

INTERVIEW V

DATE: May 1, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: NASH CASTRO

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

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

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F: We've talked about just about everything except Solidarity Day in some detail--

C: And the mule train.

F: And the mule train. How did the idea of Solidarity Day get started? What was it supposed to do to me?

C: The concept behind Solidarity Day was to demonstrate how unified the supporters of the Poor People's Campaign were, and in this connection they arranged to bring people from throughout the Eastern United States and even as far as the Midwest. Actually, they had hoped to attract people from all over the United States. The way it turned out, most of their participants came from the Northeastern part of the United States, from major cities like Philadelphia and New York and Chicago.

The first indication we had that they planned to hold a Solidarity Day exercise came from the press. Progressively, as we had visits with their leaders about matters relating to Resurrection City--and their attorneys especially--the subject started coming more and more into focus. Eventually, it resolved itself in the form of a meeting with

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their two attorneys here in Washington, Leroy Clarke and Frank Reeves; people at Justice including Ramsey Clark, Warren Christopher, John McDonough; John Layton, the chief of the Metropolitan Police; Grant Wright, the chief of the Park Police, and his deputy, Al Beye; other city officials including the Corporation counsel, Charles Duncan, the director of safety for the District, Pat Murphy. We met in Ramsey Clark's office, and along with us there appeared Bayard Rustin, who was so instrumental in the 1963 march with Martin Luther King. He had as his chief aide and helper, a very beautiful Negress, whose name I cannot remember, but who is the wife of a quite prominent New York doctor, and she impressed me as being just as bright as Mr. Rustin and just as dedicated.

The plans for the Solidarity Day program were discussed quite at length at this meeting--all the logistics, the manner in which people would be arriving in the city, the length of the exercise, the arrangements for the audio equipment, marshals, water, and all the myriad details.

F: This was supposed to be poor, not black?

C: This was supposed to be poor. It was to include the Mexican-Americans, the Indians, even New York Puerto Ricans. Very clearly, it was established that Bayard Rustin was in charge.

The planning for the exercise went right along. We were in touch with Mr. Rustin and with the lady who was helping him. Dean Rusk's son [David], who at that time was quite active in civil rights matters, was involved. He worked with Sterling Tucker, who is now the vice chairman of the District of Columbia City Council, and he sat in on the meeting with us and was our principal contact in respect to planning for the event, and more particularly, after Mr. Rustin was deposed from his chairmanship of the Solidarity

Day event. I honestly don't know what happened, but I gather some kind of a breach developed between [Ralph] Abernathy and Rustin. The net effect of it was that one day Abernathy announced in the press that Rustin had been dismissed because he was too close to the white establishment. He had asked Sterling Tucker to undertake the chairmanship of the event. Very unfortunately for us, this came about within about ten days of June 19.

F: I judge Rustin has real organizational abilities.

C: From what I know of him, and I speak from the experience I had with him in 1963 in connection with a bigger event at the Lincoln Memorial, I would say the man has lots of strong qualifications because he did a first-class job on that one. I have no doubt that he would have done equally as good a job on this one if he had continued in the role.

However it was, he was replaced by Sterling Tucker, and for us it was a real tragedy. We were concerned that, because of the relatively short time left between the time of his separation and June 19, that they would make a shambles of the whole thing, which they did. Tucker and I had a couple of conversations on the telephone and in person about it. He shifted the major responsibility for the event to young Rusk, whom I recall as a very bright, effective, articulate young man.

F: Did he have any official position, or was he just sort of a friend of the court?

C: No. He had an official position as an assistant to Sterling Tucker in, oh, I've forgotten what the name of his organization was at that time, [Washington] Urban League, I guess. And young Rusk really applied himself to the task; he was very conscientious; he was very cooperative; he worked with us very carefully and very cooperatively and very precisely, making sure that they violated no park regulations of any kind, that the exercise

was an orderly one, that they conformed to our own plans and the conditions that we outlined and the permit that we issued for that day.

Remember that Resurrection City was scheduled to fold on June 16, a Sunday. We had issued the permit to begin in May and terminate on June 16. I think part of their strategy was to confront us by asking for an extension of the permit to accommodate Solidarity Day, and we concluded that the only intelligent thing to do was to go along with this because we didn't want a big fat confrontation with them.

We issued the permit. They made all of their own arrangements to bring people in; they made their own arrangements to provide for the audio equipment on the Lincoln Memorial steps. We provided for their bus parking; we established the time at which the permit terminated. But in the back of our minds, we had grave concerns that bringing in these vast numbers of people--and nobody really knew how many would come--Abernathy would say that they would exceed the numbers that King attracted here in 1963, and some other guy in the leadership would come out with a statement that they would have a hundred thousand, and then another one would come and say that they would have a million people here.

F: Did they have any accurate way of making a head-count?

C: They would have had if Rustin had been handling it, because Rustin was very methodical and very management-oriented.

F: But they were just guessing.

C: That was the difference. They were all guessing and everyone guessed differently. At one time, they were projecting as many as one million people coming here.

F: Was the idea in general to get them here in the morning and out that evening, or were they going to have two nights in town?

C: Oh, no. The idea was that they would come in the morning and leave that night, and we never--

F: You didn't have a real housing problem then?

C: No, thank God, because that would have created a lot of problems. As it turned out, they had about fifty-five thousand people. But I'm sure that some of those who came for the demonstration stayed over in Resurrection City for the remaining days of it or for a part of that time. Our concern was that bringing that many more people into the city, at a time when things in Resurrection City itself were deteriorating, really could have caused a terrific conflagration of some kind, and we were mighty concerned that the injection of these many more thousands of people might just cause problems well beyond the scope of the problems that we had in connection with the riots in April.

Our intelligence was very effective. We had reports from all over the United States telling us exactly the number of buses that had been hired, and we could estimate closely the numbers that would come. The unknown was the number of local people who would participate. As it turned out, there were quite a few, not only black people, but white people as well.

I spent all of that day in the Mayor's command post at 3rd and Indiana Avenues, because we thought that decisions might have to be made in a hurry and sometimes in consultation with District officials. Until they arrived at the Washington Monument grounds for their assembly, they weren't our problem; they were the District of Columbia's problem.

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There are inevitably some funny things about incidents like this. I remember that at one of the windows, at the command center where we were, overlooks 3rd Street, which is one of the main thoroughfares into the city from the north. Another window opened up on Pennsylvania Avenue--3rd and Pennsylvania is a busy, busy intersection. And Walter Washington and Tom Fletcher and I stood there counting buses as they came. And, of course, we had reports progressively throughout the day. You know, X number of buses at such and such a place. Progressively, we kept building up the figure and concluded that finally by the time that all these people came from out of town and adding the local people, they had about fifty-five thousand, where Abernathy at one time had predicted a million.

The event was covered rather broadly by the press. One of the television stations here, the Metro Media Station, had light coverage all throughout the afternoon. One of the things I'll never forget is the long, long-winded speech that Abernathy made and the guy from New Mexico--

F: [Reies] Tijerina?

C: Tijerina, who talked like a real revolutionary--I recall that his final parting words, and he was very excited at this point, were "Viva la Revolución!" And I thought, my God, we are in a democratic country indeed. Who would let a clown like this talk in this manner, right smack in the heart of our nation's capital? I guess that's the wonder of our democratic system. I've wondered a time or two whether we don't overdo, remembering that if he ever opened his mouth in this way in many countries of the world, he wouldn't last very long.

The day went without incident. On the whole, the demonstration was something of a flop. For one thing, it did not attract nearly the people that they had expected. Again, I think, if Rustin had been in charge, he would have been instrumental in giving broader publicity to this event and even arranging for private money with which to bring more buses here. I don't think Tucker had the time, and probably not the connections, Rustin had.

The group assembled on the Washington Monument grounds. We actually prescribed the route of march. One thing that we stood fast on was that they would not march through Resurrection City, and the reason for that was that we were afraid that there might be riots. We prevailed upon them to stay out of there. They took the line of march from the Washington Monument grounds across 17th Street and on both sides of the Reflecting Pool and then massed up against and on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Many of them sat on the Reflecting Pool. It was a very hot day in the middle of June, and many of them sat on the sides of the Pool and stuck their feet in it. Many of them actually waded in the water all afternoon. To my knowledge, there wasn't one incident; there wasn't one arrest, which I think speaks very well for both sides. We really feared that the injection of all of these people into the city might cause some great problems.

One of the funny things that I remember about this is as five o'clock came and we'd had no incidents. We'd kept in touch with people right down at the site by telephone and, of course, we watched on television. I recall so well standing at these two windows that I talked about and counting the buses as they left the city. And every time a bunch of them would go by, Mayor Washington would say, "Hey, Nash, there go six more buses,"

or Tom Fletcher would say, "Walter, there go ten more," and I'd do the same thing.

Happily, everything went well, without incident, and I am just delighted it did.

The days that followed were rather crucial in the sense that that evening we had the beginnings of what could have been a serious riot in the ghetto at 14th and U, but the Metropolitan Police were right on top of it--checked it in a hurry.

F: Did the mule train give you any special problems?

C: Oh, gosh, yes. That bloody mule train I'll never forget. The interesting thing about the mule train is that we knew exactly where it was all the time.

F: Kind of like plotting an enemy ship coming through the water?

C: Exactly that. Our intelligence people reported to us every morning exactly where the mule train was and exactly what their plans were for that day, as far as they could determine into the future. The mule train literally didn't get off the ground in that it just pattered around in the South and made no great progress. But when June 19 started approaching, they decided to make it a significant part of Solidarity Day. We were always fearful that even though we had a provision in the permit for Resurrection City that they could have no livestock or animals in the encampment, because they were inclined to violate the conditions of the permit, we were concerned that they might bring their mules in.

F: The idea was to come right into the middle of the Solidarity Day demonstration?

C: Exactly that. And as a matter of fact, we authorized them to have their mule train on the march from the Washington Monument grounds to the Lincoln Memorial. Because of the total disorganization, the mule train never appeared.

We were really not very concerned about the mule train up until the Saturday preceding June 19. It was on Saturday that I got the word that they were going to send the mule train by train to Washington. It was the only way they could manage to get it here in time for Solidarity Day. Well, Sunday's report indicated that they were shipping the mules that day and that they were scheduled to arrive that night.

F: Where were they shipping them from, do you remember?

C: Somewhere in the South, I don't recall exactly where.

F: Were they supposed to come into Union Station?

C: No, they were scheduled to come into Alexandria. And I learned this on Sunday. I guess they were shipped on Saturday, not on Sunday, but Sunday I learned that they were scheduled to arrive Sunday night in Alexandria--the mule train and the wagons as well and however many people were with them.

Well, I got in touch with the Park Police and asked them to put a plainclothesman there and keep us informed about the movements of the mule train and the people with it. Monday morning I started getting reports that the mule train had arrived, that they were all there and assembling the wagons. They hadn't been able to ascertain what plans, if any, they had for the mule train. So about twelve o'clock on Monday I got a call from the plainclothesman and he said, "Mr. Castro, they're hitching the mules to the wagons and they say they're going to start into town."

F: Excuse me a moment. On the mechanics, I don't know anything about the Alexandria station. Do you have enclosures--some kind of a compound or corral or something where you can handle this, or were you just working this out of a freight yard?

C: They worked out of a freight yard. They plunked their mules and their wagons on a vacant lot near the railroad tracks.

Well, when I got the report that they were hitching up, I got on the telephone and called John McDonough. I said, "John, we've got to get on top of this thing and find out exactly what they have in mind so that we won't have any great confrontations."

F: Would you need a permit to bring a mule train across one of these bridges? In other words, is the bridge open to livestock? Could I come across on a horse?

C: No, you cannot. This was another problem.

F: I can see practical objections.

C: We decided we wouldn't make an issue. If their mules came in, we would let them march wherever they wanted to go, within bounds. They could not go downtown, of course, because of traffic and other considerations.

Before the mules arrived, I looked for a site where we might put them and where they would be reasonably out of view. I was afraid that those people who were not sympathetic to Resurrection City and the campaign might undertake to harm them. I located a site right by Memorial Avenue off the George Washington Memorial Parkway where we formerly operated a maintenance yard. Today, we are using it as a storage place for sand and salt for winter snows, and we temporarily locate balled trees prior to planting, among other things. This is visible if you look for it, but unless you know it's there, you're really not conscious of it except in the winter time when the leaves are off the trees. I decided that this would be a good location for their mules. The only problem was that we had no water there, and it created a real dilemma for us.

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But to get back to this specific day, meaning June 17, Monday, when our plainclothes officer said that they were hitching the mules and talking about starting their march. I got in touch with John McDonough. We already had the permit written out so that there would be no--as a matter of fact, we did issue a permit for the mules, as I look back now. We had it all written out. And so I went by the Justice Department and picked up John McDonough. In between the time I left to pick up John McDonough, I got a call from the plainclothesman saying that the word he had now was that they were going to park their mules and their mule train by the Sailing Marina on Daingerfield Island. This is on the east side of the northbound lanes of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, a highly visible place. It's true--there's lovely grass there always; this is the site of an old nursery. I decided that if they plunked their mules there it would cause a terrific traffic hazard for one thing, and for another they would attract so much attention on the part of the thousands of motorists who go by there every day that they would really mess up traffic all day long.

F: About how many mules are we talking about?

C: I think they had fourteen mules altogether and about eight wagons. I'd have to check my figures.

Anyway, I picked up John McDonough and we drove on to Alexandria. On the way to Alexandria, we decided to stop at Daingerfield Island and take a look because if they decided to bring their mules in there, we were not going to make an issue of it. We were concerned then about getting them out of town, and any incident that we created as a result of something like that would just prolong their stay. So we went to Daingerfield Island and looked around. We found a nice location in this nursery that was out of sight

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where the mules could be and where they wouldn't be harmed. The only problem was that there was no water there within less than eight hundred feet. So I decided, and John concurred, that this would be a good location for them if they insisted. We would not make an issue of it.

As we left, I asked the man in charge of the nursery if he would get about eight hundred feet of hose and also some cans, wastebaskets, whatever--barrels--which we might fill with water to water the mules. Then we went on our way.

We got down to the freight yard at Alexandria and the place was a shambles. There were all kinds of people there, cameras, reporters, mule drivers, sympathizers, policemen--all manner of people. And nobody was doing anything. The mules had been hitched to the wagons, they were reasonably lined up to form a parade, but everybody was milling and churning around. Nobody had any idea who was doing what.

F: The city of Alexandria isn't mixed up in this now? This is all on park property.

C: Oh, no, this was on city property.

F: Well, now, you've got some liaison problem with Alexandria then, haven't you?

C: Well, we should have had, but we didn't. There wasn't time for liaison and moreover, we were sure that all their concern was to get the mules in and out. Then they became somebody else's problem.

But when John and I got there, it was pure turmoil, chaos. Nobody knew what they were doing; nobody was in charge. So I started asking around of some of the Negroes who were with them. I said, "What are you going to do with your mules?" Finally I spotted a guy named Willie Holden, also a reverend, a young fellow, very sharp looking guy, whom I didn't know from Adam, and asked, "Who's in charge here? What

are you going to do with your mules?" He said, "I'm in charge, but I don't know what we're going to do with our mules. They tell us that we've got to get away from here. We've got to leave here. They won't let us stay." And I said, "Well, come with me. I have a place for your mules."

So we prevailed upon a motorcycle officer from the Alexandria Police Department to lead the parade of mules through the heart of Alexandria, and along the George Washington Memorial Parkway. Jean Smith, a television correspondent from NBC, was with the mule train all the time from the day they originated in the South. I knew her casually, and she came up to me and said, "What are you doing about these mules?" I said, "Jean, we have a place for them. I'm told that they can't stay here, and so we have selected a nice isolated place where I think they will be comfortable." And she said, "Well, do you know precisely where it is?" And I said, "Yes." She asked, "Are you sure they are not going to Resurrection City?" I answered, "Yes, because the permit does not authorize mules to go into Resurrection City." She advised me not to discount the possibility. She said, "You know, these people will tell you one thing and they're so erratic, they'll do something else." And I said, "We always run that risk, but we're going to work it out, I hope, in such a way that we will get them to the site we have in mind." I didn't tell her anything about Daingerfield Island. I referred to "the site," because I didn't want her to get the idea that they were going to go to Daingerfield Island.

Well, we started the mule train on its way. John McDonough and I got in my car and we went to Daingerfield Island. At the turnoff from the George Washington Memorial Parkway, I parked. The reason I did this is that I wanted to make absolutely sure that they did not turn into Daingerfield Island but kept on going. The press saw me.

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do this and followed me, but I didn't know it. Before I realized it, here was half of the press that was accompanying this outfit and they were all asking questions, "Where are you going to put them?" and all this business. You know, I just kept saying that this was not the site that we had selected, that we had a better site.

One of my concerns was that Daingerfield Island is very close to National Airport. The jets fly over it; they're very noisy. I felt sorry for the poor mules, which by the way, looked like they had never been fed, like they had been overworked; they were full of sores; they were, I am sure, half-starved. I felt terribly sorry for them.

The curious thing is that the press was waiting with us. I had a portable police radio with me, and kept in touch with the Park Police, who were now leading the mule train. They knew where we wanted to position the mules, and I said, "Be sure not to bring them to Daingerfield Island."

Well, we waited and sure enough, after a while, they came into view over the brow of the hill at Slater's Lane. One of the wagons broke down, which caused the mule train to stop for about twenty minutes while repairs were made. As they started getting close to the turnoff for Daingerfield Island, I walked up to a police officer, a Park policeman, John Good, and said, "John, keep going. Don't stop. Just keep going."

About the time that I was talking with him, some Negro got out of a car behind the motorcycle and said, "What you all doing here? Why are you stopping us?" I said, "We are not stopping you. We are only assuring that you get to the place where you are going." He was rather nasty.

About this time, some other Negroes started getting out of their cars, and I very casually walked on back. By golly, we passed the crisis point! John kept leading them.

And at that point, John McDonough and I got back in my car and went down to the site near Memorial Avenue and awaited the mules. This was about two miles from Daingerfield Island. About half an hour after we arrived, several of the Negroes with the mule train came up and started talking about the site. They said they didn't like it--it wasn't nice; there was no grass--and started complaining. I explained to them that this was the best site we had. It was near Resurrection City, for one; it was isolated, for another. Their mules would not be disturbed there. Finally, after much talking, they reluctantly agreed to bring their mules in.

We had another crisis. You know, Memorial Bridge leads right to Resurrection City.

F: You're right up there by the bridge?

C: No, at this point, I was at the site not far from Memorial Bridge, but off the George Washington Memorial Parkway, actually north of Memorial Avenue and a little northwest of Memorial Bridge. But in order to get there, you have to go around the circle at the west end of Memorial Bridge and down Memorial Avenue towards Arlington Cemetery and then you turn right off Memorial Avenue, and this takes you down the road to this area that we had selected.

F: How far is this from Theodore Roosevelt Island?

C: I'd say about a fifth of a mile. The thing that concerned me at this point is the fact that I was afraid that as they came to Memorial Bridge, they would decide to go across into Resurrection City. So John Good, who has such a fine head on his shoulders, foresaw this possibility, too, and instead of taking them counterclockwise around the circle, which would have put them right smack in front of the bridge, he took them clockwise half-way

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around the circle and right into Memorial Avenue and down into the site where they were to go.

F: Was regular traffic going on all this time?

C: No.

F: You had closed the area?

C: Yes, we had to. I understand it was chaotic. This was at four-thirty in the afternoon.

F: It's chaotic anytime at four-thirty.

C: It's chaotic anytime, but you add an ingredient like this and you really louse it all up.

Well, John and his mules arrived. One of the things I learned was that--and I learned this while I was at Daingerfield Island waiting for the mule train--I called our maintenance people on the car telephone and asked them to make [sure] the mules definitely were going to the other place, and all I did was check with them to make sure that the water barrels were there and filled for the mules.

While we were waiting at Daingerfield Island, Joe, the plumber who was supposed to do this, came up to me in his truck and said, "Mr. Castro, there's no water down there." And I said, "But there has to be! There's a hydrant there." He said, "I know, but two months ago we disconnected it." I told him, "The only thing to do is to get one of our water trucks and take it down there and park it," which is exactly what he did. He rounded up some big wastebaskets, the over-sized wastebaskets, and by the time we got there, they were all filled with water, waiting for the mules.

The thing that really distressed me was the condition of the mules. As I indicated before, they were in visibly bad shape. And I felt badly about it. The worst thing was that after they got the mules there and unhitched them, they started taking out food for

them from their wagons. I saw, I think, about a half a bale of hay, and they had gunny sacks with a little grain in the bottom of each one. I decided that these poor mules were going to starve, so I asked one of our park policemen to go to our stables. I said, "Load up your station wagon with hay and bring it down here, and if somebody complains and I personally have to pay for it, I'll personally pay for it." I felt that sorry for the mules.

F: You think the mules had gone downhill on the trail then?

C: Oh, there's no doubt about it.

F: From poor care?

C: Poor care, exactly. And this infuriated the Humane Society, which is still another interesting story. The Humane Society, of course, was right on the scene. They wanted to get a court injunction to keep the mules from parading and insisted that they go to their Society's farm in Virginia on the grounds they were being treated inhumanely. We had several discussions with them, which were funny, in many ways funny and in many ways very sad.

We kept a policeman on the site at night, one of our park policemen, to keep watch over the mules, because we did not want anybody coming and being mischievous. They did not use the mules in connection with the Solidarity Day exercises as planned. Something went wrong with their planning. They never were in the picture at all.

On the Thursday, the day after Solidarity Day, they took the mules out for a parade and attracted a lot of attention.

F: On the other side of the river?

C: Yes, in the District of Columbia. They took them up to 14th and U, the ghetto.

F: They did bring them on in then?

C: Yes. And they attracted a lot of attention and lots of publicity. On this basis, Fauntroy decided--he seemed to be in charge of the mules at that point, he came back into the picture--that they were going to parade them some more. This created problems, of course, because they had to have permits from the District, and they had to have permits from us. The thing was arranged in such a way finally that they would take them up to Capitol Hill, and the Metropolitan Police would arrest the drivers, and they would also impound the mules. This was prearranged.

About four-thirty on Thursday, I had a call from Al Beye, and he said they didn't follow the script. He said, "They don't want to go to jail; they don't want the mules impounded." And he said, "I've got them on my hands up here on Capitol Hill, and what do I do with them?" I said, "Al, you better take them down to the Mall, and let me talk with Fauntroy and see what we can work out." Well, the Humane Society was putting so much pressure on us at that time, that--

F: They wanted you to take them in and--

C: They wanted to impound the mules themselves and take them out to their farm in Virginia and revive them, which at that point they sorely needed.

So I got in touch with Fauntroy. First of all, after traffic on that afternoon, our Park Police escorted the mule train back to the site on the G. W. Parkway. I called Fauntroy and told him about the pressures we were under because of his mules, and he said, "You don't have to worry about them. We've made arrangements for them to go right outside the District tomorrow." This was over in the area of the Cafritz Hospital. This would have meant traversing park land, District land, and so forth, but you see, we didn't want the mules to remain here because of their symbolism. We wanted them out of

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town, but Fauntroy was determined that they were going to keep them here for demonstrations even after Resurrection City folded. We didn't want that; we wanted to avoid it.

I got the word on Friday morning from the Park Police that they were going to take the mules out on another march. By this time the pressure from the Humane Society was so strong that I said to Beye, "If they do, impound them." So I called Fauntroy, and I said, "Walter, you've got to be attentive to the Humane Society. They're going to make you look pretty sick, because they're going to get a court order, and they're going to impound your mules." I said, "If you guys have any sympathy for these animals, or any feeling about them, you're going to get them out of circulation and not parade them anymore." I added, "As a matter of fact, if you parade them, if you take them out of that area, we are going to impound them, because the Humane Society is going to have a court order."

He really got excited then. He called Christine Stevens, the wife of Roger Stevens, the director of the Kennedy Center. Chris has been very involved in animal welfare matters, and she called Carol Fortas, who has also been concerned with that kind of thing, and between them and a lady in Maryland, a Mrs. Reviere [?], we worked out arrangements under which the mules were taken to a farm. She paid for their boarding for a whole month. The interesting thing is that--

F: You never considered taking them out here to your Oxen Hill farm?

C: The farm wasn't in operation then. Thank God, that wasn't brought up, because it would just have created many more problems for us.

The whole thing was very funny in that we finally, after a long and harassing day, worked it out so that the mules finally ended up in a comfortable place with lots of lush green grass. To my knowledge, the Humane Society finally took them over, and they have been living on one of their farms in Virginia.

F: Ever since.

C: Ever since.

F: No attempt to get them back home?

C: They have never attempted to get them back home. I don't think they could afford to do it. It would be very expensive, probably.

F: Did you have much trouble with counter-demonstrations?

C: No. As a matter of fact, there were very few counter-demonstrations. I'm trying to think. The American Nazi party that Lincoln Rockwell started, two or three times, I recall, undertook to demonstrate against--

F: But it wasn't really organized either?

C: But with Rockwell gone, their leadership rather fell apart. They just never got reorganized.

F: To shift a moment and very briefly, have you had particular problems in trying to contain demonstrations against President Johnson because particularly of Vietnam?

C: We've had problems with demonstrations ever since I can remember. There are groups which, like SANE, the group for a sane nuclear policy; the Women Strike for Peace--oh, my God, there are countless groups who have objected to the Vietnam War, who have sought permits to demonstrate against it in front of the White House. Yes, they have been very problematical for us. These requests are forever with us. We have made it a

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practice to check them out with the Secret Service. We have denied a few permits because of intelligence information--you know, they may be carrying a bomb and that kind of stuff. Very sticky.

F: Do you have much attempt to demonstrate without permit?

C: Last year we had one case like that. The Students for a Democratic Society decided to demonstrate without a permit, and we arrested them all--eighty-two of them. This was in Lafayette Park.

As a result of that--I think it was a test case--the American Civil Liberties Union has us in court now, and, in fact, today we are making an appeal. The District court ruled on last Saturday that the regulations we have prescribed governing demonstrations in front of the White House and Lafayette Park are unconstitutional, and they have declared that whole section relating to demonstrations to be unconstitutional. This creates problems for us.

F: You confine your demonstration area in which you'll issue permits?

C: There are some parts in the District where you can demonstrate without a permit--Judiciary Square--we have several of them.

F: Well, I was thinking, though, in the White House area. If I want to demonstrate against the President, can I pick up my sign and go anywhere around the White House area?

C: No, you can't. East Executive Avenue, West Executive Avenue, South Executive Avenue, and State Place are closed to demonstrations and parades by regulation. The only area near the White House where you could demonstrate with a permit would be on the sidewalk right in front of the White House, or across the street in Lafayette Park. What we have done is to try to limit the numbers of demonstrators in front of the White

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House to one hundred on the sidewalk and to five hundred in Lafayette Park. This is the issue before the court now. They claim that we have been unreasonable about prescribing these numbers. We don't think we have, the reason being that people other than demonstrators also have certain rights. And I think their rights are violated by these endless demonstrators.

F: If I want to throw a fairly good-sized demonstration in front of the White House that the park and the sidewalk won't contain, can I spill into the street?

C: No, of course, you can't. Actually, we would not issue you a permit for more than five hundred in Lafayette Park, nor would we issue you a permit for more than one hundred demonstrators on the sidewalk.

F: Hypothetically, suppose that I intend to have one hundred on the sidewalk, five hundred in Lafayette Park, and because of the general concern with the issue, two thousand show up. What happens in a case like this? I mean, I didn't intend it; it just happened.

C: Happily, it hasn't happened, but if it did, we would cancel the permit. This is one of the conditions of our permit--that if they exceed the numbers, the permit is automatically cancelled. And they have been reasonably cooperative. We have a sticky one before us right now where the Quakers want to hold an all-night vigil, I think, one night next week. They have fifteen hundred people and have asked for permission to demonstrate not only in front of the White House, both on the south sidewalk and the north sidewalk on Pennsylvania Avenue, but also in front of the Executive Office Building to accommodate their fifteen hundred. We have had all-night vigils before, but in small numbers, six or eight people. This time we have a real sticky one, because they are thinking in terms of

fifteen hundred. I don't yet know how we're going to handle it. We're debating it right now.

F: I'm one lone man with a sign against something or for something. Do I need a permit to walk that sidewalk with my sign?

C: Yes, sir. Because our regulations provide that picketing in any form by any number must be done by permit. We are pretty accommodating about these things. We have to be, within the framework of our regulations and within the framework of the Constitution.

F: One other question--again hypothetically, I agree to put no more than five hundred in Lafayette Park. How am I going to keep the sightseers from swelling that number? How do you check who's legitimate and who isn't in a case like this? What are the mechanics?

C: Well, the sightseers usually don't position themselves close to the speakers and the people who are participating in the demonstration. They don't carry picket signs. Most of these people have some form of identity, the majority of them. They either carry a picket sign or an arm band or a pin or a button, something that distinguishes them. We can't be precise that they must be exactly five hundred. That's hard to do.

F: There's no counter system?

C: Sometimes there is. For example, we had a demonstration about a month ago on the part of the Women's Right [Strike?] for Peace. They are our perennial demonstrators, you know. We had a problem with them in that they wanted five hundred demonstrators on the sidewalk, and we told them that we could not issue them a permit for more than one hundred on the sidewalk. Then they proposed to have the other four hundred on the north sidewalk. The one hundred number that I'm referring to has to do with demonstrators on the sidewalk in front of the White House. On the north sidewalk in front of Lafayette

Park, which is now all boarded up because of the construction work in there, they asked for permission to have four hundred demonstrators.

I suggested instead because the White House was not their focus that day but the Capitol, that they consider instead debarking from their buses in front of the Executive Office Building and walking past, reasonably keeping a hundred people in front of the White House at a time. They were very cooperative. It worked out just perfectly. It couldn't have been better. As a matter of fact, I got a letter from the lady in charge of the demonstration expressing appreciation for our help. And this happened about the time the daffodils were blooming and she said in her closing sentence, "The daffodils are lovely--peace."

F: That may be a good note to stop on.

[End of Tape I of I and Interview V]

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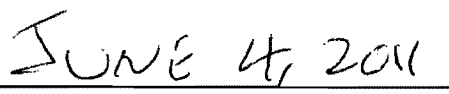
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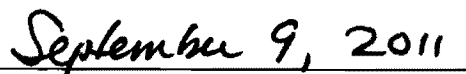
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