INTERVIEWEE: Stanley Marcus

INTERVIEWER: Joe B. Frantz

November 3, 1969

F: This is an interview with Mr. Stanley Marcus, in his office in Dallas, Texas, on November 3, 1969. The interviewer is Joe B. Frantz.

Mr. Marcus, briefly tell us something about how you came from boyhood here and to your present position.

M: I was born in Dallas, went to high school in Dallas at the Forest Avenue High School, went from high school to Amherst College for one year, from whence I transferred to Harvard and was graduated from Harvard with a B.A. degree in 1925. I spent one year at the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration and returned without completing the second year--

F: You and I have that in common.

M: --in order to be able to get into our store during a transition period when we were enlarging the store. So I came into the store in September 1926 and have been associated with the store all during that time. I became president of Neiman-Marcus in 1950, a position which I still hold.

F: Where and under what circumstances did you first meet Lyndon Johnson?

M: I met him, as best I recall, either just prior to the war or just after the war started. I was in Washington as the clothing consultant to the War Production Board. And I can't positively say whether I met Mr. Johnson before the war or in the first few months after the war, but it was some time in that period. He was a young congressman from Texas.

I was very much impressed with him, his vigor, imagination and his, at that time, liberal tendencies.

F: He was already reaching out beyond his own district by then?

M: Yes. As a matter of fact I was so impressed with him that I invited him to come to Dallas for a luncheon which was held, to the best of my recollection, in the spring or early fall of--was Pearl Harbor in 1940 or '41?

F: '41.

M: Then, it would have been in the middle of 1942 that I invited Mr. Johnson --Congressman Johnson then--to come to Dallas. I gave a luncheon for him with a group of Dallas business leaders. To the best of my knowledge this was his first exposure to a group of Texans outside of his own district. We had a luncheon in the Texas Room at the Baker Hotel and about 100 people came to meet him.

F: What sorts of people?

M: Business leaders, industrial leaders of Dallas, a good cross-section of the community. Throughout the wartime period and the years thereafter we established warm social relationships, and I found that he was a more effective representative for me than my own congressman from this district, Mr. Hatton Sumners, who had lived away from Dallas so long he didn't really have any feeling of obligation or interest in his own constituents.

F: You say that he was an effective congressman for you, what sorts of things--

M: In getting information about some of the perplexing governmental regulations of OPA. Where we needed to get information, he was always effective in getting the information to us promptly. I recall my

brother was wounded in North Africa--

F: Which brother was this?

M: My brother Lawrence, who now lives in Houston. We got word that he was wounded and immediately I got in touch with Congressman Johnson, rather than going through my own congressman, to try to get information as to where he was and what his condition was. One of the things that impressed me at the time about Mr. Johnson was the unusual staff work that he had established in his office, the promptness with which letters were answered and inquiries were taken care of.

F: Was Walter Jenkins with the staff at this time?

M: I guess he was. I really didn't--

F: You didn't know who was handling it--

M: I just knew that letters got answered within 24 hours of receipt.

F: Yes. Did President Johnson utilize your store as a customer--Congressman Johnson, I should say?

M: Yes, he started being a customer at that time. During that period he was very active in the selection of the clothes for Mrs. Johnson. And subsequently when he became Majority Leader, he became very active in the selection of the clothes for members of his staff, as he had very definite ideas of what he wanted the women around him to look like, and he had some antipathies to certain fashions that made it very difficult for us to serve him properly and at the same time dress the women properly.

F: For instance?

M: He didn't like full skirts; he didn't like tweeds; and, as I recall, there were certain colors that he didn't like. I don't at this moment remember what those colors were, but he just wouldn't let anybody work for him who wore these colors.

F: I've heard rumors that he had full confidence in his own taste and would buy for Mrs. Johnson without her being along.

M: That's right, and at Christmas time he'd even buy a dress for his secretaries and other members of the staff. At that time, as I recall, we were going through a period of fashion changing from straight skirts to full skirts, and it made it very difficult to find anything that had a straight skirt to sell him.

F: Did you become more or less an outfitter for Mrs. Johnson then during those Senate years?

M: Yes, she started coming to the store. Of course anything she bought she had to take and send home for the congressman to look at--and then the senator to look at.

F: He was still the ultimate critic in this?

M: Yes, up until the time that he became President he exercised a very powerful veto. Then when he became President, he just didn't have the time to take care of the affairs of the nation and the affairs of his feminine wardrobe.

F: Then did what you and Mrs. Johnson agree upon usually stand up, or were there a lot of returns?

M: There were a lot of returns, but we learned pretty well what the guidelines were, and we tried not to violate them. Every once in awhile I would send a message back to him that if he would just pay as much attention to the affairs of the nation as he was to the skirt lengths and the skirt widths of his women, that the country might be better off--and let me take care of that side of the picture!

F: Did he have definite feelings on the lengths of skirts?

M: Oh, yes. He had particular feelings about the width of the skirts. He liked the straight skirts.

He liked the slim silhouette. Unfortunately, fashion didn't always go along with him.

F: In his own clothes, was he fairly painstaking?

M: Yes. Being a very large man, it was difficult for him to be fitted out of stock, so he had most of his clothes custom-tailored by a tailor in San Antonio, I believe. I never particularly liked the clothes that he was having made. They bore the stamp of a country tailor, but it was difficult to get him off of it until actually he became President and he started becoming much more international in his look than regional.

F: Did he seek advice in upgrading taste, or did he pretty well make up his mind to what he liked?

M: No, I don't think he ever asked anybody for advice. He gave them the answers.

F: I see, and the questions too, probably. Were you involved in the inaugural festivities at the time that President Kennedy was inaugurated?

M: No, we were invited, but I made it a point of policy never to go to a presidential inauguration. I don't like big crowds.

F: Were you involved in the outfitting of Mrs. Johnson for the inaugural festivities?

M: Yes, we worked with Mrs. Johnson on her inaugural clothes. We remodeled a fur coat that he had bought for her while he was on a trip to Scandinavia, I believe. It was a coat that was not very fashionably designed and a couple of years old, so we made some suggestions of how to change it at minimum cost. We provided her inaugural suit that she wore under the coat. We had to prepare for very cold weather.

F: You got it, too. There was a snow storm, as you will recall.

M: We had had some experience in inaugural clothes because we had furnished

the inaugural gown for Mrs. Eisenhower. So we knew a little bit about the problems.

F: How much of an ensemble do you need for an inaugural?

M: Well, the woman needs a costume to wear at the inauguration, which is outside, and subject to the weather hazards, has to be warm. In the case of clothes for governmental dignitaries, you need to get clothes for them that have colors that are visible in a crowd. Even if black were in fashion, or a dark color in fashion, it would probably be the wrong thing to use for such an occasion.

F: In general, do you stick with pastels, or can you be fairly vivid?

M: They could be fairly vivid or pastels. You also have to think in terms, today, of how these are going to reproduce on TV--and also to be becoming to the person. Then after the inauguration they go to a reception and luncheon, so the costume itself has to be something that lends itself properly as a luncheon costume after the fur coat is taken off. I think, as I recall, we made a dress with a jacket for her, so that she could take the jacket off and have a luncheon-type dress beneath the jacket. The next, of course, important occasion is the inaugural ball gown that the wife of the President wears.

F: Now you said that you made a dress with a jacket. By "made," do you bring in an outside designer, or do you have someone within your store who adapts?

M: No, we brought in an outside designer. We brought in Adele Simpson, to whom we introduced Mrs. Johnson, whose taste evolution was interesting to see develop because in early days her taste was very, very conservative, reflecting the President's taste. She had no daringness and she had not too much self-confidence in her taste. She was always concerned whether

she was going to look right and whether it was becoming. We tried to build up her self-confidence because basically she has good taste, if she were not under too many inhibitions as to what the President wanted or didn't want. But Adele Simpson is sort of a middle-of-the-road designer, who is not extreme, whose clothes are feminine and flattering. But Mrs. Johnson became more independent, more on her own in the decisions, and more exposed to the clothes that women of position and wealth wore, we could see her beginning to swing over to some of the clothes that she had turned down in our store in previous years.

F: Mrs. Johnson and Adele Simpson then were congenial and compatible?

M: Yes, they were very compatible, and Miss Simpson did a tremendous job in servicing Mrs. Johnson. No one can possibly make any money in selling clothes to the wife of a President, because they can't come up for fittings like ordinary customers do. So you send someone down to do the fittings and make the corrections. It may be two or three trips on each group of clothes, and Miss Simpson, because of her interest in Neiman-Marcus and, also, obviously from the standpoint of having the distinction of being selected by Mrs. Johnson, went to great expense for which she was never compensated.

F: Was Mrs. Johnson fairly easy to fit?

M: Oh yes. Mrs. Johnson has a good figure and is easy to fit, subject to the pressures again of being sure that she was getting something the President would like.

F: Did she ever outgrow this sort of presidential dominance of her wardrobe?

M: I think in the latter years. A great problem that you have with women shopping is to be able to do the thing for them that is right, and

satisfy ourselves that what we are doing is right, and at the same time not having everything that we think is right upset by zealous friends who also want to express their opinions. Frequently Mrs. Johnson would come up with one of her friends, and the friend would come in after we had made our best recommendations with some cockeyed idea that just upset the applecart. Or maybe the girls would come in and very flippantly say, "Oh, I don't like that," and basically they didn't know enough to really have an opinion.

F: Now the girls started, of course, in this national limelight as bare teenagers and grew to young ladies during that period. Did they develop, along with their mother, independent tastes and pretty positive notions?

M: Just after the presidency--I mean, prior to that, they had opinions and Mrs. Johnson made the decisions for them. But after they went into the presidency, Mrs. Johnson had less time and the girls were getting older, and they were making their own pitch.

F: Was there any particular difference in servicing the girls as far as personality is concerned?

M: The girls have distinct, different personalities and the clothes that they selected were reflective of their personalities. Furthermore, Mrs. Johnson was a very dutiful wife in that she always was considering costs.

F: I was going to ask you about that, if she wasn't considerably more cost-conscious than he was.

M: She was considering budget, and she came in with the amount that she was going to spend on a given trip and, believe me, she didn't go over it ten cents! I always admired the fact that Mrs. Johnson had the ability to say, "Well, that's beautiful, I like it very much, but it's just more than I can pay. Take it out of the room." And that finished it. But she

budgeted her own clothes expenditures and those of the girls, and she did a fine job of doing that.

F: Do you want to describe activities surrounding the outfitting of Mrs. Johnson and the two girls for the inaugural festivities?

M: Do what?

F: The inaugural festivities of '65, when she was First Lady and the girls, of course, were daughters of the President--do you want to talk about the activities surrounding that?

M: I wasn't up there at the actual time, but we did arrange for clothes to be sent to Mrs. Johnson to Washington. We arranged to meet, and we delegated one member of our New York office staff to work with Mrs. Johnson, to take clothes to her to the hotel. We brought up clothes from manufacturers--samples--many times they were too small for Mrs. Johnson to try on--which is always difficult because a woman can usually tell best when she can try a thing on. Some of the clothes were made from sketches, but Mrs. Johnson frankly didn't like to buy from sketches. She liked to buy from something she could see and feel and put on.

F: Was there any playing off of you against someone else?

M: No, Mrs. Johnson was a very loyal customer. She was obviously subjected to great pressures from other retailers who were anxious to get into the act, and she met some of them socially. I think that as a result of some social contacts that were made and possibly some steering that was done by some people who may have been paid to steer her, she did some shopping with another in New York. To the best of our knowledge, though--

F: Who is this, Bergdorf?

M: No, it was Bonwit-Teller.

F: We always suspected that somebody had been paid off to try to get her to shop with them. I mean, when I say paid off, one of Mrs. Johnson's friends, and I can't prove it, so I wouldn't even want to mention any

names.

But one of the problems, as I recall, with Mrs. Johnson early in the game, Mrs. Duke, Angier Biddle Duke's wife, who's a very chic woman with avant-garde chic-est taste, decided that she was going to remake the image of Mrs. Johnson and make her the president's wife in history.

Mrs. Johnson has good taste, but you could never describe her as being chic avant-gardist, and the kind of things that Mrs. Duke was trying to push her into were perfectly fine clothes for Mrs. Duke but were not ready for Mrs. Johnson because Mrs. Johnson wasn't ready for them. And she wasn't ready for them both as to the type nor the price. I recall very distinctly Mrs. Duke saying, "Oh, she should have a Galanos dress or a Galanos suit.

And I said, "Mrs. Johnson won't even pay what the wholesale cost of what that would be, much less the retail price of it." And all the clothes that we sold to Mrs. Johnson were always at retail price. We never made special prices to her.

F: That takes a certain personality, too, doesn't it, which Robin Duke would have had and Mrs. Johnson would not.

M: That's right, two different people. When you operate a fashion business you learn to interpret clothes for the individual and what is right for that individual and what they'll feel comfortable in.

But Mrs. Duke didn't add to the ease of selling Mrs. Johnson because she was trying to steer her own canoe.

F: Did you get letters and comments from people regarding Mrs. Johnson's clothes--that is, just unsolicited outside letters?

M: No, I think the main things were the comments in Women's Wear, which didn't give Mrs. Johnson very good press, saying that she was a typical

Texan and that her clothes were old-fashioned. I imagine this sort of stung Mrs. Johnson, and this may have been responsible, I don't know, for encouraging Mrs. Johnson to become a little more adventuresome, which she did become.

One thing, somebody else from the office staff tried to steer Mrs. Johnson and the girls into going into Seventh Avenue and buying it wholesale. This was something that I thought was--obviously I have a selfish interest in it. As a retailer we fight very hard to prevent trade diversion from retail into wholesale channels, whether it's the wife of the President of the wife of anybody else. We feel very strongly that manufacturers must stay in the manufacturing business and retailers stay in the retail business, so we did not look at that with any personal pleasure. But even beyond that, I felt it very bad political reaction if it became known that the wife of the President was trying to get things wholesale. I passed that information on to Liz Carpenter and told her that I felt Mrs. Johnson could build up a terrific amount of ill-will among the thousands of retailers all over the country if it became known that she was trying to beat the retail price.

F: I presume just for the prestige of the business, the wholesaler, though, nobody would have attempted to--

M: Oh, listen, wholesalers would give them to her. But I think there are so many pitfalls in that that I was eager to prevent her--whether we got the business or anybody else. I wanted to see it stay in retail channels.

F: You would have touched off a first-class storm there.

M: Yes.

F: Did Liz Carpenter act as an intermediary for you from time to time?

M: No. I just knew Liz personally, and my daughter was working for her as an assistant, so I knew her well enough to call her up and tell her what I thought. But we dealt directly with Mrs. Johnson, and any time she needed anything she either called me or called a regular sales person here in the store or the contact person we had established in the New York office.

F: Following the assassination, of course, any mention of Dallas in the remainder of the nation was rather painful, to say the least. Did this affect at all your relationship with the Johnsons?

M: No, not at all.

F: So it created no personal or commercial problem for you?

M: No.

F: Tell me a little bit about what you were doing just before, during, and after the assassination.

M: At the time of the assassination, I was having luncheon at the Pavillon Restaurant(in NYC), eating calf's liver lyonnaise, with a bottle of burgundy wine, and I had as a guest a fellow merchant from Sweden, and a young lady from Australia who was just going into business in New York. I had a telephone call at the luncheon, calling me from my New York office, telling me that they had just had word from Dallas that the President had been shot. I came back into the restaurant and passed the news to a few other friends who were sitting there, including Lenny Lyons, the columnist, who got the news from me.

We returned to Dallas about the following Tuesday or Wednesday, just before Thanksgiving.

F: This comes in that rather vital period between Thanksgiving and Christmas. From a commercial standpoint, did this have any affect at all on Dallas

sales?

M: None that we could measure. This is always a hard thing. The city was stunned, just as the nation was. And of course there was this soul-searching that was going on in Dallas, as well there should have been, as to whether this was something the city itself had any area of responsibility for or whether, as many people said, it could have happened anywhere. Well, it could have happened anywhere, but there was an advertisement that the Dallas Morning News carried which is notorious by now. It was carried and the Dallas News published it. They apologized for the fact that it was published, saying everybody was out to lunch when the ad came in. But there was unquestionably an atmosphere that had developed in Dallas in the months immediately preceding the assassination that made it more plausible for this to have happened here than elsewhere. I would think that Dallas Morning News was as much responsible for that atmosphere having been allowed to develop as any single agency or person in the community. The Dallas News was still at that time a very reactionary paper. They were still pulling Franklin Roosevelt out of his grave to rattle him across the stage whenever necessary to incense the public, and they did nothing to aid in establishing an atmosphere of free inquiry, free expression. This was at the time of the Bruce Alger occupancy in the congressional seat here. And the whole Bruce Alger know-nothing, do-nothing, as far as federal government attitude, was aided and abetted by the Dallas News.

F: Did you get a feeling during that period that Dallas was either purposely or inadvertently being punished for having Alger?

M: For having Alger?

F: As its congressman, as far as getting government services? I'm thinking

particularly of the Federal Building.

M: I don't think there's any question that Dallas was paying a terrible price for Alger in many ways. I know that Mr. Johnson as the Senate Majority Leader and I know that Congressman Rayburn, and even President Eisenhower, all held him in low esteem. And since the Democrats were controlling the Congress, there's no question that Dallas paid very heavily for Alger and for its attitude that it wanted nothing to do with federal funds. It took Dallas about ten years to live over that and to recognize that if it were going to compete with the other cities in the country it better go out and seek those federal funds that were available on a competitive basis.

F: Following the assassination, I was moving around quite a bit and was forever being put on the defensive for being from Texas and being born in Dallas, and I'm sure that you received that sort of grilling much much more intensively than I. I'd be interested in what you did, I have a mild awareness of some of your work toward reestablishing Dallas as a good place to live and trade and work.

M: I wrote an editorial which we published on New Year's of 1965, I guess it was.

F: '64.

M: I wrote an editorial entitled, "What's right with Dallas," in which I attempted to try to jar the thinking of people first, to raise the question--try to settle the question whether Dallas itself could be blamed as a city, but, over and beyond that, to try to get the people of Dallas to try to take a good, long objective look at itself and to take an audit, just as you audit your books at the end of the year, to audit what Dallas had, what was good, and what was bad. I think

if I had run the ad, "What's Wrong with Dallas," I probably would have been stoned and run out of town. But by the use of the headline, "What's Right with Dallas," I could say the same thing that I would have said the other way and received a terrific amount of public approval and approbation. I think it helped stimulate--I hope it did--a more objective look on the part of the people of Dallas as to just what was wrong with the city.

F: Outside Dallas, did you have any particular difficulties?

M: Oh, we had the usual number of crank letters, some people closing their accounts, some people saying they wouldn't come to Dallas, but that really was sort of a tempest.

F: Now, within international trade circles, you just continued to move quietly about your business.

M: Oh, yes.

F: And let time heal.

M: Time heals almost everything. We still get a few people who say, "Oh, I don't think I want to come to work in Dallas." That's coming rarer and rarer.

F: Briefly, recount that episode in which the abstraction was commissioned for the Dallas Public Library and then refused,and your role in rescuing it.

M: I'm sorry. Will you repeat that?

F: The abstraction that was commissioned for the Dallas Public Library, and the artist was--

M: That was a bronze wall, an abstract wall that was designed by Harry Bartoia, a sculptor from Pennsylvania, and it was commissioned by the architect. When the mayor of Dallas saw it, he referred to it as a "pile

of junk" and said he wouldn't put it up. I really had nothing to do with that, other than to give some money for the purchase of it, so it was put up with private funds.

F: I rather gathered you led the movement to make good.

M: No, I can't say I led it. I was a participant it it. But this was a part of the "Know-Nothing" hostile attitude that existed in Dallas in the areas of expression--not only newspapers, but verbal and artistic expression.

F: Who was your mayor who described it as the "pile of junk?"

M: Bob Thornton.

F: Getting back to retailing, did the reluctance of Mrs. Johnson and those around her to reveal the name of her designers cause you any difficulties? I know that on hindsight, I think Mrs. Johnson's staff feels that it made a public relations error there in being so secretive about who did Mrs. Johnson's clothes.

M: It didn't cause any problems. As a matter of fact, I think that probably it was a good idea as compared to Mrs. Kennedy's attempt to make Mr. Cassini her official designer, and then she went around and bought clothes from everybody else instead. But I think the name of the designer is part of the news value of the garment, and I think as long as a woman in the White House doesn't designate just one person as her exclusive designer, then she should use the names of any of the designers.

F: Besides Adele Simpson, whom did Mrs. Johnson use?

M: I'd say that Adele Simpson, up until the last year or so, provided 80 per cent of her clothes. Ben Zuckermann made her inaugural suit. Then she became interested in some of the chiffon dresses of the Greek designer that lives in New York by the name of Stavropoulos. But

Mrs. Johnson was really not overly conscious of designer names like some people are. She didn't eagerly seek for one type of designer.

F: She didn't like some women burn for a dress by "X" designer. She just wanted something--

M: And she found that, by and large, Adele Simpson pleased her and her figure and the President more than anyone else.

F: Were you involved in the weddings of Lynda and Luci?

M: We were in Luci's wedding. We did the wedding dress and the bridal party--the bridesmaids' dresses for Luci and most of her trousseau. But Lynda decided to go off on her own and do her own wedding in Washington or New York, I'm not sure.

No, she did it at Joseph Magnin in San Fransisco. She'd been out on a trip to California and she met the Magnins and--

F: This is Joseph, and not I.?

M: Joseph Magnin. Mr. Magnin is very active in Democratic circles there. So she decided to have them do the dress, which we were sorry to lose. We would have liked to have had 100 per cent score, but we didn't.

F: Tell me about the activity surrounding Luci's wedding. I presume you had someone here and in New York and in Washington more or less supervising.

M: Yes, we called in a designer from Boston who's a specialist in wedding dresses. Her name is Priscilla. She designed a dress that Luci liked. It was hard to keep Luci still long enough to keep her attention. Finally, the dress was decided on and just about a week before the wedding someone in the White House found out that this was being made in a non-union factory, which did not occur to us at the time. And it posed a great problem because Mr. Dubinsky, the president of the International Ladies

Garment Union(ILGWU) threatened to make a stink about it. Actually, if we had gone to a union factory to make a wedding dress, we would have gotten a bad wedding dress because the wedding business is a very small business and the union people make very cheap dresses--I mean the manufacturers who use the union.

F: They mass produce.

M: Mass produced, and we never could have gotten the dress made out of handmade lace and so forth. So we were forced to take and make a duplicate dress by taking the pattern from Priscilla to a union factory, and letting them make it.

F: Where, in New York?

M: In Boston--make a second dress so that it carried the label of ILGWU. I think if I were doing it over again, I would certainly raise that question to the White House in the first place.

F: What did you do with the two dresses? Which one did Luci wear?

M: I don't know.

F: Did it compare favorably with the other one?

M: Oh yes, it was made in an ILGWU factory, but it was a handmade dress by a sample hand, rather than the factory. It simply conformed to this requirement of the union so it could have an ILGWU label in it.

F: Now, Luci's quite tiny. Does that present any problems, or does that actually simplify the dress problem?

M: Everything has problems. But whether a person is tiny or large really didn't make much difference.

F: You don't try either to enlarge her or to heighten her?

M: Oh yes, but I mean--that's part of the business. You try to make something as becoming and capitalize on a person's best features and minimize their worst features. When they are tall like Lynda, they have other problems.

F: Did you get an extra flurry of business because so many Texans did go to the wedding?

M: I don't think so.

F: Business remained more or less normal.

M: I can't trace any advantages that we got from doing the wedding at all.

F: Some of your syndicated women's wear columnists and, of course, your Women's Wear Daily, etc. took after the Texas contingent at the weddings for being, as one said, "Texas-tacky." Would you comment on that? Is that an anti-Texas feeling, or is it justified?

M: I think it, in great part, was Women's Wear's style of trying to stir up a fuss. It's a very controversial paper that thrives on controversy. And you can't compare Mrs. Johnson as a fashion leader to Mrs. Kennedy. Mrs. Kennedy was keenly aware of fashion. She had no inhibitions of either the money or a husband's particular taste, and she had a flair. Mrs. Johnson didn't have that flair. Mrs. Johnson's whole idea all her life was to dress neatly but not guadily, and her dressing came slightly on the prosaic side, in large part because of what the President would let her wear and what he wouldn't let her wear. She dressed almost in a classic fashion. Well, Women's Wear doesn't like classics. They like things that make news. If she had worn pants to the inauguration, they would have been delighted, because it would have been a news story. But if she wears something that is conventional, then it's no news story. So I think they were trying to stir up something, and I think that Mrs. Johnson basically was not venturesome at that stage of the game.

F: Did you get the feeling that Mrs. Johnson did anything one way or the other for the taste of what you might call the great upper middle-class woman, somewhere between 40 and 60?

M: No, I don't think Mrs. Johnson's influence on taste and fashion will be one of the the things that she'll go down in history for. Other things that she did, very positively she will go down in history for, in my judgment.

F: I went on several trips with Mrs. Johnson into the out-of-doors,in which she dressed in anything from blue jeans and a red-checkered shirt to fairly simple outdoor dresses. Did she spend any great time on this sort of thing, or did she just ask for something that was serviceable?

M: I think that Mrs. Johnson's approach to clothes was utilitarian. Will this dress--can I wear it to this function and can I wear it to five other functions, and will it be good next year? I'm sure Mrs. Kennedy never gave a thought as to whether the thing was going to be good beyond the first occasion she wore it. Mrs. Johnson was middle-of-the-road in her taste; Mrs. Kennedy was avant-garde in her taste. It's very unfair to compare the two.

But Mrs. Johnson was a woman of great, great integrity--is a woman of great integrity. She never bluffed about anything. If she didn't know what a fabric was, if she didn't know what a painter was, she'd say,"Well, tell me about that; I don't know about it." She never tried to pretend she knew something she didn't know.

F: She was willing to be educated.

M: She was willing to be educated and she educated herself wonderfully. I have nothing but the highest esteem for her.

F: You could see a difference between the early Mrs. Johnson and the one who in the last year or so--

M: I think she got surer, because she traveled more and she saw more people

of prominence and wealth. She became influenced, I think, as all of us do--if you visit people who have a beautiful home you come back and take a look at your own home and say, "Well, that runner that I've had on the piano doesn't look very good; they didn't have a runner in so-and-so's home." I think her whole spectrum became enlarged as a result of her position.

F: To shift off clothes, how did you come to be appointed on the Committee for the Acquisition of American Art for the White House?

M: I was appointed by Mrs. Kennedy, and attended several meetings at the White House and in New York.

F: Did you know Mrs. Kennedy?

M: I had known President Kennedy when he was a senator, and we were both on the Board of Overseers at Harvard. I supported him and his candidacy and I guess this is what you would call a political payoff.

F: He knew something, too, about your own artistic interests?

M: Yes.

F: Well, what did you do on this?

M: I helped raise money for the acquisition of several of the paintings. I think there was one painting of Benjamin Franklin that was acquired for the White House and one of Thomas Jefferson which I helped raise money for, both locally and around the country.

F: Was there any advisory capacity insofar as suggesting what should go into the White House?

M: Yes, they had some considerable amount of expertise because they had several museum directors who were qualified. I think they did most of the real advice and the other members of the committee did the money-raising work, trying to get money to do these things with.

F: How did you happen to be named a member of the Fine Arts Committee for Blair House?

M: I think because I helped raise money for the White House, and they decided I could probably raise some money for Blair House.

F: And who appointed you?

M: Kennedy, also.

F: Did you attend any of the White House social functions, either during the Kennedy or Johnson period?

M: Yes, I attended the function during President Kennedy's term when Mr. Casals played.

F: Oh, yes. That must have been really exhilarating.

M: Really one of the great evenings I think that I've ever had. I think hearing the Marine Band play as you come into the White House is one of the most exciting entrances that I've ever been to.

F: The White House is well designed for staging. Did you attend any under the Johnsons?

M: Yes, I attended several under the Johnsons.

F: Any what stands out in particular?

M: We were invited for one function, and were invited to spend the night in the White House. I forget what the function was on that occasion, but then I attended several others with the diplomatic corps when there was a reception for the diplomatic corps. Because I have a beard I was taken for a diplomat instead of a Texan.

F: Describe the routine in spending the night in the White House.

M: It was no different than spending a night in any other house. You feel a sense of history but other than that the amenities of the White House today--and I think this is something that great credit must be given to

Mrs. Kennedy for-- were brought up-to-date, which made it into a house which can compete favorably with any other fine private home. Prior to that time--and I'd been in the White House as a guest when President Eisenhower was there--it was furnished in what I would call Early American Pullman style. So I think the Kennedys made a very great contribution in their building up of all of the White House.

I think one of the nicest things about spending the night in the White House was able to go up after the function and having a chat in the private quarters with President and Mrs. Johnson on the second floor.

I remember the first night I had dinner with them up there was shortly after he was inaugurated--shortly after the assassination. I was there in January and I thought I would call Mrs. Johnson just to find out whether there was anything I could do for her. She said, "Where are you?" I said, "I'm in Washington." She said, "Why don't you come over and have dinner with us?"

So I went over and had dinner.

F: This was just an informal dinner--just an informal, family dinner?

M: Yes. I had dinner with them. I think we finally sat down to eat about 10 o'clock.

F: Waiting for the President to show?

M: Waiting for the President to show up. We went for a swim first. Then after the swim, came on up and the President finally came in about 10 o'clock. Walter Jenkins passed by and I heard the President yell to him, "Where are you going, Walter?" "I am taking some papers to your room." "Bring them on in." So the President was at the head of the table talking with Walter for the most part of the dinner. I thought to myself, it's going to be a hard, hard time keeping a cook.

F: Did the President discuss Dallas with you on that evening?

M: Well, he'd discussed Dallas and Dallas business leadership and the Dallas Morning News on frequent occasions. He was very bitter about the Dallas Morning News, about its management, what it stood for.

F: Did you ever talk with Ted Dealey about his attitude toward Johnson?

M: No, but I talked to Joe Dealey, his son, and I think that one of the effects of the assassination was that the Dallas News did really make an effort to become more objective.

F: Joe was considerably less fixed in his--

M: Yes, he was younger. I told him very candidly and frankly what I thought about their paper and the influence they'd had and the damage that they'd done to the nation. I said, "How you write your editorials is your business, and I don't propose as an advertiser to suggest that I'm trying to use any leverage on you. I'm just talking to you as a citizen. You need to present news, editorials with both sides of the question. You should present news as it happens without being colored." And I think following the assassination the News did broaden out its editorial representation so that if they had a right-wing columnist, they balanced him off with Walter Lippman, who at that time was a little less conservative.

F: Moderate, at least.

M: Today they carry the New York Times service, and they publish Reston and and Buckley at the same time, which is fine. So I think the News today is a much better paper than it was. Its editorial stance is not far different than what it was, but I think they just went overboard in their pre-assassination editorial policy.

F: When you spent the night in the White House, to get back to that, where did you stay?

M: I couldn't tell you, I don't know which room we were in.

F: Second or third floor, do you remember?

M: We were on the third floor, I believe.

F: Did having a President in the White House, who came from Texas, make any particular problems for you, or present any particular opportunities? Did it affect retailing in the Southwest, or taste in the Southwest?

M: No, I can't say that it did. It was an expensive privilege that we had of servicing them because even though we sold them at regular retail price the amount of service that had to go into it, of sending people back and forth--

F: If you were to add in labor cost on something like this--

M: You wouldn't do it and this was part of the game. We never begrudged a single cent of what it did cost us. We were pleased with the honor and privilege of servicing Mrs. Johnson--and on several occasions gifts that the President gave Mrs. Johnson.

F: Did he tend to buy gifts from here for--

M: On many occasions he did and--

F: For visiting dignataries too?

M: Well, for all sorts of people. I remember when he had his operation, I was delivering a lecture in Indiana--

F: His gallbladder operation.

M: Yes--in Indiana, and I had a call to please call the White House. I think it was Marvin Watson who got me and said, "Just before the President went into the operating room, he reminded me that Mrs. Johnson's anniversary--" her birthday I think was on the 17th of November(December 22), some date around there,--"and said for me to please get hold of something for her and that you would know what she'd want."

So I said, "Well, I think I can help you. When can I see the President?"

He said, "Oh, you can come to the hospital tomorrow." So I was in the hospital I think three days after the operation and brought with me a selection of things from which he made a final selection.

F: Did he tend to, say, get a get a gift for an occasion and "give me several ideas?"

M: He had in mind what he wanted. He wanted a pair of earrings for her. So I brought up--had mailed up to me, and met me in Washington, a whole selection of earrings for him to select from.

F: On other occasions when he gave gifts, would he have someone call you and say, "I want this sort of gift, and give me some samples," in effect?

M: Yes. He had a pretty good idea. He didn't just say, "Give me some suggestions." He pretty well knew what he wanted.

F: What did you think of his taste in selection?

M: I think his taste was good. It was decisive. I didn't always agree with it, but that's a matter of personal taste.

F: As long as you could keep him out of women's clothes, it was all right?

M: Yes.

F: Did he have a feeling for materials? I thought toward the end of his Administration--I may have been a little non-objective in this--but I thought he began to dress--some of his suits, I thought, were beautiful.

M: Again, I think this was exposure to the outside world. After all, if your standards of dress are based upon your association with congressmen and senators, it's going to be at one standard. But then if you start meeting David Rockefeller and Edgar Kaiser and other industrialists and you see that they don't wear--don't have any fancy gadgets on their

clothes, then you begin to streamline. And the President became, in the latter part of his office there, I think a well-dressed, international looking man that you couldn't spot where he came from.

Now when he first went into office, you could say "This fellow came from either Kansas City or from Texas," because his clothes had the earmarks of the country tailors.

F: Do you think of anything else that we ought to cover in this?

M: No, I think we've about covered the waterfront.

F: Thank you very much, Mr. Marcus.

M: Okay.

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Gift of Personal Statement

By Stanley Marcus

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

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Signed Stanley Marcus

Date 7/29/74

Accepted Harry J. Middleton
Director, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library for Archivist of the United States

Date August 20, 1974