INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: HAROLD FLEMING

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

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

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G: Let me ask you to start out this discussion of the 1965 White House planning session, "To Fulfill These Rights," by talking about the relationship between Daniel Patrick Moynihan and the conference.

F: Well, Pat really did not play any role in the planning of the thing. What made him an important figure at that time was that the storm broke about his report [The Negro Family: The Case for National Action] at just the time the conference was being anticipated, somewhere between the time Johnson made his Howard University speech and, what he must have regretted more than once, rashly promised this conference, or in the wake of that and the time when we started trying to put it together. It was quite a hasty undertaking, you know.

I think we started in September, or something like that, with a target date of November. It was kind of frantic. But of course Moynihan, I think, was seen as being very important at that time in influencing policy, shaping the presidential thinking about this problem and so on. So it was in that sense that he was a very big symbol. He got, as he always does, extensive media attention, and this really is what caused the problem, not the report itself. The report could have been published in paperback and distributed all over the United States, and I don't think anything much would have happened. Pat came over here earlier when that report was still confidential and briefed some of us, Stephen

Currier, [and] my board members. We were interested, but we didn't see anything startling about this, and there really wasn't. It was an updating of E. Franklin Frazier, that's what it was, though it, as we now know, had a lot of predictive importance as to how much worse the situation was going to get.

But, in any case, it was largely because he was a media symbol and the way in which this thing broke in the media. It was broke first as a leak and was not supposed to be public, which of course created an aura to begin with. Secondly, people like [Rowland] Evans and [Robert] Novak and even Mary McGrory and some of the favored few who had access to Moynihan and had access to the report, I suppose, in the leak stage, played it up in a way that any black person would find offensive.

G: How so?

F: It really was a blame-the-victim kind of thing. Well, it's man-bites-dog sort of thing, partly, and in the case of Evans and Novak, it's just the same kind of wrong-headedness that characterizes everything they write. I don't know if you see them regularly, but they are pretty awful.

Anyway, the whole idea here was, look, a great revelation. This distinguished social scientist, high in the ranks of the government, has now revealed that all the bleeding-heart view of the plight of blacks is now exposed as being all their fault, that they're dissolute, and their family structure has crumbled. It was a sort of blame-the-victim tone to the whole thing. And most of the people who jumped on Pat had not then seen the report and may not until this day have read the report. It was not the report itself and the substance that caused the hurrah, except maybe in very, very few

cases of serious social scientists. By the time the report was read, all the public positions had been taken and the controversy was far advanced.

G: Do you recall how Moynihan was excluded from participating in the conference?

F: He wasn't excluded. He was there, in fact.

G: Oh, he was?

F: At the time he was--I think he got that wonderful title from Berl [Bernhard], but--

G: Elaborate on the title.

F: Well, this was the opening session of the conference. Moynihan was there. You might say he was excluded in the sense that he was not given any prominent role in the conference. But he was holding interviews with media people in the corridors of the hotel as the conference started, and he was there at the opening session. And in an attempt to establish a note of levity, I suppose, at the beginning, because it was a fairly tense situation--we'll get into that later, but there was considerable tension around--Berl said, "First of all, I want to make an important announcement and make it clear that there is no such person as Daniel Patrick Moynihan." Well, that of course was indignantly reported and commented on by Pat's partisans in the press, and I'm sure it didn't please him very much, though I don't recall talking to him after that was [said]. I'm sure he didn't hang around for the whole thing, maybe not at all after that initial appearance. But he was not excluded in the sense of forbidden or barred.

G: But he was initially scheduled or at least proposed to play a much larger role, in fact.

F: Well, I think had it not been for all the controversy, he no doubt would have. He probably would have.

G: But do you recall how his role was diminished in the wake of the leaks concerning this report?

F: Well, I think it had already occurred by the time this planning effort got under way, as I recall. I'm pretty sure that's true, and it wasn't that the planners of the conference had any animus toward Moynihan. Far from it, I knew and liked him and had worked with him, and I don't think Berl or, for that matter, Morris Abram or Bill Coleman, as the co-chairs of this exercise, had any animus. It was the politics of the situation. Had Moynihan been made a central figure in the conference, it would have exploded. Now, maybe that's not fair to him, but it was a political fact of life at that moment.

G: There's been a suggestion that some of the black leaders went to the President and said, "You can't have Moynihan be the centerpiece of this."

F: I have no firsthand knowledge of that, but I would not be surprised. This is what they would have said, and for all I know maybe they did say it. But that was the logical opinion for them to advance. And, of course, there were a lot of--call them political judgments, political and public relations judgments that had to be made about this conference, as to participation. Now, there were people who were not invited to the conference who some people might have felt would logically be invited. There was a screening process.

G: Who were those that--?

F: Some of them were blacks whose militancy had exceeded what was thought to be the tolerable limits.

G: These are people like Stokely Carmichael, and--?

F: Yes, yes. [Floyd] McKissick, for example, who did participate, was at the very outer boundaries of acceptability at that time. But there were a variety of criteria applied. Happily, from my point of view, I didn't get involved in that much. We had various people around who--well, Berl; that was Berl's baby as far as this little triumvirate we had at the staff level. He'd have to tell you more about that, but I think there were other people around. Perhaps Louis Martin and Carl [Stokes] may have gotten into that, it certainly is to--when blacks were involved. But it wasn't just blacks. There were judgments about who might have too much leftist baggage in the background, that kind of stuff, a little bit like a clearance.

Another experience for that, which I'll tell you about if we get to the Community Relations Service, which I helped to start with Governor [LeRoy] Collins--but anyhow, on this one there was an elaborate screening process. There were all kinds of judgments, not simply judgments of exclusionary judgments; there was the question of the limit on numbers and who was it most important to have here, and if you're going to have these kinds of people, who are the most relevant of these kinds of people? And it was a selection process, as well. How did I get off on exclusion? Well, we're talking about Moynihan.

G: Let me ask you to go back now and tell me about how your own involvement with the conference began. You were with the Potomac Institute at the time.

F: Yes, I was right here. In those days, starting with the inception of this institute in the spring of 1961 and to some extent even before that, I worked very closely with people in the Civil Rights Commission, in the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, Burke Marshall and John Doar and that group. We had quite a little operation,

public-private mounted, in anticipation of the passage of the Civil Rights Act to encourage and prepare the ground for compliance, particularly on the public accommodations title. At that time the big fear was that there would be something like massive resistance or a prohibition kind of counterreaction in the South to the public accommodations provision. Of course, after a while it became clear--I'd like to think that it was all this preventive, anticipatory activity that defused the issue, but in any case it did not become the big center of controversy. But my point about it is that I had worked with a lot of the key people in the administration on civil rights issues, so there wasn't all that . . . I had been tapped--really, President Johnson did that himself, not because he knew me all that well or *vice versa*, but because of the people who were working for him who had responsibility in these things by then. He approached my boss, Stephen Currier, and asked in his typical fashion, "I need your man."

G: Johnson called Currier?

F: Well, he actually was at a White House occasion or reception. I was not there, but Currier was, and he flung his arm around Stephen Currier. This was on the basis of what he'd been told about what they were doing; they thought the Community Relations Service, which hardly anybody even remembers today, even though it still exists in some form, was going to be a very important thing. And remember that that had been a central idea of Johnson's, going back to the first Civil Rights Act of 1957, and continued to be. And I think that's certainly a very important reason why it was in the 1964 act. At that time a lot of priority was attached to it. They had gotten former Governor LeRoy Collins to head it up. They thought it was going to be an operation that was going to be doing very difficult and delicate things in the South, when there was resistance or

noncompliance, particularly with public accommodations. And my southern background, I think, was another reason for this.

Anyway, by the time the conference came along I knew most of the players; I knew Lee White and Harry McPherson and Berl Bernhard and Burke Marshall and so on, and had worked with all of them. So it was not unnatural that--what gets neglected in an operation like this, the politics and the strategy and the public relations and the relationships become so overwhelming that the thing that there's nobody left to deal with is the substance. That is, the subject matter of the conference. What about the papers? What about the planning of the scope and so on? Whom do you recruit to do the papers? And that side of it was pretty much--we all talked with each other about everything, more or less. That is, we weren't operating in vacuum-sealed compartments. But my main responsibility was in that substantive area of getting the work, you might say, of the planning conference attended to. And Berl had a lot of troubleshooting to do and also was the principal liaison with the White House in trying to keep all the lines clear and prevent too much aggravation with the President and so on.

G: Was the White House supportive of the conference or was it leery of it?

F: Well, the two principal White House staff people for this purpose, Lee White and Harry McPherson, were very supportive of what we were trying to do. Let me put it to you this way: it was well known from the beginning that this was very likely to be a kamikaze operation, undertaking.

G: Why was that?

F: The whole black consciousness thing and the associated controversies and fiery rhetoric had begun. The President, whatever enthusiasm he had for this idea had greatly

diminished by the time the implementation was undertaken, and he was getting increasingly involved in the Vietnam issue and, most particularly, beginning to be rubbed pretty raw on the budget front. What he did not want was a) a conference that would stir up a lot of dust that could be exploited by partisans and in the media and look bad, and, secondly, something that was going to come up with a whole truckload of recommendations that, if they were implemented, would double the national budget or double the domestic budget, anyway. So it was well understood that the chances [were slight] of bringing off a harmonious occasion that would reflect great glory on the President and the administration, that would come in with charming recommendations about very severe problems that would cost little or nothing. You know, this is what every president would want, every one since Roosevelt, anyway. But Johnson wanted it especially because of his increasing concern about Vietnam.

So it was under that kind of cloud that this was undertaken. When I say it was kamikaze, I simply mean that I don't think that it was an accident that the staff work direction of this thing was not undertaken by full-time people in the administration or in the government. It was regarded even then as high-risk, and of course the three of us were all in one way or another insulated against the aftereffects. Nobody likes an unpleasant experience, but we were not going to lose our livelihood or be executed by a congressional committee or anything like that. So there were some advantages in having people in our kind of consultant status taking the heat.

G: Were there times during the planning of this session when President Johnson or people on the White House staff tried to influence the course of the conference?

F: It wasn't from my vantage point a very heavy-handed process, but there was a constant flow, exchange of views and information between what we were doing and, as I say, very largely through Berl; not entirely, but Berl was over there every day. And I know that Lee and Harry were keeping the President informed about how this was going and warning him along the way that there were some pretty tough problems to deal with and some chances for public embarrassment. I remember saying to Lee White in one of those meetings--you know Lee, don't you? He's a very wry and very funny man in his dry sort of way. And I said to Lee on one occasion, "Lee, I hope the President understands what we're dealing with here and is not going to be rudely surprised. The feeling is ugly out there in lots of quarters, and ugliness is bound to intrude on this thing. There are going to be some mistakes of judgment made, probably on attendance and participation. I hope he knows what we're up against here and is not going to be taken by surprise." Lee said, "Well, yes. The President knows that, he understands. He's been thoroughly briefed on that. He understands it as well as you and I do. But I'll tell you something. A man who is sentenced to death can understand very fully what's going to happen. He's been thoroughly briefed; he knows they're going to strap him in the chair and put that thing on his leg and all the rest of it. But when the day actually comes and he finds himself being strapped in the chair, he may have understood it thoroughly, what to expect, but he isn't going to like it." (Laughter) I thought that was a very clever way of describing what could be expected when the skyrockets started going off, what could be expected of the President.

G: Was limiting the size of the conference, the planning session, a way to control it to some extent, do you think?

F: No, I don't think that [it] was. There were just inevitable constraints on the size of attendance, if you wanted to get anything done. There were costs associated with the thing, and the logistics of it and so on. I don't think that size was--in fact, you could have doubled the size and still that wouldn't have affected the screening business at all. I mean, there were at least twice or three times as many people who would be totally acceptable. The issue was political, not numerical.

G: What was the purpose of the conference, the planning session?

F: Well, of course the conference happened because President Johnson said it was going to happen. I mean, he wanted to propose some kind of action and not just describe the problem that seemed to be--and he's not the first one to do this. What do you do? You either appoint a commission or a committee or you have a conference. And he, I think on the advice of somebody or other, maybe--who was the guy who wrote the Howard speech? He was also a Kennedy speech writer.

G: Was it Dick Goodwin?

F: Goodwin, yes. It was Goodwin. And it was a whale of a speech, too. I don't know whether it was his idea or Moynihan's idea or whose idea it was, but, anyway, that's what the President opted for. So having said it, he was stuck with it, I mean, having said he was going to do it. Of course, at the beginning what one was to assume the idea was, if you read the Howard speech or heard it, you would assume that the purpose here was to devise the ways to make that man at the beginning of the race, get him in a position on an equal footing with others in the race, which since then came to be called affirmative action. And, quite clearly, the purpose was broader than federal, but the centrality of the federal role, I think, was taken for granted by people. And I think the conference came

out about the way you would expect a conference--of course, we've just been talking about the planning session up to now. There was a whole second act--

G: No, I'm talking strictly about the fall session.

F: Well, the thought was that the planning session really was not a planning session. It was a dry run on the main conference, is what it was. It wasn't as big. It was testing the waters, and you'll notice that the leadership was replaced after the planning session. That is to say, Morris Abram and Bill Coleman were replaced by Ben Heineman, and that wasn't accidental.

G: Why?

F: What I mean is, it reflected a certain amount of displeasure on the part of the President.

G: What do you think he felt that they had not done?

F: I think he wanted a process that was more under control. He wanted a more managed process. That process, from his point of view, was--he didn't tell me this, but I feel sure it's true--that he felt that this process was too far out of control in too many ways. He wanted a much tighter ship for the main act, and that's why he picked Ben Heineman, who was of course his friend and supporter, but also a man of highly-touted managerial skill. Which indeed he had, by the way; I was very impressed with Ben's operational and managerial skills, which he handled with grace, although the conference still didn't come out right. It still came out with a whole slew of recommendations costing a lot of money, and what happened is that Ben got caught up in the process and himself could not dispute the need for a whole lot of these things. Maybe not all of them, but he became rather sympathetic himself to the kind of recommendations that were made.

G: To what extent did Abram and Coleman actually shape the conference and how active were they as co-chairmen of it?

F: These were both and still are very busy people, and they could not give that thing day-to-day direction. And also you had the difficulties arising out of a situation in which the White House was very actively involved here. I mean, they were not just given a free hand and let's see what you do in three months. There was continuous communication, as I've said, with the White House and an infusion of ideas and thoughts and reactions along the way. So it would have been a process very difficult for anybody to control. Heineman had much more control of it and gave a great deal more time, I think, directly to the process. He was there a lot, and several times a week we would assemble in what I used to call the War Room. Heineman used this technique: you sit around and do the "what if" scenario about various defensive strategies or various approaches to difficult problems, and in the end he'd make up his mind on what the best way to go was. One of those problems, by the way, was how best consistent with security--a very difficult time--did you get the President in and out of the main ballroom at the Sheraton Park Hotel. In this gaming kind of mode, I finally got to the point--I have something I could show you on this--that it began to me to seem kind of ridiculous. So I said, "Look, it's one thing to be prudent, but it's another thing to be pusillanimous. This puts me in mind of the theater in Atlanta when I was a kid, the Fox Theater. The organ would come up out of the floor, rise up on a platform out of the floor, with the organist seated at it, and he would play for the assembled [audience]. Maybe we could get a mechanism like that and have the President rise up out of the floor at the appropriate moment."

(Laughter)

Well, we went on, and they got him in and out all right, though that's about as heavy security as I personally have ever seen or been involved in.

G: Really?

F: Oh, yes, it was very heavy. After the conference was all over and everything and Ben Heineman rewarded everybody with a silver cigarette box and a gavel, anyway, he sent me a telegram and he said, "One of the memories that shall remain with me about the conference is Fleming saying, 'It's one thing to be prudent and it's another thing to be pusillanimous.'" I was struck that he even remembered.

G: Why--?

F: Why the security?

G: Why any more than just, say, a presidential trip to a major city?

F: The interracial climate was beginning to get very ugly. Remember Watts? And the tone of much of the rhetoric of the more militant black leadership was pretty violent, and there was simply a feeling that this might well be a time when--and remember that the memory of presidential assassination was still green at that point. For a combination of those reasons, a lot of quite nasty things were being said and advocated at that time and the smell of violence was very much in the air, so it was thought to be very important that the whole process of who came into that big gathering, which was the climactic dinner of the conference, that there be great care and control exercised over that, that we not have a lot of faceless people sitting out there.

So that it was very much on people's minds. For example, Willard Wirtz, then secretary of labor and my good friend to this day, was turned away because he didn't have the right kind of identification on him. Several of us went running after him. He

left in kind of a huff. I don't know if we finally got him back in there or not. But we went chasing after him trying to smooth his feathers and tell him. He said, "I'm Willard Wirtz; I'm the secretary of labor." And these people who'd been put on the door had been given such rigorous instruction that because he didn't have the right kind of pass or whatever it was he was supposed to have gotten, they wouldn't let him in. And instead of calling somebody in authority, they just turned him away. It was that type.

G: So Wirtz did not come back?

F: I can't remember, frankly. I hope he did. (Laughter) I'm not sure. I don't remember the outcome of that.

G: One of the questions about who to include in the planning session pertained to people within government who had civil rights related responsibilities.

F: That's right.

G: How was this resolved, do you recall?

F: I think it was limited pretty much to first- and second-echelon people of that kind, except for people who were in some kind of quasi-staff role. You had your appropriate cabinet officers and assistant secretary kind of level, who had special responsibilities of this sort, subcabinet. But it didn't get much--it was not a conference that was dominated by administration people. It was predominantly people from outside.

G: How about the question of whether or not to have it open to the press? This was another issue.

F: It was an issue and was much discussed. As I recall, the way it was resolved was that the workshops, or the groups, and the subject matter groups under which it broke down in order to get manageable size and participation, were off the record, were off limits to the

press. And the plenaries, the press was admitted to the plenaries. Is that what you understand?

G: Sounds right to me.

F: I think that's the way it was. And also there was briefing for the press. But I think the idea was not to have a field day for reporters to pick up, you know, let's you and him fight, and to pick up a lot of kind of grass-roots sniping and rhetoric that would--a very large part of this was to avoid embarrassment, there's no question about it, which I think at that point the President and his aides felt that they had a gracious plenty already, they didn't need any more.

G: Aside from the security consideration, did you assume that the President wouldn't come and address the conference?

F: Yes, I think it was always assumed that [he would come]. It may have been discussed, I'm sure it was, the option of his not coming, but the consequences of that would have been so ignominious that it would have had to be some very, very overriding reason that his presence was absolutely required at the last minute somewhere else or something, because it would not have done for the President [to be absent]. This was his conference, disown it though he might or might wish he could. It was seen as his conference, and he had to be there.

G: Were there any in the White House that opposed the conference? You've mentioned Harry McPherson and Lee White as being supportive, but there were a lot of other people in the White House.

F: Well, I think they were supportive, but I don't know whether they favored it or not in the first instance. But once it was inevitable they were very supportive of those of us who

were enlisted to try to bring it off. And they fully realized, aside from the politics of it, the time factor was just killing, to put all that together in a couple of months. And there were the logistics; it wasn't just the substance or just the politics. Just the sheer physical business was difficult.

G: Was funding a problem, also?

F: Yes. I've gone a little fuzzy about that, but there were private funds secured, and I can't remember from whom or precisely how, but Berl might remember more about that, or--are you talking to Morris and Bill Coleman, or not?

G: Yes.

F: You are. Well, they'd probably remember that more clearly than I would. But I know that there were some private funds secured for some of the activities and the inevitable costs of this or that reception and that sort of thing. As a matter of fact, I don't think there were any direct outlays to this thing at all. For example, the detailed staff work was provided by people who were seconded from their agencies and departments, and there really wasn't any money, hardly, in the sense of having an appropriation for this or having something out of the President's discretionary fund. There was virtually nothing of that kind. And people paid their own expenses to come to the thing.

G: The dinner, the reception must have cost.

F: I think people paid for that.

G: Did they?

F: I think so. As I say, I think there were some occasions that were underwritten, but I think they were underwritten with private money, and I'm sure there were many kinds of contributions in kind from the departments and agencies, including personnel. But it was

not an expensive exercise in the usual sense of that. And I don't remember about the conferences; I'm talking about the planning session now. But I think the same thing was pretty much true of the conference itself and Ben Heineman's piece of the action, but you'd do well to check with some of the others on that. I wasn't paying much attention to that.

G: How was the decision made to focus on blacks rather than on minorities in general, such as Hispanics and others?

F: Well, in those days, the other minorities simply had not come to be perceived as prominently in this picture as they have since. At that moment in the nation's history, the problem was seen as 90 per cent a black problem or a problem affecting blacks. [It] just didn't loom large at that point and, as you know from the Civil Rights Act of 1964, that was virtually all done with primary reference to blacks and the other minorities were included in a sort of ritualistic way, as the "regardless of race, creed, color or national origin." And women wouldn't have been included at all had it not been for--was it Howard Smith--

G: Yes.

F: --who dragged them in, thinking he was going to sink the whole ship? (Laughter) I never have heard what his reaction was to the fact that it actually got incorporated. He was hoist on his own petard, you might say.

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G: --credit for his actions.

F: I wonder. It would have helped him later on, wouldn't it, if he'd stayed in there long enough. Yes.

G: Were there serious proposals to include Hispanics in this, do you recall?

F: I honestly don't recall the question coming up in any very important way as serious. Nor am I absolutely clear that there were no Hispanics involved. Are you clear about that? I know it wasn't an important issue or an issue that loomed large in the discussions. Whether there were a few, at least--it's hard to believe today that there were not at least a few nominal representatives of the Hispanic group in this conference. But, honestly, I don't even recall its being discussed.

G: What role did the big six, the major established civil rights leaders, play in this planning session?

F: Well, in a sense, to start with the negative of that, the other no-person at the conference was Martin Luther King, Jr. Martin was in very bad odor with the President at that time, because of his then-new and unprecedented, for a civil rights leader, public opposition to the Vietnam conflict. He was invited, he really had to be, but he had no role in it; he was not invited to say anything. He was just there for the ceremonial part of it.

G: Do you think he resented not being asked to play a larger role?

F: Well, everybody was very conscious of it, including, I'm sure, he himself. But it's hard to tell. He didn't say so, but he wouldn't. But he must have felt it rather keenly, considering his status in the movement and so on.

G: Was this a decision that the President himself made?

F: I can't answer that, but I'm sure it was made at the highest levels.

(Laughter)

It was either made by the President himself or it was made by people who felt they knew the President's wishes well enough, because that's not a decision that would

have been lightly made, I think. Given King's prominence, some lower-level person wouldn't simply do this arbitrarily. But, as I say, I was only tangentially and sporadically exposed to the whole complicated screening business, and I don't know how that decision was made or to what extent it reflected President or White House opinion. I assumed that it did; that's all I can say, because I assumed it would not have been made without such consultation.

Now going on from there, [A.] Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin were very much focused on their freedom budget approach and were pursuing that with some energy. At that time Randolph was still functional and active, though of some years, and Bayard did most of the day-to-day involvement from that vantage point. But in the formal sessions Randolph was there and was endorsing the freedom budget and speaking about the urgency of jobs and improvement in the economic condition. Now clearly, the freedom budget was not something that had any great popularity in the Oval Office at that point.

G: This was what, a proposal for so many billion dollars?

F: It really was an alternative budget, sort of a Marshall Plan for blacks or minorities. And it was spelled out--I've still got it, I'm sure, somewhere in my stuff, a copy of it. It was printed up as a booklet and a pamphlet. But that was basically Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin doing the Randolph thing. You remember, he got the jobs in the march on Washington and he did the thing with Roosevelt in threatening a march on the White House if Roosevelt didn't create an FEPC [Fair Employment Practices Commission]. It was a focus on the economics.

Now, Roy Wilkins was a very important figure in this, in his usual role of very reasonable, statesmanlike, well-informed advocate of traditional government action on behalf of civil rights. Roy hewed very close to the litigative and legislative approaches that at that time were the hallmark of the NAACP and the civil rights movement.

Now, whom are we leaving out? There was CORE [Congress on Racial Equality], and there was Jim Farmer, and there was SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], and there was McKissick. McKissick at that time was seen as a kind of a firebrand. He later became a conservative kind of Republican, but at that time he was the most far-out of the prominent civil rights leaders. And I can't remember who from SNCC, whether it was Jim Forman--I don't recall John Lewis being much involved in this. I really can't quite remember. It'd be easy to find out.

G: How about the Urban League?

F: And the Urban League, of course, in the person of Whitney Young. I don't recall Whitney playing a very big role in all this, but you didn't do anything like this without involving him. Whitney's role in general was very heavily directed toward badgering and cajoling and otherwise talking business leadership into playing a more constructive role in these things. And supplying publicly the kind of background facts and research.

G: Let's talk about some of the substantive areas of the planning session and any insights you have on those.

F: I really should have done some homework on this part of it.

G: Well, I'll just go through some of the task force proposals. One, the dynamics of the ghetto, do you recall? Two, the administration of justice; three, legal guarantees; four, housing; five, unemployment; six, education; and seven, welfare and health.

F: Yes.

G: Anything on those that have particular significance for the history of that conference?

F: Well, I'm sure they do, because each one of those was a fairly elaborate process of getting people to do background papers and sitting around in the Indian Treaty Room or otherwise critiquing these papers. The process started with analysis and the results of research and fact-finding analysis and whatnot, and the recommendations came out of the--now, this is not to say that none of the papers had anything prescriptive in them. They probably did, but the purpose of the papers was not to concoct a lot of recommendations. The recommendations, at least in principle, were supposed to come out of the conference, from the conference participants, and indeed they did. There were stenographers in all those sessions taking down the comments and the recommendations, and after that there was the process of kind of distilling those things and weeding them out and summing them up and wording them properly. So that you really have to make a little bit of a distinction, I think, between the preconference process that went on and what was specifically recommended.

G: What were some of the recommendations that came out of the conference that were useful, do you recall, or subsequently incorporated?

F: Oh, there were a lot of them. I have not gone back to those years to look at that, and that's what I meant about I should have done some homework. I have the reports here. Do you have the reports, by the way?

G: Yes.

F: You could fault the thing on the grounds that there was everything in there but the kitchen sink. There's really a great mass, as I recall it, of recommendations. You know,

the reaction might be, "Well, easy for you to say. Reform the world; eliminate this," and whatnot. (Laughter) And it was very sweeping in that sense. But I think--I haven't tried this exercise; it's a very interesting idea--that if you went through those reports and recommendations, you might find quite a few things that had not been implemented then and have since been put into effect one way or another.

G: There's some suggestion that there was in the conference dissatisfaction with the administration of Title VI of the [1964] Civil Rights Bill, particularly with regard to education. Do you recall that being an issue in the conference?

F: There were a lot of issues; there were a lot of kind of grievances and complaints coming out from the participants in the conference, and I'm sure that was one of them. In all these areas practically there was great pressure for greater enforcement, and you have to remember that in the field of education, segregated schools were still more the rule than the exception in the Deep South. There was a feeling that the power of Title VI just hadn't been applied, had not been enforced with the rigorousness that it ought to be.

But this was a kind of prevailing attitude, as I recall it, in all the sessions about virtually everything, and the focus on the economic, while it was beginning as a result of Watts and the whole inner-city ferment, was beginning to take shape, the focus was still more on classical civil rights than it was on economic conditions, except for the approach that I've already mentioned of Phil Randolph and Bayard Rustin. I don't recall--I think we purposely avoided trying to put a price tag on these things, because that would have made the thing even more exacerbating. But it's quite clear, if you read the recommendations, I think, that to do many of those things would have cost a lot of money

to implement, no question about it. I really would have to go back to the reports, and I have a drawer full of the original papers--

G: Good.

F: --that were done on these to get my memory refreshed about the substantive process.

G: Do you think that the conference, the planning session had an impact on the administration of the civil rights legislation as a result of some of this attitude that we can do more to enforce this new legislation?

F: I'd like to be able to say yes to that, but I'm not at all sure. I think it had disappointingly little effect, not because the process was flawed, though it had its problems, but because of the timing. It was terrible timing to try to pull this off and to make a constructive contribution to thinking and feeling about this. By the time the conference itself was held, the Vietnam thing was getting to be a real distraction of public interest and attention.

I want to tell you one little quick anecdote about that in a minute, about the President. But in addition to that, the turmoil in the inner cities and the black consciousness thing were gathering momentum at a formidable rate, so that there wasn't a climate, very much, in which you could--and you were beginning to get a pretty bad backlash, as you know, in public opinion. And Congress, even the troubles in the cities had to go farther before they produced the kind of impulse and impetus that the Urban Coalition represented for a while, saying "Well, we'd better do something about these cities," the Kerner Commission. We hadn't reached that stage yet; we were at a stage where people were saying, "What's the matter with these people; have they gone out of their minds? [They're] a bunch of Mau Maus." We had a negative effect at the

beginning. So I don't think much came of it. I think less than should have come of it, because I speak as a party at interest, though I was just one person in that, you could call it a maelstrom of activity, and I didn't have any proprietary feeling about it, but I thought a lot of people put in a lot of good, solid, sincere effort, and I'm not talking about the managers. I'm talking about people who participated and who gave time and attention to it. Really, I thought it came off better than one might have hoped, just as a process and in terms of the products. But we were at a stage where nobody from the President on down was going to pay any serious attention. And the tip-off--I've always thought it was a very symbolic occasion--was after the main conference had been held, and so on, a little group of us led by Ben Heineman were invited to the White House to--well, I guess to be thanked by the President is the way to put it. The reports had already been delivered. And it was a funny occasion. It was supposed to be very brief. It was a ceremonial thing, and he was going to thank us all and wring our hands, and we'd go on our way.

The whole thing occurred standing up, for that reason. I mean, it wasn't supposed to be a sit-down affair; it was more like a mini-reception. And it went on and on and on. And the President talked obsessively about the agony and so on of the Vietnam situation, compared himself to Lincoln, and said he thought often of Lincoln during those dark nights and the agony he suffered, and the attacks and vilifications that he was subject to. And he went on about needing the help of all of us, and getting the support and Congress on board and the appropriations. I have to tell you in all honesty that before that occasion was over, I kept wishing it had ended. It was very painful, I thought. Very little talk, very little mention even, of the conference or of the reports.

Well, that was very symbolic of the way it was at that time, as people were, as I say, from the President on down, distracted and their concern, thoughts and feelings were elsewhere by that time. Johnson, as you know, did very significant things on the civil rights front after this, notably legislation, but much of the fire had--well, it isn't so much that the fire had died down as that other things had preempted the forefront of consciousness and concern and priority. I date it, as other people have; John Herbers wrote a book called *The Lost Priority*, which really is about what he depicts as the watershed year of 1965, as the kind of turning point in civil rights, but it wasn't altogether clear in that year that that's the way it was going to be. And I think that's absolutely right, that if you charted it you'd get a gradually upwardly rising line, peaking about 1964, then leveling off and beginning to decline and then going down steeply in the latter part of the sixties. But something went out of it, and it turned sour; it turned bad and confrontational, and really, ugly is the only word for it. The momentum carried it for a while beyond then, but the real momentum was offset by a lot of other bad things.

G: What impact did the planning session have on the black leadership? Did it intensify their dissatisfaction or did it make them more militant, do you think?

F: I don't think it made them more militant. I think that the difficulty was that the occasion was seen as an invitation, a platform, for confrontation and complaints and strong demands. It was not seen as--well, by a lot of people it was not seen as an opportunity to rally a broader constituency, a coalition, behind a set of priorities that would advance the cause. It was seen as a place where you could get your licks in, your particular grievances, or your particular brand of rhetoric, or your particular--I don't mean to be too negative about this, because this was certainly not true of everybody involved, but it was

true of enough people so that it made it very difficult to do consensus-building, which is what the conference ideally should have been about. This was more true of the planning session than it was of the conference itself.

G: Is that right?

F: Yes.

G: How do you account for that?

F: The whatever we called it, the second stage, was a much more controlled and managed process. By that time a lot of people had had a certain amount of catharsis, through the planning session, and were a little more disposed to hold their fire, I'd say. You've got to remember that there was great suspicion at this time, there had been at other times, too, but great suspicion of government and motives and what the President's game was, and so on. So there was not an atmosphere of trust that we started out from here. So the question is, "What kind of a gig is this and what kind of a con job is going on?" And Bayard Rustin [was]--how shall I say?--in some ways the most elegant of people. He had a favorite line in all the negotiating and talking we did during this planning session. Periodically he would say, "But it's not clear to me who is making policy." He meant with regard to this thing, and he did put his finger on it, because there were about three or four centers of power here, and it was pretty hard to figure out who was making policy.

G: The three or four different centers?

F: I mean there was the President himself, the White House, the staff apparatus--

G: You and Bernhard and--

F: Yes, the three of us and whoever else was involved there. There were other fairly high--Lisle Carter played a role in it, and others. And the civil rights leaders, the primary

leaders, perhaps King excepted and McKissick excepted, were important influences in this. [It was] pretty hard to see exactly who was calling the shots here, who decides who's going to be invited, what's on the agenda. How does that really get decided, is really what Bayard Rustin was asking.

G: How would you answer that?

F: (Laughter) As best we could. You couldn't say, "Well, look, realistically speaking, nothing is going to be sanctioned, anyway, or go on in this process that the President doesn't want to go on." I mean, that would not have been seemly to say, but you assumed that everybody understood that.

Well, we really just answered it by pointing out that it was a kind of collaborative or mixed process with different centers of decision-making contributing. But what we were trying to reassure him and others on was that this was not some kind of a shell game, that there was a bona fide opportunity for the private organizations and the people brought in to do more than rubber-stamp something that the administration and its agents wanted to put on the agenda.

And indeed, that was true, because it was not the White House agenda that came out in the end from this process. It really reflected, to a considerable degree, the ideas and initiatives brought in by the outside participants.

G: Is that right?

F: Yes. I think so.

G: Do you mean the agenda for the spring conference?

F: Yes. Well, I'm talking about the outcome of it. Now, some of the dissent was about process. I haven't got it all clearly and freshly in mind. But there was no voting

permitted, and that was a bone of contention. They wanted to vote up or down on, you know, we recognize Red China or we don't, and . . . We talked at great length about that in the planning stage, and the decision was that this is just hopeless if we get into straight up or down votes and we recommend doubling the welfare payment by two votes, or if we get all this kind of thing, [it] would be kind of meaningless. But that all bona fide recommendations originating with the participants would be recorded and would be considered, and unless they were frivolous or something, would be included. And that's the way that worked. It's a difficult thing to handle.

But they wanted a parliamentary process and resolutions on the floor and the plenary session and all that business. Some people wanted that.

G: Well, that presumably would bring in a lot of questions about representation and whether the groups--

F: They wanted to treat this as a parliamentary body, and of course it wasn't. But I must say that that faded in the course of the conference. I think a good many of the participants began to perceive that they were not being manipulated and that this was, as far as it went, an honest kind of process. There were some exceptions; I don't know, I can't remember what they were. There were a few little skirmishes in the workshop or the smaller group sessions. But nothing critical, nothing of major importance.

G: What was LBJ's reaction to the conference, do you know, the planning session?

F: I've always assumed that he was unhappy about it.

G: Really?

F: Well, it got a lot of contentious publicity: the Moynihan thing and grandstanding of one sort or another by some of the people in attendance. More than any one thing, the

Moynihan thing dominated, and the sessions themselves that got press attention, the plenaries were . . . The press was looking for--you know, they smelled dissension and controversy and confrontation, and that's what they went out to find in this process, and they found it. And that's what they stressed, what they publicized. I think in general he must have been displeased with it. I see no reason otherwise why the whole leadership--in effect, the second stage was starting all over again. It wasn't quite that, because you did have the work that had been done in the planning session to start from, but it really was like starting a whole new ball game. We got new leadership, a kind of a new approach. I think all that reflected some unhappiness with the way the planning session went.

G: But even if the planning session had gone well, there still would have been some form of spring conference, I assume, that--

F: Oh, yes. It was always contemplated. But it was contemplated that you should have the same process in two stages, the planning session, and then in straight continuity he would move on toward the full-dress conference with a larger group involved and so on.

G: Did the planning session formulate an agenda for the spring conference or a set of proposals to be discussed at the spring conference, do you recall?

F: Well, that was the idea. I don't think, really, that's exactly what happened. I think what did happen is that the planning session and the stuff that preceded it was kind of a dry run, a test run. Part of the result of that was the new tack, or several new tacks, but I don't know. I guess I don't know, I can't quite--I have not really examined that question enough as to what degree the planning session did, in a positive sense, shape the main conference. My gut feeling, without re-examining the facts and refreshing myself on it is

that it didn't much. You really had two separate processes there, in which the continuity was mainly a continuity of some people, more than anything else. But I really couldn't say definitively. I'd have to go back and look at the products.

G: If you were to summarize the benefits of the planning sessions, what would they be?

F: Well, I think in many ways the planning session and the people involved in it had to absorb--these were the shock troops; this was the advance force before the invasion--and they had to really defuse a lot of things; a lot of people had to get catharted; a lot of venom and unhappiness and frustration had to get released and aired, and in a sense the planning session stage of this was afflicted by all of these things, and it made it easier, difficult though it still was, to do the full-dress conference, to plan that and carry it off, because some of the heat had been let out during the planning session. And that may be the main value of the planning session.

But it also gave the people who participated in both stages, it gave us a chance to bring to the second stage a much better feeling for what was going on out there; how people were thinking and feeling; what the sensitivities were; what the politics were; you know, those are not things you would know just by reading a newspaper. We learned a lot in that sense from the first stage.

G: It was an educational process.

F: It was an education, and not an altogether pleasant one, either. But I think we all felt a little surer of ourselves in the second stage, and with good reason, about what we were dealing with and how people could be expected to react, and what they were feeling, caring about.

I will say for Ben Heineman that he provided generous opportunity for the people working on this thing to air their perceptions and their views of what ought to be done or what was going on. In the end it was going to be his decision. I don't know how he related to the President or the White House; I imagine he talked to the President directly from time to time, anyway. But the buck stopped there, with him. But he'd get a very collegial process, for talking through the thing before the decision was made, which I really came to respect a good deal.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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