

## INTERVIEW X

DATE: September 23, 1987

INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPH A. CALIFANO, JR.

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

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

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G: You were talking about the atmosphere of the--

C: Yes. I remember going over to the [Capitol] Rotunda, and I remember it being a very moving experience.

G: Did he talk about the significance of the [Voting Rights] act to you?

C: No, but he generally talked about the fact that, as you later stated, that he thought that would be the most important. That getting blacks to vote, giving them the outlet, giving them political power was very important. And that that would be one of the real gems of his administration.

G: It's even been suggested that he regarded it as the single most important piece of legislation passed under his--

C: I think he did in time, regard it, certainly. Yes, I agree with that.

Also, what I'm looking at here is--we come back from the Voting Rights Act to a meeting on the drought in the Northeast, then to a meeting with the President and Bozo [William F.] McKee, who was head of the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration]. 1) we're killing the SST [supersonic transport], and 2) we're creating a department of

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transportation. He doesn't want to put the FAA in it.

Let's go to--what I can't remember--at some point, either the night of Friday the thirteenth or early, early in the morning of Saturday the fourteenth, we got involved in the Watts riot. Lee White was in my office by 8:00 a.m. on the fourteenth; I must have been in the office before then. The only reason I would have come in that early was for something like that, on a Saturday.

The other thing I don't [remember], when did Lee White and LeRoy Collins go to meet Brown? On Sunday, right? Governor [Edmund G. "Pat"] Brown.

G: Sunday the fifteenth?

C: Yes. Is that right?

(Long pause)

To meet with Governor Brown, yes.

G: So it must have been the fourteenth.

C: Well, it says, "Brown arrives in Los Angeles, vows to restore law and order. News conference." They have this August 15, page 1, column 7. See, they have this August 15. Are you sure that isn't the dateline? That's the date of the newspaper. Because the President's statement was issued on August 15. They have it listed as August 15 here. Maybe Lee White was back. All right. I'm better.

The main issues were, how involved we would get with federal troops or with federalizing the National Guard or with even sending anybody out there; 2) great concern about the judgment of the lieutenant governor, [Glenn M.] Anderson; 3) Pat Brown was in Europe somewhere. And I had great difficulty getting through to the President that day. There were more than two occasions but two that I remember when it was very

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difficult; he just didn't want to talk to me. One was that day, and one was later with aluminum. Aluminum was [when] he really closed the window on me.

G: Was this on Saturday, do you think?

C: This is on Saturday because I think what happened was, Watts steamed up. Somebody called me from the Pentagon--I don't know who--probably called me at home, and I went in early. [Jack] Valenti was down at the Ranch with the President. I remember dealing either through him or through Jake Jacobsen. But the President, now when I look at what he was doing, it's not as though he was doing anything. He was just walking around the Ranch and driving around the Ranch, just not wanting to deal with this.

But I had been through [James] Meredith. I had been through Tuscaloosa. I'd been through every civil disturbance--there was a civil disturbance at the Pentagon with A. J. Muste and the peace movement--working either for [Cyrus] Vance, or as general counsel of the army, or for [Robert] McNamara, so I had some experience. I remember telling the President--well, first of all, when I finally got to the President, when I finally started--I remember telling [Jack] Valenti, whoever I was talking to during the day, that we should not send federal troops unless we had to, that we should not federalize the National Guard because it would be hard to defederalize and that we ought to force the state to deal with it. The President not only agreed with that but he didn't even want to get into the business of sending anybody out there unless there was a request from the Governor. He didn't even want to send LeRoy Collins out, or Ramsey Clark, or whoever we ultimately sent, unless the Governor requested it.

On the other hand, he wanted to show that he was doing everything he should, and there was a real problem in California. Ultimately the President told me to send Lee

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White and Governor Collins to meet Pat Brown in New York when he landed in New York. And the reason for that was concern that Anderson was not putting on a tough enough curfew, concern that Anderson--to cool off Brown on the disaster declaration, to get Brown not to call for troops, to impose martial law, put on a tougher curfew, and I think to get Brown to call up the rest of the guard because the one thing we knew was that an overwhelming show of force was very important. And Anderson was reluctant to call up the guard, or not enough of it.

G: Had you had experience with Anderson before?

C: No, none. And I'm not sure that I ever talked to him directly. It's possible that we were so concerned about Anderson that we had somebody else talk to him. The problem that they had in California was, to the extent they had called up the guard, getting it to Los Angeles on time because a lot of them were in San Francisco and that area. I do remember that day trying to get the President to approve the use of air force planes to bring the guard down, and also to prove--talking to General [Creighton] Abrams saying we needed the planes, we needed these K-rations or food or what have you. Finally, I just told them to go ahead. I remember I told Abrams, "You've got White House approval." And he said, "Do we have the President's approval?" I said, "You've got White House approval," because I could not get an answer from the President either directly or through Jack Valenti.

G: Try to describe, if you recall, your phone conversations down there. You would generally talk to Valenti?

C: Most of my conversations were with Valenti until that night, when the President--

G: He finally called you?

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C: --finally called me. I guess if this is right he called me at 8:09. We were probably on the phone for about twenty minutes because that's when he made his next call.

G: How did you even know that you were in charge of this crisis?

C: I just did it. I do remember that. I think the Pentagon was comfortable dealing with me because I had just come out of the Pentagon. General Abrams was the director of operations for the army, which is the job in the army that really controls the troops. And he had been at Tuscaloosa. I don't know if he had physically been in Mississippi but he had been involved in Mississippi, because I don't think we got the troops in until too late. And Abrams and I had worked on the Cuban brigade. When Bobby Kennedy ransomed them, General Abrams was the guy at--I forget the name of the camp in South Carolina--that was in charge for a while of training the brigade. I was in Washington and they were at the Ranch, but I think I just took charge. Lee White had been a career government guy, terrific human being, but he was not aggressive. I was probably much more aggressive than he was. Very wise, though; he was very wise.

G: But it must have been frustrating for you not to be able to get--

C: Oh, it was incredibly frustrating. It was frustrating and I felt as though I had less authority working for the President than I had as general counsel of the army. I mean I would have done things faster had I been over in the Pentagon than I did there, because I couldn't get any answers out of the President. Eventually . . .

G: What was LBJ's reaction to the riot itself, though? Did he talk to you about it? Did he express dismay?

C: Yes. He talked about the blacks pissing on the floor of the Senate, after Reconstruction when they were elected to the Senate, and how they made fools of themselves, and he was

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worried that that would happen here, that the riots would in effect make it impossible to get more legislation and break down the gains we'd already made for them. He did talk about that.

G: Did he feel that there was subversion involved at all or--?

C: I have no recollection of that over this weekend. He really was, to me at least, remarkably subdued, tired. And until you mentioned it yesterday, I mean I hadn't really focused on the fact that we signed the Voting Rights Act just a few days before, and then this happened. That's clearly, from that high of the Voting Rights Act to this riot in Watts, was a tremendous roller coaster ride.

When he did start to focus that night, even that night, as I think back on it now, even that one conversation I had with him on that day, it was a very down conversation and he was not really grabbing it.

G: But you'd only been in the White House about two and a half weeks at this point.

C: That's right. I was just trying to see where the first--if we're still on the . . . Then at some point he asked me, either that night or the next day, to get Dick Goodwin and get Goodwin working on a statement, which was ultimately the statement that he issued on the fifteenth of August. That statement very much reflected two things that by that time we had decided were critical pieces in the strategy. One was to dump the responsibility on the Governor and the city. And two was to condemn the violence but say just because there had been violence didn't mean there wasn't injustice, and we had to deal with the injustice. He had me calling all the black leaders--[Martin Luther] King, Whitney Young, [Roy] Wilkins--to try and get them to issue statements condemning the violence, to tell them also they should all remember his Howard University speech and that we'd move,

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we were going to move. We were not going to be deterred by the violence in moving to correct the injustice, but we couldn't move to correct the injustice unless they condemned the violence.

G: Did they do that?

C: I think some of them did. I just can't remember. I mean I have to look at the papers. King talked about going to Los Angeles when I called him. Hale Champion and Governor Brown were bonkers about keeping him out. I mean they did not want King; they didn't want anybody in there they thought would re-inflate the situation.

G: Was it then your task to dissuade King from going?

C: Well, I'm sure I discouraged King from going. King was not somebody that you could persuade or not persuade easily to do anything. He really was very much a man with a mission. I guess by that time--had he been through Selma by then?

G: Yes.

C: He thought he was moved by the hand of God and it was not going to be easy. But he didn't go. My recollection is he didn't go; none of the black leaders went. They all stayed away, and that many of them did issue statements. Again, I'd have to go look in the press and see that. What's remarkable about--in the context of this . . . I think the President was also much more comfortable once we got Pat Brown out to California.

G: You did send an air force plane to Greece to meet him.

C: Did we?

G: I think you did, or at least part of the way.

C: We got him back as fast as we could. But I think the President trusted Brown, and I trusted Brown. And I had [confidence], 1) that he wouldn't come out of the blue at us

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with either a request for a disaster declaration or troops or federalize the guard or something, and 2) that he would take control and would not be--I don't think that it's fair to say Anderson was a flake, but he was weak. We didn't know him. We didn't know what he'd do. I think the lieutenant governor's independently elected in California, and I'm not sure he really reflected Brown. In any case, the guy I dealt with in California was Hale Champion, who was Brown's budget director, who incidentally later became my undersecretary at HEW [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] when I was in the Carter Administration. Hale was very good.

To get Goodwin I had to literally send police after him and run him down on either--I think on a pond up in Cape Cod. I don't know where. He was out sailing. I did get him. I don't think Goodwin ever flew back. I think he did a statement, dictated it. I note here and I remember the President telling me once we got Brown in the game to give him anything he needed, whatever support he needed. We're not talking about troops now; we're talking about a plane. "Does Brown need a plane to fly around? Does he need anything like that?"

I also see here the President talking about the fact that we've got to remember these people are out of work, that they are living in filth, that they have no homes, that the violence is against the Negroes themselves, not against white people, that they are destroying themselves. And he was concerned about the impact of this on all of our legislative programs.

G: Yesterday you explained why you didn't want the guard federalized because in the case of, perhaps, Tuscaloosa--

C: Well, when I was in Tuscaloosa when we sent troops into the University of Mississippi, it



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took us a year to get them out. We literally created a little camp on the campus called Fort USAFOX [Unites States Army Forces, Oxford], and I went down at the end of the year with John Doar to do a study and see whether we could bring them out. So we said, "No more federal troops; that's crazy, we can't get them out." So then we said we'll federalize the guard, and we were worried. We also learned in Mississippi that however inadequate the guard training was *vis-à-vis* riot control at that time, the guard was loyal; the guard did follow orders. We had been worried about that, which is one of the reasons we sent troops in. So we federalized the guard in Alabama, Tuscaloosa, kept the troops out. We sent down Abrams as sort of an adviser. But then--[George] Wallace--nobody wanted to defederalize the guard, and I remember going down there, literally going down to Tuscaloosa to look at that and make a report so we could get out, get it defederalized. And a bomb was set off, I think in Birmingham. We later found out that that bomb was set off by some guardsmen because they liked being federalized and they liked the pay.

G: They were drawing federal money.

C: We finally defederalized. So those things were coming from me. They were coming from me in a sense that I was telling Valenti and the President of those experiences and why we shouldn't do it. I do think I knew more about this than either of them did, but the President's instincts were independent of that: stay out, force the state to deal with it, force the city to deal with it. [This was] further complicated by, incidentally, the fact that [Samuel] Yorty was kind of a wild man as mayor and was by no means in sync with Brown, and kept telling me that this was his city, this was not Brown's city, and he knew what he needed and he knew what he had to do.

We did, I notice, prepare--I had prepared or had Ramsey Clark put together an

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executive order. And I think the reason Ramsey did this was because I do believe both McNamara and [Nicholas] Katzenbach were up on Martha's Vineyard this weekend and were kind of hard to get to. I may be wrong about that. But in any case, Ramsey put together a proclamation that declared this a disaster area and talked about federal assistance. The executive order gave to the Secretary of Defense the authority to suppress the insurrection, to use such armed forces of the United States as he deemed necessary, to call into the active military service the National Guard. It was accompanied by a proclamation that said that the, "Governor of the state of California has requested me to make use of the armed forces or militia as may be necessary." That was all drafted and ready to go if we needed it, but I was opposed to doing it and the President sure as hell didn't want to do it. I don't know whether we told Brown we were ready to do that or not. I would doubt it. I think the instructions that I got from Valenti, who got them from the President, which I gave to Lee White and LeRoy Collins, was to get Brown, to call up the rest of the guard, impose a much wider curfew, and declare martial law if necessary.

When I look at this I do remember now. I okayed not just the planes but the trucks, the radios, the C-rations and the A-rations, all of that. And I okayed it sometime during the day of August 14. I never had one conversation with the President on this until the night of August 14--

G: What was his reaction?

C: --so I was a little shaky. Well, he chewed me out.

G: Did he?

C: Yes. He chewed me out a little bit.

G: What did he say?

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- C: I can't remember, but now that I think about it, he chewed me out. I told him what I had done because we had to provide some help. He said, "Goddamn it, I don't want any of our military involved in this." I said they wouldn't be, that they were just landing at airports getting these troops, just unloading this stuff. And [he said], "Will you make sure?" And I'm sure I called Abrams after that and said, "Make sure nothing happens." And I may have even said to him [the President], "I've been trying all day to get to you or to get answers and I've done what I thought I had to do." Because I do remember that night I'm sure I said to Lee White, as I say here now, after that conversation with him at eight o'clock, I said, "Christ, I have less authority as the special assistant to the President of the United States than I had as the general counsel of the army. It's crazy."
- G: And this was Saturday night. Did you feel a sense of urgency in getting those additional troops down there that day?
- C: See, I notice here--this is a note, 6:25 p.m. It's from Jack to the President. He's down at the Ranch. And he said, "At 6:20 p.m. Texas time Secretary McNamara talked to Joe Califano and strongly recommended that the President send C-13[0]s or comparable aircraft to transport California National Guardsmen from Northern California to L.A. The request we had [came] from the commander of the National Guard and was concurred in by General Abrams, vice chief of staff of the army. Request on receipt of the recommendation of McNamara was given approval." I just approved it. Now I remember. I had trouble getting McNamara. I don't know where McNamara was. Abrams needed the stuff. We knew what we needed. I told him to go do it, okay? But I kept trying to get McNamara because I wanted to get a recommendation from McNamara on top of Abrams' request. I then talked to Bob. I told him what I had done and he said it

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was absolutely right. I said, "Will you recommend that?" He said, "Yes." I then called Valenti. I said, "We got McNamara recommending this now and Abrams, and I've done it." I'm sure that whenever--this memo is at 6:25. Valenti's down at the Ranch. The President's over at [Dale] Malechek's residence. Okay?

G: Yes.

C: He returns to the main house at 7:53. All right? He gets Valenti's memo and he picks up the telephone and gives me hell for sending the planes. It is really amazing how this now, when I look at this, put this together. That's what happened. He gave me hell for sending the planes, but look at that and then either that conversation or the next day--I don't know what the next--when was the first time I talked to him on Sunday?

G: It was early. Well, 10:30, 10:27.

C: Yes, but that's 7:00 in Los Angeles. Sure. The next morning--we got Brown back in California, but we've got these people killed. We've got twenty blocks leveled. We've got the place devastated. And he starts talking to me and the conversation--"Get Goodwin, get a statement." I had reached a point then where we all thought he had to make a statement. And he said, "Okay, let's take a look at a statement." We thought he had to make a statement that covered both the local responsibility point and no violence.

But in the course of that conversation he's telling me, "We've got to help Brown. We've got to do everything we can. You can trust Brown." He's telling me to call the blacks and get them to issue statements. Then he talks to me about the military pay bill which was before the Congress. He talks to me about economizing. He tells me to find a new speechwriter, which I ultimately did; it's Sparks here. Will Sparks had worked for me in the Pentagon and I brought him over to work for Johnson. But he said, "We need a

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speechwriter now. We just have"--that's the way his mind ran--"Goodwin's up in--why the hell is he up in Massachusetts? We can't just have one speechwriter. I've told you to hire speech writers. Why the hell didn't you get speech writers? Goddamn it, get a speech writer." And we're in the middle of this terrible problem in Los Angeles. I mentioned Sparks and he doesn't want to go after Sparks when he's just taken me out of the Pentagon. He told me to go get Sparks and deal with McNamara, bring Sparks over so McNamara will get annoyed with me. Then he talked to me about Vietnam, that he obviously had a little better turn in the situation over there, whatever happened that day.

And I'm sure, although I don't have notes here, that I began talking about the other suggestion of McNamara's, which is that we put somebody on the ground to help Brown. The President said, "Nobody sets foot in California until Brown asks for it. I don't want to volunteer. We'll help him informally, transportation, communications, but if we're going to send somebody visible, he's got to ask for it." And at some point, Brown did ask for it.

There is at some point during--then Champion calls in and tells me that things are--well, this is 10:40 a.m.--"May have been less crime in the curfew area than in normal times. 8:16"--this is now the Monday. "They're not going to open the schools and unemployment offices. They are putting together some kind of a commission. Yorty wants to keep everybody in jail." I guess I asked Hale if there was any organized support for rioters, so somebody must have been in our mind, that that could have been organized. This is on the sixteenth. And he said they were old established gangs in the second generation.

We got into a discussion of Martin Luther King. I told Hale that King might go

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out there but he didn't seem in any hurry to get there. He might be there Wednesday or might send his people Wednesday. At some later point Hale said, "We've got to keep King out." Everybody thought we had to keep King out and I know I talked to King about that.

We also--this drove home to us, I notice here, "Vance and the guard training problem." At some point, we had [accepted] the fact that the guard was inadequately trained, wasn't well enough trained for riot training. We thought they were better trained but we still hadn't done the job.

G: How about equipment? Did they have the proper equipment for that?

C: I can't remember. I can't remember. I can't remember when we sent Collins out but we did send him out pretty fast. If I'm still on the sixteenth here.

G: My notes show the eighteenth for Collins going out there.

C: Well, in any case--

G: Oh, I'm sorry. He went to Watts on the eighteenth. I think he was in California.

C: Well, we may have sent him out right after Brown got there. In any case, Collins was the first person out there. Then I notice on the sixteenth is King's people are thinking about coming out. Champion called me and asked me to help privately in keeping King out; tells me it can't do any good. I called King, and King stayed out. Then the President on the sixteenth said that we were not going to send somebody out unless it's requested, and he told me to call Brown or call out there and say if they made an official request to the President, he'd send somebody out there. I think it is important to get these diaries for each day because it'll show--

G: Okay.

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C: So we never issued the proclamation. Now--

G: Let me just ask you: you mentioned that Yorty was troublesome in this. What was Brown's attitude toward Yorty during this crisis?

C: Didn't trust him.

G: Did he feel that Yorty was a polarizing force in that city?

C: I mean I think Yorty was to some extent a polarizing force in the city, but it was our suggestion that Brown appoint a commission, which he did or announced he was going to do, I see here on the sixteenth. And he did appoint a commission chaired by John McCone. The reason we wanted the commission, and indeed we may have even suggested John McCone, we wanted a Republican, conservative, former CIA director on the commission because we wanted plenty of cover for any federal programs we sent in there. We also sent Ramsey Clark out, who came back by the end of the month, I guess, with recommendations for a twenty-nine million dollar program for what we called self-help projects.

G: Why did Clark go out in addition to Collins?

C: I can't remember. You know, the Justice Department was really the focus in the civil rights area and that's probably why. In retrospect, as I mentioned to you, Ramsey was not a program guy. And while I don't denigrate in any way the job he did when he went out there, he really--well, there was one part of it--it wasn't instead of Collins--we had a problem in the government between [Sargent] Shriver and [Willard] Wirtz both fighting for programs. We got into things like--even with Ramsey going, now I remember--"What's the name that's going to be put over the offices? Is it the Department of Labor or the Office of Economic Opportunity?" I had Wirtz argue stuff like that in my

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office. At that point, it was really one of those two guys who would have gone out. I think the President was always wary of Shriver because of the Kennedy thing. I think we didn't want to get into a Wirtz-Shriver fight, so we sent out Ramsey.

From my point of view, Ramsey was good because he also didn't have any long-term bureaucratic interest in any of the programs that would be involved. He'd make his recommendations. Justice didn't run programs; he'd get the hell out of there. When he came back, the fights we had were not whether to do what he did; the fights were all bureaucratic; they were all turf: who would do it? Who would run this? Who would do that? It was really quite incredible.

G: Turf fights in Washington as well as turf fights out there.

C: But the turf fights I was familiar with were the turf fights in Washington between--and mostly by Wirtz.

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C: To get again a sense of the President, I mean this is the President talking to me I guess on, well, we're on the Monday which would have been the sixteenth. As I say, we're talking about, "Get Brown to request Collins and nobody goes out until we have a request." He's telling me to tell him that we can't send anybody into the city legally without the approval of the mayor and the governor, which was really not so.

Then he got into a discussion with me of whether we should draft married men, and says if we draft them, we're going to get all the married men mad at us. Harry McPherson was working on a draft order on this. I should take one side of the argument, Harry McPherson should take the other side of the argument, and he'd hear both arguments out, and then he'd decide it. We'd do it just like I was in court and he was a



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judge, which we did do in the Oval Office at some point, I can't remember when. I can't remember which side of the argument I had, but I do remember and my recollection is that I argued not to draft married men. He decided to draft married men and then he sent me out to do the briefing. I said, "Why?" And he said, "Because there is no question they'll ask you that you haven't thought of already."

He got into a discussion--all in this same conversation on the sixteenth--we talked about our education legislation in the House, about the farm bill, about Secretary [of Commerce Jack] Connor fighting for the highway beautification bill and not fighting hard enough, about whether [Lawrence] O'Brien traded too much away, about a bill relating to the reserves and the fact that he wanted to have a legislative leaders' meeting when he got back. I just can't find--oh yes, we did, on Tuesday. We had a congressional breakfast with the Vice President, [Mike] Mansfield, [Russell] Long, [George] Smathers, [and] the Speaker on Tuesday morning at 8:30. All of this in one stream-of-consciousness conversation.

It was in that conversation, I think, that he must have mentioned John McCone to me, because I notice that by the next morning I'm checking out McCone with the Bureau, with McNamara, and with some members of Congress to see where he stood. Then I see that on the nineteenth, which would have been Thursday, Governor Brown announced the commission to be chaired by McCone. But we were deeply involved in selecting that commission because I see calls here, conversations I'm having with Warren Christopher about who should be the black on the commission. This is another example of Johnson reaching down about who should be the black on the commission, who should be the policeman on the commission.

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Also, by that time we're beginning to pick up the pieces. I notice I'm talking to John Steadman here, who succeeded me as McNamara's assistant, and Cy Vance about better communication systems when we get in riot situations, better coordination between Justice and the Department of Defense and what have you. Collins, you're probably right. On Tuesday at five in the afternoon, August 17, I met with Ramsey Clark, Vance, Collins, Buford Ellington, who was the head of the office of federal emergency assistance, whatever it was [Office of Emergency Planning], and Lee White. By that time, I'm sure we'd decided to send Collins out or were pretty sure he was going to go, and we were talking about what Collins should do, what our authority was without any legislation, without any appropriations to get money out there.

The next morning I notice I start the day almost at 8:30, meeting with Collins and Lee White. Then I begin the process of talking to the press about the Watts riots. We were talking to the fellow from *Time* magazine and what have you. I mean it's so amazing. I notice the obvious following-up on all this other stuff. I mean Will Sparks comes by to see me on Thursday the nineteenth at 5:45, getting another speech writer aboard. Then at 9:30 the next day he comes to see me and meets with Valenti, who really did oversee the speech writers.

G: During this time, Yorty is firing off telegrams urging the President to declare it a national disaster area.

C: We did not do that now. I can't remember.

Well, I see here and now it ticks something else. On August 16, somebody started leaking a story that Community Relations Service people who were then sitting in the Commerce Department had alerted Yorty in the spring that he had a mess in the racial

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situation, and Yorty went through the roof. He was on the phone screaming at me. He said he never got any warning like that. He went on the offensive immediately and he said the reason they were having riots, one of the causes, was the fact that we had cut off federal funds from him as a political move to weaken him as an opponent to Governor [Brown]. I think there was competition between them. I think there was an issue as to whether Yorty was going to run for Brown's seat.

The other thing I should mention, and I notice [Ronald] Reagan's name here somewhere in my notes, I don't know whether Reagan was a declared candidate or not but Brown was worried about Reagan. I don't know whether he said anything at this time about the riots or the cause of the riots, but he was worried about Reagan as an opponent. Reagan later beat him. And that was a political factor in all of this. It was nothing like the [Michigan Governor George] Romney-Johnson stuff, which we'll get to when we get to Detroit, but it was a factor.

G: But the two reasons that were given in Collins' report for not declaring it a disaster area were, first, there was an uncertainty whether you could take a man-made rather than a natural disaster and declare it a disaster area for federal help. And two, what this would do in terms of the programs, of bringing in federal programs, whether this would be politically unpopular then, if you were going to bring in programs. Do you recall weighing the question about applying this to a man-made disaster rather than a natural?

C: I have a dim recollection. I know we didn't want to do it, and now that you say it to me I remember that. I need Collins' report, incidentally.

G: It's in there.

C: On the disaster relief issues, that's right; we did not want to create a bad precedent.

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[Inaudible] Talked about Governor Brown. [Long pause] Oh, yes. Yorty had, both orally to me and in telegrams, asked for a disaster declaration. We did not want to give a disaster declaration because of the precedential value and because of the cloudy legal thing, and we didn't want to do anything for Yorty. We took the position that Yorty had no authority, that only a governor could ask for a disaster declaration. And one of Collins' first missions was to get Brown to commit firmly, as we had tried to on Saturday, that he wouldn't ask for one and he wouldn't forward Mayor Yorty's telegrams, which Brown did. But we knew Brown was in a squeeze.

G: Was there a feeling that Yorty had been responsible to some extent for the situation by not putting in place and funding some of the programs that might have defused the riot?

C: I think--

(Interruption)

G: I was asking you about whether Yorty's failure to put in place some of the programs that were designed to defuse the riot situation, whether this failure was responsible for the riot itself?

C: I think you can't identify any one thing as the cause of the riots. I notice here, and now it refreshes my memory, Shriver and Yorty were at each other's throats. [James] Roosevelt was a congressman out there. He had run against Yorty for mayor. Yorty had beaten him. Shriver was much closer to Roosevelt than Yorty, closer to Gus Hawkins who was key to Shriver's congressional committee. Humphrey and Shriver had said, at the President's insistence, in conferences with the mayors earlier in the year that we would run these poverty programs through the mayors' offices. But Shriver didn't always do that, and he wasn't doing that in Los Angeles and that had Yorty up the wall. Who was

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wrong? Shriver said Yorty wouldn't run the program, so he couldn't run them through him. Yorty said he couldn't run the programs because Shriver wouldn't give them to him. All of it hurt; all of it hurt. And it's interesting when I look at that, it's quite clear the only person we could trust in California was Pat Brown and he did play it pretty straight. But he was at war with Yorty.

G: What was Hawkins' role in this?

C: Hawkins was the congressman on the Labor Committee which had responsibility for the poverty program.

G: He represented that Watts district, too, I guess.

C: Well, Roosevelt had a piece of Los Angeles, too.

G: And Roosevelt was also on that committee too, Education and Labor.

C: I guess he was. Yes.

G: Did Hawkins feel left out of the decisions?

C: I just don't remember. He may have; I just don't remember. I notice that Collins says he didn't talk to Hawkins before he went out there because he didn't . . . I notice here on Wednesday, August 25, which is a week after Collins came back, and I don't see a date on Collins' report. Let me see when I sent Collins' report to the President. It would have been right away.

G: I think it was September 11.

C: Well, Collins returns from Los Angeles on the twenty-fifth and I asked the President if he wanted to see him, and by that time the President did not want to see him.

G: Why not?

C: I think he had moved on to other things and he was . . . No, that's not it.

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G: That's not it?

C: That's the twenty-fifth. By the twenty-fourth before he even returned, we had the outline of an emergency program. I don't have any indication whether the President approved it or didn't approve it or not. But see, I'm suggesting he dispatch a federal team under Jack Conway to work with state and local officials to put the program together. "You could announce the program at your news conference tomorrow." For some reason we didn't send Conway, I guess, did we? I don't remember. But it was Ramsey Clark that got sent as the presidential representative. Did Conway go out there, too?

G: Conway and Andrew Brimmer went out with--

C: Clark?

G: With Collins, I think.

C: With Collins.

G: Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe it was Clark. Let's see. They were there.

C: Yes, here it is. It's here. The announcement of Clark going is "Mr. Clark will be accompanied by Jack Conway and Andrew Brimmer." He went out with Clark.

G: Now, this was after Collins returned, right?

C: August 25. Collins returns. I sent him out at 8:30 p.m. We put it out on August 26.

Yorty blew up. At some point here--

(Interruption, long pause)

C: On the twenty-fifth of August what happened was Yorty called me, just quite angry that the President had indicated at this press conference that day that he was going to send Ramsey Clark to Los Angeles. Yorty was still on the disaster declaration kick, and this is Yorty reminding me that Los Angeles is *his* city and Governor Brown was in Sacramento.

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I told him that Ramsey would be under instructions to consult with him. There wouldn't be a disaster declaration; we didn't need it to help him. Then the next day we made the formal announcement of Ramsey Clark going out. I think after that it was done. The program was almost cooked before Ramsey went out there, as you can see from my memo to the President saying what we have. Then Ramsey ultimately came back, made a report and the President approved the report and we implemented the recommendations. We got similar recommendations and findings from the McCone commission which were very important, as I said, politically.

What strikes me as I go through this in terms of Johnson is my obvious conversations picking the members of Governor Brown's commission and checking them out. Talking to somebody at Twentieth Century--obviously Twentieth Century-Fox--non-partisan; all we want is excellence. Then another one of these stream-of-consciousness conversations with the President.

Here's another one of these calls from Yorty calling me and saying he doesn't know why Collins is out there. "What is Collins supposed to be doing?"

[A.] Philip Randolph--that's who Randolph was, the head of the railroad unions [Randolph was president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters]; getting him to make a statement, too. Put that with my stuff.

I think I'm exhausted on Watts but you may have--

G: One of the points that comes across in the files is that you were going to every government agency and saying, "What can you do to help in Watts?" Really doing a survey of all the potential ways in which the various federal departments could have put in place something in Watts.

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C: Well, I had a meeting--these memos are all dated August 23, and I see in my book here I had a meeting on Saturday, August 21; this book is invaluable. I mean I just never [remembered]--I forgot all about the meeting--my first seeing of Fortas when I walked in, whether to veto the military construction bill. They're all in my office at nine o'clock.

Well, two o'clock on Saturday afternoon, August 21, I have a meeting on the Los Angeles riot with all the key players--Lisle Carter from HEW, [Robert] Weaver, [William] Foley, Ellington--the whole crew, the Corps of Engineers, Wilbur Cohen, Ramsey, Larry McQuade--which led to the memos they sent over asking for what programs we could put in, and a meeting on the following day with essentially the same group and it was off of that meeting that I put the memo together for the President that said, "Here's the programs we can put out."

G: Was it the President's directive to give Los Angeles the highest priority in terms of domestic programs?

C: Well, I think it was our desire to do something. First, stop the fighting and the killing and the looting; then say, when that's done, we'll deal with what are true injustices, and then we tried to do it. I mean it was really that simple. There wasn't anything complicated about it. The politics were complicated because of the personalities and because of the problem of not wanting to look like if you riot, you get something.

G: Well, I guess that's one of the most important questions. Did it place a premium on an inner city that had exploded? Was this a way of encouraging other communities to riot, or--?

C: Well, we didn't think so in the way we did it, and I think history bears us out on that. I mean I think you have to remember--I guess it's [Alexis] de Tocqueville--a reformer



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rarely or never survives his reforms because what was once inevitable, when there is light at the end of the tunnel, becomes intolerable. And that's what was happening. We were reforming very aggressively and there was no way to deliver as fast as expectations were rising. It wasn't simply because we were raising expectations. I think there's really an enormous political chicken and egg problem that's very serious. I think you have to raise expectations in order to get legislation passed and to get resources committed to areas of need. So anybody who's in the kind of aggressive mode we were flying in, of changing things, is bound to run into that. From the day you say you're going to have a model cities program to the day somebody in a ghetto sees a brick moved, is a couple of years, because we've got to get it passed and we've got to get money, and then we've got to get it started.

G: Did the President follow the progress of these new initiatives in the Watts area? Was this a source of continuing interest to him at all, do you know?

C: I think he did what presidents can do. He got it done. He got the programs in and then they had to see whether they could deliver.

I actually drove through Watts--I had a client in California in 1971 I guess, late 1971--because I had never been there and just wanted to take a look at it.

G: There's also in the file some correspondence with Senator [Thomas] Kuchel that indicates that he was cooperative, was helpful in this.

C: Well, Kuchel was a good friend of the President's. He was a very liberal Republican senator. And I'm sure he was. I mean, I don't think he was a major player. I think he was just the kind of guy you like in a situation like that. He's going to help you. He's not going to worry about himself.

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End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview X

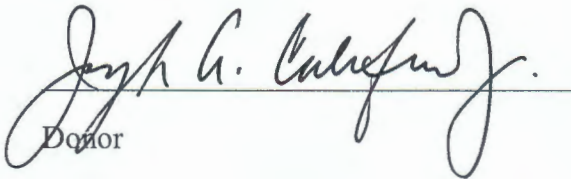
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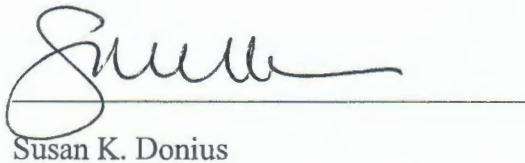
Joseph A. Califano

Interviewed by: Paige Mulhollan, Joe B. Frantz and Michael L. Gillette

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