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INTERVIEWEE: PROFESSOR H. M. GREENE

INTERVIEWER: DOUGLASS CATER

PLACE: THE WHITE HOUSE

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C: This is Professor [H. M.] Greene. I just wanted to ask first -- when did you first meet Mr. Johnson?

G: I don't remember the exact date. Seems to me along '26 or '27 when he came over to the college, when he was working on the campus rather than in the classroom. Later I had him in the classroom. First, I think, was government -- allowed electives in government -- sophomore level on up. I knew Lyndon first as a worker on the campus when he broke in. Of course, I only saw him once [and knew] -- he had great energy. You had to know him the second time you saw him. I not only knew him, I knew his entire family.

C: Through him?

G: All the family, yes, in San Marcos. His father, mother and I were all good friends. I taught all the brothers and sisters at one time or another. He was the first to come to San Marcos. I believe that's correct. He came. The family finally moved over. The Honorable Sam Johnson, his father, was [in the] House of Representatives, or had been, I couldn't be definite. He was busy in Austin. Our place was considerably closer than the other place. I assume the children had an opportunity to go to college. They finished the high school work so, I think, all of them went to college. I'm pretty sure I taught the whole group. Whether they all graduated there I do not know, but I believe they did.

C: Tell me first, what physical impressions struck you?

G: Well, physically, I noted he was a tall boy with plenty of energy and a wonder at times at how he stood out there on the campus. But that's the first impression.

C: He tells about how his mother finally persuaded him to give up being a truck driver and then coming to college?

G: I understood from her, I gathered some information, I do not know -- you know how you get the impression that he had had a truck driving job on the highway. So far as I ever knew, the President himself was desirous to get an education and wanted to come to college. My impression was that the main trouble was after his desire to settle, main trouble was maintenance while he was in college. His father, as I understood -- of course none of this is documentive evidence you know -- his father had had some misfortunes in farm busines just like tens of hundreds of thousands of others, you know. Cotton went to pot after the first World War....I mean cotton prices. So, that was his break -- through his work in legislature. Mr. Johnson knew our [college] President and they were good friends. That's the way I understood it came about. In other words: "If you want to go to college down there at Southwestern, I have a good friend in the president. If you don't have the money, I'm sure we can arrange it."

C: Did you sense any change in his -- was this sort of instinct for leadership -- was it there the moment you first saw him -- what kind of development did you see?

G: I would say that now this acquaintance with his intellectual reaction came, as I recall, first when he came to class and it was a class in government. That old method in teaching, Johnson could tell you more about it than I can but I expect reaction from the students, pull it out of them, make them feel like it's theirs. Now, I pulled out Lyndon, I popped my head up and his reactions from the first were just high class. Fact of the

business, I was fortunate not only having Lyndon but we had a whole ten or twelve other very bright boys. And in those days government was an elective. They took it because they wanted it. And when they went to class they didn't expect to do anything but get something out of it. Made a most delightful chore for the teacher of course. And, I got hold of these boys and decided I think first they're going to change my procedure. I never liked to copy off a lot of stuff and read it in class -- my way was mixed, but with a class like that -- it was conducted like a graduate seminar. And all I did was throw out a challenge, you know, let them think it out and develop it, another challenge and develop it, guide it. If they wanted to argue it, debate it -- all well and good -- anything to awaken their intellectual reaction. Lyndon was excellent in that field. I had another boy in there too who was an excellent student. Name was Henry Kyle and disposition and all the opposite from Lyndon but intellectually he was keen and they used to argue. Henry could push him back to the wall, but I don't think he ever did. He never did defeat him. More often than that I would have to come to Henry's rescue.

C: Do you remember any specific arguments?

G: We were just developing the subject matter, you see -- any particular -- I wish I had brought an article -- I don't recall just now the writer. He had been a student with me -- after Lyndon, I think. He gave a whole lot of Lyndon's reactions, but so far as I can see....

C: If you find that article, I wish you would send it. I can get a copy and then send it back.

G: Why, certainly. Not so complimentary to me though, maybe he was slapping back proof -- that's about 25 years [ago]. Some remarks he made -- but fundamentally it's all right. His aim was developing Lyndon -- Lyndon's attitude and so forth. So after reading that and thinking it over in the

light of what Lyndon has accomplished, I had a feeling insofar as his attitude, his philosophy of government; it was excellent then as now. Of course, it's extravagant, the Senator's position, but fundamentally it's about the same. This....what is his name. [I'm] getting older now and names especially slip me. But that would be my reaction. Lyndon Johnson's philosophical and fundamental attitudes toward humanity and his dealings with human beings essentially same right there. He showed wonderful promise. Especially getting people to work with him -- organizational ability.

C: In a sense, what had developed this philosophy? Had it been from observing politics through his father? Where had he gotten his philosophy?

G: The analysis that I made from my own satisfaction was that, in the first place, he was born with all the interests. In the second place, his experiences, you see, had verified these things and other experiences no doubt. The main forces were his mother and father. The fundamental concept perhaps, I would say, came through his mother but political practice, I felt sure he would get from his father. Mr. Johnson was himself a very successful man in politics. And Mrs. Johnson was very successful in these other concepts that were mentioned. Maybe I ought to talk about his traits-- where they come from. Lyndon was hungry for information and I connected, as I saw it, his suitability for his nickname. He was known on the campus as Bull Johnson. And you'd naturally jump to conclusions because he was always shooting off his mouth. He'd start a bull session because if he was going to learn while he was working or while he was playing. Get the other fellows to bulling, don't you see. And sit there and learn. Oh, he'd make his contribution, you see. But what he was after, I had the impression, was getting information. And, by the way, he was adept in getting information of the people. I understand -- I read one criticism one time that

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made me chuckle.-- said he didn't like the way he fought to get his information. He liked to talk and get other people to talk, which doesn't necessarily follow. As it happened, I had gone through a whole lot of experiences that Lyndon went through. I didn't have opportunities in school either, not even access -- not even to high school. Had to pick up dirt myself. And I had to learn by listening. I didn't have time to read, but I could work at something else and listen. So, I was quite sympathetic with that attitude. This man, if you get that article, this boy dug down, his name still hasn't come to me, he dug into those files, you see Lyndon became Editor of the College Star and he enjoyed his philosophy -- especially his editorials. And this lad picked up a group, probably read them once and chuckled at the boy, and had the impression that he pretty well covered the subject. Didn't dig deeply, I mean the subject throughout, to get a grasp of Lyndon's philosophy at the time. You know his people of course, no need for me to repeat that. But I often think he got the best from those families.

C: Did he ever indicate why he had taken this detour after high school -- when he went out to California and then came back and worked and he didn't seem to be in any hurry to go to college?

G: No, he never explained to me but I have had the impression that he was somewhat restless, no doubt hungry for information that he'd get first-hand. It took him away. And I had the impression all the while he had no intention of staying away. Get out, make his way and learn. He was ravenous for information. After all, he was quite young, he was only 15 when he graduated which was younger than it is today. I would surmise that he made a wise choice -- that he was not mature enough to go to college right then. And I'd like to point out also that in his time usually men and women went to college. In these days kids go to college. And if he had gone with these

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men and women, it would have been a disadvantage, don't you see? I felt that it was his good fortune that he did this. He met humanity. He saw what life was and not what Momma and Pappa would tell him it was or should be. He saw it and, of course, enough to escape any of its pitfalls. And, in other words, enough to benefit from it. And I have a feeling even that he benefited from him highway experience; he benefited from creating rocks and papers and leaves from that old rough campus.

C: Tell me about his extra-curricular work -- how did you know him in that connection?

G: Well, he and I associated together very closely.

C: Did he live with you for a while?

G: No, he had lived with Dr. Evans. In those days he had -- Dr. Evans is President of the college -- and he had a room, an apartment, or whatever you call it, over his garage. And Lyndon stayed there.

Dr. Evans had no son. He had ambition and vision for him, you see. Dr. Evans was one of the shrewdest, the most conscientious and most successful school men appreciating and dealing with politics. Those days he had to go in and get him money. That is how he got to know Sam Johnson and the connections. So....

C: You said you saw quite a bit of him in extra-curricular activities -- I was wondering -- how did you do that?

G: Yes, he was on the...side of work and on the society on the hill -- that's what we called the college -- the honor society on the hill at that time was Harris-Blair. And the sponsor was away studying and I was asked to sponsor in his absence. And there is where Lyndon and I....he helped me so wonderfully because this society -- the oldest in the school I think -- was the only one. (interruption)

End of Interview

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