INTERVIEW I

DATE: May 5, 1971

INTERVIEWEE: CARROLL KILPATRICK

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Sid Richardson Building, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

F: You came up out of Alabama into the Washington scene, didn't you?

K: Yes, about thirty years ago when I first came to Washington.

I remember one incident that I might just interject, my wife and I had been in Washington just a few weeks, I would say that it was early in 1941, and we were invited to Sunday noon lunch or dinner at the home of some Alabamians, who were then in the government. I have a very vivid recollection that one of the persons present was Lady Bird Johnson, whom I guess I had never heard of before. He [Lyndon Johnson] was not there because he was ill. The one thing that stands out in my memory of the whole day, and I don't remember really anything else about the day, is that she said, "Lyndon has recently been appointed to the Naval Affairs Committee, and he doesn't know much about naval affairs, but he learns awfully fast." That's one recollection I have, and then I didn't see anything of the Johnsons for a long time thereafter, didn't meet him until much later.

F: When you were with the Raleigh News and Observer, did you ever get any feeling about how the Daniels felt about Johnson, or had he emerged sufficiently for them to be aware at that time?

K: No, I was really working for the Birmingham papers, and just for a few months I also did some work for the Raleigh paper because a friend of mine was their correspondent and he had to leave town for, I guess, some war-connected job. I tried to keep his paper for him for a short time and that's how I did the work for the Raleigh paper. It was very much part-time, but I have no recollection of ever discussing Johnson with either Josephus or Jonathan Daniels.

F: Well, he may not have emerged in their consciousness sufficiently at that time.

K: He may not have.

F: When did you first begin to be aware of him? Is there any clear-cut memory?

K: Well, I suppose that luncheon that I mentioned. And then these same people had a high regard for him and I can remember--

F: Who were they, may I ask?

K: It was Clifford Durr, D-U-R-R, who was a member of the Federal Communications Commission, and his wife. They were pretty active New Dealers. Mrs. Durr was the sister-in-law of Hugo Black. They were great admirers of Lyndon Johnson. And either at that luncheon or at some other time they described in some way the relationship between Johnson and FDR and [said] that FDR thought well of him. But remember, he was still a junior congressman and I certainly did not, at that time, hear any comments about future greatness or anything like that.

F: Did you ever actually interview him before you went with the [Washington] Post?

K: I don't believe I did before I went with the Post, but I went with the Post in 1952.

F: That's right. At which time he is emerging.

K: He was then in the Senate.

F: Yes, minority leader.

K: I don't believe that I had met him at that time.

F: Did you ever hear Senator Richard Russell talk about why he deferred to Johnson?

K: I never did. I never knew Russell that well. No.

F: Did you see much of Johnson during those Senate majority leader years?

K: I did in the later years. I was not on the Hill. I was an editorial writer for the first four years I was with the Post, and my only contact was an indirect one with Phil Graham, who was publisher and who had a high regard for Johnson. I don't think I met Johnson until 1956 or 1957, something like that.

F: In the Post in those days, how did you decide an editorial policy?

K: Well, the editor in those days was first Herbert Elliston, then he died and then Bob Estabrook succeeded with the title of chief editorial writer or editor of the editorial page. Phil Graham was not active in day-to-day direction. Those two men were the ones who made the day-to-day decisions. Of course, they consulted with him. But I saw something of Graham and

knew some of his thoughts about people.

F: But Phil Graham's own admiration for Johnson would not have translated into any sort of activity on the editorial page?

K: No, I don't believe so at all.

F: He would have come at that independently.

K: Surely.

F: Did you feel in those years prior to 1960 that you did have a future presidential candidate on your hands or did you think he had reached a peak there?

K: I don't know the answer to that offhand. I knew that he was a very ambitious person politically, and he was very energetic and he did quite an extraordinary job in the Senate as both minority leader and as majority leader. I suppose I was influenced somewhat by the same consideration that others were. I can remember very clearly a meeting with Nixon. I was covering Nixon some in those years. And I would say in the late fifties, I don't know when in the late fifties, 1957/58/59, I had traveled out west with Nixon, and late one night at the Denver airport there weren't but four or five reporters with him and he invited us into one of the airport rooms while we waited for the plane to be refueled. We sat there for an hour or so and we talked about Johnson, and I remember this very clearly, he said, "He is the ablest one," and I think he said, "[He] would be a successful president, would be an able president." The implication was that he was highly equipped

to be president. But Nixon added, "But he has two strikes against him: one that he is from Texas, and one that he has had a heart attack," and I know that he said, "If he had only one strike against him, he might make it, but I don't think he can with two strikes against him."

I also remember--[and this was] certainly in 1959, I remember this because it was before John Kennedy announced--a group of us had dinner with him. And I must say, at that time--

F: With Johnson?

K: No, with Kennedy.

F: Oh, with John Kennedy.

K: Before John Kennedy announced. I am sure that I was at that point influenced by that comment of Nixon's and I accepted it at face value; I'm sure I did. A group of us had dinner in the National Press Club, one of the rooms upstairs, with John Kennedy, I would say it was the fall of 1959, because he told us quite frankly, "I'm going to announce, I think, in January." We talked about all the candidates, Symington, Johnson, and so on, and he said, "Lyndon would make the ablest president of any of us running, but he can't be elected."

F: No one ever really contested that viewpoint either, did they?

K: No, I don't think anybody did.

F: Did you go out to the Los Angeles convention?

K: Yes.

F: Was there any feeling there that Johnson had a prayer?

K: I'm sure I never thought he did, and I was surprised that he was picked as vice president. John Kennedy had lunch at the Washington Post a month or two before the convention. I was not at the luncheon, but I later discussed it with Russ Wiggins, who was then editor of the Post, and I remember Russ saying, "I think a good ticket would be Kennedy-Johnson." I disputed him and argued that Johnson would never accept second spot. He argued that he would. And I know that at that luncheon there had been some discussion of that ticket. There may be a record of that, a memo of that luncheon.

F: Did you ever have any association with old Joe Kennedy?

K: No, I never knew him at all.

F: Did you ever talk directly with Senator Kennedy about Johnson?

K: Well, I mentioned that one [occasion]. Yes, I talked with him about him at that dinner in the fall or early winter of 1959. I don't remember any other direct conversations.

F: Now, newsmen cover the news as it develops, and yet they are human and they have their own predilections and preferences. Was there a sense among the newspeople in Los Angeles, a sense of anything from pique to downright hostility that Kennedy would have picked Johnson? Or can you generalize?

K: Yes, I would generalize. We thought there was a good deal of hostility between the two people, and I think it was evident that there was. Johnson, as you remember, made a rather bitter attack against Kennedy and raised the health issue. I was under the impression--that's all I can say, I don't have anything specific--that Kennedy was quite unhappy about Johnson. You

must remember also the record and Phil Graham's memos and so on that John Kennedy instructed his staff not to go too far in their criticism of Johnson. They were criticizing him because they recognized him as one of the chief opponents, although I don't believe that they ever thought that Johnson could get the nomination. I never thought he would get the nomination in that year.

F: Did you get the feeling from your peculiar vantage point that Phil Graham was the key man in the association of Johnson and Kennedy?

K: I didn't know that until much later. I didn't know anything about it at that time.

F: He didn't tip his hand to you?

K: The Post wrote the first serious story out of the convention that Johnson would be picked for vice president. Dick Lyons wrote the story and he wrote it because Phil Graham suggested [it] and told him what the information was that he had. It surprised me at the time and I know a lot of people didn't believe it at the time. But I was not in on the conversation. Remember, at a convention, each one is assigned to some particular part of it, and I was assigned to Kennedy. I was at the Kennedy headquarters and I frequently didn't know what the other people in the bureau knew, because we were all so busy that we didn't [have time].

F: Were you around the Kennedy headquarters when the news came that

John F. was picking LBJ?

K: I think I was.

F: You don't have any clear memory of the reaction?

K: I don't have any. I just remember the surprise that came. I remember that Kennedy came down to one of the banquet rooms in the hotel and announced that Johnson was his choice. It was the same room, I believe, that they had their debate [in]. You remember they had a debate in the early days of the convention.

F: As you recall the scene, when Kennedy made the announcement, was it sort of an aggressive tone, was it just matter-of-fact, or was it highly enthusiastic?

K: I think it was rather aggressive: "I want him and I'm going to fight for him." There wasn't any doubt or hesitancy about his announcement. It was an emphatic endorsement of Johnson to be vice president.

F: What did you do during the campaign?

K: I traveled on the Johnson train in the South one week. I spent I suppose half of my time on the Nixon plane and half on the Kennedy, maybe a little more with Kennedy than [Nixon].

F: What was the trip through the South like?

K: It was hectic and chaotic, as so many of Johnson's activities are.

F: Why are things chaotic around Johnson?

K: That's a good question. He's in some ways a well organized, well planned individual and, in other ways, he is the most

undisciplined, chaotic human being that I've ever encountered. And that raises the most intriguing questions about him. Here is a man who came from this small town in Texas and came up and dominated the United States Senate as no man had ever done, with skill and precision and understanding. And he totally failed ever to understand the workings of the press. He could understand the workings of the Senate, but he never, in all his years, learned exactly how the press worked and how it operated. Why he was able to master one and not the other, I've never understood and never been able to explain.

F: Where did he fall down with the press? Was this evident in the Senate days? I'm sure it magnified--

K: It was magnified later, but it was evident to an extent in the Senate days. There are many stories about his conflict with the press, and his secrecy was extraordinary even in the Senate days.

F: He liked publicity.

K: He liked publicity. I frankly think he thought he could manipulate the press, and that was his undoing. Just a few months after he was president he talked to a group of reporters on his plane flying back from Texas to Washington and he told them, "You play ball with me and I'll make big men of you." Those were almost his words. And they lived to haunt him as long as he was there, because in essence he was saying, "I'm buying you." He thought he could influence us by taking us to lunch or making some dramatic gesture.

I know one day a colleague's wife was up at the Hill and Johnson saw her looking for a cab and said, "Oh, no!" He sent for his limousine and had her taken home in the limousine. It was little things like that that he thought would endear him to the press. Instead, it aroused the suspicion of the press.

F: Were there feelings among the press that some people were bought, did fall for this kind of treatment? Now I grant you that the bulk of them are a tough-minded group.

K: Certainly there were some, and certainly in the beginning of his presidency. Some well-known people were completely--they were not bought--

F: I don't mean involved in the sense that they were purchased.

K: They were certainly greatly enamored of him because of his openness and his willingness to see them. Sure, there were people who were influenced by this. And [they] liked him. I liked him. A great many people liked him and let that influence them.

F: But having a press like you doesn't blunt their right to criticize.

K: No, no. For example, the President thought I'm sure that Walter Lippmann was almost in his vest pocket. He called Lippman to ask him what to do about this and that. Lippmann was an independent minded man and he said, "No, you shouldn't do this." And then he would go out and write in public that the President made a mistake when he announced this policy yesterday. That antagonized Johnson. Then he and Lippmann finally never spoke. Lippmann became extremely critical

of him after that.

I remember James Reston was very favorably impressed with Johnson in the first months.

F: Well, it's an interesting story because he seemed to have everything going for him in 1964 and how it got kicked away is a fascinating study I think for psychologists of the future and political scientists and whatnot.

K: Yes. I remember when we came here for Christmas in 1963, he showed us through the house. And I would say half of the press corps thought, "Gee, this is absolutely marvelous that the President of the United States would invite the press corps and give them a personal tour of his house," and so on. And half of them thought, "This is cornpone stuff," and they were somewhat offended by it. Lady Bird said, "Don't go into our bedroom. It's not made up," and he barged right in, took everybody right in there, after she had said not to do it. He was over-exposed to the press in certain periods, which damaged him some.

F: In these days of strong coverage by all sorts of media, don't we have an inherent danger of that familiarity that, in a sense, will breed contempt? I mean, does the cliche hold up?

K: Yes, it holds up, and I think Nixon saw that. Nixon is not a gregarious person in the sense that Johnson is, and [when] he came in he was trying to do everything differently. And one of the things he did was never to see the press, except in the

most formal press conference relationships. I don't think Nixon ever stops to chat with reporters while he's waiting for a plane to take off or is waiting for an event to begin there. He just doesn't acknowledge the presence of the press, and I think partly he's saying, "I'm doing it just the opposite from Johnson." Johnson started out by taking us on these walks at the White House and talking endlessly and spending hours with certain reporters. Certain ones that he thought would be useful to him he would spend hours with, as you know.

F: Did you ever get the feeling you were being courted?

K: Yes. There was that. I knew him, in a sense, better than some. There were some who spent a lot more time with him, but I had the advantage which some of the White House reporters had not of having known him on the Hill. And we had had some clashes on the Hill. I think he liked me. He always said he did, and I think, also, he was just a little bit suspicious of me as he was of so many reporters. So there was never quite the warm embrace that he gave to some.

F: When you get someone like William S. White, who is obviously pro-Johnson down the line, does he reap a certain disdain from the remainder of the press corps?

K: Yes, I think anybody who becomes sort of a spokesman for a president is subject to the criticism of his colleagues. That's always true.

F: George Reedy, among others, is on record for saying that any

time President Johnson, Liz Carpenter, or anybody else in the world gives an exclusive and makes somebody very happy that he annoys ten times as many people out there as he wins over. Did you see that?

K: Yes. That's true. Of course, there were so many who saw Johnson that it wasn't as true of Johnson.

F: Kind of a matter of standing in line?

K: Yes. You know, all of us who covered the White House were on those walks or we were on Air Force One for many rides, so we didn't have the feeling that he was inviting some and excluding the others to the extent that it might have been if he were having, say, a half-dozen only that he talked to.

F: Did you get the feeling that you could get more out of Johnson than you could get out of the press spokesman for the White House, if you could get to him?

K: Yes, if he wanted to talk. Johnson was always, ninety nine per cent of the time, in complete command of what he said and he did not overspeak. The instances where he misspoke were so few that I don't remember them. But he did not misspeak and he seldom gave out information that he didn't want to give out. He sometimes talked off-the-record at great length about past events and past experiences and so on. Many of these were very colorful and his descriptions of senators were brilliant. Then these began being passed around and I think they damaged him, because they'd get back to the--

F: It was too good not to share with somebody.

K: They were too good. There were some marvelous Johnson stories, as you know, and they were shared, and the news people made fun of it, which was unfortunate.

F: Was there a sort of, as he felt, almost sophisticated Eastern Establishment that did look down their nose at him for cornbread and barbecue?

K: There was certainly some of that, but I'm sure that he overdid that.

F: There was no systematic effort to gut him, was there?

K: No, there certainly was not. He complained one day [when] he had not been in office very long, six months maybe. Some criticisms were beginning and he accused the White House press of being Eastern Establishment. At the time he said that he was talking to me and to several others and I think everyone of us was from [the South]. I was from Alabama, Tom Wicker was from North Carolina, The New York Times, Doug Kiker from the Herald Tribune was a Georgian, and there were several others. So how could he have made this charge? I think we remonstrated with him. And he wouldn't listen, he had made up his mind on the thing.

F: Does it do something to a man to join the Washington press corps? I grant your point that this is a drawing in of talents from all over the United States.

K: There was, from the beginning, a certain looking down the nose at this big, rambling, gawky Texan, who was very colorful in his sombrero hat and liked to get up on his horse and have his

picture taken. The stories about his table manners got around even when he was vice president and so on, and that sort of thing certainly did him a lot of harm. People enjoyed laughing at [them]. There was one story that went around, I don't know whether it was true, that he was at some embassy function when he was vice president. He saw a roll and he took his fork and he speared the roll in front of somebody and got the roll, that sort of thing.

F: Well, it's just as good as if it is true. I mean, it doesn't matter.

K: It doesn't matter whether it was true or not, it got around and was believed. I know that this story got around--I was not on this trip--that when he went--where was it, Finland?

F: He went to Finland, went to Scandanavia.

K: --that he did something on that trip of a similar nature. There's a story about it that he went to a war cemetery and made a sort of a political speech, and they deeply resented it. That was the story that came back.

So those built up. There were any number of stories about this crude Texan, and they hurt him.

K: But I don't think there was any effort to lampoon him, in the first instance. Later it became fashionable to lampoon him. In his early days in the presidency, there was enormous sympathy for him, as you recall, and enormous hope that he was a man of action who got things accomplished. That was certainly the

view that Lippmann and Scottie Reston had in the first months of his presidency. I remember talking one night to a liberal-minded State Department official, a bureaucrat, not an appointee. This man I know had gone to Harvard and so on and he was saying almost in effect, "Well, by God, after the disastrous days of the Kennedys, we're in good hands, because this guy knows what he's up to and what it's all about, and he knows where he's going."

F: What was the feeling at your level of how Johnson got so deeply involved in Vietnam? Did they feel that this was a two-fisted Americanism coming out, or that he just blundered in, or was he misled or he trusted the wrong people, or do you have as many different opinions as you have people?

K: I don't know that I can add anything to that story. I think that Johnson was doing what almost any president at the time might have done. I think Kennedy would have done about what he did in the first instance. You've got this letter, which is on display, from Bobby Kennedy written to Lyndon Johnson, I guess late in 1965, in which he commends him for how well he handled the Vietnam situation. Yet later Bobby Kennedy turned violently against him. I think we all at that time thought that a little show of force and Ho Chi Minh would back down and that would be it. I think that's the basic thing, and the feeling also that we've made a commitment and we don't want another Cuba. I think it was a very widespread feeling.

You remember it was called the McNamara War. And McNamara said he was proud to have it called the McNamara War. But he later changed his attitude on that.

F: Was there a feeling among the press corps that Johnson deferred to McNamara?

K: There was a feeling that McNamara had great influence certainly, as much influence as anybody in that period. Although while Johnson was vice president, he clashed with McNamara and he clashed with many people, as you know. But it seemed to me that within a week or two of the change of administration that Kermit Gordon who was the budget director told me the story that he, Gordon, and McNamara had clashed with Johnson while he was vice president and that McNamara had made the comment after this battle,over some budget problem I guess, McNamara said to Gordon, "Well, there's one thing you can be sure of. If this man ever becomes president, you and I will be out." There was another official there named [David] Klein--he was on the NSC staff--[who] told me that he thought McNamara would be the first Cabinet member to leave. This was within two or three days of the change. Of course, he also thought the two personalities were too strong and they would clash.

F: So he stayed four of the next five years.

K: Yes.

F: Did you get the feeling that Johnson, from your antenna, was better or worse than any vice president's kind of doomed to be? You

know, he was a joke in a sense, but all vice presidents are jokes to an extent. Was he laughed at by the administration?

K: He was laughed at by the administration. There were some of the Kennedy people who laughed at him. I never had the feeling that John Kennedy laughed at him. I thought that John Kennedy, while always a little bit uncomfortable with him, was also respectful. Johnson told me once late in his presidency, "Kennedy treated me much better than I've treated Humphrey," I remember his saying that. I've forgotten the occasion or why.

F: Did you get the feeling that Johnson's lack of consideration for Humphrey on occasion was just due to preoccupation with other things or was it some kind of a purposed put down?

K: I never knew if there was a purpose. I think it was just Johnson's nature that if anybody said anything that he didn't like, Johnson would call them up and tell them. Once or twice Humphrey would say something that Johnson wasn't ready for him to say, and I'm sure that Johnson made known his annoyance.

F: Did you ever hear any complaint out of Humphrey?

K: I never did. I never heard it. Any complaint out of Humphrey has come later.

F: Yes. Did you hear any complaint out of Johnson?

K: No, I don't recall--well, I think it was pretty [obvious]. You remember Humphrey's Marshall Plan for the cities, Johnson publicly knocked that down very vigorously in a press conference.

F: Did Johnson, as vice president, ever talk to you about his restiveness in that post?

K: No, not directly. I don't believe he did. I made the 1961 trip around the world with Johnson, and I had several long, gossipy conversations with him. And he never expressed any criticism of Kennedy, never expressed any unhappiness in the job, but some of it showed nevertheless. "I advised such and such, but, of course, they didn't follow my advice." It was that type of comment, but no direct criticism. And there were the expressions of admiration for Kennedy, too.

F: How did that trip go?

K: It went like so many Johnson trips. It was hectic and frenzied. He wouldn't keep to his schedule; he wouldn't tell us his schedule in advance.

F: Is the schedule in that case made by the White House?

K: The basic schedule is. I remember that we had all gotten to Bangkok and we had all gotten to bed late, late at night, and I don't know, two o'clock in the morning we got telephone calls that Johnson was having a press conference. He was in a hotel in one end of the city and we were in the other. So they rallied us all out of bed, and we found cabs and got across to his hotel room, and there he was in his pajamas. He was very annoyed by something so he was having a press conference to offset it. Of course, when that was written up later he said, "Well, I was doing it for your advantage so that you would have it."

But he had gotten annoyed by something that had been written and he was making a statement to clarify it. The next night I know they told us to be at the such and such dock at seven o'clock in the morning because he's going on the tour of the klongs, the water market.

F: How do you spell Klongs?

K: K-l-o-n-g-s, isn't it?

F: I don't know the term.

K: I remember getting awakened in the middle of the night and told, "The trip has been canceled, he is not going." Then later at six or six thirty or so, being awakened again and saying, "You missed the trip because you didn't get there in time. He's already gone!" It was constant things like that. I know that the television people who were on the trips always wanted to know, "What hotel are you going to stay in in the next town," so they could ask their people to make arrangements with telephone circuits and so on. And this was a matter that must have been known, they were in constant touch with the next town by telephone, and yet they would never give them that information. We blamed George Reedy at the time. It didn't matter particularly to me, but the television people did [mind]; they thought that George wasn't alert enough to get the information and give it to them. And Johnson has <u>never</u> been able to keep to a schedule.

F: Were your administrative superiors fairly tolerant when you did fail to make it on a story because of a change in schedule?

K: Yes, they understood.

F: Once in a while somebody must have gotten a scathing cable saying, "Why weren't you at so and so?"

K: Surely, because on a trip like that there was a close knit group and you worked together and you were all there at the same time, but Johnson would sometimes forget--everybody would leave and suddenly he would see two or three people still standing around and he'd start talking to them and make news. Then the others were left out, and there were complaints. That happened in Saigon one night. We thought everybody had gone and he called some of the wire service people into his room in the embassy late at night and talked to them. Those things all hurt Johnson.

Yet I came back thinking that he [had done well]. I know that my impression was favorable after that trip despite the hectic pace of it.

F: These are the people who are accompanying him. Did that extend to the people whom he was meeting? Did he get across all right dealing with them?

K: I think Johnson knows how to deal with officials and I think he made an impression on most of the people who saw him. We were moving so fast we couldn't stop, you know, and ask.

F: You never got any chance to mop up, did you?

K: No, no. But the impression was favorable except, you remember, on that trip he referred to Diem as the George Washington or the Winston Churchill of Asia. That extravagance of Johnson

got a lot of criticism and he was laughed at for saying that. Several things like that happened. And that was the trip [where] he invited the camel driver in from Pakistan [to visit the United States].

F: Did he get any feeling that the Kennedys were annoyed by that camel driver episode?

K: I had that feeling, but I don't know that I can document it. I had the feeling that they were amused more than intolerant of it. "What the hell, what's he done now?" That's the way I felt, and I guess it was buttressed by the fact that Kennedy was reluctant to see the camel driver when he got to Washington. I think he finally did see him very briefly there at the White House.

F: He almost had his hand forced on that, didn't he?

K: Yes, yes.

F: Did you get the feeling in these off-the-record briefings you used to get that the President was leveling with you and was being pretty accurate or that he was trying to see you a bill of goods, a posture? I'll grant you again that if I had been in his position and had a point I wanted to make, I'd try to prepare a brief.

K: Well, he was awfully good at preparing a brief. This was after the presidency, he came to the Washington Post for lunch. It would have been in the spring of 1970, after the [Townsend] Hoopes book was published. He obviously wanted to talk about

that book which rankled deeply. Tom Johnson was there and, as soon as the subject came up, he said, "Tom, give me that document we were looking at yesterday," and Tom would pull out this. And "Give me that document from Rusk," and for an hour or more he talked about the allegations in that book and read us documents and convinced everyone in that meeting that he knew what he was talking about and Hoopes didn't. He was very convincing.

There were other occasions like that when he was [convincing].

F: Are these luncheons at the Post any sort of a formalized arrangement? Who comes?

K: No. Whoever they can get to come.

F: Do you do it ever so often or just whenever--?

K: Whenever anybody becomes available. They have Cabinet officers and senators and bureaucrats.

F: Are they sought or dodged by the principal involved?

K: Both, both. We've asked both Nixon and Agnew to come. They have refused. I believe all the Cabinet officers have been there. I know that John Mitchell and [Richard] Kleindienst and the Justice Department officials have been, and most of the White House staff, the prominent members of the White House staff.

F: Who comes from the Post?

K: These are arranged by the publisher and primarily she [Mrs. Philip Graham] presides if she's in town; if not, the managing editor or the executive editor presides. They're very informal and most of them are understood to be off-the-record or for background.

Although John Connally was there two weeks ago and he said, "Let's make it on the record," and they got some news out of it. I was not there for that one. You know, there's a big staff and she invites those that she thinks have a particular [interest]. If she's inviting somebody from the White House, she will invite me; if it's Justice Department officials, she would invite our people covering legal affairs; she wouldn't invite me normally, although I was there for the Mitchell luncheon. But that's the way it's done. The editorial writer who specialize in the courts would be invited. You can't invite everybody, because they try to hold it down. The room is small to begin with, a dozen are seated comfortably, and sometimes there are fewer than that. I think when Johnson was there, there must have been fifteen people in the room.

F: Does the Post resent the fact that sooner or later the White House always starts sniping at it, or do they look on it around there as a badge of honor?

K: I don't know the answer to that. You hear different things from different people. I gather there has been some unhappiness by the Agnew attacks, some real concern that he is damaging the Post or that he's damaging its chances of maintaining its television properties.

It doesn't bother me, as an individual reporter, that Agnew attacks us. It seems to me that the press generally is over-sensitive to criticism. We dish it out all the time, I think we

ought to be able to take it.

F: Did you ever get to observe Robert Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson in conflict?

K: No, only indirectly. I've heard Johnson at times when he was very critical of Bobby Kennedy. He clearly did not like him; I've heard him talk about him. I heard him say once privately that Bobby one day, said he wanted to see him, came in and suggested he fire Rusk and make [Bill] Moyers secretary of state. And Johnson's remark was, "That's when I took my measure of Bobby Kennedy." But I think he had taken it earlier, because he had certainly not warmed to him back in 1960 when he knew Bobby Kennedy was a tough, hard campaigner for his brother and helped defeat Johnson's bid for the nomination.

F: In 1964 when he announced that no Cabinet member was going to be eligible for the nomination for vice presidency, did he do any fill-in on that with the press?

K: Not that I recall, no. I don't believe so, although it seems to me there was a luncheon where two or three reporters were present where he made it very clear that Bobby Kennedy would not be his running mate. This took place before that. Eddie Folliard, F-O-L-L-I-A-R-D, who was for many years the chief White House reporter for the Post, whom I succeeded and whom I worked with in the last two or three years before he retired when he wasn't maybe putting one hundred per cent on the job, it seems to me that he was in that luncheon and reported that Kennedy would

not be nominated.

F: In general, the press is dependable on observing off-the-record remarks?

K: I think it is. There are times--well, you have the recent Agnew meeting in Williamsburg where he talked off-the-record to nine reporters and then it leaked that he had been critical of the administration's China policy. No, the record isn't perfect on the off-the-record. There are many off-the-record confidences that are kept very rigidly. Johnson told me two weeks before--and he never put any bar [on it], but it was clear that it was off the record--that George Reedy was resigning as press secretary, and he talked to me at great length about it. I hated even to tell my office because I was afraid that it would leak out and that he would accuse me of violating his confidence, but I did tell my managing editor. I thought he was going to announce it the next day and then I think he put it off for two weeks.

But he said many things that were certainly respected. I don't think he ever complained more than once or twice that somebody violated a confidence. I don't recall that he ever thought we violated any.

F: Did you get the feeling that he thought George wasn't the right man, or that George thought he had enough?

K: At that time it was that George thought he had had enough. He said that George based it on his health, at that time it was

foot problems. You know, he had an operation right after that.

F: Let's talk about press secretaries for a minute. It's not the world's best job, although if you want to get your name in the paper, it's a good place to start.

Does the press secretary make a lot of difference in the image of the president, or is he pretty well the captive of the president?

K: I think he's the captive of the president, and I think he's reflective of the president. The reporters make much to-do about the press secretary won't do this, or he does that, or he does something wrong. I think he's usually the man who's on the firing line, he's doing what the president wants him to do. I think [Ronald] Ziegler reflects Nixon's attitudes pretty well. I think that certainly George Christian reflected precisely what Johnson wanted him to reflect. Moyers sometimes was a little freewheeling, and I think that got him in trouble. Salinger was certainly doing what Kennedy wanted him to do and expected of him. They're in the image of the man they're working for and they have to be.

F: Was there a feeling that Moyers was kind of an assistant president?

K: I think everyone thought that Moyers was a very ambitious man and that he was very able, and sometimes talked without consulting the President, that he did not want to say, "I don't know, I don't konw," as Ziegler will do or as Christian will do. Because it might reflect on him, he would try to think of an answer. And

[there was] a little bit freewheeling in his responses.

F: Every man has his favorite, but I pick up the impression sometimes that Jim Hagerty was the most respected of the press secretaries within recent administrations.

K: Well, he was certainly respected. I was not covering the White House on a daily basis when he was there. I was on the Hill.

F: I was wondering what he had that maybe some of the others lacked since Eisenhower was not noted for his own outgoing--

K: I think Hagerty was an extremely good organizer and manager. That job does take a lot of organization and management, and people who are covering the White House certainly put a fair amount of stock on how well the job is organized. If you travel with the president, it has to be organized or it's chaotic, and they thought that George Reedy was not a good organizer. And it was Johnson's fault because we would take trips with Johnson--I remember once we went to St. Louis on a Friday and one member of the staff would say, "Johnson is going on to Texas after this trip," and another member of the staff would say, "No, I think he's going back to Washington." Johnson hadn't told them until he got back in his plane and the pilot didn't know whether he was going on to Texas or back to Washington. So you can't organize a trip [that way]. You've got sixty people you've got to take into consideration. That was something that bothered the press. The press is human.

F: It must put a strain on some family relations.

K: It put a strain on family relations, because you never knew what was coming. Even some of Johnson's big trips, as you know, were announced twenty-four hours in advance. I remember the trip to Canada where he spoke at the American Exhibition. We had rumors of the trip the night before he was going, so at seven the next morning I called the White House and said, "What about it?" There was nobody in the press office, I got somebody in the transportation office. Well, they're not really authorized to say anything, but sometimes they can give you some indication. And they said, "We don't know a thing yet." I think I made another call about seven-thirty, trying to get the press office and didn't get them and then just assumed that he was not going. At five minutes to eight I got a call saying, "You've got to be at Andrews Air Force for a nine o'clock a.m. takeoff to Canada." Well, that's fifteen or twenty miles from here; it's away across town. And that was the way everybody was informed.

F: Probably caught some people still further offbase, over in Arlington or--

K: Yes, surely. And how people made that is amazing, but they did.

F: Something the traffic police better not know.

K: I had heard that that morning Johnson had called Rusk and said, "I don't think I'm going," and Rusk said, "Well, you've already told the Prime Minister that you're going, and if you don't go today, you'll have to go some other time." There was a third reason--this was a second-hand story--that Rusk is alleged to

have said. So then Johnson said, "All right, I will go. Tell Christian that we'll go."

F: It's a curious thing that I think the psychologists are going to enjoy working on because you never think of the man as being indecisive in a way, and yet he was working all over.

K: I can remember that Bill Moyers told me that the first thing he remembered about working for Johnson back when he first went there in the mid-fifties was that Mrs. Johnson on Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday would start calling people in the office and saying, "Is Lyndon going to Texas this weekend?" and they would say, "We don't know, we'll tell you as soon as we find out." He says then that frequently at four o'clock on Friday afternoon, Johnson comes tearing into the office saying, "Call Lady Bird and tell her to meet me at the airport at five o'clock, and call Walter Jenkins and tell him to get me two tickets." That was the notice that Mrs. Johnson got. And I know on two occasions I was in people's offices in the White House when she telephoned, one was to Jack Valenti and one was to George Christian, and I could hear enough of the conversation to know that she was asking what his plans are and they would say, "We don't know. We'll call you as soon as we can find out." So he would not tell anybody.

He once said to us, "I've always said, when I make up my mind, I'll tell Lady Bird first and George Christian second." (Laughter)

F: And you last! (Laughter)

K: And then George tells you. Well, George would tell us, and frequently George would say, "He's going to make this trip," or he's not going to," and then it was called off or it was changed. Those stories circulated to his disadvantage.

F: Doesn't help the old credibility.

How did you handle the logistics of this, that is, you have to have a passport, tourist card, and sometimes you don't have time to go home?

K: I can give you one example. Johnson announced--this was in 1966--that he was going to Honolulu. Well, you don't need a passport to go to Honolulu. I think he announced it one day and we left the next, to go to meet Ky, then the prime minister.

F: Much luxury. That much time.

K: Yes. So we went, and he had the meeting. Nobody took his passport and I think very few people took winter clothes. They thought they would be in a warm climate. We got there and I can't remember, the conference lasted two or three days, and the evening before we were to leave, Bill Moyers said to me, "I think I've persuaded the President to stay all day tomorrow, so you'll have a free day here." We had not done anything but work. That was around eight or nine o'clock at night, and the next morning at eight they summoned a press conference and Moyers announced that the President was leaving within a couple of hours to go back to Washington, and that he would meet Hubert Humphrey

in California and Humphrey would then fly to Hawaii and the next day go on to Asia. Well, my office called me and said, "You stay there and go with Humphrey." And a great many others had the same thing. We didn't have passports, we didn't have any record of our shots. The State Department has an office there, and that afternoon they issued temporary passports and arranged for somebody to give us all the shots, whether we needed them or not. We had about a dozen that afternoon. At five the next morning, we left with Humphrey. I gather he had gotten some hint a couple of days before that he might be asked to do something special, but he didn't get any real advance information either.

F: And you didn't have the clothes for it.

K: We went not only to Vietnam but we went to South Korea where it was below freezing.

F: Was it the general feeling that Johnson's staff work was equivalent to, better than, worse than, the Kennedy or Eisenhower staff work, or Nixon, for that matter, to come forward.

K: Well, the staff changed, as you know. I certainly felt in the first instance that his staff was not up to par, that he had people on it that did not really make a contribution. But that's a subjective judgment. All of them were able people. Valenti has taken a lot of criticism. There are some people who felt that Valenti's influence on Johnson in trying to project him on TV and having all these elaborate preparations and so forth was

a mistake. And I think it was a mistake. Johnson is better when left alone than with all these elaborate preparations and the use of the contact lens and the teleprompter, and so on. But he wanted everything prepared and he never went to any public meeting that I ever saw him go to where he didn't have a text, even the most informal, greeting somebody in the Rose Garden, he would read it. He demanded that, whereas Nixon never has a text and John Kennedy seldom had a text for a thing of that sort; I don't really remember what Ike did on it.

But the staff was always a problem to Johnson, I think. There was not dissension on the staff as there was in some administrations, but there was a certain amount of chaos in the staff with some working at cross-purposes.

F: Would certain people leak on certain other people?

K: No, I don't think they did much of that. They were afraid to talk to the press on things of that sort.

F: Was there a general feeling among the press that Marvin Watson was something less than--

K: There was that feeling, and that came through. They were never direct and it was slow, but you could tell that Marvin Watson was not a popular man among the rest of the staff.

F: Was there a feeling among the press that Marvin made the President's lot more difficult?

K: I don't know that a lot more, but Marvin seemed to me to be a literal minded person who carried out in a literal way the

orders of the President, and hadnot had enough experience in either public or press relations to know exactly how to adjust, and in political relations too. He had an unfortunate attitude toward the staff. He was very strict with the staff. And I think he thought the press ought to hew the line a little closer, too. That was the impression.

All these things seemed to me to be somewhat secondary to the fact that the President is the one who chooses them and the President is the one responsible for them, and, if any of them get out of line, the President instantly can pull the rug from under them and get them back in line. So when you talk about the subordinates, you're really talking about the President.

F: Did you ever get the Johnson "treatment," either from the standpoint of being royally chewed out or royally courted?

K: Well, I guess. He could be pretty rough in talking to people, and then the next day he'd be all sweetness and light. He was very rough with me once when he was in the Senate. I wrote something he didn't like. And he has called me at home about things he didn't like. He's a very blunt man. I don't know anything in particular to throw light on it.

Johnson had a strange [attitude]. Once he called me at home because I had written a story--this was after he was president--saying that George Reedy had announced that the President would go, this was a Monday or Tuesday, on Friday to address the Georgia legislature. This was in 1965. Well, George was mistaken in his

announcement. He was not addressing the legislature; he was addressing a breakfast of maybe a thousand people in the hotel where the Georgia legislature was invited. But that's beside the point; that was a mistake that Reedy made. But anyway, my story said that President Johnson will go Friday to Atlanta to address the Georgia legislature--and it is believed that he will touch on civil rights. Then there were just a few more paragraphs about the physical plans for the meeting, and so on. Johnson saw the first edition of that story and was absolutely furious. He called me at home and practically demanded that I take out the reference to civil rights, because he didn't know whether he was going to talk about civil rights and how could I know he was going to talk about civil rights, and so on. Well, it was perfectly obvious to anyone that he would talk about civil rights because he had not talked about it earlier in his presidency, and here he was going into the South and he almost had to.

Well, we bowed to his wishes and just struck out those three or four words in the story because we couldn't be sure and he was so insistent. Then he went down on Friday and made the speech and it was one of the most powerful civil rights speeches anybody ever made.

He just did not want anybody predicting what he was going to say, and he didn't realize and never recognized that he completely misled me. In fact, later he pulled me aside and

thanked me for having taken that out of the story, and I couldn't say, "Well, Mr. President, you misled me." He did. He misled me. I assume that his reason was that he didn't want it said in the Washington Post that he was going to talk about civil rights and have the Georgia people annoyed in advance. Maybe the Georgia members of Congress would have refused to ride down with him if it had been known that he was going to talk about civil rights. But it was perfectly legitimate newspaper speculation to raise that question. In fact I've always thought that we made a mistake in changing that story in later editions.

F: You weren't attributing it to anyone around the White House. You were making an educated guess.

K: It was an educated guess. Oh, he was really upset over that.

F: Did you make the trip to Puente del Este with him?

K: I did not.

F: El Salvador.

K: I did not. No, somebody else did and I can't remember why.

F: Can you think of anything else we ought to get into?

(Tape was turned off, and when turned back on, Mr. Kilpatrick was in the middle of a story concerning George Reedy's departure from the White House as press secretary)

K: The President said George wanted to teach. "I've told him he can't do that," he said. "You know George doesn't have but eight dollars!"

F: I see. "George can't afford to leave the White House, can he?"

K: I think the reason he told me this was that he wanted to know what the press reaction would be if George were given a different job on the staff. The President quoted George as saying:

"If I stay around, I'll be ridiculed, humiliated," and I said, "No, sir, Mr. President, that's not so, George won't be humiliated." I think that's what he wanted me to say, he wanted to be sure that his judgment on it was right. George felt that the press would ridicule him if he stayed in the White House. But nobody had any grievance against George. They were sympathetic with his physical problem.

F: They're looking for reasons, of course, why people leave, but at the same time I think they are very understanding of the fact that you could just take so much of the pace.

K: Yes. And that same night, he continued at great length. I had mentioned the Phil Graham memo on the choosing of the vice president. It had just been published in Life and I said something about it, and this brought forth a torrent. He was very abusive of Phil, whom he liked.

K: I was going to ask you, where did he fall out with Phil?

F: He never really fell out with Phil. He was sympathetic all along. Phil was a tremendous admirer, but Phil wasn't well his last year or two, as you know. He thought that Phil greatly exaggerated the confusion and the disorder of Johnson's campaign in 1960. That was largely his complaint.

Then he told me at some length how he thought the vice presidential thing came.

F: Phil, as I recall, was another one of those southern boys who came to the East to make a lot of money.

K: That's right.

F: Turner Catledge. When you get to naming them--

K: Surely. Oh, there are a tremendous number of southerners in the Washington press corps. I guess we were starving in the South and we were all going somewhere else.

F: Reminds me of someone talking about Faulkner and Eudora Welty and all the group that has come out of Mississippi at one time, and said, "Why did Mississippi have such a disproportionate number of fine authors," and said, "It's because public schools are so bad they had to live on their own imagination. They could never get adjusted like other people."

K: Yes. Right.

F: Well, we did it. Thank you.

(End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I)

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of Carroll Kilpatrick

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Carroll Kilpatrick of Washington, D.C. do hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recording and transcript of the personal interview conducted on May 5, 1971 in Austin, Texas and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recording shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.

(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcript and tape.

(4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Carroll Kilpatrick
Donor

July 15, 1978
Date

acting James E. O'Neill
Archivist of the United States

August 1, 1978
Date