

INTERVIEW I

DATE: July 25, 1978
INTERVIEWEE: RICHARD R. BROWN
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Mr. Brown's residence, Washington, D.C.

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G: Why don't we just start by asking you to recount how you got into the NYA and became assistant director to Aubrey Williams.

B: I was teaching school in Denver and was president of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association and chairman of the convention committee for the big NEA that met there in July of 1935. While I was working on this committee work and making sure that we were taking good care of twenty-seven thousand delegates who had arrived, and we had so little in the way of space for them, I had a call from Oscar Chapman, who was the under secretary of interior. When I came home late Mrs. Brown said he was at Senator [Edward P.] Costigan's house and wanted to talk with me, no matter what time I came in. So I called him, and he wanted to know if I could come over right then. This was past midnight, and I went over. He said, "Aubrey Williams has asked me to look around for somebody to be the state youth director here. I've decided I want to name you. Are you interested?" I said, "Tell me about it."

I knew that the Youth Administration was in the middle of a tremendous critical period at that time. It had been announced, and it

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hadn't been given to Commissioner [John W.] Studebaker. The teachers in the National Education Association were very much against it. I hadn't been briefed too much on it, so he told me a little bit, what was planned to be done. I told him, "Yes. Go ahead and submit my name." I was also teaching at the University of Denver that summer. I had a messenger deliver a telegram to me which was very terse and quite Washington-like from Aubrey Williams. [It] said, "I have today named you National Youth Administrator for Colorado. Make no commitments and incur no obligations. Aubrey Williams." So, of course, I was sought after by the press right away, and I couldn't give any answers as to what was going [to happen].

Well, a few days later I had a telephone call from my good friend Josephine Roche, who was the under secretary of the treasury. She told me that Aubrey was most anxious that I take this job and was I willing to do it. I said, yes, I'd be glad to. Then nothing happened on that, except that I got a communication from Johnny Corson stating to go into the WPA and see the administrator, John Carroll, to get office space and whatever I needed in the way to set up an office. So I did that. Then, as I say, we got this call to come back to Washington and have a meeting with Aubrey Williams and the other people topside. We had about three days of meetings and finally wound up the last meeting.

I was quite perturbed about it because everything was so negative. All the plans that people submitted, somebody on Aubrey's staff with

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the WPA would knock down, [saying] that there was a regulation against this or that. I was a bit brash, and I just said, "Well, Mr. Williams, we spent three days and three nights here trying to figure out [what to do]. All the discussions have resulted in telling us what we couldn't do. Could we have a half hour before we go home in which you tell us what we can do?" Well, he laughed and got a little red-faced. Then we had a very lively discussion for about three hours, and our people told what they planned to do.

I recall quite vividly that Lyndon was one of those who had some very concrete plans as to what he wanted to do. He wanted to go in and help bring up all of the county records--some of them had been lying in the courthouses--use youth to do that, to bring them up to date and to classify them. He wanted to build quite a number of roadside parks to take care of people who were driving through Texas on those long stretches and have them available, possibly with a well of water and so on. He wanted to do a great deal in the way of trying to build additions in universities and colleges, particularly the small ones for which there was no appropriation, and use youth labor to do it under competent supervision. So he had some very good ideas. We discussed them and I had some ideas.

I came back from Washington and established my office, appointed two or three more people, and was down in Pueblo setting up a regional office down there in the state when I got a call from Aubrey Williams. He wanted me to come back to Washington. I couldn't go right away, but I did come back in a couple of days. Aubrey had been in an auto

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accident in the meantime. His car had gotten squeezed in between a trolley car and a curb. He had a couple of broken ribs, so when I met with him he was lying on a couch holding his ribs. We talked. I recall his conversation very well. He said, "How much am I paying you?" I told him. He said, "Well, I want you to come back here to Washington and run this thing for me. I can pay you--" and he named the next figure. He said, "How about it?" I said, "Well, I'll have to check with my wife. I left her in Kansas with her father and mother. Her father is a minister out there in rural Kansas." He said, "Has she got a telephone?" I said, "Yes, it's a party line. Everybody for miles around will be on." "Call her up and see." So I called her. She said, "Whatever you want to do," so we decided. I stayed and took over right away then as the deputy executive director.

Then I went back to close up my house, and get a successor for my job in Colorado, and came back and took over and began then trying to get the NYA on the road. One of the first things that I found necessary to do was to go to work on the NEA people. Since I was a life member in the National Education Association and had been chairman of the hospitality committee in Denver, I felt very close to them, and I was quite annoyed that they were taking such bitter opposition to the NYA being under Harry Hopkins instead of John Studebaker. I took it upon myself to go to them and try to alleviate that situation, which I was able to do by explaining what this agency was, that it was as much a relief program, if not more, than any kind of an educational program, and Studebaker's office wasn't set up to handle the situation that way.

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There was a big contention on the question of vocational training because that came under Studebaker. I said, "We're not going to attack vocational training at all. We're going to try to cooperate with it. We've got to use short-term plans. We don't have state grants and subsidies."

And then there was concern about the apprentice training. I said, "Well, my own feeling is that an apprenticeship committee under the Youth Administration is a mistake. It ought to have been kept in the Department of Labor where it belongs." That was one of the things the first year I was here I was able to do when I went to the Congress and plead with the committee to transfer the apprenticeship training program to the Department of Labor and the Bureau of Labor Standards and outside my jurisdiction, which was of course most acceptable to labor organizations over the country.

Then we began our program. I made frequent visits to the field. I went to Texas two or three times then to inspect the program and meet with Lyndon and his staff. I think it was in 1937 that I went down to Texas. Lyndon was quite edgy. He had something on his mind. So finally I cornered him. I said, "What's bothering you?" He said--he always called me Mr. Boss Man--"Mr. Boss Man, some of my friends want me to run for Congress." "Well," I said, "that's fine, why don't you do it?" He said, "I can't. I haven't got any money." I said, "How much is it going to take?" I think the figure he said was, "Well, initially I've got to have twenty-five thousand." I said, "Haven't you got twenty-five friends with a

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thousand dollars?" He said, "I don't think I can find five friends with a thousand dollars." I said, "Well, get two hundred and fifty friends then, and get as much money out of them as you can, a hundred dollars or so." He said, "What I need right now is I've got a filing fee of seventy-five dollars, and I'm strapped." So I sat down and wrote out a check for seventy-five dollars. I came across the cancelled check a few years ago, and I think maybe I've got a facsimile copy of it which I'll show you in a while.

Then Lyndon ran for Congress and was successful. I didn't see too much of him after that. I frequently went down for a short chat and visit, but he was probably one of the busiest congressmen, and later senators, that I've ever known. I always felt that, although he was very genial and very friendly, that I was sort of imposing on him to take his time.

I stayed with the Youth Administration until I came down with a mastoidectomy and had to resign. I left the Youth Administration then in 1938. As soon as my condition would allow me, I went to work with the American Youth Commission as a part of the American Council on Education, to be a deputy director of the American Youth Commission. From there then I was pulled into quite a number of different government activities as a trouble-shooter and an organizer. What I had had as almost a promise was I would be back for six months, so I took a leave of absence from the Denver schools. I stayed on the job in Washington and never went back to teaching there. I stayed on with my work in several government agencies including the National War

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Labor Board, and later I went with the apprentice training program. I had worked with the surplus commodities distribution and helped devise a school lunch program.

Frequently in those activities, and later when I went with UNRRA as deputy director general and chief executive officer, I had occasion to go down and chat with Lyndon. For instance, when I was in Europe in charge of the Office for Refugee and Migration Affairs we were trying to get the concept accepted of a world refugee year, with every country on the globe making some contribution to accepting or helping to support refugees. I needed to have something put in the Congressional Record. I needed, if possible, to have something said in the Congress on the World Refugee Year. So I went to see [William] Knowland and Lyndon. Lyndon said, "Well, what's Knowland going to do?" I said, "He's going to make a statement for the record and maybe a statement on the floor." He said, "Well, you can count on me," which he did then.

But my contacts with him were quite infrequent until I had an attack of Meniere's syndrome and lost my hearing in Germany. I came back to become the director of the Office for Refugee and Migration Affairs within the Department of State. I served there about three years. Then a very, very severe recurrence of this thing that I'd had in Germany caused me to have to think seriously of giving up. But, in the meantime, a chap by the name of Abba Schwartz had been appointed as the administrator of the Bureau of Consular and Security Affairs, in which my office was located there. He called me one day

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and quite preemptorily--I thought he was a good friend of mine--said that I was through; there was no place for me in his Bureau. I'd had this long experience in government. I had also worked very closely with Tad Walters, who was really the leader of the immigration activities in the Congress, so I felt I still could make a contribution to refugee work.

I thought the Schwartz decision was unfair and decided not to take it lying down. So I wrote a letter to Lyndon. He got in touch with the under secretary for administration, Bill Crockett, and they offered me about anything I wanted. State Department was making a study of the manpower situation in the department and in the Foreign Service. Crockett wanted to have a working party on that. I said, "Well, let me do it." Then I had a sudden attack of Meniere's, and I couldn't hear any kind of a sound for three months, even with amplification. Finally I went down to see Crockett and told him, "I don't want to work full time. I can't. I think I've got to take a disability retirement, but I'd like to serve as a consultant." He said, "Well, that's fine. We need you." I retired then in 1963.

After a lot of treatment and help, I was able to get some restoration of hearing. I now have less than 5 per cent in the right ear and less than 3 in the left. In the meantime, I've made a comprehensive study of lip reading and get along all right, although I'm no good in a big conference or at a cocktail party. I can read the lips across the room, but I can't hear what people are saying.

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That's pretty much what the story has been. When I was with NYA, Lyndon visited in our home several times. He and Lady Bird joined us in a picnic down in Rock Creek Park. I think we still have some pictures around of that.

G: I'd love to see them. Was this while he was state NYA director?

B: That's when he was still youth administrator.

G: He was up here in Washington for one of those conferences?

B: Yes.

G: Let me ask you about some of the NYA projects, anything that you recall about these particular projects, his role in them or his dealing with the national office, the roadside park project for one. Was he the first state director to have a roadside park program? Was this something that he originated?

B: I'm sure it was. But we had other state directors that were putting in parks, too. They were roadside parks or an extension of--some consolidated school had a nice corner that wasn't being used, and they made a park out of that. But I would say that he was pretty much the first one that made a comprehensive park like the Roosevelt Park.

G: Did he have any problem getting the state highway department in Texas to go along with this, do you recall?

B: Oh, yes, he had problems, but Lyndon was a very capable operator. If he was turned down by one man, he'd find to whom that man reported for his guidance and get hold of him and get it changed. He always

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knew where to go to the top man on anything like that, and he didn't have too much problem with that. He was, I think, one of the most fortunate of the state directors in his ability to get contributions from the county and state highway [departments] and matching contributions to go with limited NYA funds. We only had fifty million dollars to do this whole job nationwide, and that didn't go too far.

G: I gather that he was constantly seeking more money from your office, is that right?

B: Oh, yes.

G: Do you recall any particular circumstances?

B: No, except that if I had conceded to all his requests it would have been a Texas youth program instead of a national youth program. A lot of his requests were extremely valid and worthwhile. My only regret was that I had to share the money with forty-seven other states.

G: What arguments would he use with you in asking for more money?

B: Well, the primary argument was the benefit that would accrue to the unemployed and out-of-school youth, and then to the community around it, whatever the project was. Only on rare occasions did he ever mention that it would be a good political move to do this, because we were supposed to be out of politics. Lyndon was not very much interested, as some of the other state directors were, in welfare projects, guidance and that sort of thing, but later on he came to the point where he felt they were quite valid. I think that he had a distrust of social workers.

G: Did he?

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B: Yes.

G: Why do you think that? Did he ever say anything about that?

B: Yes, at times he would make remarks that were not complimentary, not too cutting, but he wanted to look twice at these so-called welfare projects.

G: What did he say about social workers? Do you recall his words?

B: I don't recall his words on it now. Quite often he referred to them as do-gooders?

G: How about his relations with Aubrey Williams? Did you get any opportunity [to observe them together]?

B: I think for the most part they were extremely good. I think Aubrey had a feeling that he had to hold him down, that he wanted to move too fast and go too far. But I think their relationships were very good. Aubrey didn't go to Lyndon much for assistance on the WPA after he was in the Congress. I always felt he could have used Lyndon a great deal more when we had some opposition on the Hill. But Aubrey didn't move in that direction very much, I don't know why.

G: Did you ever suggest that he see [Johnson]?

B: Yes, I suggested it several times.

G: What was his reaction?

B: "Well, we'll see." But he didn't do anything about it.

G: Why do you think he didn't?

B: I really don't know. It's always been a puzzle to me.

G: But wasn't Lyndon Johnson as congressman a big supporter of the NYA?

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B: Oh, yes, very much so. But it was more on the WPA that had its indirect effect upon the NYA that I had thought that he could get Lyndon's assistance. But he didn't seem to want to do it.

G: There was a regional state directors' conference in New Orleans. Did you go down for that?

B: Yes.

G: Can you recall that trip and seeing Lyndon Johnson there?

B: Not very well. I remember it, and we had lots of discussions. It was at a crucial time when there was a question raised about our ability to build on municipal property. That had to be squared away. It was finally argued with the attorneys there that it was permissible. We had run into some difficulties with building library annexes and so on, in which the question of the property, public usage on that, was in question. But I don't remember too much about that meeting. I remember that we accomplished a great deal and that a lot of the fellows that had never been there before enjoyed themselves in New Orleans.

G: I wonder if he had ever been there before?

B: If Lyndon?

G: Yes.

B: I'm not sure.

G: Did you get together with him socially in New Orleans?

B: Only in a group when I was there. I was usually so busy at those conferences trying to keep the loose ends of the meetings going that I didn't have much chance to socialize.

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G: Huey Long had already been assassinated then?

B: That's right.

G: Now in August, 1936, you went to Texas. There was a banquet in your honor in which you were presented a Texas hat and--

B: Made a Texas Ranger.

G: An honorary Texas Ranger. Can you recall the details of that?

B: Oh, yes, that was at the time of the Fort Worth--Dallas big fair, you know. They were vying with each other on what to do. I remember I was met at the airport in a beautiful car with Barney Oldfield driving the thing. He was driving for VIPs. This big banquet was held there with Governor [James V.] Allred. Governor Allred made me a Texas Ranger and presented me with a big hat. I took this big Stetson, the first thing I did to it was knock a crease down the middle, squeeze the side and put it on my head. All the Texans in there clapped because they realized that I knew how to wear a Texas hat. Then I went on to tell them that this was a great honor for me because, born and reared on a ranch in Colorado, my ideal of a law man and a good man was a Texas Ranger. I had always looked up to them, and now I was going to be one. Then we had a number of meetings there. I spoke to their educational association, I think, at one time, and had several conferences with Lyndon and his staff.

G: It seems like he would have used that sort of occasion to ask you for something that he wanted.

B: I don't know that that was any specific occasion. I don't think he intensified his requests any more at that time than he normally did. Any time I would meet him he wanted something.

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G: Did you go out to his house in Austin?

B: No.

G: You didn't. Did you get a chance to observe his relationship with Governor Allred?

B: I felt it was very friendly. It was almost a father and son business as far as I could see. Allred took a great liking to him. He seemed to be extremely fond of Lyndon. But I recall only two occasions when I saw him, at that banquet and at one more reception at another time. But I felt that Governor Allred was very much impressed with Lyndon.

G: My impression is that Texas had some unique problems because of the size of the state, the distance from one district to another, and the fact that so many of the programs were so isolated. Did Lyndon Johnson ever talk about these problems?

B: Oh, yes. In fact, one of his most pressing requests was more money for travel, because they had such long distances between his headquarters and these outlying places, and more need for staff than we had felt that we could afford to let him have. To the extent possible we granted that and recognized he had a very valid complaint that he was trying to do a Texas-wide job with just too small a staff and too little money. We gave him as much as we could afford at that time. I think in fact we scraped some of the others to make it possible for him. But that did present quite a problem, because I think of one of the things that he found difficult, and if I had to be critical I might criticize, was his inability to keep as close a supervisory

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hold over some of his remote areas. [It was] no fault of his. He just couldn't be all over, and he didn't have the top supervisory staff there that he really needed. He had some very able people on his staff.

G: Was this reflected in complaints or inefficiency in some of these isolated projects?

B: I think it was reflected in criticisms from WPA, from local administrators, criticisms from these people, like complaints from Lyndon's own staff that they weren't getting cooperation here and there. I think they were cases of compliance. But one thing about Lyndon's program, as far as I know we couldn't fault him on compliance with regulations. He would stretch them as far as they'd go, but he stayed within them.

G: Reading the NYA files, it seems like he was constantly trying to get your office to approve appointments as quickly as possible. Your office in turn was constantly saying, "Don't make this appointment until we approve it. Don't hire this person until we approve it." Was this a common phenomenon?

B: Yes, because we were in a peculiar position. Although there was a semi-autonomy for NYA, there were phases of the program, including personnel activities, that had to have the WPA clearance or advisory clearance on. I finally got most of that removed, but in the early days of the NYA it was very difficult to get an appointment through. We had trouble getting approval and then in turn advising the state administrator that the approval was through or was held up.

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G: This was a WPA coordinating committee that had to approve these, is that right?

B: Well, it wasn't a coordinating committee. It was more or less their own personnel set up.

G: I notice in one case they disapproved a project that Lyndon Johnson thought was a very good project. Do you recall this?

B: I don't recall that one at all, but I know they did disapprove some of the projects. It was either on the basis of the lack of clarity as to the objectives of the project, or the ownership of the land if something was going to be built on it, or inadequate sponsor's contribution.

G: There was also some friction between the WPA in Texas and the NYA, I think, with regard to who asserted authority over whom and who had the responsibility for NYA projects. Did LBJ come to your office for support in that?

B: Oh, yes. In fact that was a common situation in many states, and in some states it was even worse than that, where a WPA administrator assumed that he was in charge of everything and they had come to him for it. We had to knock their ears down and relieve that.

G: One would think that Aubrey Williams would go to Harry Hopkins in this case and work on that level.

B: Well, yes and no. Harry was an extremely busy man. [He had] far more on his plate than WPA. Aubrey had so much more on his hands than NYA that quite often it was difficult to even take some of these major differences and get Aubrey to act on them.

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G: Now, if Lyndon Johnson wanted something from your office and he met resistance, would he then go to Aubrey Williams and try to get him to agree?

B: He may have on several occasions, but not because he was unhappy that I couldn't give it. He was just complaining to Aubrey as well. I don't think that Lyndon appealed over my office's head to Aubrey to get anything done. I would say it was more in lodging a joint complaint with Aubrey as well as with mine. Lyndon had a very definite, I would say that it was a moral code in this respect, that when he went to the top of an agency, that was it. He might go above, but only on a collateral arrangement.

G: Now there was one occasion I think when he disagreed with your office over the promotion of one of his people, Ivan Baker. Do you remember the details of that?

B: No.

G: You favored a raise for Ivan Baker, and he himself did not. I just wondered if you knew the background of that?

B: No, I don't remember it at all. It rings a bell, just the name.

G: This was a guidance and placement service, I think.

B: Yes. Yes.

G: I gather there was another problem in getting non-certified people hired, people with some expertise. Do you recall the issue here and how this was resolved?

B: Non-certified on what, for staff jobs or to work on the programs?

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G: I think to work on the programs.

B: That was one of the problems that we had, because the WPA welfare people had to certify these cases as being in need, except for student aid. But on the work projects, and quite often we felt that they took a very, very adverse attitude, uncompromising, when here were these kids living next door to each other, one of them would be certified and the other one wouldn't. The only difference is that one of them the parents had been on the relief rolls, and the other one hadn't. The one who hadn't been was rejected. We were constantly fighting that out with the WPA people. I had many a battle with the welfare people in WPA and their regional women out there on that.

G: Did Lyndon Johnson work with the state legislature at all and lobby for cooperation there, or the state government, the governor's office?

B: It wouldn't surprise me if he did, but I don't know of any instances. Lyndon didn't let grass grow anywhere that he could avoid it. If he needed help he'd ferret out a place to get it.

G: What was he like at this point? What was he like at this stage in his life?

B: Very energetic, a very tense individual, ambitious and very anxious to have what he's doing acknowledged. He loved to be praised, and most of the time he was deserving of praise. But he was very keen. He could smell out insincerity about as fast as any man I know. He wanted no idle compliments if they weren't sincere, but when they

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sincere he really appreciated it. He was outgoing, and yet Lyndon had a considerable amount of reserve that I don't think any of us ever penetrated.

G: Can you elaborate on that?

B: Yes. I would have to say that he was like the lone state. He was somewhat of a loner. Although he was "hail-fellow-well-met," still, the real Lyndon Johnson had some reserves that very few people could crack. That came to light at times when he would express himself along some line that you wouldn't have any idea that would be his convictions.

G: Can you recall a particular expression or a statement?

B: No, I can't right offhand, I'm sorry. But I felt that Lyndon had a private life as well as a public life, let's put it that way.

G: What was he the proudest of, of his projects?

B: I think the roadside parks and his construction projects.

G: I guess a lot of them were related to education, like those freshmen [college centers].

B: That's right.

G: Do you remember the freshmen college centers?

B: Yes. Yes, he was proud of them. I would say his construction projects, his parks and his educational programs were the things that he admired. There were a lot of things that they were doing there that he didn't pay too much attention to.

G: Let's talk about the NYA programs that benefited blacks in Texas. I

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gather that he earned the esteem of Mary McLeod Bethune. Do you recall anything about [that].

B: Did what?

G: That Lyndon Johnson earned the esteem of Mary McLeod Bethune.

B: Yes. I think that Lyndon made every effort there to reach as many blacks as could be done through the NYA program. Certainly that was true in the aid that he gave to the Negro colleges and so on. Mrs. Bethune had a lot of areas of interest in Texas, particularly colleges there, for which she was anxious to get maximum benefits. To the extent possible I think Lyndon went out of his way to help her. Of course, she was a magnificent person, and a perfectly marvelous individual. I think she held Lyndon in far greater esteem than she did some of our other southern youth administrators.

G: Did you ever hear her talk about him or characterize him?

B: Oh, yes, on a couple of occasions his name came up, and she said, "Well, he's a very outstanding young man. He's going to go places. He'll be a big man in this country."

G: Did you ever see them together?

B: Only in conferences when they would be talking in a small group of two or three. I don't know.

G: Another specialist on race relations, I guess, in NYA was Juanita Saddler. Is that right? Do you remember her?

B: Yes. She came after I had left NYA, I think.

G: Now I have a note here that said that she went to Texas to visit projects in March, 1936.

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B: In March when?

G: March, 1936.

B: Frankly I don't recall. I remember the name, but that's so far away. I was under the impression that she came into the Bureau of Negro Affairs after I had left NYA, but I guess not. I'm thinking of somebody else.

G: What were Lyndon Johnson's racial attitudes during this stage of his life?

B: I would say that for a Texan he had rather broad tolerance for races, particularly the Spanish-Americans. I think that Lyndon had probably a more defined interest in the Spanish-American young people than he did in the blacks because there were more of them. His own teaching experience and his work had made him more aware of them, a closer relationship. But he was extremely tolerant. I remember on one occasion somebody made, in a staff meeting, a remark that wasn't too disparaging about--I've forgotten what they said on that, but he snapped them up like that. He said, "You can't use that term here."

G: Was that with regard to Mexican-Americans or with regard to blacks?

B: I can't remember whether that was a Negro or whether it was a Mexican. I think that it was a case of a Mexican or a Spanish-American.

G: Was it one of his people in Texas?

B: Yes, one of these people from out away from headquarters.

G: Was this while you were down there visiting?

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B: Yes. I was sitting in on a staff meeting when he took him to task about using that term.

G: Anything else on his attitudes?

B: No, I don't think so. I felt that he was a very tolerant, a very broad-minded young man.

G: Now there was one occasion, I think in 1935 or 1936, where the NYA state directors went to the White House and shook hands with President Roosevelt?

B: They went to Hyde Park.

G: Hyde Park? Did he go?

B: Yes.

G: Did you go?

B: Yes.

G: Do you recall anything about that visit?

B: I guess it wasn't the state directors that went to Hyde Park. I guess it was the executive committee, and we went up to see Mrs. Roosevelt at Val-Kill.

I remember when the state directors, after they had been to the White House, the meeting that we had with the President and Mrs. Roosevelt and our national advisory committee, at which Mrs. Bethune made one of the most thrilling statements that I have ever heard anybody make. She stood up. The President was sitting there smoking [with] that long cigarette holder. Mrs. Roosevelt was knitting. The two dogs were on the floor all in front of the

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fireplace. The President had called on different people to give him a report on what the NYA was doing. Mrs. Bethune got up. She had on a purple dress, and she looked like a royal princess, and her eyes flashing. She made a statement there that I wish we could have recorded for posterity. It was simply brilliant as well as deep. It was so filled with pathos that the dogs sensed something different in her tone of voice, and one of them raised up and started to growl. The President just put his hand out and patted the dog on the head, and he quieted down. Mrs. Bethune was really thanking the President and Mrs. Roosevelt for what they had done in the leadership. She mentioned the various state directors in that she talked to them, paying tribute to the jobs that they were doing, mentioned just four or five, and I think she mentioned Lyndon in that meeting there.

G: Do you remember what else she said, or how she said it?

B: Well, the big thing she said was that this program was helping them to help themselves, to lift themselves by their bootstraps, not making them wholly dependent upon others, giving them a chance to prove themselves. Then she went on to say, "And that's what I'm telling them, that the only way they will achieve is by doing as much for themselves as they can."

G: Now in June, 1936, President Roosevelt and Mrs. Roosevelt came to Texas to dedicate, I think, a building in the Texas Centennial Exposition, or visit the Exposition. While he was there LBJ prevailed on the President's party to stop and dedicate a roadside park outside Dallas. Do you remember the circumstances of that?

Brown -- I -- 24

B: No, just vaguely. I remember that it happened.

G: Did he work that through Aubrey Williams?

B: No, I think he did that entirely on his own.

G: I've heard that Aubrey Williams felt that Lyndon Johnson was doing such a good job as NYA director that he didn't want him to run for Congress.

B: Yes, I think that he was hesitant in having him leave.

G: Did he ever say anything to you about that, or do you recall any efforts to dissuade LBJ from running for Congress?

B: No. All he said to me was, "If he leaves, we'll have an awful hole there to fill." He asked me then what we would do. I said, "Well, I think the thing to do would be to put Jesse Kellam in charge." And he said, "Well, I don't know him." I said, "He's a very good man, but he's not a Lyndon Johnson. They only come one in a generation like that."

G: Do you know if Aubrey Williams tried to dissuade LBJ from running for Congress?

B: I don't know, frankly.

G: I gather that when he did run, Jesse Kellam was not appointed immediately. He was just named acting director. Was there an indication that if LBJ lost that he would continue to be NYA director?

B: Oh, I think you could assume that that was there. I don't know. I don't recall. I'm sure that that was sort of a protective [measure].

G: I wanted to quote from a letter.

(Interruption)

Brown -- I -- 25

I found a note in the files that indicated that the arrangement of having Jesse Kellam be acting director while Lyndon Johnson was running for Congress was regarded as a sensitive and unusual situation. Do you recall any of the details of that?

B: I'm sorry, I don't.

G: Do you have any insight on the relationship between Oscar Chapman and Lyndon Johnson?

B: No. I knew that they saw each other frequently, but my guess is they weren't too close. I really don't know on that.

G: Now in Texas, as I suppose all the other states, there was an NYA advisory board. I noted that Alvin Wirtz, Senator A. J. Wirtz of Texas, was the chairman of that board, but he was not among those originally recommended by Lyndon Johnson. Do you have any idea how he ended up on the board and ended up as chairman?

B:: I don't recall.

G: Who suggested him?

B: My guess would be it was a White House suggestion.

G: Someone writing a book about Lyndon Johnson said that the White House suggested that Wirtz be on the committee. But I can't understand why Lyndon Johnson wouldn't have suggested him, because they were close friends.

B: I wouldn't be a bit surprised but what Lyndon Johnson had suggested him, but they wanted the prestige of a White House recommendation to go with it.

G: But you don't have any particular memory of that at all?

Brown -- I -- 26

B: No. My recollection is from the very beginning that the recommendations for advisory committee from the states came through me, and then I passed it over, I think, to Wicky [Elizabeth Wickenden Goldschmidt] to take up with Aubrey personally. Then they came back, and I sent them on back. I made my comments if I knew any of the people. If I didn't, why, I just made no comment.

G: During your visits to Texas did you see any of these members of the advisory committee and see their interaction?

B: Yes. I don't remember their names. A couple of them were college presidents, I think, if I recall, and I met them. We'd have meetings over the state, discussion meetings. I'm sure some of the advisory committee were invited to them.

G: How about Alvin Wirtz in particular? Do you remember Wirtz?

B: Yes, I remember him. I certainly met him at one meeting, but I don't recall what meeting it was. He was quite an avid booster for Lyndon in the program.

G: Anything else on their relationship?

B: I don't recall.

G: Doctor Mary Hayes made at least one visit to Texas to inspect the NYA projects. Do you recall her visit?

B: I recall when she made it and she came back. She was very enthusiastic about it. As I recall, she had some question as to whether or not Lyndon might be running afoul of the vocational school mandate.

G: How?

Brown -- I -- 27

- B: I don't know. I don't recall enough. But as I recall there was some question in her mind. But later it was resolved, so there was no problem there.
- G: You mean doing too much vocational work?
- B: Well, overstepping the bounds. We had a pretty clear line of demarcation as to what vocational training was and what on-the-job training was. Lyndon, in his enthusiasm, it was apparent, had moved over into the vocational side. She thought we might run into problems with Studebaker and his vocational education people.
- G: Did Lyndon Johnson get along well with Sam Gilstrap?
- B: Yes, I think so.
- G: Do you recall anything here of their friendship or working together?
- B: No. I think they got along all right. Sam got along with most people pretty well, he and Burleigh Love [?], who was his boon companion. No, I think they got along all right. Of course, they had differences. Sam was my budget man most of the time there. They had differences as to what Lyndon should get and could get.
- G: You were not the only one that got a Stetson hat out of LBJ's directorship. I understand he sent them to a number of people in the office, is that [right]?
- B: I didn't know that. No.
- G: Although yours was the only presented by the Governor.
- B: There's one other thing Lyndon did while I was down there that time. He gave me a hat and chaps for my little boy.

Brown -- I -- 28

G: Is that right? Now, he had a friend from Texas named Lawrence Westbrook, who worked with the WPA.

B: Colonel Westbrook, an engineer.

G: I see. Did he ever seek his help in getting support in Washington?

B: I don't believe so, no. I know that when Lyndon would come to Washington he'd try to drop in and see Colonel Westbrook.

G: Do you recall anything else about that picnic in Rock Creek Park?

B: No, I don't recall. I know we ate and talked, and Lady Bird was there.

G: Did you ever get the impression during this phase of your association with him that he had higher aspirations, that he might run for office?

B: Yes, I think I had the impression that he would do it. I can't say why. The most positive thing that I recall was one of my other secretaries in my outer office told me that after he'd been here on a visit, "You know, Lyndon Johnson told me that he was going to run for Congress and the Senate and be a president of the United States one of these days. I think he will." That was just about the time he was running for Congress, or deciding to.

G: Who was she? Do you remember the secretary's name?

B: Yes. She's married. Her name is Elizabeth Treadwell now--she's a member of our church out here in Chevy Chase.

G: Okay. Well now, for some reason, shortly before Congressman [James] Buchanan died, Aubrey Williams wanted to come to Texas and talk with Buchanan about something. Do you recall anything about that? Any idea?

Brown -- I -- 29

B: I have a hazy recollection that he was going to Texas. I would judge it was something on the WPA, because right at that time we were having some difficulties with the WPA down there.

G: Is there anything else about Lyndon Johnson as NYA director that we've left out?

B: No, I think we've covered the waterfront pretty well. I think he was indeed fortunate in having selected a top-notch staff, because they really worked hard. They were all of them filled with that same infectious enthusiasm. Saturdays and Sundays didn't mean anything to them if they had a program to work on. They were there all the time.

G: Then the national office realized this, that they were working Sundays?

B: Oh, yes. Those of us who had been there knew it. That was true of a lot of the NYA state directors, because there was so little time to get so much done. Most of these people were zealots by the time they got into the program, and they would rather work on it. I know I had very little family life. I was down there most of the time Saturdays and Sundays, late at night.

G: I understand that one of the other state directors was particularly good. I think he was from Illinois or one of the states.

B: Bill Campbell.

G: That may have been the one.

Brown -- I -- 30

B: He's a federal judge out there, William J. Campbell. He was very good. We had several top-notch ones. Campbell was outstanding. We had the president of Arkansas State College in Arkansas. He had a wonderful program. He vied very closely with Lyndon on the roadside park and community recreation areas. He also had an extremely fine program of bringing the documents up to date in county registrars' offices, where they were subject to rats and everything else, and getting them filed. That did a wonderful thing for the kids because it gave them a touch of history they'd never had before. It was something the state didn't have money for. It was something that made them realize that they'd have to get legislative funds to bring into position a filing arrangement and a record-keeping basis to prevent anything like the havoc taking place again.

G: How would you rank Lyndon Johnson among the other state directors?

B: Pretty close to the top, if not the top.

G: Really? Do you think Aubrey Williams shared this view?

B: Oh, I think so. Aubrey had a little closer relationship with a couple of the other state directors that he'd known longer. For instance John Lasher from Wisconsin was a former colleague of Aubrey when he was a professor at Wisconsin. I think John Lasher was a little closer to Aubrey than [Johnson]. I think Aubrey rated him [Johnson] very high.

G: As you look back on the NYA, what do you feel were its major accomplishments?

Brown -- I -- 31

B: I think the biggest thing was giving hope to a very discouraged and despondent group of young people that couldn't go on to school. Life savings had been wiped out; college savings had disappeared. It gave quite a number of them an opportunity to stay in school. Then it gave work experience to a lot of the kids that were from families on relief and were just lazing around. It put a stop to the constant migration of all these young people in boxcars across the country that had been taking place before our program started, wiped it out almost entirely.

But I think the big thing is it gave hope to them and work experience that went into other things. I was giving a graduation address in Frankfurt, Germany, to the American military high school graduates. I had mentioned in my speech something about the NYA, and I said, "Perhaps some of your parents here participated on it." Most of these were officers. After the meeting, oh, I guess a dozen both men and women came up and said, "Yes, we stayed in school because of NYA," or "We did this," or "We got a job," or "I was able to look for a career." Often when they find I had been connected with NYA the older group now really feel that it was a godsend to them, and I think it was. It was a small program in terms of money, but what we did was stimulate the putting of additional funds into a program. So that when we finally came out of it, it amounted to much more than fifty million dollars.

G: I certainly do thank you for taking [the time].

Brown -- I -- 32

B: Oh, you're very welcome. I'm very happy to. It brought back a good many memories that I had pretty much forgotten.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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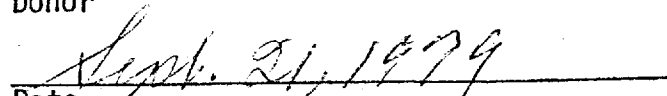
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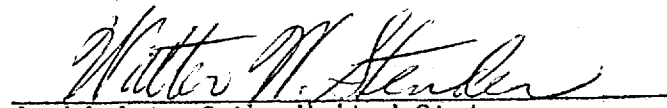
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