INTERVIEWEE: HODDING CARTER, JR.

INTERVIEWER: T. H. BAKER

November 8, 1968, in his part-time home in New Orleans, Louisiana

B: I have the machine on now, so if we can go ahead and start. I'd think a logical starting place, sir, would be with when you first met Mr. Johnson.

C: When he was in Congress.

B: What sort of dealings did you have with him then? Did you meet him in a political connection?

C: Yes, I met him in a political connection, and my immediate reaction was that this was a man I'm for.

B: What was the nature of the political connection? Can you recall over so long a time?

C: I can't recall. It undoubtedly had something to do with the Democratic Party, and favorably so.

B: What was there about Mr. Johnson that impressed you then?

C: He was a man. More than anything else, I think--that's what he was.

B: You mean a quality of forcefulness and decision?

C: Yes. A quality of foot-westerness, you might say. I don't say that Jack Kennedy wasn't a courageous man, a brave man, or that he wasn't someone who would inspire you. Kennedy was able, I'd say, to inspire you more than Johnson could, but to me he didn't have that quality of manhood that Johnson had.

B: In those days did Mr. Johnson make clear to you his opinion on civil rights?

C: Yes. And I'll tell you a very interesting thing. This would be helpful, I believe. He was a rough talking guy--is a rough talking guy. About eight years ago at the meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, he spoke--he was then just Vice President--to the American Society on the space program. After the meeting was over, then he said, "I'm going to name a few honorary Texans and take them into a meeting with me." And he said, "Hodding, I'm going to make you an honorary Texan for this because I'm going to say some things." And he did. He said, "You sons-of-bitches have got to find out that the world doesn't belong to all one group of people, that this is the black man's world as well as the white man's world."

B: Whom was he talking to in this?

C: He was talking to the Texas editors who were members of the ASNE. They were all Texans except me.

B: Would there have been people there like Ted Dealey of the Dallas News?

C: Oh, sure. And he cussed them all out. He said, "You're not going to get by with it."

B: What was their reaction to that?

C: They gave him a big hand. And I was with him on the thing, of course, and gave him as much of an ovation as anybody could.

And that was an example of the man's courage because most of those people there were against him.

B: Did that have any effect? Didn't most of that group continue to be against him?

C: Oh, yes, sure.

B: Before the 1960 Presidential nominating conventions, did you not in your newspaper in Greenville advocate Lyndon Johnson as the candidate?

C: From the very beginning.

B: Were you surprised then when you discovered that he had taken the Vice Presidential position?

C: Yes, very much so.

B: Were you at the convention by any chance?

C: Yes.

B: Did you have any knowledge of what was going on, why he decided to take the Vice Presidential position?

C: Well, I think Lyndon Johnson was so surprised to get any position, that I wasn't surprised at all. I think he was delighted to have gotten that nomination.

B: Really? Rather than staying in the Senate?

C: Yes.

B: Did he campaign in Mississippi in the 1960 election?

C: To the best of my recollection he did not. Oh, he might have made a talk there, but he was not active.

B: During the Vice Presidential years, did you have any other contact with Mr. Johnson other than the anecdote you mentioned awhile back? As Vice President, Mr. Johnson was chairman of the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunities, and I wondered if you had gotten involved in that?

C: Well, we were very much involved in that. My paper. We were for him because we were for it from the beginning--for equal opportunity--and believed the man was completely right.

B: Did you have any contact with John Kennedy during those years?

C: I'd say it was casual, but I had contact with him as a man whom I was for as President.

B: During this time--this doesn't relate directly to Mr. Johnson, but during the early sixties, Mississippi went through a great deal of racial strife--the events surrounding the admission of James Meredith into Oxford and a number of other things. And the Justice Department was active in Mississippi during that period. Were you ever contacted by any representatives of the Justice Department about the events in Mississippi and their work?

C: Oh, yes. Mainly for my opinion--my conviction about which way we ought to go; what we could do.

B: Do you recall whom you talked to?

C: I talked to numbers of people. You name them.

B: Well, let's see. Robert Kennedy? Burke Marshall? John Doar?

C: Marshall-John Doar, I did. Robert Kennedy, I did.

B: Did they ask you for advice on how to deal with Mississippi political figures?

C: Oh, I'd say Doar did. I think that they thought they knew.

B: Oh, you believe they felt they didn't need that kind of advice?

C: That was my impression. And I'm sure in the light of what came that they were right.

B: You mean you feel they handled the crises quite well?

C: Yes, I do.

B: Was there at that time--I'm thinking about 1963 and '64--was there a good deal of atmosphere of hate against the federal government?

C: Very much so.

B: Did any of this ever affect you directly? That is, your newspaper's outspoken defense of the activities of the federal government?

C: Not in the sense of there being any threats. We had little Ku Klux-type threats, that kind of thing, but as far as big--no.

B: You never felt it necessary to go armed or anything?

C: Yes.

B: You did go armed?

C: Yes.

B: Was it common knowledge in Greenville that you carried arms?

C: Oh, yes, I'm sure that it was.

B: Was this a long-standing custom, or something you took up just in this time?

C: It was something I took up.

B: Why?

C: Because I didn't want to have somebody shooting at me without having a chance to shoot back.

B: Then there must have been a sort of sense of danger?

C: Oh, sure.

B: I've heard it said that, say, in '63 and '64 the Ku Klux Klan became very close to being a major force in Mississippi affairs.

C: I think it actually came later.

B: About when?

C: '65, '66.

B: That was the peak of their power then?

C: I would think so.

B: How close did they come to dominating the State?

C: They never came close to dominating the State. They undoubtedly tried to. They terrified some people--perhaps terrified is the wrong word--they frightened some people.

B: You mean businessmen and that kind of person? Politicians?

C: Politicians. I don't think there was any great effort to dominate or to frighten businessmen.

B: Would that have been more--say, intimidation of businessmen have been more in the province of the citizens councils groups?

C: Yes. The Citizens Council didn't really dominate the State; the organization frightened people, but I think it was the fear of--an economic fear--that the Citizens Council tried to frighten other people who were the citizens council-type and say, "You'd better stay in line, and don't change."

B: Was there, to your knowledge, any direct connection between the leaders of the Citizens Council and the leaders of the Klan?

C: No. I think the Citizens Council tried very hard to disassociate themselves from the Ku Klux Klan, and largely did.

B: The two of them appeal to different types of people?

C: Yes. One appealed to your real Mississippi rednecks--your real redneck killer type.

B: That would be the Klan?

C: Yes. The Ku Klux appeal to--but you know, they are killers, and they were, of course, more dangerous because of that.

B: Was the Klan active in your area--in the Delta area in Greenville?

C: Yes, but they didn't get anywhere. They were active. I think they still have a little Klan today.

B: Did you know, personally, those persons who were active in the Klan leadership?

C: I knew any number of them, yes. And I must say they were people that you couldn't be afraid of.

B: Why not?

C: Well, they were rotten little cowards.

B: Did any of them ever threaten you or anything like that?

C: By mail.

B: Anonymously?

C: Anonymously, but a lot of them directly. And we knew who they were. And they wrote things, unpleasant things. But they never scared us--I'll put it that way.

B: Would you care to put on the record an example of the kind of unpleasant thing they would write to you?

C: Oh, they told me that if my son--my oldest son--didn't get out of town, they'd kill him the next day.

B: Your son, at that time, would have been in his twenties?

C: Yes, and editor of the paper. They frightened my wife--tried to. She doesn't particularly frighten.

B: By phone calls, and that kind of thing?

C: Yes. Phone calls. And they tried to frighten me. But we told them that if anybody came after us, I would kill him, and I meant it.

B: I assume they knew you meant it?

C: Yes.

B: Was the Citizens Council more difficult to handle by being more sophisticated and more subtle?

C: I never found either one of them hard to handle. The Citizens Council was harder because it was more--you're right--it was a more sophisticated group. It had an appeal that the Klan didn't have--an appeal to, well, you almost might say, a decent middle-class group and, as such, they were harder to deal with.

B: Was your newspaper ever subjected from the Citizens Council group to the threat of economic boycott?

C: Oh, God, that's what they did most of.

B: Did it ever work?

C: If it did, I wasn't conscious of it. I knew it was going on. There were some very amusing things--boycotts, so-called poems, unpleasantries.

B: Again received by mail?

C: No, the Citizens Council didn't go at it that way.

B: How did they go at it?

C: Economic boycott. Just almost entirely they would say, "You are a danger to the State, and we're going to put you out of business."

B: Did your newspaper then have a competitor?

C: No.

B: Was there ever any threat to try to start a competitive paper?

C: There was one started, but it didn't work. There was a competitor started, but it didn't get anywhere.

B: Started by the Citizens Council?

C: I assume so.

B: In 1964, you supported Mr. Johnson for reelection, did you not?

C: Yes.

B: I would guess the only Mississippi newspaper?

C: No.

B: The Tupelo paper--

C: Tupelo did. There's a fantastically courageous woman over in Lexington, Mississippi.

B: Hazel Brannon Smith?

C: Hazel Brannon Smith did. Oliver Emmerich in McComb did. I think that was all.

B: Did you have any personal conversations or letters with Mr. Johnson in connection with the '64 campaign?

C: No.

B: Did you ever get a thank you note from him?

C: Oh, yes.

B: What did he say?

C: Just that he appreciated our support and that he valued it, and that we were going to win.

B: Did the fact of your supporting Mr. Johnson for reelection cause any intensification of the antagonism against your newspaper?

C: No, I wouldn't say so. The antagonism was already there to the extent that you couldn't brood on it.

B: Incidentally--this may be an impossible question to answer--do you suppose your endorsement had any effect on the vote?

C: In Mississippi?

B: Yes, that is, had any effect in gaining--?

C: I'm sure it did. We have our own following down there, and people went along with us that might otherwise not have taken a part in the election.

B: Did you take any active part in the campaign other than through the newspaper?

C: I let my son do the talking. Oh, I made some talks, but he made better talks than I did.

B: Did you speak in Mississippi? Were the talks well-received? What sort of reaction did you get?

C: Well, in our own general area, very good. I would say this. I don't think what we had to say hurt Mr. Johnson.

B: You were telling me privately before we started the interviewing here that you believe the civil rights situation in Mississippi is getting better.

C: Oh, yes.

B: What do you suppose is the reason for (this)?

C: I think the reasons that we could speculate on--I think the willingness of people to stand up and be counted today.

B: The willingness of the white Southern moderate or liberal?

C: Yes. You see, what's happening--we're not scaring any more. The Negro is not scaring and the white man is not scaring. This is true.

B: Is it that white Mississippians have been, so to speak, converted, or is this just a group that was lying dormant?

C: It was mainly a group that was lying dormant, but the conversion factor was there, too. I think also people--Mississippians--just got God-damned well tired of being told what they could say or believe or think.

B: You mean being told by people like the state politicians and the Sovereignty Commission and so on?

C: Yes. And Klan people. They just got a belly-full of it.

B: You were also telling me an incident you had seen at the polls recently of whites helping Negroes vote and so on.

C: Oh, yes. I saw a good deal of that. You might even call it friendliness at the polls between them, and, at the worst, I can say that I didn't see--except in the redneck parts of Mississippi--unpleasant areas--I didn't see in Mississippi this time what we saw the last time.

B: What sort of things did you see the last time in the '64 election?

C: Frightened people.

B: Scaring people away from the polls?

C: Yes.

B: Do you suppose the redneck areas will ever be converted in this sense?

C: Yes, because we're going to get rid of the rednecks.

B: How?

C: Well, they're getting rid of themselves economically. The redneck is disappearing in the deep South.

B: You mean, as Mississippi improves the economic status of all of its people, this attitude--?

C: For instance, we've just gotten in Greenville, as an example, a new industry--300 new and damned well-paying jobs are coming in. You know, people who get decent jobs don't stay rednecks for very long. That's the hope of the South, of course.

B: Is Mississippi likely to get better leadership now, too?

C: It's getting better leadership. There are signs. Let's say, Governor (Paul) Johnson (Jr) is human.

B: This is Paul Johnson, Jr.?

C: Yes. And (John Bell) Williams is a more human person than Ross Barnett, for instance.

B: I was going to ask you for your opinion, your characterization, of former Governor Barnett.

C: I think he is as low as a politician can get.

B: Deliberately so, or--?

C: Well, deliberately in the sense that he knew that was the way to win office. I mean, this man is a bad man. He deliberately tried to foment what was really civil strife among white and black.

B: This would be particularly at the time of Meredith's admission to Oxford?

C: Yes.

B: Sir, did you as one of the leading citizens of the state ever try to talk to Governor Barnett, to advise him?

C: Yes. Of course, he was an adroit politician. He would say, "Hello, Hodding. You know, old Ross doesn't believe this stuff they're saying about you down in Jackson," all that kind of stuff. He knew I knew he was lying. But he was such a politician of the worst order that he would do anything for a vote.

B: Did you ever talk to him and say something like, "Look, Governor, this won't do!" Or would it have been just useless to try?

C: It would have just been useless.

B: Do you, by any chance, know former Governor (George) Wallace of Alabama?

C: No.

B: I was wondering if you had ever had any dealings with him?

C: I may have met him. I can't say that I didn't know him, but I can say that I was not an intimate of his.

B: How about former Governor (J. P.) Coleman of Mississippi?

C: Yes, I knew him very well.

B: Is that an example of the kind of thing we were mentioning awhile back--a Southern moderate who had to sort of lie low?

C: Yes. Coleman was a good man. Let me put it this way. He was a good man who believed a hell of a lot more than he ever let on. He was an extremely able man. I think Governor--what's his name--had

recognized that. You know, who appointed him--

B: He's a judge now--Governor Coleman.

C: Yes.

B: Did you know Medger Evers?

C: No.

B: Are you acquainted with any of the other Negro leaders of Mississippi?

C: Oh, yes, I know all of those others, but I never knew Medger Evers.

B: What's your opinion of the quality and the caliber of the Negro leadership in Mississippi?

C: I think it's quite high, and I think it's extremely courageous. And I think that, in great part, Mississippi is where it is politically because of these courageous Negroes.

B: You mean their activities in encouraging registration and voting?

C: Yes. And in standing up and being counted when it was hard.

B: Who are some of these people? One thinks of Aaron Henry.

C: Aaron Henry, Dr. Matthew Page over in Greenville--a very courageous young Negro. You said Aaron Henry; and, of course, the Evers.

B: His brother Charles?

C: Yes, he would certainly be. We've had a lot of them.

B: Do you see any signs among the Negro leadership in Mississippi of the kind of internal fragmentation that's taking place elsewhere--new, young men, more impatient than the older men, taking over?

C: They're more impatient, but they're also, I think, more intelligent in their reaction. They know they will only get anywhere by staying together, and they have stayed together in Mississippi. So in that, the Negro is lucky. They're not split up; no, they're unified.

B: Have you had any other direct or indirect dealings with Mr. Johnson during his Presidential years since '64?

C: Well, I'm prejudiced because I'm still for him. My own feeling is that he will go down as a much stronger man, a greater man politically, than he's getting credit for now.

B: Do you feel that he has been truly a leader in the development of civil rights?

C: Yes, he has been that. He's such a stubborn man that I think he has hurt his cause.

B: By pushing too hard?

C: Yes. And also stubborn in the sense that he wants his way and he wants it now.

B: Have you ever had any personal instances of this--these qualities?

C: Yes--you mean me, personally with Johnson?

B: Yes, sir. Or fairly direct knowledge of it; that is, has he ever tried to work the Johnson treatment on you?

C: He never had to. What I think about Lyndon Johnson is that he's a man of courage who believes, and believes implicitly, in what he said he stood for.

B: Well, I was wondering if you had any specific instances of what you call the stubbornness that has sometimes hurt his activities?

C: I think you'd just have to read his record. It's written down for you to see.

B: Do you think that Johnson, by virtue of being a Southerner, has been able to do more in this regard than, say, President Kennedy?

C: I think he did in his initial years, but then I think as this thing went on he became hated just like so many Southern Presidents--candidates.

B: You mean, hated all the more in the South for being a Southerner--the turncoat charge?

C: Right.

B: Is it fair to say, again, from your standpoint as an observer of the South--is it fair to say that Mr. Johnson is pretty well universally hated?

C: In the South, yes. I think you'll only have to look at the record. Well, look at the five Southern states; that tells the story to me.

B: You mean the ones that voted for Governor Wallace in the recent election?

C: Right.

B: Do you recall any instances of this kind of hatred against Johnson--anything you've heard people say about him?

C: They just curse him, they'd say he's a turncoat son-of-a-bitch, never anything specific and that's a point.

B: Do you suppose there's anything Mr. Johnson could have done, at any time in his Presidential years, to change or ameliorate that attitude?

C: Well, I think what he could have done are things that you and I don't really know because it was behind the scenes. There's bound to have been any number of maneuvers that could have taken place that would have made him more liked.

B: But perhaps at the expense of the civil rights movement.

C: Sure. The man will not change his mind when he thinks he's right.

B: Obviously, you admire Mr. Johnson, but you can also see him clearly. What other faults does he have in addition to the stubbornness you've mentioned?

C: I think he's an arrogant man. There are not many things I have against him, but arrogance is one.

B: Does that come out rather clearly when you're with him and talking to him?

C: The few times I have, yes.

B: Is it what he says, or just the general impression?

C: Well, I'd say it's much how he says it; that he knows he's right, you see; that idea that nobody is going to tell him he's wrong.

B: Have you ever tried, in those circumstances, to debate with him?

C: No.

B: One just does not try in his presence?

C: I would say not.

B: Are there any other bad qualities you can think of?

C: No, you see, I'm not the person for you to talk to because I'm so prejudiced in his favor. I think he has most of the qualities I like and very few of them that I don't.

B: What are his good qualities then?

C: I think I said at the beginning he has got guts. He would, I think, fight you at the drop of a hat, if he had to. I think he's a man who, if he believes he's right, he's going to not forget it and not let you forget it.

Now, that's his--I'm disliked around the state--I've got hanging on the wall there a photograph of Lyndon Johnson inscribed to me. That doesn't get any votes for him in Mississippi.

B: Sir, one thing that comes up, in regard to your career in the South here in the 1960's, is the fact that, although, as you say, you may be a man hated in Mississippi, you're one of Greenville, Mississippi's leading citizens, and Greenville has not really just tolerated your newspaper, but actively supported it and is proud of it--now, the question arises: what makes Greenville, Mississippi so different from the general tone of the rest of Mississippi?

C: I worked out something that I believe is true. This goes deeper than I usually have time to do. But Greenville, Mississippi probably suffered more than any town in the deep South; it was wiped out three times by flood.

B: You're talking of the floods in the twentieth century--in 1927?

C: Yes, 1927. And much earlier, Greenville knew--

B: Would it go back as early as the Civil War?

C: Well, yes. I was going to start with the Civil War. Old Greenville was burnt to the ground. It was destroyed by Yankee gunboats coming in because they had a lot of sniping back and forth and the town was pretty well destroyed because of that and had to rebuild on a new site. Later we were decimated by yellow fever. And because of this suffering there developed--I can see it just as a historian--a sense of unity that grew up. Because if you go through what Greenville went through--both sides go through it, and Greenville learned to get together and stay together.

B: Both sides--you mean white and black?

C: White and Negro, yes. And we learned to be poor together, to understand certain common problems, to live together, to get rid of the hates a whole lot faster than anywhere else that I know of in the South. That having been true, or so I believe, Greenville developed a leadership that you didn't find in the South--a leadership of black and white who could and did work together, so that we had way back in Greenville, Negroes and whites working together.

B: How far back would this be? You mean back in the twenties and thirties?

C: Oh, back further than that. This would go back to the Civil War. They learned to suffer together--I suppose that's the best word for it--and

then with that suffering came a leadership that you don't find. These white Southerners--they were, of course, largely white because the leadership was in the white man's hands--and, together with the black man, they developed a unity that we didn't have and a willingness to work together that we didn't have, as far as I know, anywhere else in Mississippi, certainly, and I'm sure not in Alabama or in any of the deep Southern states. And with that unity came a leadership that you didn't find anywhere else. We always go back to the Percy family--was one of the great Southern families, still is. Incidentally, it's my son and young Billy Percy--both of them untouchables, as far as who they are, you see, as far as family is concerned--were the two kids who stood up for this whole thing. They put up the fight for civil justice for the vote and for all that.

B: Yes, your son was involved in the integrated delegation to the Democratic Convention of this year. Was Billy Percy in that, too?

C: I'm not bragging about my family, but there are no other two families in a social--other sense, than the Percys and the Carters in Mississippi.

B: May we place Billy for the record? Is Billy--who is his father--Walker, or is he--?

C: Billy's own father is Leroy Percy from Birmingham. Leroy was an orphan, he and his two brothers. One is a noted Southern young novelist, Walker Percy, who wrote The Movie-Goer and a couple

more. He is a great young writer; and the second Percy is a lawyer here in New Orleans. They were all three orphaned.

B: Are they the ones who were adopted by Will Percy?

C: Yes, they were adopted by Will. Well, Walker and Roy are the Percys. Phin--his name is Phinizy Percy, an old Georgia name--Phin has not been as active in civil rights as--

B: That's the one who is a lawyer here?

C: Yes.

B: You know, mentioning Will Percy brings up another question. Among its other attributes, Greenville is the home of a rather surprising amount of literary and cultural development. One thinks of yourself as a historian, Will Percy as a poet--

C: Walker Percy, the novelist; Shelby Foote, who will probably be put down as the greatest of the Civil War historians. This dear woman who is the first person I employed around the paper and became my second son's--

B: Is this Eudora Welty?

C: No, this girl's name is Louise Crump. She did a couple of novels.

B: Well, what I was going to ask is, is there some connection, however indefinable, between the suffering and the unity of Greenville that you were describing earlier and its--?

C: Yes, that's one of the points I have liked to make that is definitely there. You can't have that creative spirit, I don't think, without it.

B: Have there, incidentally, been any Negro literary or artistic figures in Greenville?

C: No.

B: Is that unusual?

C: It would be unusual if there were any appreciable number. No, we don't have any Negro literary figures. We're getting political figures, but not literary.

B: It would be unusual on the grounds that education has not been adequate?

C: Education, I think, would be the primary reason, yes.

B: Do you suppose this quality of Greenville will spread to the rest of the South?

C: I think it has.

B: The same kind of unity will develop elsewhere, or is developing elsewhere?

C: Is developing elsewhere, yes.

B: And that, at least, the South will eventually find the solution to the race problem?

C: Not necessarily through literature.

B: Well, no, I didn't mean literature specifically; I meant in a much more general sense.

C: Well, I think we're doing that and considerable parts have done that.

Southern town after Southern town has asserted what we're talking about here, a new Southernness, partly the child of political problems, not so much political unity but a political independence. We're getting a political independence--the free Negro.

B: You mean the Negro vote?

C: The vote and the Negro not being afraid to vote. The willingness of the white Southerner to accept the Negro as equal, politically.

B: To get back to our main subject, Mr. Johnson, can you make any connection between the administration of Lyndon Johnson and this new attitude; that is, would it have come anyway? Or has Mr. Johnson's Administration fostered it or accelerated it?

C: I think his Administration has fostered it. Lyndon Johnson spoke out for it, he spoke out as a strong man--a man of, not only personal courage, but a man who had--well, I don't want to use it in terms of wealth, but you almost could--he's an independent man, in that sense. He could, and has, spoken out as Lyndon Johnson.

B: You mean his financial independence gives him a freedom?

C: Financial independence does it--right!

B: Incidentally, have you ever met or had any dealings with Mrs. Johnson--with Lady Bird?

C: No, but my wife has. My wife has, on numbers of occasions, been a guest of hers in the White House. So I might have been in the White House, but--I used to kind of play in the background.

B: What's your wife's opinion of Mrs. Johnson?

C: She likes her. She thinks she's a charming woman.

B: Some say that Mr. Johnson, by himself, is pretty good, and that Mr. Johnson with Lady Bird is unbeatable.

C: She is. My wife could really talk you down. My wife doesn't have to take a back seat to anybody. And she thinks she's a delightful and charming and intelligent woman.

B: Sir, is there anything else you would like to put on this record?

C: Yes. Let's elect Ted Kennedy President!

B: You already started campaigning?

C: You're damned right.

B: Do you think he has got a chance?

C: Yes, I think he has got a chance.

B: How come you're picking Ted Kennedy right now for four years?

C: Well, I'm a sort of an emotional guy. I was so much for the Kennedys.

B: Were you for Robert Kennedy before his assassination?

C: I had supper with him and the whole Kennedy family the night before he was killed out in California.

B: You were out in California--were you participating in the primary campaign?

C: I was campaigning, making talks and writing ghost speeches.

B: What was Robert Kennedy like on that night?

C: I never saw a man as happy in my life. He knew he had it, and he did have it.

B: You mean he had California in the primary?

C: Oh, yes, he had the darned election in his pocket. And he was a great little guy.

B: Did you have any intimation that he had a sense of danger?

C: No. I don't think the Kennedys have ever had a sense of danger. They were like Lyndon Johnson--I think this same quality is present in both Johnson and Kennedy.

B: Do you remember anything else about that dinner you had with Robert Kennedy that night?

C: Well, it wasn't a dinner. It was a supper; very, very informal, happy.

B: Who all was there?

C: John Glenn; those two wonderful Negroes who--athletes who--

B: Roosevelt Grier is one of them.

C: Grier, and they were sort of his bodyguard almost. Roosevelt Grier and--

B: I can't remember the name of the other one myself. (Rafer Johnson)

C: I can't either to save my neck. But it was that little intimate group he had around him.

B: And everybody was happy and joking?

C: Oh, yes. We knew it was in the bag and it was in the bag.

B: Did you talk just about politics, or was the conversation--?

C: We talked about sailing. I do a lot of sailing. We have a place up in Maine where I'd rather go than go to a political convention. And

Bobby Kennedy was a great sailor. He gave my son, Philip, who was with Newsweek, a beautiful scoop as to his decision to run for the Senate from New York.

B: Oh, really, out of friendship for your family, he allowed your son Philip to break the story?

C: Out of Philip's friendship, this new young columnist, Rowland Evans, was doing very well; he had just started the new column--and--. He was on this now-famous cruise that Bobby Kennedy and a number of personal friends took just before his decision to run, or to seek the nomination. He let my Philip--as I say, he was with Newsweek--he has now decided to free lance for awhile--but he gave him this scoop and it beat the hell out of Time and the New York Times and all.

B: To get back to the tragedy in California, you were still there at the time of the assassination?

C: No. I had to leave that day. I heard the news on the way home.

B: Do you recall the reactions that were all around you then?

C: Well, my own reaction was I cried for a whole day, and just about everybody I knew was in tears and ready to kill somebody. Of course, I saw just his friends, mainly just his friends, so I'm quite sure there were a lot of people. Well, I hit a guy in the mouth, bruised three knuckles, coming back through Texas. And a bunch of God-damned Texans got on the plane--four of them, and one of them said, "Well, we got that son-of-a-bitch, didn't we?" And I knew who he

was talking about, but I turned around to give him a chance, and I said, "Who are you talking about?" He said, "You know damn well who I'm talking about," and I said, "You're just a son-of-a-bitch," and I hit him in the mouth.

B: This was right on the plane?

C: Right on the plane. I knocked a bunch of teeth out of that guy.

B: Did that quiet down his friends?

C: It did. And what really quieted down his friends, the stewardess started screaming because I'd laid this guy out cold and she started screaming, and the co-pilot came rushing out with an unorthodox weapon--a monkey wrench. And he said, "What has happened here?" And he looked like he was sore at me. I said, "I hit him in the mouth and I'm going to hit him again." He said, "What did you hit him for?" Cause the co-pilots are the law officers on these planes. And I said, "I hit him because he said that Bobby Kennedy was a son-of-a-bitch." I said, "If you want me to hit you, I'll do that, too." I bruised three knuckles. He turned to the Texan and said, "Did you say that, you son-of-a-bitch?" He and I were getting ready to take that whole plane.

B: Sir, the future historian is going to hear that and he's going to wonder one thing. How old a man are you?

C: Sixty.

B: One other thing. I think this needs to be asked, and you may be in a

position to shed some light on it. One of the things the future historian is going to see in the public prints of today is a good deal of speculation about the relationship between Robert Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. Do you have any knowledge of that--of Robert Kennedy's opinion of Lyndon Johnson?

C: I think they were both two strong men and that they really liked each other.

B: That they did like each other?

C: I can see Lyndon Johnson laughing at him now as he looked at this cocky little New Yorker.

B: Did you ever hear Robert Kennedy say anything about Lyndon Johnson?

C: I don't think so. I don't remember, but I don't believe I did.

Don't make me a two-gun man in this thing, because I'm strictly a newspaper observer, and the fact that I hit these guys is nothing.

B: Well, it's your position as a trained observer that makes your comments valuable in this sort of thing. But you believe that whatever rivalry existed between Robert Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson was just the rivalry of two strong men?

C: Yes, I think this. Two men who both wanted the same thing.

B: Do you know Ted Kennedy personally?

C: No. Well, I met him that night in the hotel.

B: In San Francisco?

C: Yes.

B: Does he know you're getting ready to support him for President?

At the recent convention, did you have anything to do with the little boom for Teddy Kennedy for Vice President?

C: No.

B: Well, I asked you awhile back before we got off on those fascinating stories if there was anything else? Is there anything else now?

C: I can't think of anything.

B: Do you know any more good stories like that one?

C: Like which one?

B: Like the one you just told about the Texans on the airplane.

C: Well, you know, that's one story I've told you that I feel kind of odd about, because this does sort of make me a sort of roughneck.

B: Not under those circumstances, sir. I think your public record beyond this is going to show that roughneck is not the word for Hodding Carter of Greenville, Mississippi. Besides, under those circumstances, that's courage--not rowdiness.

Is there anything else that you think needs to be on here?

C: I can't think of anything. I'm sorry we're tied up with these other friends.

* * * * *

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By Hodding Carter

to the

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Signed Hodding Carter

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