizations. We had been called Office of Private Groups.

G: Let's move on to the Job Corps, and again primarily at the task force period. Initially, there seems to have been a move within the task force for the Defense Department to play a rather large role in the Job Corps, and then that was eliminated. Do you recall the pros and cons there on that?

B: Yes, yes. I'd not remembered that at all, but you're jogging my memory now. I think that my immediate feeling about it is like the one I probably had then, too. I think mostly it was discarded on general political, psychological grounds. It was the wrong symbol, it was the wrong connection. It was like we were picking up disadvantaged kids to route them to the army. I think that Adam Yarmolinsky was favorable to it, was he not?

G: He was from the Defense Department.

B: From the Defense Department. I think he gave it kind of a--it may have even stemmed from him, but I'm not sure, I don't want to guess.

G: I know Willard Wirtz was opposed to it.

B: Yes, and others. It didn't get serious consideration for too long a time. Now, in the course of the legislation, was that seriously considered?

G: I think it was before the submitting.

B: Before. I don't think it was ever debated on the floor of the Congress.

G: Is it accurate to say that the Labor Department wanted more emphasis on youth employment?

B: Than other things, things other than employment, you mean?

G: Yes.

B: Well, I'm sure it was, why would they not? That's not a remarkable thing, though, because surely from day one the idea of singling out or stressing the young people

dimension of the program, that was basic. After all, we had not only Job Corps but Neighborhood Youth Corps and literacy programs and all of that. So much of it was youth-oriented, and the basic premise, to say the obvious, was that it may not be too late to save a certain generation, the young people.

G: Do you recall the discussion and debate within the task force over which group of kids the Job Corps was trying to help, whether it was the very bottom of the barrel or a level above that where there was a better chance of [success]?

B: Oh, yes, yes, sure, there was lots of that.

G: I think they called it "the cream of the crap."

B: Yes, just exactly what I was going to say. "The cream of the crap" business, and I think that, yes, there were a lot of discussions. Some of them were flippant, some of them were very serious. But I think that--again, maybe I'm being much too subjective, and I hope I'm not attributing to others what I myself felt and still feel--the feeling, surely for Job Corps, was that while we cannot and should not say that anybody no matter what his criminal record or social behavior can come in, because that would jeopardize the program itself, we said that "Yes, indeed, we've got to have minimum conditions and also maximum conditions for entry to Job Corps. It's not intended for those who with economic recovery would just be picked up because they're there and they're available."

I think that became the dominant view. You know, if I could try to describe it arithmetically on a scale from zero to ten, ten being the most able and the most competent, we were probably looking for the, let's say, something like the two to the six category for the Job Corps. I remember comments like "We don't want the kids who are too good for Job Corps to be getting into Job Corps," whatever those vague words meant.

And Neighborhood Youth Corps was available; that's another part of the program.

And the women's [Job Corps]. There was a lot of discussion about the women, whether we should have [a program] for women at all. Then with Edith Green and the others, I remember now there was a major--we were always being badgered by Edith and the others that we were not doing enough to provide it for the women.

G: Well, when the legislation was sent up, there was no provision for women at all in the Job Corps.

B: Yes, did the draft specifically say young men?

G: Yes, and she jumped on that right away.

B: She succeeded, and I'm glad she did, I'm glad she did. Because the women's corps was very important. I think again one of the more exciting days, if I had to pick out key days of being gratified--I may again be imprecise in the detail, but the impression is right. I remember that great day when one of the first women Job Corps graduates was brought to Washington to be acknowledged. She was a woman from California who became the first black airline stewardess for United Airlines, I think it was. I don't know how many people understand the significance of that kind of a breakthrough, because until that point in 1965 or 1966--it's still true to some extent now, but surely then to be an airline stewardess meant you had to be among the very top, best groomed, best trained, most articulate, charming, intelligent, you know, all of that. And to think that a Job Corps graduate could qualify for that kind of thing--and a black one yet! Just a most remarkable day. I'll never forget it.

I ought to make the comment, if I haven't made it anywhere before--in any case, I feel so strongly about it that I don't care if I make it a second time. *De facto*, to use a

cliche, I think the poverty program did as much for civil rights breakthroughs as any other thing we've done, including even the historic 1964 Civil Rights Act. The goals and the legal protections that we wrote into civil rights laws were historic and basic. But the poverty programs provided the vehicles for carrying out these more general, abstract concepts, whether it be Head Start in Mississippi or any one of a thousand programs around the country, both in terms of participation of black people, the employment of black people, and the management roles and the prominence given to black people. That doesn't mean we didn't make mistakes of excess. Sometimes black people may have been promoted faster than they should have, but that's part of the very difficult question about how affirmative action is carried on. But we surely can feel good about the contributions we made to civil rights progress.

G: Do you recall how the decision was made to delegate the Neighborhood Youth Corps to the Labor Department?

B: No, except that there was a big fuss about it, but I don't remember the details.

G: Wirtz wanted the Job Corps, is that right?

B: Yes. And actually that delegation was done by the time the legislation was put up, wasn't it? Yes.

G: Yes, it was in the legislation.

B: I don't remember. I don't know what it is even that you're alluding to. I know that there was a battle, but--

G: I'll go into this in more detail, but as long as we're on the subject let me ask you, do you think that OEO was able to do an adequate job of monitoring the delegated programs like Neighborhood Youth Corps, [those] run by other agencies?

B: It didn't do it. I mean, all that we know looking back [is that] obviously there were gaps. But on the other hand, we were if not the first, surely among the very first agencies of the federal government that adopted the whole idea of an office that policed programs. Edgar May was there at one time.

G: Oh, inspection. Office of inspection.

B: Inspection. Bill Haddad. We had an active operation going for the purpose of evaluation and to do all kinds of firefighting.

G: Whose idea was that, do you know? To set that up?

B: Whose idea? Wasn't there something comparable to that in Peace Corps? I think there was. It might be worth looking up. I think that's what [inspired it]. But Bill Haddad was the first guy and he was very interesting. Are you interviewing him?

G: Yes.

B: Well, he can give you the whole story. But he was, you know--you know what kind of character he is, real gung ho. And I think some useful things happened as a result of the reports we would occasionally get at these daily meetings. I think a good part of the agenda each day flowed from the alarms that we were getting about problems.

But now your basic question was whether OEO did a good enough job. No, if that's the question, the answer is no--it didn't do a good enough job because we know we had a lot of problems that continued.

G: Well, I'm talking specifically about the delegated programs. The programs that were the operating responsibility of, say, the Labor Department.

B: Of other agencies? Yes, my mind's getting clear on that now. I guess I don't even remember to what extent we tried to examine NYC programs, but we had problems with

it, because it impacted on the reputation of the program generally. But no, I suppose I would have to say that we were so bogged down with problems implementing the programs we did have responsibility for that we probably paid less attention to the delegated programs. Community Action was such a headache. It was terrible. We had scandals of all kinds, complaints of all kinds. Job Corps was our program, and there were beatings in the local bar, and neighborhoods that were protesting having it in their neighborhood. Those are the kinds of difficult problems we dealt with.

G: Sure.

B: So the big picture sometimes got lost.

In Neighborhood Youth Corps, what was the nature of the--I remember a continuing problem. Was it our problem or was it Labor Department's problem? The point was constantly being made in Congress and elsewhere that it isn't enough to give these kids the jobs; what are we doing about training them? Just making income available or jobs available wasn't really carrying out the basic goals of the poverty program. I know that did come back to us constantly: "What can we do? What can we suggest?" Of course, later on, much later on, we delegated Head Start, too.

G: With regard to Job Corps, did the task force people believe that the Employment Service would do an adequate job of recruiting for the Job Corps?

B: No, no. Let me put it as kindly as I can. We accepted the basic assessment, some would say prejudice, that the Employment Service was just loaded down with bigoted reactionaries who really didn't give a damn about changes. Even now, I think probably there were good reasons for having that attitude about Employment Service, especially in many states in the Union that never had been touched yet by the civil rights revolution

and other changes. So there was a lot of skepticism about that, and that's why we supplemented Employment Service recruiting with other systems for recruiting, including WICS [Women in Community Service] and JACS [Joint Action in Community Service] and stuff like that.

G: How did the Employment Service work out?

B: I really can't make an assessment of it. I really don't know. I do know that we had recruiting deficiencies for a while, but also there was a substantial period of time when the problem was how do we process the literally tens of thousands of appreciation cards that came in from kids in the early stages. I remember they were just sending in post cards saying they were interested. We weren't keeping on top of that. I just don't have enough of a recall.

G: Do you recall the conservation lobby in Congress advancing the concept that a certain percentage of Job Corps projects should be conservation projects and making their support conditional on that formula?

B: We did do that. We did do that, yes. Oh, sure.

G: Do you recall how that was worked out, though, or what the details of it were?

B: No, but I imagine that through a person like Gillis Long I'm sure that either some explicit or implicit arrangements were there. But just like we set goals--again, I'm not sure whether they were firm or flexible goals--on women's Job Corps centers, we would also say we had to have some, it wasn't so much conservation, we thought of them as rural centers as against urban centers. We never did call any of ours conservation centers, I don't think. Or do they now have centers that are called conservation centers, Job Corps Conservation Corps?

G: It was certainly the conservational lobby in Congress that was--

B: Lobby, yes, that wanted them in some places.

G: Let's go on to the education component. I noticed that preschool education was something that was discussed, and the whole concept that later became known as Head Start. Why wasn't this in the initial legislation, do you know? Why wasn't there a title specifically for Head Start?

B: The only explanation I can offer on the basis of my memory is that the Head Start concept was not a program that had been refined or defined to the point where it seemed to require explicit legislation--it was one of those things cooking. And from the beginning, once Head Start was before us, I don't remember anybody saying that this was not a thing that was contained within the mandate that the legislation gave us. Of course, as to whether it's wise or not, whether we should really seek to have twenty-five thousand kids by this Christmas, those are administrative challenges, but not the basic authority. So I surely don't think--but tell me if you've found elsewhere because I'm curious to know--anybody's ever made the case that we deliberately kept it from the Congress. It just wasn't developed sufficiently up to that point. And then of course it became the big star.

G: Did HEW want to administer the programs that dealt with education? The poverty programs?

B: Well, whether the department as such ever explicitly made the demand, I don't know, but surely both in Labor and HEW we always felt that there was competition for responsibility. Yes, that's my recall at this moment. And Interior, Interior as far as Job Corps. The rural ones, Interior had a role. But they were represented in the task force.

Every one of these departments was represented.

G: Do you recall how the adult education provision was added?

B: Added when? It was in almost from the beginning.

G: It was. But whose idea was it? You have talked about literacy.

B: Well, I think we always knew there would be *a* literacy component. My suggestion, which was turned down with a lot of compliments, but turned down, was that we say that we want to engage one major battle at a time. The first one, I urged, should be aimed at wiping out illiteracy, and I would have put the whole money into that. Oh, you would have had to have maybe a few other things. . . . There always had been adult education, so how you planned it with the ongoing adult education was a problem, and how much you had to put in to get congressional support. It was a rather modest program, as I remember, at the beginning.

G: Then you also had the VISTA program. Did the Peace Corps fear any competition from VISTA in terms of recruiting or attention or appropriations? Do you think they saw it as a potential rival?

B: No, I never sensed that. They were rather proud of VISTA, it seemed to me, because the same kind of people were interested in it, and they thought they had inspired VISTA.

G: But you never encountered any resistance to the VISTA idea from the Peace Corps?

B: No, but from the very beginning and even before the beginning, so to speak, there was some advocacy along the lines that the two programs ought to be together. It ought to be a single program, I don't know where housed, but that you should have [one program]. Then, of course, you had the bigger issue of general national service of which both Peace Corps and VISTA could be parts. But no, the idea of competition or jealousy or rivalry,

no, I never saw that. It may have been there, but I never sensed it.

G: The VISTA concept was considered by some to be a liability since it had been defeated legislatively the year before. Was there any concern in attaching it to the poverty program for this reason?

B: I don't recall. Later on, we got into VISTA problems because of allegations by some governors and mayors of overzealous VISTA kids who were coming in to challenge the establishment. You know, it was another aspect of the Community Action problem.

G: That was my next question. Did the task force envision VISTA volunteers doing community organization work?

B: I feel at least some of the designers thought of that, in the same way that they thought of Community Action as being political. Nobody would say political, but to be prods to examining the status quo in political relationships. And some of them were in fact somewhat eager in what they did.

G: What was your idea at the time the legislation was approved of what VISTA volunteers ought to do?

B: I had no ideas that were different from what was described as a basic standard objective as written into the legislation. These would be people who for minimum income, expenses, would teach local people the processes of self-help, of mutual help, of community work. It was surely different from Peace Corps in that VISTA volunteers wouldn't themselves be teachers; I didn't think of that. I don't recall whether there was really any conflict in what the purpose was. The relationship of the VISTA volunteers to the poverty programs, to Community Action, to the governors, to the mayors, that became a continuing issue just as it was for Community Action. The relationship of *our*

programs, the ones that we funded, to ongoing things was always a difficult one, but not as to what we hoped VISTA would do. At least at this point I don't recall any major conflicts.

G: But the way you describe it, it sounds to me more like it's Community Action sort of work, community organization work than it would be--

B: Except that they would be going into some places where there was no Community Action. If it's an isolated Indian village or an isolated agricultural community, you wouldn't have Community Action. But where there was Community Action, the whole business of relationships between Community Action and VISTA was a continuing source, to some extent, of problems. At least we had to think through the relationship. Then after a while I'd think that VISTA volunteers were in fact assigned to Community Action programs, but it didn't start immediately that way.

G: Did the task force consider what impact that would have on the volunteers themselves, whether it would be, say, sensitizing a bunch of white, middle-class suburbanites, that this would be a way to make the poverty problem better understood by people who were not normally involved with it?

B: Well, sure, that was articulated as an objective, but--and I want to be sure about this, I don't want to start inventing what may not have been--I think this was a concession. Concession is not the right word; this was a manifestation of another sort of concurrent social goal of Shriver's and many of us also, which is that aside from poverty as such, young people especially, but people of all ages, should be given an opportunity to serve. I've always been friendly to the idea of national service, general national service. So that one might have designed a VISTA program to help in the environmental objectives of our

society. It might have been designed to advance cultural aspirations of America. It happened to have been--not happened, it was at that point thought of in terms of helping the poverty program. But as much as it was conceived as a vehicle for giving specific tools to people like the Peace Corps did elsewhere, it was also I think yielding to another goal for society, that people motivated by the poverty program would also be motivated generally. People ought to care for one another, and if somebody, if a rich kid from White Plains or a poor kid, but mostly they were college graduates, wanted to serve, we thought we would be getting, we ought to give them a way to serve.

I don't know whether it's still true in task force days, but surely later on we asked ourselves the same questions that Peace Corps found itself asking. How do we get other than white, rich, college kids? How do we get older women, how do we get older men, how do we get blacks, how do we get labor people to become VISTA volunteers? There were conscious efforts to recruit them, with some success--not great, but with some success.

G: Well, let me ask you some questions about the legislative fight in 1964 that the program enacted. Did the White House help at all?

B: Oh, you say help at all? Sure, I'd have to say yes.

G: Do you recall anything, say, that Lyndon Johnson did to help the poverty program become law? I'm talking about specifics here. Did he call a particular senator that you know of?

B: I just can't remember that type of thing. I'm sure that if I had files around I could either support or reject things that are being asserted. I don't remember, but Shriver was the full-time organizer and lobbyist. I think we went over a bit of that last time. He was that

kind of guy. He was very effective. I mean, after all, he probably got more praise in the press generally for how well he'd done in Peace Corps, both to promote it and to run it, so he was a great promoter. Johnson, after all, in 1964 was a new, unexpected president of the whole country and couldn't be expected to do too much. But whatever else might be asserted about his later preoccupation with Vietnam, *et cetera*, one can't fault a record that shows him asking for this War on Poverty within literally two or three months after becoming president, seeking the legislation, wanting very much to make a major speech on it, which he did, getting the message over. Considering the nature of this thing, to get the legislation adopted by August and the appropriations by October has to be considered a pretty good record. Surely nobody can contend that it was done without the support of the President.

Now, the relationships between Shriver and Johnson--of course, I guess books are already being written and many more will be written about the Johnson years and the Shriver years and the Kennedy years. I don't claim to be able to add any particular insight into that situation, but everybody knew, including Johnson, that Shriver was not the most popular Kennedy.

G: With the Kennedys.

B: With the Kennedys. With the Kennedys. And that for him, it was kind of--I don't know whether he ever consciously thought about this, but LBJ could be nicer and more outgoing to a Shriver than to a Kennedy, as such. And he was. After all, he didn't have to ask Shriver to be the head of the poverty program. It was a great recognition of what Shriver had done in one program, and asked him to continue that kind of leadership in another one. He did that. I can't recall the specifics, but I know that Johnson participated

in several ceremonial functions, the kind that contribute to an acceptance of a program and so on. He did that. There's that picture on the wall of a meeting in the Oval Office. He brought in the National Advisory [Council]. I never did mention the National Advisory Council, which is the one established by the law itself.

G: Well, let me ask you about the church-state issue. This was something that came up at the congressional hearings on the legislation. With regard to the educational programs. How were you going to resolve this? Do you remember that issue?

B: No, I don't. I don't remember that issue at all. Isn't that odd? Not at all.

G: Do you recall dealing with Adam Clayton Powell in getting the legislation passed? Of course, he was the committee chairman in the House.

B: Yes, yes, he once sent a telegram to the President and issued a press release demanding Bookbinder's expulsion from the program.

G: And Shriver's, too, I think it was.

B: Yes, and Shriver's, too. What had I done? Isn't that funny I don't remember what caused it?* I'll think of it in just a moment, but something was attributed to me in the press that led him to demand my immediate discharge. And I can't remember it. But two weeks later we made up. He said he now understood it, everything worked out. Now, what specifically is your question about Adam Clayton Powell?

G: Dealing with Powell to get the legislation passed. For example, let me ask you this. Did Powell have something in New York City, in Harlem, that he wanted before he would send the program forward?

---

*There was a press story about a speech I made that suggested that OEO programs could, in the future, be spun off to cabinet departments. Powell was furious. --H.B.

B: I don't remember, but I wouldn't be surprised. I think, rather, it went to jurisdiction. One thing, it wasn't always very clear where this bill would go in the Congress. Although much of it was Labor and Education, therefore it should go to Powell, wasn't there some early problem, because the bill was so comprehensive, as to whether it might not be a more--do you remember anything? Wasn't there something about whether it should go to a different congressional committee and not his?

G: Well, there was enormous rivalry.

B: Because there was Interior, and the Job Corps, maybe it should go to more than one committee and Powell had this, I recall now, insistence that it was his bill. And he got it, it was his bill. He wanted a permanent role in it. He may have gotten involved in the Labor Department jurisdiction bit, because he was a friend of the Labor Department. But whether he got any particular thing in New York out of it, I just don't know.

G: I think there was a suggestion that it should be a select committee, since it crossed the boundaries of a number of [standing committees].

B: Yes, something, yes, yes. And he did not like that. He wanted it to be his bill, yes. He had a fondness for Shriver that came out, but there were also problems later on in specific programs. But he was helpful. Basically, I would have to say that he helped get it through in the time that it did. It was his kind of program, surely.

G: There was a rural provision for what was called a land reform proposal that Congress rejected. Do you recall?

B: Land reform proposal? I don't remember that phrase. I don't remember that phrase. Sorry.

G: It was a program to allow a corporation to purchase land and resell it to the poor.

B: It never did make its way into the legislation, did it?

G: No.

B: I know we never did carry out that. I don't remember it. My God, there's been a lot of stuff.

G: Let me ask you about the Adam Yarmolinsky incident. Do you recall the details of that?

B: What details are you--I mean, there were people gunning for him from his work at the Defense Department. They were not going to have him become the number-two man. I know that. Then the question, the big question, the painful question that I know persisted for a long time--and I still don't know the answer to it. I don't remember the details, but [the question was] whether Shriver did or didn't have to cave in. You know, in the shop and elsewhere there continued to be speculation about that.

G: Was it primarily the North Carolina delegation, do you know?

B: Yes, I guess it was largely that. In those days the threat of filibusters and that kind of thing was always very frightening, but it was a very bad. . . . I remember, again it's just an impression, the day everybody was stunned. Some of us were so involved, bogged down in our day-to-day work that we didn't follow the day-to-day thing. But suddenly one day word came in, "Adam is through. The deal has been made." I don't know what phrases were used, but the idea that it ended that way was just very shocking. Even though Adam, I have to say, I would say it with him right in the room, and someday he may read it, he deserved all of the admiration and acclaim he got for his brilliance and for his work, but he wasn't the most beloved character around. But even those that did not like him because they felt that he was the kind of taskmaster--he was at least equal to Shriver in being a taskmaster, but with not as many endearing, lovable qualities

surrounding him. But it didn't matter. Around the place I remember that whole business of despair and embarrassment and hurt and anger that "these bastards on the Hill" could do this type of thing.

G: There's some indication that it was a response to a situation where Shriver indicated that he had not yet designated anyone for the second position, deputy director's job, and that congressmen had indications that he had in fact designated Yarmolinsky for that, and that Shriver was caught in this position of having told the committee one thing and--

B: Yes, I think you're right, now that you're telling me. Sure, there was some dissembling there. I can tell you this, that there's no question in my mind but from about the second or third day that Adam ever came into the task force to help out, that it was understood, nobody challenged the fact that he was the heir-apparent, because that's not the right phrase, but he was the designee. He was the man that would be the number two. There was no question about that. But Shriver may not have been lying either in that there was no explicit, firm guarantee.

G: Did it hurt the program that Yarmolinsky was forced out, do you think?

B: Do you mean politically, did it hurt? Or substantively?

G: No, I mean in terms of the operations.

B: Well, how could I know? It's hard to tell. I mean, how does one know? How does one know?

G: Well, he didn't have an assistant director for a good while, did he?

B: Let me see, when did--who else then came in to be [assistant director]?

G: Well, Conway did ultimately.

B: Conway came in after the legislation. It was right after the legislation?

G: No, I think he was working with Community Action for a while, wasn't he?

B: Yes, he came in through--oh, yes, that's right. He was Community Action first. So what did happen when Adam [left]? Finally what in fact happened at that point? Was [Bertrand] Harding the first and the only deputy?

G: No, I don't think--you know, there was [Bernard] Boutin and several others.

B: Oh, Boutin. Well, Boutin, yes. Was Boutin the first one?

G: No.

B: Boutin came from the accounting office, didn't he?

G: Yes. But there was this period in which there was no deputy, and Shriver was still head of the Peace Corps.

B: Yes, and that was annoying. By that time when we really had to get going, I guess we all took time every now and then to gossip and to complain and say, "For heaven's sakes, it's one job or the other." But he did both. In fact, he was giving Peace Corps very, very little time during much of the task force days. And I remember he was always saying, at least to us in private session, you know, humorously and otherwise, "They don't need me. They're proving that they don't really need me over there. That program's going well." When did he actually resign from Peace Corps? Surely it was after the legislation.

G: I think it was 1966.

B: About 1965? Middle of 1965? 1966? As late as that? You are going to be seeing Mary Anne Orlando, aren't you?

G: Yes.

B: She could probably tell you more than anybody else, especially those days between the two agencies.

G: Well, we've gotten through the legislation, so perhaps that's a good stopping point for today.

B: Okay.

G: I appreciate it.

B: All right. Okay.

(Interruption)

B: --took place either just before the legislation or just after, and, as I say, it's hard to tell--it doesn't matter for the purposes of this story. All kinds of people, all kinds of groups were [inaudible] Shriver all the time, looking for--whatever purposes they had, whether it was looking for jobs, needing help, offering help, having ideas about how to solve poverty, and all kinds of funny stories and tragic stories about that. But one day, as a result of--it may very well have been Adam Clayton Powell or somebody else, some congressman, getting placed on Shriver's calendar [was] a group of people coming up from New York City to see him about a special problem they had, and with a--headed by a woman called Ruth Atkins, who I must tell you--the first time I saw that name I assumed [she] was a Jewish woman from New York. And I learned one day that a busload of people was coming up to see Shriver. Shriver was going to see them but he alerted me that he had--very, very busy, and he'd spend a few minutes with them and then would I listen to them and see if I could help them, because he had to see--he'd promised somebody he would see them. Well, it turned out that they came on a day when Shriver couldn't see them at all, and I had to receive the group, a group of about forty or fifty, almost all black, some Spanish Harlem men and women, and two or three whites. Ruth Atkins turned out to be not Jewish, not white, but a marvelous, big, heavy, beautiful black

woman. [I] brought them up, and it's--we got them into a room, a crowded conference room, and they started to tell me what their problem was--something to do with school, a school in East Harlem where the kids were dropping out, they were getting into difficulties, and they couldn't do things, and almost from the beginning I sensed--oh my God, they're under a misapprehension that we can get involved in a program like that, it's not--you know, nothing we can do about that. But I was going to be civil, and be polite, and I was, I listened, and after about twenty or thirty minutes I [said], "Well, who have you taken this up with, have you gone through your Board of Education?" "Yes, we did, and then we went to the county, and then we went to Albany and we saw this person, and. . . ." They don't know what they're going to do next.

Well, after two hours of this, finally--while I sympathized with them, and I wanted to help, I started to make a little statement to Mrs. Atkins and to the group, saying, "Look, I'm very impressed and I'm very moved by what you've told me, and I'm really also very impressed by what you've done; you're obviously very concerned people, you're worried about the children--oh, at the school, every six weeks there's a new principal, or something. But let me tell you that, as sympathetic as I am, let me tell you what we do, what we're here for; this is our mandate, and--really now, it's not for--we can't get involved in this deal." Well, she stopped me in the middle of that speech, and she made a speech to me which just changed me and my whole outlook, and gave me a feeling about what in effect our program was about and what it ought to do. She said something--words to this effect: "Now look here, Mr. Bookbinder. Don't you give me any of that stuff now! We have these problems, we went to our principal, he said, 'Go to the Board of Education.' We go to the Board of Education, he says, 'Go to the Assembly.'

Assembly says, 'Go to the state Senate.' Somebody else says, 'Go see the Mayor.' The Mayor says, 'Go see the Governor.' Now, we've been reading in the papers that we now have a program in Washington that cares about poor people, that wonders--worries about us. And now we come all the way to Washington. We collected nickels and dimes to get the bus to take us here. Now you're going to tell us it's not your business either? Where the hell should we go?"

I fell in love with that woman the moment she made that speech to me. Because it still was true, as I told her--"I still don't know what I can do in connection with this particular problem, but I promise you I'll do something. I won't let your speech be forgotten." And I want to tell you that before that day was over I promised them that I would go--that I felt so thoroughly demolished, properly scolded, excoriated by this woman for having given her that kind of response that I said, "I don't care whether I have a mandate or not. I don't care whether I do it on my own time, or buy my own ticket to go to New York, but I'm going to stay with this thing." She's right, when it comes down to it. She's absolutely right! Somebody's got to start listening and saying we're going to do something, not just keep sending her around.

One week later I was in that neighborhood, in that school, talking to about fifteen hundred parents that had come out to listen to the man from Washington. And I told them the truth--I said, "I don't know what we'll do, but what you've done is exactly right. You've called it to the attention of your government. We have a responsibility to see that something is done. And in time you'll be part of a poverty--Community Action program. We've got to provide the means for you to be able to"--you know, I made whatever I could. And I got a very good response, and I felt better about it. She became one of our

leading lights, by the way, in the poverty program; she became a member of this Community Representatives Advisory Committee.

But I'll never, ever forget the impact of that speech. "Somebody's got to listen to us! Don't just send us away to somebody else!"

G: So what happened? Did they get a Community Action program?

B: Well, they got something going, but, more important than that, we got--I think we encouraged some greater attention to the particular school problem. That was the--we couldn't handle the local school problem. But they were all poor people--they said, "Well, we're poor people! We have problems. Our kids are dropping out of school, and nobody's paying attention. Well, why not go to the poverty program in Washington?" See, even though it was not an appropriate use--"appropriate" is not the right word; even though it wasn't an explicit, mandated objective of ours, on the other hand, as in time the program, I think, did reflect, at least in some places--yes indeed, we said that there is no problem, including one like that, that is not properly before the Community Action group, that says, "What can we do to enhance the possibilities for our kids to get out of poverty and get--what can we do [with] the resources, the federal resources?" So in a way it was not irrelevant to our mandate, except that it seemed to me, of course, that I had to send them elsewhere, and she put me in my place, and I was overwhelmed.

It also told us that--something that I was alluding to earlier in this interview. If this program contributed to giving the Ruth Atkinses of our country a sense that there is a vehicle around, that there is a way to use the system, that you don't just scream and yell and burn and loot, but you get nickels and dimes from your community, and you charter a bus, and you go to see the people who are presumably supposed to be responsible for

your welfare--I think that's great. It was really one of the greatest days of [my] whole association with the poverty program.

G: Fascinating.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview 2]

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of Hyman Bookbinder

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code and subject to the terms and conditions hereafter set forth, I, Hyman Bookbinder of Washington, D.C. do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted on December 9, 1981, May 19 and June 30, 1982 at Washington, D.C. and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

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

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

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

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

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

Hyman Bookbinder
Donor

Sept. 9, 1983
Date

Archivist of the United States

Date