INTERVIEW I

DATE: June 11, 1986

INTERVIEWEE: MARJORIE LAWSON

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Judge Lawson's office, Washington, D.C.

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L: I think I'm about as ready as I'm going to be, because we're talking about things that happened so long ago, and in a sense, I'm an old lady, and you know old ladies forget things. (Laughter) So it has been wonderful to review the material that you sent me, because it has helped me recall a lot of incidents and fond memories.

I first knew Mr. Johnson as vice president, and I met him on the morning after the nomination in Los Angeles. What had happened was that I had been campaigning for President [John F.] Kennedy for about three or four years on a part-time basis. I hadn't left my office, but I would go out on trips to meetings and conferences and conventions and talk to people about Senator Kennedy. Finally, I began to campaign seriously for him, and in the summer of 1959 and even as early as 1958, I was rounding up the black delegates, whom we called Negro delegates in those days.

When we got to Los Angeles, there were fifty-three black delegates from various states, not from all of them. And one of the reasons that I had won many of them over was--and they were not easy to bring to [the] support of President Kennedy, because they

didn't really know him--he hadn't done anything in civil rights. He was untested, young, had no knowledge about race relations at all, or poverty. So it was an intellectual exercise to get them to support him. But I had forty-eight of those delegates voting for Kennedy in Los Angeles.

G: How did you do that? How did you accomplish it?

L: Oh, just by talking and pointing out that he was young, that he was obviously very intelligent, that he wanted to learn, and that I thought he could, that having a first Catholic president was another door to be opened that would be helpful to other minorities. And the alternatives helped, because one of them was Senator Johnson. The other alternative was Stuart Symington. He had George Weaver on his side, because George was a labor man and had worked for Senator Symington.

Frankly, one of the arguments I used in getting support for Senator Kennedy was to say, "If you don't vote for him, you're going to get Johnson." So you can imagine that the morning after the nomination, and Kennedy had chosen Johnson as his vice presidential team mate, all hell broke loose.

G: How did you first learn of it, do you recall?

L: I was there, you know, in the hall, at the convention.

G: But the choice, Kennedy's announcement of the choice?

L: Well, I guess I just heard about it when everybody heard about it. And I think everybody was very surprised, including President Johnson.

When the muttering started, and it was like pandemonium that night, we got in touch with Congressman [William] Dawson, who was then the vice chairman of the

Democratic National Committee and who had helped me in supporting Kennedy. And we, all of us together, agreed that the best thing to do would be to have a meeting, and that it should be called by Mr. Dawson.

But that morning, the morning after, Senator Kennedy called me to his suite and he said, "What are we going to do? How are we going to handle this? Will you have a problem?" I said that I had never met Senator Johnson, but I had known of him through Mrs. [Mary McLeod] Bethune. The two of them had worked in the National Youth Administration. Senator Johnson, when he was a younger man, I guess a congressman, he had been in charge of the state of Texas for NYA, for the National Youth Administration under President [Franklin] Roosevelt. And I told Senator Kennedy that Mrs. Bethune had always spoken very highly of Mr. Johnson, and that was something we could all depend on, her word.

G: What did she say about him, do you recall that? That's of some interest to us.

L: Well, I can only remember what she told me, and I'm sure she made other public statements. But she said that he had demonstrated such fairness in the way he had developed the program in Texas and that she was very impressed with him. That was enough for me, because she was a very straightforward woman, very strong and powerful.

G: He didn't have an integrated advisory board. It was an all-white board, and then he had a separate advisory group of blacks. Do you recall how she reacted to that, if she thought that that was a problem?

L: I don't remember any discussion about that, because she was operating with Mrs. [Eleanor] Roosevelt on a national level, and I don't believe she ever had much to say. Of course, by

this time she was gone; she died in 1954.

So I told Senator Kennedy that morning that we should not handle the campaign as the [John] Sparkman campaign had been handled when he was the vice presidential candidate. I don't remember in detail what the difficulty was, but somehow they tried to keep Senator Sparkman separate and away from civil rights groups, because they were embarrassed by him. It made it very difficult; the election was a very difficult one racially because of that. And I said I didn't think we should apologize for Senator Johnson, that we would have a Kennedy-Johnson ticket, and we would carry it together and campaign together, and that I thought we'd just have to face up to it and do the best we could and work with him, so that we could get some positive statements and so on.

Anyhow, the meeting occurred that morning, this meeting with the black delegates and other black leaders who were still in Los Angeles attending the Democratic National Convention.

G: Before you get into that, though, I want to ask you what President Kennedy's reaction to your recommendation was.

L: He was surprised.

G: Really?

L: You know, it was as if to say, "Oh, do you really think so?" He was pleased.

G: He was pleased. Tell me your own reaction, though, upon learning that Lyndon Johnson was the vice presidential designate. Does it run along the lines that you indicated to President Kennedy, or were you privately kind of horrified that a southerner was going to be on the ticket?

L: Well, I had spent over two years talking to politicians, with no prior experience in politics. But I had learned a lot in those two years, and I had learned that politics is a matter of accommodation and counting and that you find strange bedfellows. I wasn't horrified. I was surprised, but I wasn't horrified. And I thought, really, that Senator Kennedy needed the help. I could see that; I could see why he did it. I think he was right. I think he wouldn't have won without Senator Johnson as--

G: Is that why he did it? Did you ever hear firsthand or from somebody whose opinion you really valued exactly why Johnson was put on the ticket?

L: I think the general sentiment among the Kennedy people and operatives that I knew at the time [was that] it was like a marriage of convenience, that they were realistic enough to know that Kennedy was a long shot, and they were not silly enough to believe that he was going to just win without some very astute planning and campaigning. I think there were some purists who were offended and astonished and angry, but among the people who were practical, I think they thought that it was something that Senator Kennedy needed, and I think he thought so.

G: Did Senator Kennedy ever give any indication of wavering from his choice after he had made it?

L: Never.

G: Really. You think he was comfortable with it?

L: I think he had a different opinion from Bobby. That's not a very bright statement, because they did agree on most things. It was like Bobby was his dark side or his practical side. And I have never gone along with the people who felt that Bobby had changed so much in

the course of a year or so when he became a candidate himself.

I think that President Kennedy was going to keep President Johnson on the ticket for another term. I didn't have any information contrary to that belief, but why would he have dropped him? Things were not going so well in the Kennedy Administration, and it was certainly not Vice President Johnson's fault.

G: Let me ask you to go on and describe the meeting.

L: Yes. Well, Senator Kennedy and Senator Johnson came in together, but before they came in, the meeting was very excited, people were very excited, and there were women crying. I remember one delegate from the District of Columbia shook her finger right in my face, with tears streaming down her face, and said, "Marjorie, how could you do this to me? I have been going along with you all this time, and now look what has happened. Why did you ever deceive us like this?" Which wasn't fair to me, because I didn't know, you know, and I wasn't deceiving them.

But when Senator Kennedy and Senator Johnson came in the room, Congressman Dawson introduced them. I don't remember all that Kennedy said, or anybody else, because it was such an excitable time. But Senator Johnson said, "If you all will just go along with me, I promise you that I will achieve more progress in race relations and civil rights than has been achieved in the past one hundred years." That was a strong statement to be making in 1960, when we didn't know any of these things were going to happen. And he mollified the group.

G: Did he?

L: He really did. I don't remember all the things he said; I wish I could. If you'd asked me a

long time ago I would have remembered, but it's kind of gone from my mind now.

G: Had there been a perception that he had watered down the 1957 Civil Rights Act and the 1960 act as well?

L: I don't remember. That probably was said, wasn't it? Yes. The fact of the matter was we had two candidates who were not very strong on civil rights. The trouble I'd had with Senator Kennedy had to do with his approval of the section in the civil rights bill that made--can we go off for a minute?

(Interruption)

G: The jury trial amendment.

L: Yes, the jury trial amendment, as a civil complaint rather than a criminal complaint. And previously, he'd had some meetings with black leaders in Boston, and they had the impression that he was going to oppose the amendment. When he voted for it, they were really angry with him, and that's one of the reasons I got involved with Senator Kennedy, who had approached my husband first. Shall I tell you that story?

G: Yes. Please.

L: Okay. 1956 was the first year that the District of Columbia could vote for delegates to the national convention, and my husband was elected a delegate and went to the Chicago convention. He was bound to vote for Senator [Estes] Kefauver on the first vote, but after that, he was free to vote--if Kefauver didn't win on the first vote--so he was free to change. He got to working on the floor for Senator Kennedy, whom he didn't know. When everybody got back to Washington, my husband got a call from Kennedy's amanuensis--let's go off.

(Interruption)

G: Ted Sorensen.

L: Got a call from Ted Sorensen, saying that the Senator wanted to meet Belford [Lawson]. So they made a luncheon date and had lunch, and the question was why were you working on the floor for Senator Kennedy? And I guess what I just told you was his reason as well as mine: that it was a chance to elect a Catholic president. He was young, he was smart and we thought we could teach him. And so they met several times after that, and would call Belford for advice on issues, and then asked him to go to Boston with them to talk to the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] people up there. My husband was very active in Alpha Phi Alpha, which was the largest and oldest of the black fraternities, and he subsequently became the national president about that time, about 1956. So he had a lot of friends in Boston, and he called them together, and he tried to assuage their feelings. They continued to call on Belford, and he was a practicing lawyer and really didn't have time for politics or that much of an interest in it. So finally, he said to them, "Look, I can't do that. But maybe my wife will help you." So then they went through the same process with me, and Ted called me up and I went down and had lunch with him, and they asked me if I would come to work. And I said, "No, I can't do that, but I'll write some memos for you." I didn't want to leave my office either; we were practicing together.

So what happened after that is that I wrote a lot of memos suggesting where he should go and what he should say and whom he should meet, and in fact, by the time he was nominated, he knew black leaders from all over the country. I don't think any presidential candidate had ever known as many black people as he did, and I don't believe any since

have known as many as he did, because I was trotting them up the office all the time. Sometimes Jackie would send over lunch, and you can imagine how exciting that would be to, say, a local city councilman or a state senator, to be invited to have lunch with Senator Kennedy in his office with lunch that Jackie had sent over and that Mrs. [Evelyn] Lincoln was serving. So that was how I had campaigned, on a very personal basis.

And whenever we had the so-called famous Kennedy teas, I had made it clear to them that we would have no segregated teas; we would have no black teas. If we had teas in a community, they would be for everybody. They were not used to that. They were used to having ethnic teas; they would have Italian teas and Jewish teas and so on, and whatever. And I wouldn't hear of it.

G: Did you have any trouble getting this policy implemented?

L: I don't know whether I did or not. I just told them that's how it's going to be, and they never opposed me.

So, to go back to that famous morning meeting, I think Senator Johnson won over a lot of people that morning, just by the sheer force of his personality. Thereafter, Senator Kennedy made me the chairman of the civil rights section of the Kennedy-Johnson campaign, which means that I was doing it for him, because I don't know what Senator Johnson was doing in his campaign. He had his own campaign organization. But I don't remember that it was very difficult to carry the ticket with the people that I had been working with. So I really began to work full time from the convention on, every day, through the election.

Then afterwards, when they had won, they started asking me what did I want? And

I kept telling them, "I don't want anything. I just want you to be at the other end of the telephone when I call you." (Laughter) I ran like an employment agency with John Macy for about two years after the election, because all these people who had helped me bring in the black vote now wanted to come to Washington and be in the administration. And a lot of them did.

G: And you recommended them to Macy, who--

L: Yes. I was always sending resumes over to Macy, and a lot of the people got hired. Finally, the Kennedy people called me up and said, "Look, you're an embarrassment to us. You've got to take something. And until you make up your mind what you want, would you be willing to take an assignment on the President's committee on fair employment practice?" So I was agreeable to taking that. I had been on the staff of the old FEPC during the war, and John Davis and I had written the first government brochure on fair employment. It was called "First and Final Report of the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity." And I had really prepared the files of that agency for--you know, I put it to bed. I worked out of the [Harry] Truman White House to put that agency to bed, to get it ready for archives. So I had a history of being in the field.

That's when I really got to know Vice President Johnson, as a result of being a public member of that committee when he was chairman.

G: Had you had any one-to-one contact with him before that?

L: Well, my memory's not so good. I guess I had, and I think it grew out of the planning of that meeting, and I don't know how I was asked to do it. But what I had recommended was that some of these same people that I had worked with in the field would be good people for

him to know, and he liked the idea that he should know the people that President Kennedy knew. So we had an invitation, we invited them; they came on their own money, and he spent the day with them. We talked about jobs and education--he was always interested in talking about education--and civil rights. It was a very lively meeting and not critical of him at all, and he was at his best in being earnest and promising what he would try to do. Then after the meeting was over, we went up to the hotel 2400 [?] and had a reception, and he came right along and brought Mrs. Johnson to the reception. She made a big bowl of chili con queso and stayed there. So he met all the people that I had been working with, and he was pretty thrilled by that. I guess that happened before I was on the committee, because when was I appointed?

G: Let's see.

L: Now, I was appointed in December 1961, and this meeting took place in May of 1962. So it was just a few months later. It was probably my idea to introduce him.

G: Was there any way to gauge the sincerity of what he proposed to do, other than just by the strength with which he said it? Was there any way that you had, as a leader, of sort of testing how committed he really was to civil rights?

L: Well, he used to tell a story about his cook, whom he had employed in Texas, who had lived with them in Texas, I guess. He brought her to Washington, and he said it used to make him feel so bad that when they went home for the summer--this was while he was a senator--this lady, whose name I used to know--

G: Zephyr Wright, was it?

L: Yes, Zephyr, that's right--and her husband would have to motor to Texas, and they couldn't

stay at a hotel or a motel or go in a restaurant. And he thought so much of her, and to think that she would be so humiliated and ostracized. Well, when he told that story, that got a mixed reaction, because it's like "my old Mammy, whom I love, but she's different." This is a group of sophisticated, educated lawyers and leaders that he's telling the story to. But his sincerity of his feeling for her did come through, and his appreciation of the fact that she really had a hard time, and that he was sorry for it, that came through.

I suppose at that time everybody had a let's-wait-and-see attitude. But they also had it about Kennedy.

G: Good point. Let me ask you to go into the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity and describe from that first meeting what it was like, how the committee worked, and what your own--I know that you've headed several projects or subcommittees, one of which you've talked about, that community leadership conference. Let me ask you to just talk about the committee, how it worked, and who the real forces were in it.

L: Well, I don't remember too much. Seeing these minutes has helped. And what is interesting to see [in] the minutes is all the names of all the people who came and went. You know, people who were from the government, from various agencies in the government, and the public members who came and went also.

In the beginning, there was an awful lot of searching to see what the program could be, how this could be developed, how we could get the federal government to focus on its own shortcomings, and how to persuade industry to comply with the executive order, how to get the labor unions to cooperate, because some of the worst practices were in the labor unions. One of the techniques of Vice President Johnson was to involve people, to bring

them in, confront them, make them think and cooperate, sort of putting them on the spot and then pushing them to do the best they could. He really was the chairman of the committee; he really came to the meetings, and he was informed.

He brought Hobart Taylor in to be the executive director, and Hobart was his protégé. Hobart was from Texas, and Hobart's father was a friend of then-Senator Johnson, had contributed to his campaign. So I remember that then-Vice President Johnson said that it was too bad to bring some of the best brains and the best people out of Texas to work in the government. But he had another name for it, and I can't remember what it was, it's like the best little calves. You know, I think he made an allusion to Texas cattle, and why sacrifice your best calves. They should stay in Texas.

G: And build the herd, so to speak?

L: Yes, we need them there, but we need them more in Washington, so we brought Hobart here. Actually Hobart didn't come here from Texas; he came from Detroit, where he was practicing law. (Laughter)

Hobart was brilliant, and worked very well with Vice President Johnson. They were close, and I think Hobart understood how far he could go and what the Vice President wanted, and he was smart enough to be able to talk to industry heads. In fact, he was so good at it that he later went back into private practice in Washington and made himself a lot of money working with the very people that he had met through Plans for Progress.

G: Let me ask you to talk about Plans for Progress, a system of voluntary compliance, where industries would work up their own plans to alleviate discrimination in their plants. How did this work? Was it successful, do you think?

L: Well, it got to be a dichotomy. The challenge, the authority of the commission [committee?] itself, because we had two programs going, and the Plans for Progress was more glamorous, with the more important people, and got more publicity.

G: Do you mean because the committee members identified with it were more important, or the companies, or--?

L: The companies. They did a lot of PR on their own to say, "Look how great we are," you know. And they would develop a plan and announce it, have a big press conference about it. So Plans for Progress got a lot of publicity, whereas state government agencies plodding along with statistics and other government agencies [giving?] a lot of resistance weren't having what seemed to be as much success. And finally, I think Plans for Progress was brought to heel, to be under one direction.

G: There was some suggestion that it actually allowed compromises in the executive order and the regulations, that it was a way for industry to procrastinate and not implement the executive order. Is this a valid criticism, do you think?

L: I think so. There was some of that. But you know, politicians always try to get what's possible and to compromise. If you get one advantage, you may have to give up the black letter of the law to get your goal. The first go-around you don't get everything. You take what you can get, and then the next time you squeeze a little harder.

G: Robert Troutman, the fellow that headed the Plans for Progress, had been an associate of the Kennedy family, I guess, and was identified with President Kennedy from the campaign on, and yet he was a southerner. How did he tie in or diverge from Lyndon Johnson? Was he more of a Kennedy follower than a Johnson follower?

L: Probably. You know, my recollection of that is not too keen.

There was a dichotomy in the commission. Have you heard about the famous meeting when Bobby Kennedy upset everybody?

G: Tell me about that.

L: Have you heard about it? Is it in the minutes anywhere?

G: It's been written about, but--

L: Oh, it has? I was there.

G: Tell me about it.

L: The meeting was under way, and Hobart was making a report, a lot of reports. And Bobby Kennedy came in with the Assistant Attorney General--what's his name? Anyhow, they swept into the meeting and sat down and surveyed what was going on. Hobart started talking about needing to get approval of some new forms from the Bureau of the Budget in order to do some studies. So Bobby said, "Who are you talking to in the Bureau of the Budget about the form? What's the name of the form?" Hobart told him some number. And he said, "Well, what's the delay?" Hobart said, "There's no delay. I'll have it shortly." And Bobby said, "Well, tell me who you're talking to, and I'll call up and get it done right away." And Hobart said, "That's not going to be necessary." Bobby persisted, and there was a real confrontation. I don't remember now who stopped talking to whom first, but they were having a big fight right there in the middle of the meeting.

Then I guess Mr. Johnson called on Mr. [William] Schnitzler to make some kind of a report because he was head of a committee. And Schnitzler started making his report, and Bobby interrupted him and got into a fight with him. And he was so rude that everybody

was astonished. And then after he had made a scene, he got up--it was Marshall who was with him--

G: Burke Marshall?

L: Burke Marshall--and they got up and stormed out of the meeting. Well, I don't think Marshall stormed out of the meeting, but Bobby did. Hobart was so angry that he threatened to resign that very night. Vice President Johnson had to persuade him to stay on.

G: Were you there when he talked with--?

L: Hobart? No. After the meeting they met privately and talked about it. But Hobart and I were friends, and he probably told me about it later.

G: What did Schnitzler and Kennedy disagree on, do you recall that?

L: I think it probably had to do with apprenticeship programs and the number of young blacks--because that was what he was working on--that could be admitted, and which labor unions were still segregated and what was being done to open them up.

G: Reportedly, there was a confrontation also about how many blacks were employed in NASA, working on the discrimination here. Did this happen? You're nodding your head as if it did.

L: Yes, I think so.

G: Was it part of this meeting or was this another meeting? I thought maybe Jim Webb might have been confronted, as well.

L: Maybe if I could look at the minutes, I could tell, the minutes of that meeting. That was May 1963, wasn't it?

G: Yes.

L: (Looking through documents) Well, Webb was there. "Mr. Schnitzler indicated that the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrialized Organizations] had been working closely with the Labor Liaison Section, and had been making some very significant progress. He said that the Subcommittee on Apprenticeship and Training had recommended a conference. In response to a question by Attorney General Kennedy whether there was available a list of local unions in the United States barring Negro membership, Mr. Schnitzler replied that he was presently working on such a compilation. Then that confrontation took place. I'm amazed that the minutes do not more clearly reveal what was going on. It might have been that the confrontation with Webb took place at another time. I don't see any reference here to that. But I remember it did occur.

G: Anything on Lyndon Johnson's reaction to this?

L: Oh, listen! He was red in the face. He was so angry I thought he would explode. And when he got angry, he got very quiet. He didn't shout; he whispered. And he brought that meeting to a close so quietly you could hardly hear what he was saying. (Laughter) But everybody knew that he had reined in his anger as best he could, and everybody left that meeting very quietly, too, knowing that there would be an explosion later on. And there was.

G: Was there?

L: I heard there was, yes. Hobart told me he was just livid.

G: Why do you think Kennedy did that? Were these justifiable grievances or problems that needed to be--?

L: It was like kid stuff. Here were people who were working seriously on something, on different things, and he walked in with no background and upset the meeting and upset the people for no real reason, other than I guess he wanted to show that he had a lot of power.

G: I guess some of the people who subscribed to Senator Kennedy's viewpoint felt that some members of the committee really weren't doing very much in terms of actually eliminating this kind of discrimination in employment, and perhaps Hobart Taylor was not really working as hard as he should have been.

L: Probably there were people who felt that way. I'm sure there were. But look at what they were doing. They were changing things pretty drastically from the way they had been, and I think they were trying to do it by pulling people along rather than making enemies. Then you have a fundamental question as to what is the best way to achieve your goals, and people will differ about that.

G: Did the members of the committee, particularly you yourself, feel that Vice President Johnson had a different approach than, say, Robert Kennedy here? Would Kennedy have liked to have moved faster, do you think? Do you think at the time that he really wanted to advance this effort at a quicker pace?

L: I think that there was such a fundamental dislike between Vice President Johnson and Bobby Kennedy that they would have disagreed about anything that they had to work together on.

G: But did the committee members necessarily see one as oriented to go faster and the other one to take a slower, more compromising posture?

L: First of all, Bobby didn't come to that many meetings. I can only think of a couple that he

attended, so how would anybody know what his real goals were and what he planned to do? Probably in an overall national context, he wanted a good showing to help his brother and probably wanted things to go faster and be more publicized. But I don't think there was any great feeling generally among the committee members that they thought things were going badly or slowly and that they thought what Kennedy would do would be better. There probably were some people who thought that way. Have you had any other interpretations of goals?

G: Well, it's just difficult to sort out, because you have Robert Troutman, who was the chief--

L: Of the Plans for Progress.

G: Yes, Plans for Progress guy, and yet he was identified with the Kennedy Administration, and LBJ on the other hand--I'm just trying to sort out what the committee regarded as the force that was driving forward at the faster pace.

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L: I think the committee thought that Plans for Progress was a PR job and that the more solid work was being done by what Hobart was doing, just digging away at government agencies and industry in general.

G: Was there a problem with Congress, because you sort of had to pick up money here and there to run the committee?

L: I don't remember, really.

G: Do you remember senators objecting to the fact that you were bypassing the appropriations process?

L: I don't remember that. I wish we'd had this interview twenty years ago. (Laughter) I would

have remembered more things.

G: There was another meeting in St. Louis that you worked with. Do you remember that one, a regional meeting?

L: Yes. I think again that grew out of my feeling--I think I'm the one who suggested that we needed--well, there was talk of having a national meeting. And from my experience in the campaign, I knew how different people were in different areas, and I thought it would be a good idea to take the commission to the people and have regional meetings, because the problems are all so different in different regions: different industries, different racial patterns, and so on.

The first meeting was in St. Louis, and it was a great success. It seems to me that we had subsequent meetings, but I don't see anything here about that. But we did plan a meeting in Detroit, and we had that. I think we had a meeting in Philadelphia; I think we had one in Los Angeles. How about Buffalo?

G: I'll check my records. There's some indication that Dean Francis Sayre was critical of LBJ's performance at the St. Louis meeting, that LBJ just came in, gave a political speech and kind of left; then came back during the day and was more of a disruptive force. And [Sayre] so reported this to the committee later, back in Washington. Does this ring a bell; do you recall that?

L: To the commission itself?

G: Yes, to the--

L: He said that publicly?

G: Well, to the committee, to your group.

L: I don't remember that, but you know--

G: Was Sayre there?

L: I don't remember.

But Dean Sayre was an ultra-liberal at a time when people weren't--and it had an overlay of righteousness about it that took on some of his religious convictions, that he would be brave and he would speak his mind, and it would be so pure. I'm not saying he wasn't a great man with a good heart and probably very impatient about the pace of things.

But I never would discredit a speech by Mr. Johnson to any group that he wanted to convince. I mean, he put his heart right in it and worked very hard, too. Maybe you wouldn't always agree with him, but you'd--you know, he was a good persuader.

G: What was his role in the St. Louis meeting, do you recall? You were there.

L: No, I don't. I was there. I think it really was to say, "Here I am; I'm the vice president and this is my program and I'm pushing it for all I'm worth. The administration is sincere in wanting to push fair employment and we're going to do it." I think that was his message. I mean, that was the overall message. Now, what he might have said in particular about St. Louis, I don't know; I don't remember.

G: Anything else on Sayre and LBJ and their relationship on the committee that's significant?

L: I don't recollect anything.

G: Okay. Now, you worked with the subcommittee on government employment surveys, and one of the difficulties that you reported was the difficulty of really getting an accurate reading on minority employment when you didn't have that information on employment records. How did you deal with that, do you recall?

L: No, I don't recall. What I know is the fact that government records did not show race, and that had been a civil rights objective, not to show race. But that became such a problem in measuring accomplishment that subsequently, of course, the government records did show race and age and sex and national origin and anything you could think of. But that took a while to convince everybody that it was going to be impossible to measure your success unless you had the facts.

G: And that those facts wouldn't be used to discriminate.

L: Yes.

G: That's an interesting point.

There was also another area of interest to you: the area of training and education, what the committee could do to promote this to advance the hiring of minorities. Do you recall this thrust of your effort?

L: There was a lot of pressure on Bill Schnitzler to really open up the apprenticeship programs, and it was like a brick wall. Nothing really came about because there was no forcing the unions to do it until later. But with the tools that we had at that time, they just resisted.

G: Were some government departments and agencies worse than others in terms of hiring minorities?

L: Oh, yes.

G: Can you give any specifics in how you might have dealt with those departments?

L: Well, how about the Department of Justice? (Laughter) Here was Bobby, being so holier-than-anybody-else about his civil rights objectives, and yet the department had a very bad record of hiring black lawyers, and still does. It hasn't improved very much. It's really

been one of the bastions.

G: Was this brought to the Attorney General's attention?

L: Well, not in the commission itself, but I'm sure he knew. And I don't see that he ever made any serious effort to change the pattern. The Department of Agriculture had a good record of employing numbers of people and so did the Post Office, but not in any supervisory positions. The Department of Labor was another one that talked a good game, but when you counted noses it wasn't very much. Even the Women's Bureau for a long time was awful. The Treasury Department, the State Department, it would be hard to find one that didn't discriminate in a big way. The answer always was, "Oh, we can't find anybody that is prepared. They don't pass the tests. They don't apply." All the old reasons. And yet when I think about where we were in 1963 and where we are now, we've made some progress.

G: Anything in particular on the Defense Department?

L: The Defense Department had begun to move with Truman. It had been one of the greatest offenders before then, with segregation and discrimination, a very rigid pattern. And I'm not sure when the break came, but when they finally began to address the issue, they did it with military precision and they did it better than anybody else. Subsequent to this period, there were some really great case histories of people who made progress in all the services.

G: Let's talk about the other side, the contract compliance outside government. Was there any pressure from the administration to take it easy on those businesses or firms that had supported the Kennedy campaign? Was there a tendency to take care of the friends of the administration?

L: I think so, yes.

G: Can you give any examples here where this might have been done?

L: My recollection is that the Kennedys were not terribly interested in making a big issue of fair employment at that time. I think they had a lot of other things on their minds. I think they originally gave it to Vice President Johnson to give him a hot potato, to keep him busy, and then probably didn't give him much support. On the other hand, he was determined to make something of it, I think, and to show them that he could do the job. I think it's fair to say that the Kennedys were not terribly interested at that time in what was going on, and whether they would give favors to individual supporters, I don't know.

G: Why do you think they were trying to give him a hot potato? Just because of the controversy surrounding civil rights at this time?

L: Yes, yes.

G: There were a number of reports on the committee's work; one was by Theodore Kheel of New York. Do you remember that one, a series of recommendations?

L: I remember knowing Ted Kheel. I'm trying to think of--what committee did he have?

G: Basically it included such things as having the committee members rather than the staff play a more visible role in speechmaking and contacts and things like that.

L: I remember seeing some reference to his work here. I wonder if we could find something that refers to him. I don't remember his being present at that many meetings or being with the committee that long.

Well, the thing about Mr. Kheel and Dean Sayre is that they considered themselves to be leaders and important people, and if they were going to give their time to a commission like this, I think they wanted to have more recognition of their role, and

probably they had their own ideas about how it should be done. They wanted more public relations about the committee's work, which would star them.

(Laughter)

G: The Southern Regional Council also issued a report, particularly with regard to Georgia and the effort there, or lack thereof, and it was a relatively critical report. Do you recall that and how the committee responded to it?

L: I don't remember that.

G: Any specific cases that you are familiar with, like the Philip Morris? This was one that had been a big contributor to Kennedy. Lockheed in Marietta, Georgia? The Ingalls Shipyard in Mississippi, remember that?

L: No.

G: Houston Lighting and Power Company?

L: No.

G: U.S. Steel in Birmingham, Southern Bell, Lycoming Division of AVCO in Bridgeport?

L: This is what the Southern Regional Council said--?

G: No, I think that theirs was devoted strictly to the Atlanta area, perhaps Lockheed.

L: I don't remember any of that.

G: These were just various corporations that the committee looked into.

L: And then nothing came of it?

G: Well, no, I don't say that. I just wonder if you remember any of the investigations.

L: I really don't.

G: Okay. Anything on the question of including utilities as governmental entities for getting

minority hiring, anything there?

L: Now that you ask me this kind of detailed question, I'm wondering how much of that really came before the committee in our meetings, whether that was something that was handled on a staff level, and that maybe we didn't even know about it until it was all over, or even then. I don't remember being involved in case-by-case discussions.

G: Yours was more of an overall policy direction rather than--

L: And PR. Mostly, I think the public members were trotted out to give credence to the commission as being people whose records were sincerely on the side of progress in civil rights and as spokespeople for that, rather than as day-to-day operators of a program. Maybe that's what Ted Kheel and Dean Sayre objected to; they wanted the publicity and decision-making on policy procedures in the organization.

(Interruption)

And John Wheeler was a businessman, and a successful one, and a southerner, and he was given great courtesy as an important person and listened to, really, whenever he had a statement to make. Everybody was very respectful and listened to what he was saying. I don't know whether they did anything with it or not, but he was always invited to the White House and to conferences. And he had a contribution to make. He was a more conservative person, I think.

G: Was he?

L: A conservative businessman, not to say he was conservative on race relations, but his way of going about solving a problem would be, let's not go headlong on this. We'll just think about it and do what's best.

G: Any recollections of Silliman Evans working with the committee?

L: No, I don't remember him. Who was he; what did he do?

G: Did you feel like the committee had a large enough staff to do its work effectively; should the staff have been larger?

L: I don't remember. I know that--what was the Powers fellow's name? We had a staff person--he was good, and sincere.

G: Ted, was that his name?

L: I don't remember. John? John Powers [?]?

G: Maybe so.

L: Anyhow, I would say the staff wasn't large enough. I think what we would do would be to look at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which really took on the job later, and you can see that what we were doing was just a drop in the bucket to what needed to be done and that it would require a fully-staffed and financed operation for it to achieve what needed to be done. We more nearly got that with the later commission that grew out of this. I guess Mr. Johnson knew enough about what needed to be done that he could support the larger effort.

G: I was going to ask if you saw any development or evolution of his views on the civil rights issue from the perspective of this committee.

L: I think so. I think that Mr. Johnson was that kind of southerner who had good feelings, not negative discriminatory feelings. It's the best kind of southerner, because they know firsthand; they've had association with black people, and they've learned to be able to judge them fairly and to feel the pain.

But until you begin to think about an issue as great as race discrimination was at that time on a national level, you really are not equipped, whether you are a southerner or whatever, to comprehend it. And when you begin to understand it, then you realize that massive effort is needed, that committee meetings and good will will not do the job. That something as big as the Voting Rights Act, something as big as real equal employment opportunity, something as big as aid to education and the War on Poverty, which was not a big enough war and didn't last long enough, is going to be needed. And I saw a broader, greater comprehension in Mr. Johnson and certainly in President Kennedy, too.

G: Did Johnson articulate this while he was on the committee, or do you think it's just something that was verified by his actions as president?

L: Actions. I think when he became president, he began to act out what he had learned in the commission and in talking with people and being on the other side of the issue from the way he was when he was a senator. He now was a national person, and he was getting national experience and growing and being willing to take the risk.

G: Did you yourself feel more comfortable about him on the basis of working with him on the committee? Was it a positive experience for you?

L: Well, I hadn't known him before the campaign.

G: But you had known of him.

L: Oh, yes. I had no knowledge of what he really thought. I just expected that he was a senator from Texas and that he was going to vote that way, and so I didn't expect anything of him. I expected him to be just the way he was. What I think is true, and maybe I'm fooling myself, is that once he was free to be a national person, he became one. And maybe

he was underneath all the time. But he had to get re-elected.

But then I always have had such admiration for President Johnson, for the way he took over the government after the assassination and the way he fought for civil rights and achieved things. I have always been sad, as many civil rights people are, that he got bogged down in Vietnam, because other than that, I think he would have gone down in history as one of our greatest presidents.

G: Did you have any input on that civil rights speech that he made in Gettysburg in 1963?

L: I think we talked about it, and then afterwards he sent it to me.

G: I noticed that.

L: You know, there are people who say that President Johnson was not sincere, that he was just putting on a show, that he was really not concerned. But I've seen him cry. Of course, maybe he was just a good actor. But I always thought that he was sincere.

G: What is this occasion you're--?

L: At meetings. He'd get all wound up talking about the problem and the need to free everybody up and have civil rights. Remember the night he spoke at night for the Voting Rights Act, that speech? That was a wonderful speech, and I think he cried that night. And I've seen him get teary when he's making speeches. You know, he's a stemwinder; he'd get all wound up and convince himself. (Laughter) Did you know him?

G: Yes.

L: Good.

G: Anything else on his work with the committee that we haven't talked about?

L: Not really. I guess I left--when did I leave the committee?

G: Well, you were appointed in 1962, but you continued to participate in the committee after your judicial appointment.

L: Yes. I wrote a letter to the Department of Justice and asked if it was okay for me to stay on the committee after going on the bench, and they wrote back and said it was okay. I got it cleared.

G: There was a span of about six months, I guess in 1963, where there were no committee meetings at all, and I'm wondering why that was the case.

L: Do I have all of the minutes?

G: I doubt that you do; I can send you some more. But there was clearly a void in the meetings, and I'm wondering if you can help us.

L: Well, what happened after the assassination?

G: This was before the assassination.

L: But what happened afterward?

(Interruption)

After that meeting in May where there was the fight with Bobby Kennedy, I don't remember any more meetings after that. I don't have any minutes here of any. We were just talking about a span between May and November.

G: Right. Do you think that that was a result of the difficulty during that meeting? Was it a conscious decision not to call more meetings?

L: I don't know, and I'm not sure that--there may have been. Do you think there wasn't any meeting after May 1963?

G: I think there was one in November.

L: Do I have that? Here's July; that's the last one I have, July 18, 1963. That was the eighth meeting. You can see how long the meetings were, two-thirty to six-ten. That was the report on the St. Louis meeting, too.

G: Okay, the gap was from November 1962 to May of 1963. So it was later.

L: Yes, I noticed that. Not May, there was a meeting on March 4, 1963.

G: Oh, really?

L: Yes. George Reedy took those minutes. So from November to March there wasn't a meeting.

G: Do you think that LBJ's enthusiasm for the committee remained high during the time he chaired it? Did he himself come to meetings and participate?

L: Oh, yes. I don't remember any meeting that he wasn't present.

(Interruption)

G: To repeat, you were talking about your role as the civil rights adviser for the Kennedy campaign, is that right?

L: Right. My title was chairman of the civil rights section of the Kennedy-Johnson campaign, and I was asked to do that by President Kennedy. But at the same time, I think that some of the people around him didn't have confidence that I could do the job. As I said before, I was new in politics and Katie Louchheim said, "There are two ways you can get in politics. You can go to the local meetings and stuff envelopes and knock on doors and lick stamps, or you can get in at the top like Marjorie Lawson did."

So from that inexperience there were people on the Kennedy campaign trail that really didn't think I could bring in the black vote and who were always looking over my

shoulder and asking me a lot of questions and trying to go around me and above me and appeal directly to President Kennedy and to change whatever suggestions I had made. And finally they even tried to take over.

In the days before the nomination, I was going to a lot of conventions and meetings, like the NAACP convention and the Urban League convention, and all these people were--I sort of say they're re-embroidered, you know? They serve as local leaders, they're national leaders, and they're all the same people; they're the politicians. They were in those days; it's not so now. But you could name the people. And whenever I would go to a convention, I'd have a suite, and my room would be full of these people all of the time. And the Kennedy people would try to come and participate, and it's as if they were going to make a direct contact with the people and get the names and addresses and find out what was going on and push me aside. But my folks were loyal to me, and it didn't happen.

Harris Wofford was one of the worst offenders in that regard, and I used to make him so frustrated, because it's like, almost, he wanted to be black, so he could be part of everything. (Laughter) And Sarge Shriver tried to--I guess he thought he was really the head of the civil rights campaign, and at one time suggested that we needed to have a committee instead of just me as the director--I was the director. And he was suggesting that it would be a good idea to have a committee in charge of the civil rights campaign. And that way he was trying to cut me off from the candidate. And while we were having this discussion in a staff meeting, it happened that President Kennedy called me and asked me for my advice on some issues. (Laughter) And when I hung up the phone I looked right at Sarge and I said, "You're not going to come between me and my candidate." But that was

the kind of thing that women had to put up with, and I was still the only woman at that level in the Kennedy campaign.

G: As long as you're on the subject, I want to ask you about President Johnson's attitude toward women.

L: Entirely different from the Kennedys.

G: Really?

L: Yes. The Kennedys--well, they had said that the Kennedy attitude grew out of their religion, that they thought women should be at home, barefoot and pregnant. And they would frequently say that, in joking. But I think they also thought it, and not many women got assignments or appointments. I know one time Harris Wofford said to me, as we were getting near the end of the campaign and it looked as if we were going to win, "Have you made up your mind what job you want?" And I said, "Well, I don't really want any job." He said, "Yes, but what would you take?" I said, "Well, the circuit court of appeals." (Laughter) Just to tease him, you know. Because I think he was shocked that I thought I was qualified to sit on the court of appeals. I was serious; that's what I really would have taken.

(Laughter)

G: You said LBJ's attitude was different.

L: Yes.

G: How so?

L: Well, I think he liked women and believed in them, and that he'd had a good experience with Mrs. Johnson and with--you know, her chief of staff.

G: Liz Carpenter?

L: Liz Carpenter. And Liz was always pushing him to appoint women. Have you got her oral history?

G: Yes.

(Interruption)

L: When I decided to leave the court, I asked for an appointment with President Johnson. I went to see him and told him that I was going to resign and that I felt that I couldn't really get much done--and we can go into this later--because the resources were not there, and that I was just pushing kids through the system, but not really helping them, and that I thought I could be of more usefulness to the community to be out and working on housing and on other things. So he said, "But, Marjorie, I was going to elevate you." I said, "Mr. President, I was afraid of that. I don't want to be tied down and elevated, because if I go to the U.S. District Court, I'll have to stay there." It's a lifetime appointment, and people don't leave the district court. He said, "Would you be willing to take on some other assignments from time to time?" I said, "Yes, I'd be willing to do that." And so he gave me four, right away.

(Laughter)

G: Did he really? What were they?

L: Well, I guess the first thing was the [President's] Commission on Crime in the District of Columbia, and then the UN [United Nations] commission. One Sunday morning my husband said to me, "The President's on the phone. He wants to speak with you." I said, "Yes, sure." (Laughter) He said, "No, I'm serious." And I went to the phone and, sure enough, it was President Johnson. He asked me if I'd be willing to be on the [Arthur]

Goldberg team at the UN. And I said, "Oh, great. Of course, I'd be happy to do that." So I enjoyed that, and then he appointed me to the Advisory Council on Research Resources at the National Institutes of Health. Those committees are statutory citizen committees that have to work with the institutes. And then he also appointed me to the Building Research Advisory Board of the National Academy of Science. I could have done more things, you know, but I was busy trying to build housing.

(Interruption)

While I was on the bench, Mrs. Johnson had a luncheon in the family quarters at the White House on--you know, the program for children, for little children.

G: Head Start.

L: And she asked me to make a little speech, and I told them a little bit about the work I was doing at the court and that one of the most serious problems was the lack of an identifiable family that I could work with to improve the condition of the children and their behavior. And she said, "Well, what about Head Start?" I said, "It's fine for what it does. But those same children, who have been getting chances all day long, go home at night to a situation that is not at all what they've been experiencing during the day, and I don't know which experience is going to be more lasting. Head Start is all right, but it's not enough." Well, I shouldn't have said that. It was like a criticism of Head Start, and I didn't mean it that way. But there were people who felt I shouldn't have said it. I don't think she was upset.

G: Really? How do you resolve that problem?

L: You can't. That's the dilemma.

(Interruption)

Here's another interesting little tidbit. When I went to see President Johnson to say that I was resigning from the court, he said during the conversation, "I'm going to tell you a secret. I think you can keep a secret, just like Bird can keep a secret. Can I trust you?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "I'm going to put Thurgood Marshall on the Supreme Court bench, and he doesn't know it."

(Laughter)

He said that the thing that impressed him was that Thurgood was willing to come off the U.S. District Court in New York and come to Washington to be the solicitor general and didn't ask any questions. Didn't say, "Well, what's going to happen to my career," or "Will I be able to go back on the bench," or anything. He just said, "I'll be happy to serve." And he said, "I'm going to do it."

So one time Thurgood and I were in Africa at the same time, in Abidjan in the Ivory Coast at a meeting of the World Peace Through Law Conference. And I told Thurgood this story; I had never told anybody. You're the second person I've ever told it to. And of course, now everybody will know. (Laughter) But he was not amused; he was not amused.

G: Why was he mad, or not amused?

L: Well, he didn't say anything. He didn't respond to me. But he looked very grim. I think he probably didn't like it, that anybody would know before he knew.

G: But you did keep a secret; you didn't--

L: Oh, I never told anybody before I told him. And I've never told anybody else but you. So I don't know whether we should put it in the oral history or not.

G: I think it's all right now.

L: Do you think so?

At that same meeting with the President when I was telling him about resigning, when we finished he said, "I've got some fellows working on civil rights legislation and other things, and I want them to have the benefit of your advice." So he took me into some of the offices where the staff was working, and he said, "Now, I want you fellows to call on Marjorie here to get her ideas, because she will have some good ideas for you to work with." I never heard from a single one of them.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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