INTERVIEW I

DATE: May 14, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: LOUIS MARTIN

INTERVIEWER: David G. McComb

PLACE: Mr. Martin's offices in Chicago, Illinois

Tape 1 of 1

Mc: First of all I'd like to know something about your background--where you were born, when, where did you get your education?

M: I was born in Shelbyville, Tennessee, November 18, 1912, and four years later moved to Savannah, Georgia, where I attended the parochial schools, Catholic schools. Subsequently I went to high school in Nashville; Fisk University had a high school department at the time. Following high school I went to the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and finished with my degree, an A.B., in 1934.

Mc: Tough time to finish.

M: Yes, that was right in the middle of the Depression. Shortly after graduation I went to Havana, Cuba for a year. My father came from Cuba originally. Upon returning to this country in the fall of 1935, I went back to Ann Arbor to work on graduate work in my major which at that time was English.

Then in the middle of the Depression, money was a problem of course and I was looking for a job all the time. Ultimately, I made contact here with the Chicago Defender and Mr. Robert S. Abbott, who was then the publisher and owner of the paper. And February 18, 1936, I came on as a reporter for the Chicago Defender. I stayed here a few months and then in June of the same year, 1936, I went to Detroit to help establish and edit and publish the new newspaper called the Michigan Chronicle, which I still retain some proprietary interest in. From that date to the present I've been basically in the newspaper business.

I got my first political experience in the state of Michigan in state politics.

Mc: Have you had some connection with the Defender here all this time?

M: Yes. John Sengstacke, who is a nephew of Mr. Abbott and the owner of the paper, enabled me to go to Detroit and establish the paper. We formed a corporation in which

the two of us became the stockholders and principal owners of the paper. So the relationship from the ownership side was always with John Sengstacke, who is the current publisher of the Chicago Daily Defender. So actually we've been associated in business since 1936.

Mc: Are you connected with newspapers elsewhere than Detroit and here?

M: Yes. We now have a chain of papers, including the Pittsburgh Courier group, the Chicago Daily Defender, the Tri-State Defender in Memphis, the Michigan Chronicle in Detroit--altogether about ten fairly good newspapers.

Mc: And some in the South as well as in the North?

M: Tri-State in Memphis is the biggest one. We had a paper in Louisville called the Louisville Defender, which this corporation still has a little interest in, but basically it belongs to Frank Stanley.

Mc: Have you got any interest in newspapers in the West?

M: None, a proprietary interest we're thinking about.

Mc: Now, when did you first get your interest in politics?

M: In the state of Michigan. In those years when we began the paper, of course, there was a great deal of agitation about the organization of the auto industry. We were very active in that because at that time the Negro leadership of Detroit was very much against all unions because of the craft union concept which barred Negroes.

The CIO came in with a new type of industrial unionism. We got interested in that and in championing the cause of organizing blacks, along with whites, in the auto industry. That led us into politics and we began to show a great deal of interest in the paper, and personally, in promotion of candidates. Charles Diggs, Sr., the father of the congressman from Detroit, was running for state senator. We worked with him and did what we could to help him get elected.

We sponsored candidates for the city council ourselves. I was personally involved in promoting candidates.

Mc: Did you also get into Illinois politics?

M: No. Only indirectly. In 1944, because of that activity in Michigan, we got a call from Congressman Dawson of Illinois, who was then a new congressman here. In that 1944 national campaign, he was named vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee in

charge of minority operations. I got a call from him, asking if I would be interested in the campaign in terms of publicity and press relations. I was intrigued, came over, talked with him and we agreed on it. I took leave from my paper for three months in 1944, went to New York and worked out of the Biltmore Hotel during that campaign--Roosevelt's last campaign. Truman was the vice presidential candidate. Basically I was in charge of the publicity in the Negro area and in the Negro press.

Mc: This was your first touch with this national work that you've done?

M: That was the first experience in a national political effort.

Mc: And then did this continue to develop? Did you continue to do this kind of work?

M: Oh, yes. Once I got a little test of the national political scene, my interest grew. I had been active, of course, in Michigan politics and promoted the interests of blacks wherever I could in the political arena. I must say when I was in college in Ann Arbor I literally fell in love with Roosevelt. I considered Roosevelt more or less my ideal from a political point of view. So I started off in the Democratic Party.

Mc: How did you make connection with the Kennedy people?

M: It was a great accident, as a matter of fact. First, I should say that in 1947, I think it was, while I continued to edit and publish the Michigan Chronicle, I came over here to edit this paper in Chicago and start a daily. We were originally a weekly. I got involved in that, so I had an interest in Chicago and Detroit. Then I started a little magazine in New York, and had a little interest out over there. So I was kind of spread around.

Well, in 1959 I was asked by a group in London to go to Nigeria for a year to work on pre-independence communications for Nigeria. The group was Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborne. So I worked out of London, the international branch of BBDO, headed by Patrick Dolan. I literally took leave of the domestic business and spent that year in Nigeria.

He [Dolan] has established quite a reputation in England. He's an American citizen who, after the war, remained in England and started up a public relations-advertising business. And he had an account in Nigeria for the Western Regional government. So I went over with them. The group was formed to help in the pre-independence communications in Nigeria: newspapers, television, et cetera. As a matter of fact, our group put up the first television in Africa--WNTC in Ibadan.

My specific job was editorial adviser to the Amalgamated Press of Nigeria, which had a few papers, and we established some new ones. It was this experience in Nigeria that kept me out of the country in 1959 up until the summer of 1960.

In the summer of 1960 upon returning to the United States I was asked to escort Chief Rosiji, who was quite a factor in local Nigerian affairs at the time, around the United States on a general tour. As a matter of fact, it was then that I first met Lyndon Johnson, because Chief Rosiji wanted to meet all of the important people in the United States. He asked me to get him in touch with people who were being discussed as candidates for president, et cetera. I was unable to make any contact with the Republican side, but through friends in Washington I got an appointment with Senator Lyndon Johnson.

That first meeting with Johnson remains in my mind very vividly because I was impressed with him, his size, his charm, and what I thought was his very warm and gracious personality. He also exhibited a great deal of concern and interest in the things that Rosiji wanted to talk about. I was very impressed with him. As a matter of fact, I had difficulty with Rosiji because when he found out that Johnson was a potential candidate for the nomination, he wanted to issue a press statement supporting him. I told him I didn't know whether that was quite the thing that a foreigner to do in this country. But Johnson made a great impression upon both of us.

On the Kennedy side, there was another call out of the blue. I returned to Chicago, following that trip around the country, and I was about to re-enter my business. I should have told you, I had some other business interests. I was on the boards of two insurance companies and a savings and loan association. I really couldn't quite figure whether I would go back fully into the newspaper business or watch after some other things I was trying to develop.

In the middle of this, I got a call from Washington at my home here. Harris Wofford and Frank Reeves both talked to me. I think I got a telegram also to come to a one-day meeting of so-called Democratic Negro leaders around the country in Washington. This was after the convention. The purpose of the meeting, I was told, was to try to figure out how we might get the Negro vote for the Democratic ticket, Kennedy and Johnson.

So, I came to Washington for the one-day meeting and it lasted eight years.

Mc: Did they offer you a permanent connection with the Kennedy people then, or what?

M: No, my job there was somewhat like the 1944 job. It was in the area of publicity in what they called propaganda, to get Negro votes for the Democratic ticket. Eisenhower had made some inroads into the Negro vote in the election before, and it was a tight contest. It was felt that every vote was precious, and the minority vote, the black vote, was terribly important to them. So in the course of that meeting, it turned out I happened to be the only one present who had the practical experience of a national budget for the minority groups and whatnot because of the 1944 experience. And I think in the day-long discussions these matters came up.

Following the one-day meeting, Sarge Shriver asked me to stay behind. We had a private meeting, and he said that he felt that since I had that experience I could be most helpful, and would I consider working in that campaign. I told him I was not prepared to do that, but I would give any time I could.

So I flew back to Chicago. Almost as soon as I got in, I got another call, "Come back immediately." Then, in typical Kennedy fashion, they jumped on you. I agreed to work three days a week and commute. But that lasted two weeks. After that it was seven days a week. So that's the way it all began.

Mc: This all occurred after the nominating convention then?

M: Yes. I took no part in the nominations. The only thing I remember about the name Johnson prior to the convention, I happened to have dinner at Eliot Janeway's home; he's the economist.

(Interruption)

Mc: We're talking about the 1960 connection with Kennedy, and you mentioned that you'd had a brief contact with Johnson.

M: Not with Johnson actually, but I heard about Johnson--I just happened to think about it--prior to the nomination. I had dinner at a home of a friend, Eliot Janeway and his wife, who used to be managing editor of Fortune. John Connally was also there. Janeway knew me as a publicist type. He and Connally started telling me what a great guy Johnson was. I said, "Well, I met him with Chief Rosiji, and he wanted to know how to win this nomination." But it was just one of those discussions. But the relationship I was talking about in Washington, of course, was subsequent to Kennedy's nomination.

Mc: In 1960 did you have a hard time selling Johnson to the Negro community

M: I have to backtrack a bit. Adam Powell is an old friend of mine. Ray Jones is an old friend of mine. At the Rosiji party I had arranged at the Statler-Hilton--this was all before the nomination--Ray Jones told me he liked Lyndon Johnson, and Adam Powell told me the same. I said, "I met Johnson with Rosiji and he impressed the devil out of me. But I'm not in this act. I'm just escorting this guy around the country. So I forgot about it.

But after the nomination and after this discussion in Washington with the Kennedy people and the whole business of "How are you going to get the Negro vote?" came up, I remembered this. I told Adam and Ray, "I'm going to get with these black publishers, and I'm going to work a deal out." So I got on the telephone and talked with the most powerful newspaper guys in the area. I must say I had served as president of the National Newspaper Publishers Association for two terms.

Mc: That helped.

M: So I knew these guys intimately. Secondly, in 1944 I had been in charge of all of the advertising in the black press and I had lived up to everything that I had ever promised any of them. So I think they had confidence in me. The message I gave them was simply this: "I do not want Lyndon Johnson lynched in these newspapers simply because he's from Texas. Now, you remember what happened with Stevenson and the guy from Alabama"--what was his name--the vice presidential candidate from Alabama, Senator--?

Mc: Sparkman?

M: Sparkman. The Courier ran a--

(Interruption)

I said I didn't want any particular favors, "I only want this guy given a fair shake, and nobody out to oppose him just because of the geography."

Mc: You mentioned the Courier had run something on Sparkman.

M: Yes, the Courier did a vicious job on Sparkman. It was paid for by the Republicans, I'm sure, but they ran a big section, and they took Sparkman to task. It was anti-southern of course and literally killed him in the Negro eyes--at least it did a great deal of damage. And some of the other papers echoed this.

Mc: So you were trying to stop that sort of thing.

M: Exactly. Now, there were no promises of money or anything like that. It was purely on the basis of "This is not the kind of journalism that we want." I was amazed at the willingness of the guys to say, "Well, we're going to be fair; we will run it as it is. We'll be objective." So this was the sort of an off-the-record commitment that I got from the keys to the Negro press.

And they followed this commitment because, although they didn't carry everything we sent them and they did not go out of their way to mention the candidates, they were willing to listen to what Johnson said and to measure him in relationship to the other candidates on the record with regard to civil rights and everything else. And although Johnson had some vague civil rights positions, Kennedy also had vague civil rights positions. And I don't have to talk about Nixon and Lodge.

My argument has always been with them that "however unworthy my cause may seem, you've got to think comparatively. You've got to take it in terms of how does it stack up with the opposition." My argument is that on balance the Democratic candidates

and the Democratic platform, the Democratic Party are more concerned with our basic causes and interests.

Mc: Did Johnson get any credit for the Civil Rights Act of the mid-fifties?

M: We saw to that. I mean, we used the fact that as the leader of the Senate, he tried to do it. The Negro press carried those stories.

Mc: Was that Civil Rights Act from the fifties considered a forward step or was it a mere palliative?

M: It was considered a half loaf. And a great many of the black publishers, including me, raised hell about it editorially at the time. But it was in some respects a forward step, without question. It wasn't half enough. Half a step.

Mc: Then after the campaign was over with and you had done all this work, did you have much contact with the Kennedy group after that?

M: Oh, yes. The big problem developed right after the election, because, having had the experience in 1944 where I spent just three months on the campaign and returned to my business, I was prepared to do that this time. So I packed up and drove my car back to Chicago. And on the night preceding the election, Sarge came out and we sat down together. In fact, we had a problem, Phil Klutznick of "Big Chicago." And we took an hour's time, Polk Brothers' time; we got that time from Polk Brothers to put Klutznick on the air to wipe off some of the criticism of the Ambassador. Drew Pearson and others had accused Ambassador Kennedy, the candidate's father, of being a Nazi supporter. To counter this charge, we asked Phil Klutznick, one of the most prominent Jewish leaders in the country to speak on TV on time donated by Polk Brothers. That's the reason I remember so well, because we had a bunch of writers around, and Klutznick didn't like anything anybody wrote. So I tried my hand at it, and fortunately Klutznick thought the stuff that I had put down was clear and a little more to the point. This is the reason I recall this episode so clearly.

Mc: So you packed up and drove back.

M: I was here. I was back home at my house on Greenwood. I never thought about returning to Washington. And of course, two days later I get another call, "Get back to Washington." This time it was Sarge, Bobby and the whole crew.

The number one challenge at that point was simply this: "We've got to recruit a whole leadership here for this new government. We've won it. Now we've got to do something with it." And of course jokingly the guys said, "Now, you told all those lies about what we're going to do for these minorities. Come on down here and help us make

some of those lies come true."

Immediately I was put on a task force with three people, Sarge Shriver, Tom Farmer, and--the guy's up at Harvard Business School now, he was with McNamara in the Pentagon--I can't think of his name, a very bright guy, brilliant guy--Adam Yarmolinsky. Anyhow, we were on a little task force to recruit. Sarge was the number one person. His job was to search out cabinet possibilities and others. Sarge asked me to do some research on some of them. As a matter of fact, one of my jobs was to dig out information on McNamara. I went all through the business books--Standard & Poor, et cetera--and all the other things to find out about McNamara. Since I had come from Michigan, I had to put calls in to people I knew to find out all about him. I wrote a long profile on McNamara.

And one afternoon, Sarge runs in, picks the stuff up, and says, "I'm on my way," and he went out to see McNamara. That night when he called me, he said, "I think we're going. I am going to have to see Jack."

My specific concern, however, was blacks. So I got together with some prominent Negroes around the country, including Judge Irvin Mollison, who was a Negro in the Customs Court and an old friend of mine, a Phi Beta Kappa from Chicago, very brilliant. We gathered the names of about 750 especially well-trained, well-qualified Negroes in various fields in the United States, without any regard to their political affiliation. I then began agitating, which I did most of the eight years--agitating for these people to be given appointments in the federal establishment. I finally got a commitment that they would right away do something unusual--give a Negro a position of policy-making, decision-making status. That turned out to be Bob Weaver, who was then made the head of the independent housing agencies of government.

During this period I had no direct contact that I recall with Lyndon Johnson. Most of it was with Bobby and Sarge, and occasionally with the President, prior to the inauguration.

Mc: You mentioned that you have recorded some material for the Kennedy Library. Did you cover the Kennedy years in that tape?

M: Yes. Most of it was about Bobby and JFK.

Mc: If you covered that there, then all we need to do here is make reference to it. And then any researching, scholars will be sure to pick it up. What I need to do is to pick up any connection you had with Johnson during those years.

M: I did not work with him in that talent search period. I saw him only occasionally. But after the inauguration, Vice President Johnson then was over in the EOB, Executive

Office Building. He called one meeting of various Negroes who had come into the government--Andy Hatcher, Bob Weaver, Marjorie Lawson, et cetera, a whole bunch of us, and began to ask questions about the race problem generally. And he brainstormed about current developments and issues. He also was asked to take over the business of the President's Committee on Equal Opportunity, or something like that, at the time--I've forgotten the exact language of the title.

Mc: That was the Equal Employment Opportunity?

M: Yes. It was called the President's Committee on Fair Employment, or something like that at that time. They subsequently reorganized it, and as a matter of fact it was a presidential committee, not a committee created by statute at that time. It was really a follow-up of something that the Eisenhower-Nixon team had begun. And Vice President Johnson was given the task of looking into it, reorganizing, trying to find out how he might make it more effective.

After the first meeting it was decided that we should hold frequent meetings. It was a sort of black cabinet meeting with the Vice President on civil rights, the whole spectrum of those problems. He, I thought, showed exceptional realism in dealing with the problem. He was a good listener, and everybody was free to say everything they had on their minds. I was very much attracted to him personally.

Mc: You didn't doubt his interest in this at all?

M: One of the reasons I think I was sold on him, he talked so much like Roosevelt about the problems of poverty and the problems that faced us, that my view was that whether he liked you as black or not was secondary to the greatest interest he seemed to have in humanity in terms of poverty and these other things which were my overriding concern. The question of whether he was a liberal or conservative faded into the background in the light of his seemingly real passion on these things that I was obsessed with. So I think it never occurred to me to doubt him because he was so convincing on these things, and his record and his admiration for the Roosevelt point of view, really, sold me almost immediately.

I had had occasion in 1944 to meet Roosevelt once or twice, and then when I was president of the Publishers Association I went to see him several times so I knew Roosevelt a little bit. Roosevelt was a great talker and he expounded his views and I sat with Lyndon Johnson and it was always reminiscent of FDR, to me. So I think probably he captivated me quicker perhaps than anybody else, I guess because I'd had that background.

Mc: Did you have any contact with Johnson immediately after the assassination of Kennedy?

M: I was there when he came in on the plane. I was in the White House when he came in. But he didn't have a sit-down session as such. But I think our relationship had developed over that period to the point that I knew that he would be a man that we could depend on--at least I felt it--and I think he knew enough about me to feel that he didn't really have to have a sit-down session with me, that we were going to do everything we could to help in any way we could.

Mc: Did you play a role in the civil rights act that was passed shortly after that in 1964 sometime?

M: Oh yes. I must say that in the Kennedy years my job was sort of liaison between the White House and the civil rights people--the NAACP and Urban League types, Whitney or Roy and Martin Luther King. I had worked with all these people during the campaign in one way or another, and I had had a long association with them in the newspaper business. So I think I had an easy entree. Bringing them to the White House was a part of my job, or getting them on the phone and telling them about certain policies, setting up appointments. Then during the Kennedy years I also was given the privilege of recommending people for the White House dinners.

As a matter of fact, the largest affair at the White House ever given for blacks we gave under Kennedy. It took me an awful time to persuade them, we had 800 blacks in there from across the nation. So I never stopped campaigning. I was appointed right after that, they gave me a title of deputy chairman of the Democratic National Committee right after the victory in 1960 which was really just a peg to hang a hat on. But I never stopped working with the Negro leadership in the interest of the administration and bringing them into contact with the White House and so forth. As a matter of fact, one interesting, funny thing happened on one of those occasions when the Vice President was present. We had a meeting with the civil rights leaders, and President Kennedy and Bobby and Lyndon Johnson and a few Cabinet officers were among those in the room--the Cabinet Room. The President had to fly away, so he greeted them, gave a little statement, and assured everyone of his concern about the immediate cause--and I've forgotten what that was--and then got up and ran out of the room and got into a helicopter and flew off and left Bobby on one side of the table and Lyndon Johnson on the other. And just before he left, he had asked the Vice President to carry on. I never will forget--I was on the side, but not at the table with the rest of them but like most of the White House aides, you stay a little bit to the side. At one point Bobby looked up at me and motioned for me to come over. That's usual, you know. So I went over, and he whispered in my ear, he said: "I've got a date, and I've got to get on this boat in a few minutes. Can you tell the Vice President to cut it short?"

So knowing something of the relationship of Bobby and the Vice President at the time, I was absolutely thunderstruck. So I went back to my former position and did nothing. Then he motioned again. I went back over there and he said, "Didn't I tell you to

tell the Vice President to shut up?" And Bobby was--I can't explain and describe adequately how he could talk to you. But anyway I was in such a dilemma I had to do something.

The Vice President was going full-steam. I went around the table and got close to him, and he saw me. I whispered in his ear, "Bobby has got to go, and he wants to close it up." He glared at me, and didn't stop for a moment. He just kept going. I thought surely this was the faux pas of the year, as far as I was concerned, but I didn't really know what to do. I knew that the Vice President, once he was aroused, was a pretty tough gentleman, and I was really sick. Fortunately, the meeting lasted only another ten or fifteen minutes. They ran out of questions, and the Vice President decided maybe he'd close it up. But this was just one of the experiences that almost gave me gray hair prematurely.

Mc: Then after Johnson became president, how did he use your talent?

M: The liaison role that I had been trying to fill with the Kennedys continued, bringing people into the White House, bringing black leaders in to meet the President, and selecting guests for those White House dinners and so forth. One of the things that I had to do with him that I did not have to do with Kennedy, was to write him memoranda. When JFK was president, Kenny O'Donnell, who was the appointments secretary in the Irish Mafia, and I were very, very tight. If I wanted to see the President, I'd just go over and tell Kenny, "I'd like to see the boss." On many occasions he would tell me to put my head in the door, and, "if he looks like he wants you in there, go on in." And on many occasions I did that, and on several of those occasions the President said, "What do you want? Come on in here." And then we'd talk the matter out.

But with President Johnson there was just no way to see him because the Appointments Secretary had things locked up, and the Vice President had a different style. None of his aides walked in that door without permission and so forth. So I began writing notes and using the closest aides. Vice President Johnson would be very thick with Califano one week, with Harry McPherson another, or with somebody else another week, and he would play all of the guys, and my job was find out which one was he close to that week and I'd sent that guy the memorandum.

I had a White House pass under the Kennedys, and I was allowed to keep it. So I went in the White House almost as if I worked there, although my offices were over at the Democratic National Committee.

On one of those occasions, I remember I was talking to Harry McPherson or one of the White House aides, and I was very unhappy about a speech that the President made. Some black leaders complained that in this long speech he devoted only forty-five words to Negroes, to the civil rights cause. He had counted the words, and I told Harry: "If

you're going to write speeches for the man, at least you can give the man a few more words. I'm sick and tired of this."

So one day in the corridor--I may have been coming out of Califano's office--and LBJ saw me and grabbed me by the lapel, and he says: "I know you've been around here arguing about my speeches. Now, what the hell do you want? Rhetoric or action? I'm giving you action!"

I told him: "My business is propaganda, publicity. I want the action." But he was very forceful about it. And I had no quarrel with the actions. But as a publicist I had a problem with the Negro papers, and often the leaders would take exception to anything.

Mc: Did you have much contact with congressmen in your work? Did you ever go up on the Hill and talk to them?

M: Occasionally, I tried to avoid that and work through the White House if I wanted things done.

But I did have one problem I never will forget. Right after the JFK assassination, two weeks later, I went into the hospital and I was in the hospital for six weeks. I was very unhappy. So the new President, LBJ, called me in the hospital. I thought he was calling me to ask how I felt or something. He called and said, "What's this you told me about this woman out in St. Louis that you wanted on the Civil Rights Commission--Frankie Freeman?" I said, "Yes, sir, Mr. President. That's right." "You recommend her?" I said, "Yes, sir, she's excellent. She's a black woman, she ought to get the job, she's smart," and I went on to explain the political significance of it. He said, "Well, now, who else could I check on this?" I said, "You could talk to Bob Weaver or some of the guys. They know her." He had not asked me anything about my health, hospital, anything! But I had received, earlier, flowers and letters and things from the White House and they just said, "President Johnson." But I knew that Lee White who was his legal counsel had been sending them. So I was really salty and said to myself, "At least he could ask how I felt!"

But anyway, at eight o'clock in the evening of the same day, he called back. He says, "I've got your sidekick over here, Bob Weaver, and tell him about that Frankie Freeman and what you guys think about her." So Bob Weaver got on the phone. And I said, "Well, what the hell! I think this is a good political stroke, but more than that, it's in the national interest." Bob said, "Yes, I know. I told the boss."

The President was friendly, but this is the way he operated. I got in trouble with the Hill on this, because two days later President Johnson goes to St. Louis, calls this lady to his hotel room. It leaks in the paper that he's thinking about this appointment, and the two senators from Missouri, Long and Symington, didn't know anything about it. I'm in

the hospital. My office gets calls and then calls me. Senator Long and all of them are angry with me. I said, "Well, what is it all about?" He says, "Well, who told the President--where did the President get this name from? Who's making these appointments anyhow!"

I had so much flak, I had an awful time explaining to the two senators that my job was just flushing up names and it was not my job to handle the protocol between the White House and Congress; that was a White House job. And normally it is the White House job. You have liaison workers in the White House. But President Johnson just ignored the whole system, and I got really burnt up. So that taught me a lesson, and I stayed away from it as much as I could.

And I had another bad experience with a liberal senator from Pennsylvania over a black judicial appointment I wanted President Kennedy to make. I called the senator and the senator told me to mind my business. I told him that the prestige and the stature of the President of the United States among the blacks was my business, so we had an argument over the phone. I subsequently lost that one.

Mc: You know, it's a cliche that Johnson as president was interested in appointing people from minorities. Is this true from your point of view?

M: I think that President Johnson was very sensitive to the general charge that black did not have true equality of opportunity in the federal establishment. He also recognized the political value of getting good men in spots so if he found exceptionally qualified blacks he really covered two bases. He got the job done, but he also got some political points.

Now my feeling about Johnson, and this is what I used to tell many Negroes in the newspaper business and others--is that since Johnson was a Southerner, he would normally, being a good politician, lean over backwards to prove that he was not a racist. Further, there's something in the folklore of Negro life that a reconstructed Southerner is really far more liberal than a liberal Yankee. And I exploited this part of the folklore.

Mc: Is that true as far as Johnson is concerned?

M: I think it is true. I think Johnson did many things that Kennedy would never have done, including appointing Andrew Brimmer as a governor of the Federal Reserve Board. I don't think I'd have ever gotten Kennedy to do that. Johnson did it without prodding. Nobody pressured Johnson, nobody prodded him, nobody told him, nobody marched, nobody did anything. Johnson saw the merits of this guy. Of course, I believe I know why he did it. It was rumored that he might have had another pressure, but he did it without pressure. At the time he was supposed to be very angry at William McChesney Martin and he put Brimmer on there. Furthermore, Brimmer was super qualified.

Mc: You can't argue with that.

M: On his merits he was better qualified than anybody on the board of governors so Johnson had an ace in the hole. It was really funny.

Mc: How about the appointment of Robert Weaver as a cabinet secretary?

M: That was a trying year. This thing had been bruited about so long, and Weaver unfortunately was getting advice from forty different places, and a lot of it was anti-Johnson. There were rumors that since Weaver was not immediately appointed once the new department was created, that he should resign because the President was not going to appoint a black. Then there were stories in the papers about others to whom the President had talked about the job, and Bob felt terribly humiliated.

But President Johnson I think enjoys--I shouldn't probably say this--but I think he really gets a little thrill out of putting the guys through the wringer, because I must have talked with him fifteen or twenty times about this. And some of the calls were initiated by him. He would call me at home at ten o'clock at night and just talk about it. And the ploy that I remember best was that he said--and I think he said this to others--"I can accept that resignation just as quickly as he can give it to me. You just tell him that you're working on it, and he's not ruled out. I'm after the best man." And then the last ploy--I never will forget--he said: "I'm going to tell Joe"--he was talking about Joe Califano--"to tell him thus-and-so. I'm going to tell Lee White to tell him thus-and-so. And I want you to tell him thus-and-so."

What really amused me was Johnson had three of us who knew Weaver well each telling him a different story. This was the greatest game I've ever seen. But in the end he said, "Now, I know that if I don't appoint this, you're going to call me a confederate son of a bitch! I know what you're thinking," he told me.

So this game went on so long, and it was really--

Mc: It was months.

M: Yes, it was trying. But I was told by labor leadership who had just left Johnson that they were not going to put Bob Weaver in. In fact, one of the labor leaders who was very strong and whom I knew personally came to me and said, "You are doing a disservice. You should tell Bob to quit."

I said, "I am not going to tell him to quit. I'm going to tell him to stick, and I'm going to fight to the end to get this job."

I talked with Bob at home; I talked with Bob at the office. I said, "Don't listen to

these people. I think I know this man." And I went on to tell him about a lot of other stories in connection with Johnson people. I said, "He puts whites through the wringer; he puts everybody through a wringer. Don't let that disturb you."

Mc: He must have been getting nervous about that time.

M: He was in horrible shape psychologically.

Anyway, one night I get a call at nine-thirty or so, the last call. He said, "I'm going with him. I'm going with Bob Weaver." He called me up and told me. This was ten days or so before anything happened. I thought when he called me he was going to do it the next day. But having been around long enough, I said nothing to anybody, not even to my wife. I was afraid to say anything to anybody.

But I saw Bob the next day, walking down the street, on K Street. I was going to the club, and he was going in the other direction. Bob looked so depressed, and so I said to him: "Bob, why the hell are you frowning? You should be smiling!" He looked at me, and I said, "Now, didn't I tell you to keep your courage up! Smile!"

He says, "You sound like you know something."

I said, "No, I don't know a thing." But I had a big smile, a big grin. But he perked up.

I went over to the White House. I thought there would be an announcement. I monitored the press briefings. Nothing happened. Nobody saying anything. The next day, the next day, the next day, I was really up a tree. I said, "He told me he was going to do this." And day and day went by!

Then one morning about ten o'clock I got a call from the White House. The boss was on the phone. He said, "I was sitting in the toilet here and I got to thinking about you. Why don't you come over here for a while, and when you come over, hang around Watson's office!"

I said, "Hang around--?"

He says, "Yes, just hang around Watson's office." This was all he told me.

So I went over to the White House and I showed up in Watson's office. Watson said, "What are you here for?"

I said, "The Commander in Chief told me to hang around your office." And he had a big broad smile on his face. Then the cabinet started coming in, and lo and behold,

here's Bob Weaver and his wife coming down an inside corridor, and Woods and his wife coming down an inside corridor. I knew when Bob saw me it was a great day. They called a press conference, had the cameras all set up in the Fish Room. I knew what all the show was then. Of course, I slipped in there behind these TV cameras, and I know a lot of the White House correspondents. As soon as I stuck my face in there, they all looked and they all figured--at least three of them I know said, "I know what it is now, dammit." Because it was too late then to call their papers. They couldn't move. It was about ten or fifteen minutes before they started to make the announcement. It was a great day.

I've got a wonderful picture that followed that because he called me in the office with Bob and Woods, and we just had a ball in his office. He shook my hand; I've got a picture of him shaking my hand, Bob and Woods all smiling. It was a great day. (Laughter)

Mc: Was there a good reaction to that from the Negro community?

M: Yes. Now, let me explain this. Bob Weaver was not regarded as a militant, he wasn't regarded as a very strong civil rights guy. But for years, even earlier when he had been in the housing thing, we actually had sold the leadership. I privately had talked with most of the civil rights guys from King on down and up, "This guy, whatever you think of his militancy or whether you call him an Uncle Tom or whatnot, has a chance to make history. Let's make some history." I think we cooled off most of the antagonisms. It wasn't antagonism, but they felt that Bob was, in the vernacular, a white folk's nigger. You see, that's to be honest with you. But we had overcome that by that time.

Mc: But he was the first Negro cabinet member.

M: First Negro in American history in the cabinet of a president of the United States. You see, earlier, I forgot all this, but back in 1960 during that campaign Lodge had said in New York that if Nixon and he were to win they would put a Negro in the cabinet, or something like that. Then Nixon quickly disavowed it.

And at that moment I told the Kennedys, "I don't want to go through another campaign, ever go through a campaign with the Democratic Party where we've got to talk about a Negro in the cabinet or the Supreme Court of the United States. After I came back to work later for them, they told me, "The day will come when you won't ever to worry about those two spots." I said then, "When we get the cabinet and the Supreme Court, I quit. That's all I want. I want to make that history." Because politics was not my business.

Mc: You got to seat the Supreme Court position, too, then.

M: Yes. That was the next one; that was the great one. But the President was sold on that one.

Mc: He didn't put you through the wringer on that one?

M: Yes, he did, too. As a matter of fact, he moved Thurgood Marshall from a judiciary spot in the Appellate Court to the Solicitor General's spot. He told me I was agitating about that. He says, "He's not doing a job over there. Now, I'm not going to tell you, but he ain't worth a damn as an administrator." He won't tell anybody, but he told me! So we yackety-yacked about that.

But he had in his mind giving Marshall the exposure and this is why he put him in as solicitor general, so should he put him on the Supreme Court he would not be considered simply a one-issue lawyer concerned only with civil rights. And in doing that, I think he had a great deal of wisdom and I think he moved properly. But he never gave you the satisfaction of feeling that you had a sure bet. You never knew what he was going to do next. Then he really cooled me off when he told me he wasn't worth a damn as an administrator, because Cox, who had preceded him, was a very efficient operator. He told me that Thurgood "doesn't pay any attention to half the cases; he just gets those he likes. But he really ripped him up.

There again, on the occasion of the appointment, it was fantastic. I got a call in the middle of the day again, this was the morning, and he again said, "How do you come into the White House when you come to the White House?" I said, "Normally, I come in EOB at the 17th Street side, and then go through EOB, and then go through the basement."

"Come on over here. Make sure nobody sees you." This was that morning. So I go over there. Watson tells me to go on in and sit down. I go on in there, and the President is standing up.

"What have you been doing?" Just one pleasantry after another. Well, I still don't know why I'm there. Then about ten minutes later Cliff Alexander showed up. Cliff and I were very close friends. I helped put Cliff on the White House staff by appealing to Walter Jenkins. Cliff worked for National Security with McGeorge Bundy. But I needed a Cliff in the campaign of 1964, so I wanted him on the main White House payroll so he wouldn't be hatched. Jenkins pulled that one. Anyway, Cliff showed up, too. So, as soon as Cliff showed up, I think, "Uh-oh, this must be it." Cliff doesn't know, so we both stood around there wondering, although we began to feel this must be something big. He was having fun with us, you see--the President was.

A few minutes later here comes Thurgood. Thurgood walks in. So the three of us are in there, and we all knew the story then. I think the President just had a ball. He

enjoys it so, you know. He knew how happy I was, because I'd been agitating. It was one of the things I'd been after for years. He talked to us a little bit, and then Thurgood explained how he was told to come in the White House. He was told to join a tour at the Mansion, and that's what he did. He joined a tour at the Mansion, and then when he got into the White House, he came through that corridor into the Oval Office, to the West Wing. So nobody knew he was in there.

And then the President got on that telephone of his and started calling. He called Dirksen; he called the Supreme Court Chief Justice, got him out in California somewhere. But he called all over the nation. He lined these guys up and said, "Now, I'm about to do this and I want you to go with me." I never will forget Dirksen, the "Wizard of Ooze", that voice of his. "Yeah, Mr. President." And that's the way that happened.

Mc: Do you have any insight on how Lyndon Johnson ever got Dirksen to cooperate on civil rights legislation?

M: People talk about Johnson's style, but I don't think there's a warmer individual in America on a person-to-person relationship. He needed Dirksen, and he worked on Dirksen, flattered Dirksen, and he gave Dirksen certain privileges. As a matter of fact, when the Republican vacancy developed on the EEOC, he told Dirksen to name somebody. He gave Dirksen the right to pick him.

Mc: Again, was the appointment of Thurgood Marshall well received?

M: Fantastically well received, in this sense. You see, we had moved beyond the question of any appointment of any black being a major--not a major, but a super colossal production, because by the time of that appointment, we had put several hundred blacks in various positions of importance. And I think the feeling in black America was that sooner or later that this would happen. It came as a pleasant surprise to many. But we were moving beyond this business of appointments being the thing that black America itself was keenest about.

Mc: Did you have any trouble in your liaison work with the more militant blacks?

M: Yes. I had a running battle with Martin Luther King and Johnson. We managed much better with Jack Kennedy because at that time I think King was somewhat flattered and honored by being invited to the White House. It was old hat by this time, and the blandishments of the powerful just sort of rubbed off because King himself had become a Nobel Prize winner. So we had the problem of protocol with him. If he wanted to see the President privately, he didn't want anybody else present, and a lot of things like that. The Vietnam issue split them completely. And then he finally didn't want to see him at all. I set up two appointments which he cancelled out.

Mc: You mean King cancelled out on Johnson?

M: Yes, King. And the President was most unhappy.

Mc: You mean King refused to see the President?

M: Yes.

Mc: What was the trouble between the two? Was Johnson not moving to the satisfaction of King, or what?

M: I think certainly that was some part of of it. The Vietnam war was another. I think King was under some pressure from the rising black militants himself, in his leadership role in the United States. Now the question arose, and it also arose with Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young, about being too close to the President, and more militant blacks began the snide attacks claiming that they were captives of the White House. In order to maintain their own leadership posture, they had somehow to indicate that while they agreed with the President on some things, some things they didn't agree with. As a matter of fact, Johnson told Roy Wilkins once, "You can criticize me, you can hit me a little bit," because Johnson was worried about Wilkins' posture with his own people. That shows you what a smart politician Johnson was, that he was big enough--and people say how sensitive he is to criticism, and yet he suggested to Roy I remember once, "You can take a potshot at me. I can understand that. After all, you're not...."

Mc: Then what happened with King's death? That was a crisis point apparently.

M: It was a major disaster. The assassination was just overwhelming bad news.

Mc: Was it a shock to you personally?

M: Yes, it was a shock. But I think you've got to remember that King was having great difficulty at that period. He was under an awful lot of fire from some Negroes. His non-violence concepts were being repudiated.

Mc: His leadership was slipping, wasn't it?

M: Yes. It was really slipping because while he seemed to get a lot of press, the criticism in black militant circles, Panthers, et cetera, was just rising to a high point. And the Malcolm X assassination was having its effect. Of course, the assassination itself turned things around.

Mc: Was there any kind of meeting to decide what to do about the funeral arrangements, anything of that nature?

M: I wasn't in on them. I had some other problems. You see, my concern immediately was how could we pull the leadership together, and frankly I was very involved because I was concerned with the direction of the militants. And with King gone, I went to work. I was on the telephone trying to sound people out and talk about it. I really didn't get into the funeral aspects so much because I was thinking about how you'd regroup. I spent my time in that area.

Mc: Did you have any meetings to that effect, or did you spend all your time on the phone?

M: Most of it on the phone.

Mc: I heard a vague story--I don't know whether it' s true or not--about a meeting in the White House after this in which Floyd McKissick tried to show up but didn't make it in time, it broke up, and that you played a role in--

M: That was at the King funeral.

Mc: Was that when that was?

M: Yes. You see, what happened, we had this memorial service over at the Cathedral. The President called them all to the White House--the civil rights leaders--and he joined with them in going over to the Cathedral to pay tribute to King. That was right in Washington. I had McKissick's name on the list because I wanted McKissick there. McKissick was giving us a bad time. But I figured at this occasion I might be able to get him in. We were successful in getting everybody else there.

And in the middle of the meeting at the White House Cabinet Room I got a call from the west basement. They said that McKissick and some people were outside and the Secret Service wasn't letting them in. I said, "Well, I'll leave here and get with them and work it out." But I must have stayed five minutes or so before I went down. And the next thing I knew I got another call and McKissick had left and was calling from the outside. He was no longer at the gate, but he was calling from another phone. He called me and blessed me out. So then I called the Secret Service and I said, "Let these guys in the west basement." I didn't know how many--it turned out there were only two--McKissick and Roy Innis. In the interim I whispered to Roy Wilkins, I said, "I've got a problem. McKissick is acting up, and I don't know what the problem is. I don't want to mess this thing up because you fellows are supposed to go with the President over to the service at the Cathedral."

He said, "Well, keep him out of here. We don't want any confusion." So I was trying to decide in my mind how to handle it.

Anyway, I left the meeting and as soon as everybody got in the cars, I went down

to McKissick who was then in the west basement with his associate. But they didn't know what was happening upstairs because they were inside. So when I got downstairs, McKissick was warm and Roy Innis was raising hell. I knew Roy, but I didn't know him well. I knew McKissick, because I had given McKissick some money when he first started out down there in North Carolina--personal checks, not from the committee, just from me--to help him on registration, before he even got started. So I had a relationship with him.

He said, "I'm not going to the meeting"--that's what McKissick said--"without Roy Innis." Well, I didn't tell him the meeting had disbanded and all were en route to the Cathedral.

I said, "Well, you put me on the spot. We sent this invitation to you. You did not indicate to anybody that you were bringing anybody else. The Secret Service doesn't know anything about it, and I am caught now between you insisting that a guy come that the Secret Service didn't know anything about, and you're in the west basement simply because. . . ." So we just had a big argument. But I was holding for time, so I just argued and argued.

So he gave Johnson hell, and Roy Innis hell. I said, "I am a political worker, trying to be helpful, but I cannot overrule the procedures of the White House. You've got to let people know."

(Interruption)

Mc: You'd just told McKissick that you had to let people know you were coming.

M: Yes. I said. "The Secret Service, the protocol of this place. You've been here often enough to know. You insist on bringing an associate. Suppose everybody who was invited insisting on bringing an associate, how could we have a meeting!" And we had a big argument, but I was really sparring for time because I wanted the cars to vanish before we got back outside. So after about ten minutes of fake argument, I said, "Look, let me check on the meeting." I knew they'd gone by now.

So I went back upstairs, and then I came back downstairs, "Oh, my God, the meeting is all over." You see, they didn't know anything about the arrangements of the meeting. And so I said, "It's anticlimactic, it's an academic discussion. The meeting's over with."

He just started raising hell. "I'm going to hold a press conference, and so on."

So then I said, "Now listen, Floyd, let me get with you. Where are you staying? Let's talk this thing out. I'll assure you that the esteem in which you are held by the

President is beyond question. You got an invitation from him to come. He didn't know of your insistence that you can't come without your aide." So I had a real argument with him.

Then I walked him out of the basement, walked him down the Executive Office Building, got him a cab. I talked to him and I said: "After all," then I started explaining to him, "I'm doing all that one guy can do, but you've got to be reasonable."

I never will forget Roy Innis. Roy Innis said, "Well, I'm not blaming you, but I'll tell you, we're going to change this to give you power. You haven't got any power."

I said, "That's right. I sure don't." Boy, that was really a donnybrook. But I missed the whole affair because of McKissick and Roy Innis.

Mc: If he had shown up by himself, he would have been in.

M: He would have been in. You see, the Secret Service stops these people at the front.

Mc: Right.

M: There was no record of anybody but McKissick. But McKissick said, "I'm not coming in unless Roy Innis comes in." He refused to do it.

Mc: Why didn't you want Roy Innis in?

M: I would have gotten Roy Innis in, but, you see, Roy is the kind of guy that might want to disrupt things. Further, if he saw Whitney Young, Roy Wilkins and some of the others in that room, he might decide to try some one-upmanship; in fact, McKissisk might. You see, that was a danger I was running with McKissick. But Roy is far less protocol-conscious than McKissick, because Roy was on the make.

You see, when these black leaders are on the make, they'll do anything to get in the headlines. So I began to think about it. What would be a perfect occasion for a real headline to have a formal ceremony with the President of the United States memorializing King and have Roy Innis blast everybody! As a matter of fact, I was afraid McKissick was going to do it. But I was even more afraid of Roy.

Mc: Let me ask you one final question. I know you're under pressure. What are Lyndon Johnson's achievements and what are his failures in this realm of civil rights development? Can you summarize that?

M: I think one of Johnson's greatest achievements was his willingness to make history in terms of these appointments that we have talked about. His overriding concern in poverty

and issues which are meeting the basic needs of the American people--black and white.

Mc: This would be housing and--?

M: Housing, jobs--the whole poverty spectrum. I think that he had one other thing, and it's the key, I think, to his whole mental process--all of his thinking. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was probably far greater in its ultimate impact on this society than any other laws, because he had a feeling, which I shared, that once you gave that black vote to those millions in the South who had not been able to vote, you would give them a tool with which they could create a new era for themselves. And he was convinced that that political route, which was within the framework of our constitution and our tradition, would ultimately enable blacks to reach a new degree of equality and freedom in the South and have an impact on the Congress and everywhere else.

Mc: Was this right? Was this analysis correct?

M: Absolutely. Completely correct. As a matter of fact, few men in America today had the vision of Johnson on that issue. Today, as far as I'm concerned, that is still the number one battle. Because should we really get true political development among the millions of that South, you will have an impact on the Dixiecrat bloc in the Congress. And it is my view, and I've stated it, that this country is not run by the President. It's run by the coalition of that Dixiecratic bloc with the reactionary Republicans. Not one dime can get out of that Treasury without that bloc agreeing to it--that coalition.

Secondly, all of the legislation has to be supported by funds, had to be funded, you have to have teeth in the civil rights law. And the reason that most of the things are teethless and you don't have appropriations for half the things is because the coalition won't permit it.

Mc: Do you think the voting will eventually override this bloc, will break it up?

M: I think the black vote is large enough potentially in the South to knock off some of the Dixiecrats, and large enough to influence the thinking of others and water down this racist, arrogant attitude on these problems.

I don't say you can knock that Dixiecratic bloc off that easily. But once you penetrate that bloc and change the political climate--and that is already being indicated because it's more and more difficult for an outright bigot now to win in many places where just a few years ago he was a shoo-in. This despite the backlash, because, you see, in the congressional situation you run in districts.

There are eighty-five congressional districts in the United States in which the black population exceeds 25 per cent, and in about twenty-six of these districts it exceeds 35 per

cent. Now, in this black political development there are some values in an alliance with poor whites and organized labor--and you have seen that in some races already--that good political thinking where you can explain to the constituence that "we're both poor, black and white, and that while we disagree on a hell of a lot of things, we do have common ground on getting this bigot out, because he's not only keeping the blacks down, but he's not doing a damned thing for human poverty."

Now the long view--I'm still struggling to get the black leadership and the militants and the radicals, I talk to them all the time, talk to them now--the greatest program they could have would be to beat the bushes of the hinterlands, of the boondocks of the South, and get everyone registered and educate them politically.

And I'm not speaking narrowly now in terms of party. I'm thinking in the national interest. In the state of Alabama we could have elected a black congressman last term. There's one district that's almost 60 per cent black. Now, the problem is, if in that district you don't want to run a black, or you'd think that there'd be a backlash, you could still get a liberal white. And this is why political education is so important. You don't always have to have a black man, but you can choose between your candidates and get those who are at least half-way liberal. And I think that Lyndon Johnson understood this better than anybody else.

Mc: Given the situation he is in, the climate of political opinion, could he have done anything more?

M: There are a few things that I think he could have done. But I'll tell you the truth. His obsession with the Vietnam thing probably hurt him more than anything I know, because it did take away a great deal of his time, concerns, and interests in the poverty program and these other things, in addition to costing money and so forth. And I think there was a certain inflexibility on points of view there. But I think historically he's going to turn out to have been probably--to have made the greatest impact on civil rights than any president in American history.

Mc: Perhaps on that note, we should call the interview to an end. Thank you very much.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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