INTERVIEW II

DATE: September 10, 1972

INTERVIEWEE: JOE B. FRANTZ

INTERVIEWER: DAVID G. McCOMB

PLACE: Dr. Frantz' home, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

F: We were talking about Dorothy Nichols, and about the only thing I need to say more on that was that she was like the traditional English butler that gets to see everything from all the family fights to the innermost state secrets but is totally the invisible man. I really came away feeling that I had gotten absolutely nothing.

M: Yes, but would she just tell you that?

F: Well, I mean, I don't know. I never got her either explicit or amplified. I was unable to. You know, that becomes what is a difficult interview. I've had interviews that I felt inadequate to, naturally, and that can be a kind of a sweaty process to be sure you ask what you hope are intelligent questions.

One thing I wanted to throw in because it's one other Johnson relationship [is that] somewhere back there, I'd say around 1964, Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., was on the National Historical Publications Commission. He went back to Truman. He had been reappointed a couple of times and had been in the Eisenhower years I know and of course the Kennedy years, since John F. Kennedy was very fond of his son, or at least leaned on him. I would presume he was fond of him. Well, he died, and he died toward the end of a term and there was a vacancy in the National Historical Publications Commission. It's a four-year term, and so Johnson had an appointment to make. Again, I don't know the

background and I'm not always sufficiently detective minded. I'd make a poor industrial accidents investigator. Things happen, and I accept them and go on.

But I rather think Oliver Wendell Holmes from Minnesota, to keep the record straight, who was an executive director of the National Historical Publications Commission, and others recommended me to be the new appointee. There were two presidential appointments out of eleven members on the National Historical Publications Commission. No reason why Holmes should have, because he and I weren't close; in fact, we barely knew each other, and the same way with Wayne Grover, who was archivist of the United States. But I rather wonder if they weren't looking for someone from Texas. With Johnson as president, they thought it might be advantageous and that I was acceptable to them. But I mean that's surmisal on my part. There might have been stronger or weaker reasons why. I was aware that my name had gone up to the White House when the President had called for the suggestions. Usually in a case like that you send three or four or five, whatever he asks for, so I presume there were other names.

M: What was the time on this?

F: This is, I think, about 1964; it might have been early 1965. I did get word that my name had gone up. I think I got it through Frank Wardlaw, who'd been up there to see about getting some money from the National Historical Publications Commission. Frank Wardlaw is the director of the University of Texas Press. And nothing happened. I was on a take it or leave it basis. I had enough to do, and although I wasn't looking for it, I would be very pleased to get it. I think most anybody would like to be at least tendered a presidential appointment.

Time went by and nothing was heard, and I asked Wardlaw one time did he know anything. He said, well, he'd picked up the word somewhere that I had criticized Johnson in something I'd read or a speech I'd made. Well, I had made a speech at the University of Chicago--it was the only thing I could figure--in the summer of 1962, which they had asked could they tape record. I let them, and they sent it out to all the educational radio stations. I think it got evidently a very wide play. It was called "The Contradiction of Texas Politics," in which I talked about Johnson among others, since he was a political factor, and gave what I thought was a fairly honest and dispassionate view, and the fact that Johnson did throw his weight around in Texas politics and had a habit of coming up on winning sides of issues and surfacing where you least expected him and so forth. I know I got fan letters, fan in quotes since they were both pro and con, from places like San Francisco and Long Island and so on saying, "I heard your speech on the radio and on our local VHF"--or UHF or whatever it is, I guess it would be the local FM station--"and I want you to know so and so"--either you're a louse or amen or whatever it was.

I mean all this was a total surprise to me. So my guess is that was Johnson's wide ranging antenna, that that probably is where he picked it up or the word came that "You're not acceptable to Johnson because you have been critical." I thought that's the end of that and thought no more about it. I think it was possible--again, and I'm trying to get sequence, that's when he asked me, as I told you earlier, was I a friend of Mary Margaret's--that this was still pending.

But anyway, sometime after that--and this is a typical Johnson touch; he is very good at letting the right people, instead of his calling me or Joe Califano calling me or

something--I overslept one Sunday morning, and at something like eight-thirty in the morning there was this phone call saying very sweet and brightly, while I'm kind of uh-h-h, "Dr. Frantz, this is Mary Margaret." Well, I don't know a lot of Mary Margarets, but I didn't have any in mind at the moment. She said, "I just want to congratulate you on being named to the commission." And I didn't know what the dickens she was talking about. I always felt very bad about that because I wasn't properly enthusiastic. It wasn't very clear until after I hung up and scratched for a little while. Helen said, "What was that all about?" And I said, "Well, I guess I've been named to the National Historical Publications Commission. That's the only thing I know."

In due time, I got a commission signed by the President. Henry Graff of Columbia and I went on together. That's another Johnson contact, and it's one that I had just given up on and forgotten. As I say, I was really surprised, as it was dead as far as I was concerned, and also I thought it was so typical of Johnson that he would let a person in his menage that he thought was closest to me break the news.

I've picked that up from all kinds of congressmen, that Johnson was almost always, and everybody's bound to slip, but almost always very good, particularly as senator, when he put something through for a constituent to call Congressman McComb and say, "Now then, I have just gotten this through for somebody in your district. You wire them." Of course, again it was good politics because Congressman McComb remembers that the Senate Majority Leader let him make the announcement and get the local credit. Then if Congressman McComb wants to get out of hand, I'm sure Senator Johnson could also remind him that, "Don't forget that time I called you."

And so, anyway, that's how that came about. I might add in line with that, this is not very consequential in the history of man's affairs, but the four-year term began, I think, December 31, 1966, and in the course of events my four years ran out. Now it had been in the past fairly usual for presidents to continue at the head with Schlesinger, Sr., regardless of party affiliation. But by this time Nixon was in, and I feel sure, I know that the Historical Commission people recommended that I be reappointed. Holmes told me that the word came back down that I was not acceptable to the White House because I was too much identified with Johnson, that they wanted a Republican. The thing then stayed vacant I guess for a year and a half or two years because they had trouble finding a respectable Republican historian.

They further restricted themselves by deciding, since Bob Kunz was now the General Services Administrator and was from Pennsylvania and was very politically minded--I think he was a good GSA [General Services Administration] Administrator but he was a 110 per cent party man--[they] not only wanted it to be a Republican historian but he had to be a Pennsylvania historian. That complicated it still further, with the result that they looked and they looked. They finally decided on a list of three from Pennsylvania, and then they started a final check out on them. One of them turned out to be the chairman of the county Democratic committee, and the whole thing was a kind of a fiasco.

Then they fell into a pot of luck. See, various agencies, like the member from the Congress, the member from the Senate, the member from the Department of State, one from the Department of Defense and learned societies including the American Historical Association had picked the director of the American Philosophical Society, which was

Whitfield Bell, who was on the commission when I went on. His term had run out, and the AHA had then named someone else. I believe they named Arthur Link to take his place. So Bell, like me, then was a super-annuated person. But then it occurred to them somewhere in there that Bell was a nominal Republican, not the least bit active, which could be an advantage because therefore not the least bit controversial. They checked Bell out, and he was Republican. He was from Philadelphia. Bell then got the presidential appointment, and it was a quite superior choice. That's our appointments, you know.

M: How about returning way back when the interview began and pick up this advisory board business? You've spoken about that and about some of the difficulties with the FBI files.

F: I'll tell you one other difficult interview, because I can get anecdotal forever. This wasn't difficult. I had a pretty good interview with an Austin matron; I don't mind naming her as Mrs. Max Brooks, Marietta Brooks. I went out to her home, and thought she gave me a rather good interview, all things considered. We got about halfway through. She was rather detailed, a little wont to over detail in some things in woman's fashion, you know. She didn't do this, but it's like some woman trying to get you, telling you a story and she tells you, "I remember I was wearing my red dress, and we had English peas and ice cream that night" sort of story.

But it was a good interview, and we got about halfway through on the chronological scheme. I thanked her and asked her when I'd see her again, at which she just burst. And I spent the next hour and a half consoling her because five minutes before my arrival, I gather to her great surprise, a letter had come from her and her husband's lawyers telling her that Max was suing her for a divorce. Bless her heart, she had gone

through the thing; I mean, she'd kept the date, but it had unstrung her. She had held herself together until I said, "We have got to think about the next time," at which the dam had burst.

M: Oh, my.

F: I came into the office about two hours later, and the people weren't expecting me. They all looked up and said, "Hey, that must have been quite an interview!" Half of it had been sitting there patting Marietta and listening to her talk about her forty years with Max, all the problems of child raising; I mean, there was somebody else's emotional trauma that you're thoroughly sympathetic with and you really wish you hadn't gotten into.

M: Yes. Okay. When you're picking your advisory board, do you have any criteria in mind other than they are prominent historians?

F: Yes, I wanted them geographically spotted. Really, I guess geographical spotting was the main thing, but I preferred that they have some breadth and discipline. I mean that two ways. I wouldn't have wanted a very narrow academic sort that dug his own little rabbit hutch just deeper and deeper, but at the same time I tried to get them from Maine to California, in effect. I also wanted some experience. I didn't know Louie Starr prior to that summer. I didn't know Richard Chalmer of Princeton, but I knew he ran the Dulles project.

M: Yes, and you wanted that kind of experience.

F: I knew he had experience. Louie Starr ran Columbia, and Allan Nevins was the father of them all. I really didn't expect a great deal of help out of him, because by this time his health was beginning to give him trouble; he was getting to be a bit antique, although he

turned out while he lasted to be quite helpful. He had the advantage also of being from California by now. And Frank Vandiver as chairman, because I did agree [with] their suggestions that it would be nice to have a chairman who was in easy communications distance.

M: Why John Hope Franklin?

F: John Hope Franklin for three reasons. In that videotape series, they brought him down. He spent two or three days around the house, we had dinner out here at the house twice and so forth. I didn't know him real well, although we'd kept up a relationship through years and always saw each other at meetings and things like that. Then Kennedy had put him on the Board of Foreign Scholarships. I can't remember whether Kennedy or Johnson made him then the chairman. But he had continued to be quite active in the Johnson period, and I suppose as a wide ranger he packed more wallop than anyone else. I can't deny the importance, in a sense, of his being black, although in John's case it's not one with a bunch of nettles of blackness that stick out all over him. He's a human being first of all, but I mean he does give you a certain credence in the black community if you need it, I presume. I thought he might be able to open a door, and I think he is one of the finest men in the profession. I might add they had a very harsh FBI file on him because he demonstrated in several civil rights confrontations, you know, in which known communists were present or something.

M: Did this board of advisers really do much?

F: There was a certain amount of window dressing. In the beginning, though, they did. That is, we called a meeting fairly early in the game, and they went over things and gave advice and gave me people I could lean on. I couldn't just go around showing interviews

to people, but since these people had been checked out I felt I could show them, the same as I could have shown you, interviews that we had reason to believe might be restricted and talk to them about the problems. Basically, that was it. I suppose the most helpful person of all would have been Louie Starr because, after all, he was running a long-time big project.

M: Were these people selected at all for their possible aid in getting funds?

F: I don't guess, really, any of them was. I never used them for that. None of them sat on any give-away foundations. It might have been more politic if I'd picked the McGeorge Bundy type to be advisers, but I didn't.

M: Okay.

F: I might say that no one turned me down. James MacGregor Burns was a little reluctant, and I called him back. He initially said no. I felt that not only was he distinguished, but he himself was on the other end of the thing. He had done these biographies of Franklin Roosevelt and was coming forward to Kennedy and Johnson and so on, had already edited some things on Johnson, and in the process had himself used a lot of oral interviews. He'd used the Columbia project quite extensively and had used whatever interviews they had at Hyde Park on Franklin Roosevelt. He knew it from the other end very, very well. He knew the subject matter probably better than anybody else going, outside of Lyndon Johnson. So I thought he'd be quite good at that. So I called him back, and this time he said, "Okay."

M: Was there a political angle to all these people, by the way? Did they all have to be Johnson people or Democrats?

F: I think that there could have been. Now, this didn't come up; this didn't really have to come up. None of them had been among the front running violent people on Vietnam that had shaken fists in the streets and thundered and so forth. I don't know what would have happened if I'd chosen one of those. I mean, they are people who don't do a lot of that.

M: Yes.

F: I can't see Allan Nevins out there saying, "Down with the government."

The only person that was ever questioned was Paige Mulhollan. I got some kickback from somewhere on him. I guess it came out of the FBI files. Somebody came to me and said, "You're naming a young fellow from Arkansas named Mulhollan as one of your interviewers." I said, "That's right." They said, "He has led faculty protests against Vietnam." And I said, "Well, he's a great protester." They said, "Well, is he trustworthy? Can you depend on him? Is he likely to"--we didn't know the term then, but--"turn out to be another Ellsberg type that will get all this and then spill it all?" I said, "I'll stick my neck out for him. But I can well believe that Paige led a faculty protest and demonstration, that he feels rather strongly about things. He does talk rather loudly, and he is one to get in the forefront"--and I never told Paige this--"but I would trust him to the hilt." That's the last I ever heard of it.

M: Okay, where did you get your money to work on?

F: Well, I told you, or did I put that on tape?

M: About the original fifty thousand dollars? That wasn't on tape.

F: That wasn't on tape.

M: I might preface this by saying you worked out a budget of around two hundred thousand dollars with Douglass Cater. Okay.

F: Okay. But I don't have any money.

M: But no money and no federal funds.

F: I'm paying Mary Dale. She's just continuing her CIA salary, so that's it. I'm living off the largess of Austin bankers and what little lifetime--

M: University of Texas appointments and so on

F: . . . and so on.

M: Okay.

F: So anyway, I've also got people like you hanging on the hook, saying "Stand by." If there is a call it will come kind of quickly, but there's no call. They give me a long rein. I worked primarily with Harry Ransom, to some extent with Frank Erwin. Primarily my university contact was Ransom at this time. Because, among other things, we didn't want to get me ensnarled in university bureaucracy where you're limited to fifteen dollars a day and have to get permission in advance to go places and things like that.

M: Yes.

F: So I really let Ransom carry the ball, and one day I got word that $50,000 had come through. I did go to the Ford Foundation, and I did see McGeorge Bundy, as I said, down here at Lakeway and really felt fairly confident. This is when he was giving various people kind of rehabilitation funds from the White House. He'd give Joe Califano $12,000 or $25,000 or something for a trip to Europe to get himself back in shape. I mean, actually to observe the new world and a bunch of that. I had asked him for $100,000; actually, I'd asked for something like $98,000 because $100,000 is really in a

very different category. It's more difficult. So we agreed to keep it just under that. I made trips to the Ford Foundation, *et cetera, et cetera*, and finally got the word that-they weren't going to give anything, that they had decided to change their policy. I sounded out other corporations--Harry Ransom's on the board of Carnegie--and didn't get anywhere with them. Ransom and I are rather simpatico and agonizingly similar. We have a great deal of faith not that the Lord will provide, but somehow you'll get through. Ransom felt sure we'd get it off the ground. To make a long story short, the rest of the money came through. I was informed I had $50,000 to start it, and more would be forthcoming.

M: Yes.

F: That wasn't beginning to get me through the year, and so at that stage I sent for you. And it was at that stage that I came back to Texas. I'd been bumming rides every time *Air Force One* came down to try to come along, and so I bummed another one. The Johnsons invited Helen and me out. By this time I'd named my board, and I must say I did have a free hand. I had advice, but I had a free hand at choosing whom I wanted and to install whom I wanted as chairman and so on. I had nobody forced on me and nobody taken away from me on that.

Anyway, I went out to the Ranch. Just after I drove up and had been greeted the plane landed, and it was Frank and Susie Vandiver and George and Alice Brown. George Brown, of course, being the Brown and Root, Brown, and so forth, was also at that time chairman of the board at Rice, and Vandiver was provost. No, he was acting president at that time, and therefore very close to Brown. From that time forward I felt pretty sure that the $50,000 was coming from the Brown Foundation, and that my naming of

Vandiver as chairman had been a stroke of inadvertent genius for which I deserve no credit. I didn't have Brown in mind at all. I mean, this gave a link to Brown that I wouldn't have had otherwise. Now Brown always had been and still is, I think, very much interested in projects dealing with Lyndon Johnson.

M: But you don't know for certain?

F: I don't know for certain. I mentioned it once to Harry Ransom, and we just always agreed we'd leave the financing to him because otherwise, again, I might feel obligated. Then later on, as Ransom began to be less involved in direct University System affairs, my contact became Frank Erwin. It wasn't until this year that I ever went to anybody but Frank Erwin. With the coming of the Spurr administration Stan Ross made a strong move, which was I think organizationally correct and personally less satisfactory to me, to get things back into the regular stream of affairs instead of so much of the personalized, almost out-of-pocket operation around the University.

Erwin had been particularly good, and Ransom, too, at committing the University to things, and the titular president would read about it in the paper later, you know. The first he'd heard about it, sort of thing, just like--well, we've got a number of faculty who showed up here ready to go to work, and quite truthfully the chairman had never realized he'd hired them. Now almost invariably they were people he was glad to have, with one or two exceptions, and he'd worked himself into a lather to get them, but this is the way the University was being run. There was a certain brilliance in it and a certain organizational chaos. But I took advantage of the chaos and worked with the people I knew could produce. I feel rather sure that most of the money was Johnson-induced, one way or another.

M: Yes.

F: In other words, I know I talked about financing very closely with Arthur Krim, who was Johnson's chief money raiser. We talked about people that I might [contact] and organizations and so forth. I know he did some interceding for me with the Ford Foundation, to no avail. But I feel reasonably sure that Arthur put money into the Johnson Foundation, which in turn gave it without restrictions to the University. But among other things I also wanted to stay clear of the Development Board at the University, which has its own restrictions. This has been a continuing fight between me and the director of the Development Board, a fellow by the name of Dean Blunk. He's a personal friend, but with whom I would not care to get involved officially because he does have, it seems to me, a bureaucrat's view toward how things are handled, and again, it would have been restrictive. What I wanted was a blank check of X dollars given to me each year, then let me spend it as I thought best.

M: This is essentially what you had then?

F: Yes. My reporting officer at the University was Don Walker, who was then vice chancellor for fiscal affairs and was new. He and I talked about it, and the only thing that really he ever required, which I would require anyhow for protection, was that we don't do as you sometimes do in that situation: go out and spend a hundred thousand dollars, and when someone says, "Where did it go?" you say, "I don't know, we just spent it." That kind of thing. So very early then I took on Colleen Kain, who'd been running the History Department as its administrative secretary, to keep books.

Quite truthfully, I'd been the vice chairman of the Athletic Council, [and] I took Colleen on a walking tour of the accounting personnel of the Athletic Department

primarily because the coaches always had a system. In other words, you don't clear things. You best stick with University rules, but you don't go through all the bureaucracy of getting ready to rent a plane to fly to Monahans, Texas, to see a hot prospect one minute ahead of the coach from University of Oklahoma. And you don't not go because you spent your travel allotment for that month or something. They have a free hand, and they work out the justifications later. So she talked to them and found out how they worked it, and we pretty well patterned ourselves on the athletic department as far as financing is concerned.

M: So you got a sort of an informal accounting system?

F: Well, I've got a very formal accounting system. We can tell you where every last penny went.

M: Yes.

F: It's just that we don't have that prior justification particularly, or even the after justification. But you get a proposition like this: now the University will not honor, the state of Texas will not honor a taxi bill in excess of two dollars and fifty cents. Okay. It happened last time I was in New York interviewing Larry Levinson. He was tied up on something when I went to see him. I had, I think, a 4:10 plane out at Kennedy, and when we were finally over I had no choice but to take a taxi if I was going to make it. The alternative would have been another twenty-four dollars or whatever it was to stay in New York another night, if they would have let me stay in the room, you know, all the expense of one more night. Well, I do the expensive taxi bit and put it in, and they honor the fare.

M The financial arrangements then that you originally had with Ransom were continued with Erwin?

F: Yes. All I did was go to Erwin, and Erwin's as bad as Ransom in some ways. They're in a lot of things and they're hard to catch, and they're not thinking about me all the time. So that I came down to the end of each year never quite sure what my budget was going to be, never quite sure that there was even going to be one.

You asked about that advisory board earlier. Toward the end of the first year, I believe it was in May, I had the advisory board meet here in Austin. Erwin came over and talked with them--Ransom did, too, but particularly Erwin--and said that the University was vitally interested in this, did want to do everything it could. It needed to know from somebody, and he thought they were the ones, just how good it was. He wanted their signatures on it, and he wanted a critical judgment. So we went over things. I might say incidentally that I was getting off to somewhere, maybe when I was getting off to Ecuador. I kind of took what would normally be my vacation for a month's Fulbright in Ecuador on a little lecture tour. But I wrote the critique of it myself and sent it to the members of the board and told them to correct it. I thought it would be easier if I did it, what I felt were the strengths and weaknesses and so on, and no one edited it. Vandiver sent it in as the official report. I didn't know all this when I left. I found out after I got back. Left to fate that it would be, and so it came through.

Now this last year we had pretty well again, with it under the University administration, with the stringency of funds and so forth, come to the conclusion that--I might say that after that first year we had cut the budget down, I think, to $68,000.

M: Per year.

F: Per year. And we did it again for the third year, same budget. And I might say that again now we have stayed within the budget. We have never gone back for more; we've had a little carry-over. We never got to $200,000 the first year. I think we got about $170,000 and spent about $165,000 and had some left over. I think we had about $10,000 left over, until we got actually something like $58,000 for the new year plus the $10,000, we already had, and we ran around there $65,000. We had about $3,000 that we carried over into the third year and got another $65,000 to go $68,000 again and so on, and we've got three or four thousand left over right now. We don't have a final accounting because the fiscal year ends August 31, and of course bills continue to come in well into September.

I should say that the University has never charged anybody any overhead for this as they do with so many things, so we haven't had that expense. In other words, every last cent was available to me to spend. As I started to say, as we came down it was obvious that the University could use the grants for other things, or, if it were strictly Johnson Foundation money, they had other needs at the Library and so on. I really was feeling that I'd about come to the end of the road, and after a number of conversations Spurr finally said to Ross--Spurr is president and Ross is provost--that he thought the University had an obligation to wind the thing up.

Meanwhile I'd talked to Bert Rhoads about it because I felt, I suppose, kind of avuncularly protective toward Misses Kane and Mathews to protect their positions since they'd both given up lifetime jobs to come with this. I didn't want them just thrown on the streets. And [it was] more crucial this year than others because of the tightness of good jobs, although they are both quite capable and will I don't think ever suffer. They've got too much to offer. Then there's the fact I'd hate to walk off and leave

something in an unfinished state. Because one of the problems in oral history is that transcription is slow, you send cleaned-up typescripts back to the people, you give them a month to go over it, and you really have no handle to insure they'll ever send them back. We've got a few that have been long-time worriers for us. We use every known, practically tax collection agency, including a letter that says if we do not get it by January 1 or next month we will take for granted that you approve it without restrictions, which really, I would guess, won't stand up, wouldn't be binding.

But I mean you've got to do something to get busy people, frequently recalcitrant people and so forth. We're pretty lenient really if you want to take longer. But we had a call from Archbishop Lucey. I mean some people really take these things deadly seriously. Archbishop Lucey down in San Antonio called me and said that he just could not make the deadline I had given him, could he possibly keep it another month. He wanted to rewrite it because he had no idea how terrible he sounded. He didn't care for himself, but he hated for a hundred years from now for Catholic parishioners to read this and say this is the level of intelligence of a Texas archbishop in the 1960s. (Laughter) I said, "Take your time." So it's a very flexible sort of thing, has to be, and it means then that you're always, on the mechanical side, running way behind.

To make a long story short, after coming right down to a week before the end of the fiscal year, there were no jobs for either Miss Kane or Miss Mathews, so the University granted $21,000 for them, put it under Research in Texas History to get them through another year. Meanwhile we've got that little overage for me to play with, although I'm now off the project. We also have the assurance, and we have this in writing to Ross from James B. Rhoads, Archivist of the United States, that beginning July

1, 1973, the Archives of the United States will take over the project and will among other things include Misses Kane and Mathews if they're so inclined. In other words, the thing's going to continue at least at the level that it is now. So that they couldn't do it this year. I mean they were in sympathy with it, and they always assured me that eventually they planned to absorb it into their operation, just as they have the Roosevelt and Truman and Kennedy projects. But they took a pulse again of the very severe budget limitations in this great Nixon year of 1972-73, and there just was no give. They would do it, they'd guarantee it in 1973, but what do you do until you get to July, 1973?

M: Well, to make all this perfectly clear--to use the Nixon expression--in those years you would just submit a budget to Frank Erwin or Ross and just wait for them to respond.

F: Yes.

M: And they'd come back and say, "You've got it" or "You don't have it" or "You've got this much. You can work from there."

F: Well, I jumped the traces again when the administration was slow. I went back to see Frank Erwin and told him what I had, and all he said was, "I'll do something." He and I have operated on that basis. Frank Erwin has got lots of critics, and there are times when I'm one of them, but one thing I've never known him to do is go back on his word. On the other hand, you can't eat his word, and how do you tell somebody who's making house payments and car payments and so forth that Great White Father Frank Erwin says that you're going to be okay and they say, "Where's the money?" So from that standpoint it's been a worry, and to a certain extent I've resented it. I suppose some people who are more precise than I am would have gone nuts. But I have felt all along that the project had a worth and a magnitude--financing shouldn't be my problem. I personally think the

University is making a mistake getting it out from under its aegis, and the board of advisers so wrote the administration saying that they're giving away a valuable asset to the Archives.

M: Did the University ever charge you for the rooms you've been using? They just absorb that?

F: They didn't charge for the rooms or anything else.

M: The project had to pay?

F: They didn't charge for the accounting problems.

M: Which would be overhead.

F: Well, yes, I mean on other projects, why, they figure it takes an extra bookkeeper or something or three more hours of punching the computer or something to figure in this account. But they've been very good on that. They could figure that in. Where they're charging projects 16 per cent or 24 per cent or even 48 per cent, as they do in some instances, it makes a great deal of difference to your operation.

M: Yes, it would. Do you want to take a break?

(Interruption)

We're back on now.

F: You're on the air.

M: Okay, you've got your advisory board, you've got your money. Now you've got to put together your staff, so what do you do there?

F: I contacted a number of people. Actually, as I recall, I only contacted one more than I hired. I wondered whether they'd be interested: you, Paige, Harri Baker, Dean Ferguson, there may be one other, but I don't remember.

M: You lined up your two, three secretaries. You already had Mary Dale.

F: Yes, and, well, I lined up Ruth and then Colleen was at first tied up with the History office and didn't want to move but later decided she wanted to. So that's how we did that, and then that's just about all there was to it. We got started. I spent the summer drawing up a list of people to be interviewed, spent a little while working out kind of what looked to me like interview techniques, procedure.

M: Did you have any staff urged on that you didn't want?

F: No, I visited with Herman Kahn, who was in charge of presidential libraries, who then went to Yale, I guess, in the History Department. He at one time had been the director of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and then was in charge of all the presidential libraries for the National Archives. He and I got together and talked about things. And somebody would drift through Washington, and I'd talk with them--nobody in particular, anybody that came along.

Early in the game it was thought that I might be able to use some of the White House personnel. I remember in line with that somebody--it could have been Califano, could have been even Johnson--we had a meeting one afternoon in my office in the EOB with Harry Middleton, Peter Benchley and Leo Janos as possible interviewers. But they also doubled as speech writers, and we decided that it was better to keep the White House out of it for obvious reasons.

M: Anything in particular that you're looking for in the interviewers?

F: I wanted them to be sound enough historically and did not want them to be sort of narrow in their interests. I wanted them to be a politically alert but judicious. I don't mean by that that I cared what their personal politics was, but I didn't want them to feel they either

had to confront or evangelize everybody they interviewed. The best example of that, I think, is somebody like Harri Baker, whose politics tended toward liberal Democrat very definitely, and he got along quite well with Lester Maddox and George Wallace. I think he even liked Wallace. I would guess he'd say he didn't like Maddox, but, in other words, you're there to hear what McComb has to say when you interview him and not to convince McComb that he's dead wrong. Nor are you to take the stance that Johnson was our number one interest in this, he was either a hero or an enemy and therefore slant your questions in that direction, but hopefully find out what relationships were and what did take place and let other people decide.

M: Did you try to pick these people with any balance? I know this is the way it worked out; that is, for example, with Paige being somewhat of an expert on diplomatic affairs.

F: Yes. I did that with some foresight and intention, premeditation, to get people out of different interests. You were the only one who had been my student. I never had Harri in class. Paige, I think, I had had in class, although he was in no way my student.

M: When you start out on this project did you have any sort of philosophy of approach and what I mean here is were you going to concentrate strictly on Lyndon Johnson, were you going to talk only to friends or only to enemies or were you going to throw a wide net or a narrow?

F: My interest, and almost stubborn interest, was to mirror the life and times of Lyndon Johnson. In other words, there are people in there that never knew Johnson personally, maybe never even met him. I know Mrs. Johnson particularly has been concerned sometimes about "Who's he? Why's he there? He never made White House policy," and that kind of thing. My only answer to that is that there's some moment in history which

for whatever reason I think he is important. Not that he influenced things at the White House level, but that in carrying out a program way down in HEW he had some place that he either forwarded the program or threw it backwards or something. Also, part of it, I think, is a kind of a sampling technique that I would like actually, if you could do it, to make six or eight veteran, say, embassy employees overseas, just to see what the difference is. I'm talking about the guy who's in Chile and lives in Chile and is going to die in Chile but works for his embassy for thirty years. And what's the difference between, oh, the spirit that infuses the place during Johnson's administration as against Nixon's administration or Kennedy's administration, that sort of thing.

So I've seen a batch of people like that, not nearly enough. I've been criticized by some people. But as far as Vietnam was concerned, I've tended to talk with--I'm using the Papal "I," I guess, in this case; actually I've done very little of it--generals and with ambassadors and with State Department high level or secondary or tertiary level. Why have I not talked to the GI? Why haven't I interviewed all the black soldiers? Was this a racist war? What do they think? Well, in the collective I think it's important what they think, but I don't think you can, unless you're a sociologist, take two or three soldiers and say these represent the norm and the whole and so on. So consequently I haven't done that. You and I both served in the same battalion, or we both fought in the streets, or we both--in other words, in civil rights we ought to talk to the Poles in West Chicago who virtually turned Martin Luther King inside out. Do they represent the white opposition, or do the people that--I want to say Ridge Oak Country Club in Houston--

M: River Oaks.

F: River Oaks Country Club in Houston would also represent white America. Or the Alabama farmer.

M: All right. Well, what you're saying is that there is a level below which you just couldn't go for, I suppose, time reasons and money and such things.

F: Yes, a really massive interview program of, oh, Henry Wallace's common man or Roosevelt's forgotten man or collective nonentities who do turn policy around when they get collectively hot enough or concerned enough are very important. But I don't think it had any place in this program.

M: Do you have any worries about whether or not the right questions were being asked?

F: Constant.

M: Ever resolve that?

F: I made peace with it. No, I don't think you can ask the right questions. This is part of the philosophy, and that is within reason just saturate the field and hope that out of that when you squeeze the sponge a few of the right drops will fall out. The best example of that is one I've quoted elsewhere told me by Richard Challener on the Dulles project. They started right after Dulles died, kind of an upstart program, wasn't very well thought through and certainly wasn't well financed, and they went broke very quickly after having interviewed a number of people. Then there's a long hiatus. Then they retooled as time went on, did it right, finished it. It turned out to be a great break for them because they didn't ask anyone in that first round of interviews about Vietnam. The big issues were Quemoy and Matsu and Formosa and Red China; Vietnam was just something way off on the periphery. Well, by the time they had gone through this agony of suspension and come back to it, then Vietnam had become kind of the number one problem. So they

then find out what they can about how the Eisenhower people happened to be in Vietnam to hand a baton on to Kennedy, to hand it on to Johnson, to make the biggest thing in his administration.

So consequently I'm asking questions, but I'm also thoroughly convinced that I'm asking a lot of the questions of now and not what people will want to know in 1980. If you had run a program like this in the 1920s on the issues of the day, there are a lot of things that you would have neglected. I doubt very seriously that you'd have done much on the black in America. In the 1960s that's preeminent. What's stirring down there that I can't see, that no one really sees, and thirty years from now they'll say, "Well, why didn't they find out about this?" My problem is, for instance, to be complete I ought to spend some time with somebody like, say, Cesar Chavez and talk about grapes in California and the organization of the California agricultural worker, but that's almost in one sense independent of Johnson. You get the feeling that would have happened regardless. So you just don't do it all and you know you don't do it all. If you're thin-skinned you better not deal with it.

M: Okay, there were some stock questions.

F: Well, this is to a certain extent a train of thought, a skid greasing thing, and you size up your person. That you do through some prior thinking, through your research, and make no pat formula. I've had I don't know how many people starting programs ask me to send a list of my questions, and from the start I thought that a tightly structured thing was all wrong because you're dealing with six hundred different individuals. To go to see Dorothy Nichols with a set of questions that would fit Willard Wirtz is of course ludicrous. The most obvious question, which again doesn't fit everybody, is, "At what

point in your life did you get to know Lyndon Johnson, did you become conscious of Lyndon Johnson?" I mean something like that, which pulls up that old reminiscent bit, which works on them then, and they begin to tell the story of their life.

M: Yes.

F: One thing leads to another, and they think of things that they haven't thought of in years. Momentum. And momentum is very important in this.

M: Did you make any sort of categorization of minds in the type of people you're dealing with? That is, in my interviews some people were very good, had organized minds, had excellent recall, whereas others that you expect to be really good turned out to be rather lousy, and the quality of the information coming from them was very poor.

F: I don't think it had much to do with the job. Some cabinet officials were very full. Some of them you almost wondered if they did more than just come in when there was a signing ceremony. The same way with departments, although basically I thought that the people in the attorney general's office were rather good. They worked on it rather well. I suppose my most satisfactory interviews have been with the second level person who was a professional educator, a professional attorney. I mean, he's mixed up in politics almost incidentally. He runs a program, he knows what they tried to do and what they didn't try to do. By second level, I don't mean to put him down in the least.

M: You're talking about assistant secretaries, under secretaries?

F: Them to a certain extent. The type that maybe came up through the ranks as against the one who came in from outside. I found almost without exception that the White House assistants were good, I judge, to a certain extent, because they've tended to be young and on the make, and this was the first time that they had sort of moved out into the world and

everything made a deep impression on them. Sort of like your first movie when you were a kid, if you didn't start too early; I'm looking at the wrong generation for that. But I mean, your first professional game, maybe, you can remember much more detail than when you became more intelligent, but they all run together in your mind. They definitely remember; I mean, even the details of who sat where and which door they came in and which door they went out. All that is very clear in their minds. It was vivid at the moment, and it impressed them. All except Jack Valenti who when he came back with Johnson, never having been in the White House before, and arrived there after the Kennedy assassination, that night going through the darkened basement over to the West Wing in the Executive Office Building said he didn't know who was the butler and who was the cabinet officer because he had never seen any of these people before. They all impressed him, in the dark. I had a great sympathy for his feelings.

M: What about these people who have had one contact with Johnson?

F: Of course, they tend to magnify that into a big thing in their life, and consequently they are quite good on that one contact. I found that secretaries as a category were the least satisfactory, and probably congressmen were second.

M: Why?

F: That's knowing there are exceptions. I suppose a secretary is almost in a position of a lot of relatives who aren't good sources. I mean: "Oh, David was always there. I remember he and his daddy used to go round and round." "Well, what about?" "Well, I don't know, they just went round and round all the time." I mean, that sort of thing. That's about as detailed as you're going to get out of them, and it's about as detailed as really they remember. I think there's that, and I think there is this kind of natural mothering attitude,

proprietory attitude, that most secretaries develop. And particularly with someone like Johnson, where I think it would have been very easy to do. So I don't think they ever really saw it in terms of, "I've got to remember this for history." Whereas somebody like Larry Temple would have been very conscious of it and would therefore make a good witness. It is important to him that McComb is seeing Johnson on this particular morning. For Juanita Roberts it's another appointment, and what I've got to do is be sure that he doesn't stay longer than thirty minutes, even if the President seems to want him to stay longer than thirty minutes, because I mustn't let the schedule get fouled up. The expanse is different.

And congressmen I think sometimes, a lot of them were just too busy.

M: What do you think about the truthfulness of these interviews? People deliberately lie, do you think? Just how far can a historian trust these?

F: I think you've got to take all of them with extreme caution. I don't see any choice in that. I think the great value--Paige Mulhollan has written this somewhere--is really the humanizing quality that it gives to history and a reinforcement to the notion--Paige didn't say this--that these are complex human beings working on other complex human beings. You get away completely, it seems to me, if you were to sit down and read every one of these, that the federal government is a great big sort of anonymous bloc as it's seen, I think, by so many people in the public. But it's just as complicated as a family or ball club or anything else in which it's very important who's quarterbacking, who's coaching, and how game plans that come in for Mr. Nixon are devised and then how they're pushed through in that. Just as Coach Royal, for instance, here can devise, presumably, a near perfect offense, he can't foresee that on a given moment his fullback, with a wide open

field, is going to hit a wet spot on the field and nobody within ten feet of him and go down and wreck the whole thing.

So you get, I think, a very good documentation of the fact that the government lumbers ahead with all our lives in a sort of a molasses momentum that nonetheless--it's just very chancy. I think you can show this in things like that so-called Black Monday Supreme Court decision, which presumably did away with segregation in the public schools, and while extremely significant still ran up against a strong opposition that hasn't been completely put down yet nearly two decades later. You can't make a guy move. You learn with the kids. We move ahead on programs because some kind of leadership tells us and we don't bother to go against it, whereas one guy saying that he will not obey the law may be able to bring enough people along with him that the law really becomes invalid at that point. So the best laid plans then are extremely chancy.

The other thing that I think is of value, and this is as I say something Paige did in a paper I read, [is that] it gives you enormous anecdotal depth. Anecdotes is not the coin of the historian, but good anecdotes are enormously illuminating. The more stories you pick up about the so-called Johnson treatment, the more you understand really how a lot of things got done or how some people got turned off. I think it's important in both instances.

M: What about new information? Of consequence?

F: I'm not too optimistic about that. I think it's clarification of detail. The thing is I think Washington, in its way, is smaller than Muleshoe, Texas. Because everybody--I say that with the problem of all generalizations--from taxi drivers and bootblacks on up are politically conscious, and therefore everybody is poking into everybody's business and

everybody wants to be a big shot and tell something. And you've got somebody they'd like to tell it to over the evening barbecue or down at the National Press Club or somewhere. I think just about everything gets out. Not everything is provable.

Once in a while I have come upon something I thought was brand new information, and discretely asking certain people that I thought might [know], just kind of probing to see whether they knew about it, found out they had known about it. You either couldn't prove it or didn't think it was worth bringing up for whatever reason, no point in rocking that boat, that kind of thing. I have not gotten any information on a couple of frequent charges against Johnson, for instance. I've gotten relatively little information on Johnson as a wheeler-dealer in Congress. I've been told by a number of people that "Yes, he twisted my elbow" and "Yes, he gave me the treatment." "Well, specifically--?" "I don't know, I mean he just did it." That's about as deep as I get. I've also tried to probe some of those charges that were made down in his home district, which you think may be politically motivated and might be valid. But charges of Johnson's kind of financial sharpness, let us say, in some deals, unholy alliances and that sort of thing. I don't think I've turned up anything.

M: You know, to add to this, which is sort of on the gossip column side, there are all sorts of charges about Johnson being a woman chaser. I have found no evidence of that. Another point that's kind of puzzled me, everyone says that Mrs. Johnson was a great influence on her husband, and almost every time when someone would say this I would ask them to give me an example and they never could.

F: Yes.

M: That's an assumption that may be quite true, but nobody could give me a specific example.

F: On this woman chasing business, I haven't done much of this on tape but before or after the talk, and I think it's been worse with female reporters who have said, "Have you talked to so-and-so?" And I'd say, "Yes." They'd say, "What did she say about her relations with Johnson?" I'd say, "Well, do you know?" "Of course, I can't prove anything. I'm just convinced that they had something doing there." And I said, "Well, what evidence?" There's nothing secret in Washington. I'd say, "Well, for instance?" So it all comes to naught. I really think the only person who could reveal anything on that would be Lyndon Johnson. Of course, you'd look stupid asking him because if he says "Absolutely not"--whereas then he says, "Now on the other hand--" where are you? (Laughter) So there you are.

M: The one point that I was able to prove that everyone talked about, also a gossip column type question, was that Johnson used rather earthy, salty language. There is ample evidence of this that has been put on the tapes, which I suppose gives insight into his background.

F: Well, this is a peculiar thing. Truman was the first modern president to use man-in-the-street language, and he made words like S.O.B. almost parlor expressions. I can remember in my undergraduate days when the student newspaper, *The Daily Texan*, quoted old man Hilsberg when they went around poking in his kitchen to see whether it was clean, called one of them a son-of-a-bitch. The *Texan* ran it, and they tried to fire the editor for using obscene language. Well, nowadays of course you can use it in front of your children and teacher and everybody else, and nobody thinks anything about it,

thanks, really, to Harry Truman. Eisenhower had that image of being a basically sweet and good man. All I can gather was that he also could talk like an army muleskinner. And Kennedy, with his reputation for elegance, apparently could get very specific in some of his expletives, but I suppose it's a type of man. It wasn't an issue with Eisenhower or Kennedy; it was an issue with Johnson.

Some people were turned off by his language, apparently because it came from him. I think it's one of those issues that probably over a long run will be more endearing than it is at the moment, just as I think people have always felt that in that facade of perfection that George Washington had the fact that he did use strong language was one of the few humanizing things about him. And of course Lincoln's off-color stories offended lots of people. In fact, all his stories did. That's an intriguing theory, because he and Johnson both had that in common. That's really a kind of a western characteristic, or a frontier characteristic: the tight-lipped cowboy, if you asked him a question, always illustrated it rather than giving you a direct answer. They speak in hyperbole I guess, according to folklore classes, and Johnson was one of them. To a rather crisp type of person you can get in parts of the United States, they don't understand that it's sort of circumlocution that goes on, and what I'm trying to say to you is "Yes."

M: Has it struck you as being somewhat, I suppose, ironic, or puzzling maybe, that this project has gone on now since 1968 and you've talked to hundreds of people and you've got thousands of feet of tape, and there's a great deal of information about Lyndon Johnson, and you probably know more about him than he might know himself, and yet you've talked all around him but you haven't talked to Lyndon Johnson himself?

F: For a long time I didn't particularly want to because, as you know, you'd like to go back and redo some of those early interviews. Each interview teaches you something practically. I don't think any is wasted, and so that's sort of the educational process. I can talk so more knowingly, or I could talk somewhat more knowingly now to some of the people I interviewed earlier than I did. So I think anybody would realize this, and I think we realized it and figured it's premature. Of course, we weren't about to hit him while he's president, just as I've made no attempt to see Richard Nixon. Because--I don't know about Nixon--but basically he'd be hurried and have other things on his mind. My only hope is that he and I will last and we'll get together somewhere down the line.

But I do feel now I ought to see Johnson. Early in the summer I sent a note to Mrs. Johnson saying that if the President were confined to the Ranch and would like to talk, I'd like to. I'd be very much available to come out almost any time he suggested. He could just go in any direction he wanted to for any length of time. I also suggested to her that since she comes in with a great deal of regularity by car, that if she would like I'd be glad to come out early in the morning when she was going to drive in, drive in with her, interview her, or we'd just talk on the way in. She could go about her business, [and] when she got ready to go in the evening I'd just ride back home, pick up my car, and we'd have a two-way interview. That way there'd be nothing taken out of her time. But so far I haven't gotten any response. I can only surmise why not. I don't know. I mean, she has said to me somewhere in there, well, she did hope that Lyndon would get started, but I think that's as far as it's gotten. I haven't been turned off or anything, it's just that nothing has happened.

M: This reminds me of another question that's plagued the project, or followed it, not really plagued it, which ought to be asked and put on tape, and that is, given Lyndon Johnson's curiosity and drive, how can this project ever be protected if he wants to see something?

F: I don't know. That's a matter of faith. All I can say is that to this point his behavior has been absolutely circumspect. I said this earlier: when he was doing *The Vantage Point* he contacted people, of course, to help him with various sections, clarify things. I can remember one case in point, William Bundy, who told him, and I think this makes sense, "Well, I've gone over all that with the oral history people. Why don't you just use my interviews?" That's the word then we got from the Johnson assistant calling us, and we said, well, we want to wait until we check out with Bundy ourselves. We checked with Bundy, and he said, "Please do, I don't see any point in my going over the same thing twice." So I looked over the tapes, and I think there were four, and we gave three to Johnson. One of them I didn't think he ought to see. We told Bundy, and then I sent him three out of four. That's all I ever heard out of it.

There have been a couple of other occasions like that, but there's never been any pressure to see somebody's tape. Once we turn the tapes over to the Johnson Library they're placed behind a wire fence, heavily padlocked, only two people with a key--I think it's Middleton and Dorothy Territo--none of the other staff have. This is their ultra-security things. I don't know how resistant they would be if he demanded to see something. I don't know, there's no answer to that. You have to take it on faith. Nancy Dickerson, for instance, before we started said, "You'll just never convince me that Lyndon Johnson won't see anything he wants to." Ralph Yarborough so far has refused. To which I said, "Well, look, I won't turn the interviews over and will leave them in my

will." "He'll get hold of them somehow." Of course, Ralph tends to be kind of paranoid toward things. I don't know. On the other hand, I've been surprised at how frank some people have been.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

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JOE B. FRANTZ

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