INTERVIEW VII

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INTERVIEWEE: HARRY McPHERSON

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mr. McPherson's office, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

G: Well, let's start with the beginning of 1957. As you've looked over that outline is there anything that springs to mind right away about that year?

M: I've made notes here and I'll just refer to them as I go along, to make recommendations to you for other people to see. The first name that just jumps off the page for me is Gerry Siegel, who is here in Washington as, I think, the Democratic minority counsel of the Senate Rules Committee. He was my boss in the Senate when I first got there, for the first couple of years, went off to Harvard the third year. Gerry was what I was to become in the White House; he was the Jewish contact, the difference between him and me being that he's Jewish. When the Mideast Resolution issue was before the Senate in 1957, when all the turmoil about the Israeli presence in Sinai and what kind of action the United States would take, whether we would have sanctions against Israel, Gerry was receiving a lot of comment from the Jewish community and was in close touch with a number of the leaders of the Jewish community and conveying those to Johnson.

Johnson was friendly with many of those Jews and continued to be throughout his political career, while having a kind of amused, Texas view of Jews.I remember one time when I kept pushing Johnson to take up a bill that would achieve some immigration reform and let a lot of people in the country. I kept pushing him on it; he wanted to hold it for trading purposes. And he turned around and asked me if I didn't have a lot of Jew in me, and I looked at him kind of stunned. And he said, "I mean you're always pushing things like this," and apparently so was the American Jewish Congress and a lot of other things. So he had a little--I wouldn't call it anti-Semitism, it was a little of the southern, country attitude toward urban, very different Jews. At the same time he was kind of Jewish himself.

There was a wonderful piece that someone did when we were in the White House, some Jewish writer talked about characteristics of the non-Jewish Jew and characteristics of the Jewish non-Jew. And the classic non-Jewish Jew was a Texan, just generally, the Texan being loud and wearing his heart on his sleeve, and being full of complaints, and fun, and being a little bit too much at all points. It was a Jewish writer who wrote this. And Johnson was kind of a non-Jewish Jew in that sense; he was outrageous and he talked too much and demanded too much and was never satisfied and was a lot of fun, all the things that we kind of associate with Jewish people.

In any event, all that said, Gerry Siegel was in contact with a man, and I remember the name of Barney Balaban, who was, I think, the head of Paramount Pictures and very active as a friend of Israel. Johnson's connection and Gerry Seigel's connection in 1957, in the early part of that, with Paramount was through Edwin Weisl, Sr., who was later to come down and be the counsel of the space investigation when the Russians put up Sputnik. Weisl and Eliot Janeway and others had produced a lot of Jewish money for Johnson way back. And my understanding is, at least from Eliot Janeway, that it started when Johnson first ran, that he got some money from Jewish contributors in New York. And Weisl, Balaban, and who knows who else communicated with Gerry Siegel and he provided Johnson with a lot of feeling for and understanding of the Jewish community's views on the Israeli sanction question.

Johnson, no doubt thinking of 1960, thinking of his future role as a senior Democratic politician, wanted to be on the right side of the Jewish community. And he took the opportunity to support their protectiveness toward Israel, at the same time wanting to take advantage of [John Foster] Dulles' leaning against Israel, wanting to take political advantage of that, but at the same time not wanting to go too far and embarrass Eisenhower or to disturb Eisenhower. Johnson had what I believe was a partly political and partly, let's say, institutional regard for President Eisenhower's, for any president's, prerogatives in the field of foreign affairs. He had really absorbed the lesson from somebody, perhaps from FDR and the FDR experience prior to World War II, that if you were in Congress you should not attempt to run the foreign policy of the United States, that you should not embarrass the president when he had to deal abroad. It didn't mean that you didn't assert your views in the appropriate way, but you didn't try to run over the president. From a political point of view, you didn't want to risk getting the country riled up as you tried to take over the management of foreign affairs from a popular president. But anyway, all that comes back to mind, and Gerry Siegel would be your best source for it, and I commend you to him.

G: Well, would you say that Johnson's tie to Israel during this period was a politically-based tie based on his support from Weisl and I guess all the others?

M: When you consider the people, the Jews in the Roosevelt Administration that he must have been friends with. He was a friend of Bobby Lehman of Lehman Brothers. In fact, he called him often. He was a friend of the Ben Cohens and the Sam Rosenmans, and the guys who had been around FDR, the Jewish lawyers and contributors who had been around. So they were part of the political community that he was accustomed to.

Abe Fortas, just jumping over many years, when Abe Fortas' nomination came up for chief justice, there was a lot of Republican opposition, which ultimately defeated the nomination. I was in the White House. We were all--Larry Temple and I and a couple of other people were assigned the job of trying to rally support for Fortas. And someone

sent me a photograph of Abe and David Lloyd Kreeger, the Washington philanthropist and very successful businessman. The two men were violinists in their spare time and there was a photograph of them playing a duet at a benefit and they each had yarmulkes on, you know, the little cap. I sent the picture to Johnson. I had had trouble getting the Jewish community fired up about Abe, and I sent it to Johnson and said, "I want to circulate this because this is great. Here's Abe in a yarmulke playing a fiddle, and I'll circulate it and try to get the Jewish groups behind us." And the photograph came back with a note on it typed by a secretary, "The President says, 'This doesn't mean a goddamn thing. I've had on more of those things than Abe has.'"

(Laughter)

And Abe was a non-practicing Jew, and Johnson had been to a thousand fund-raisers where he'd had a yarmulke on. I thought that really betrayed a lot of understanding of the--

G: That's marvelous.

Well, had the financial support not been there, do you think that LBJ would have had the same sympathy for Israel's cause? Did he seem in tune with it?

M: Always to have [been]. Well, it was part--Johnson was a national Democrat and he had to, as we know, make his peace with the southern Democrats. He was their candidate for majority leader, and they were the powers of the Senate; in his days as majority leader they had the majority of the committees under their chairmanship. But all that said, he was a national Democrat, and national Democrats are pro-Jewish; they are pro-Israel. It goes back a very long way, it goes back--in fact the current popularity of Reagan among a lot of Jews, not a majority but a lot of them, is something I think probably shortlived. In the top of the Republican Party I think there is a feeling that the United States' policy in the Middle East is much too dominated by Israel. In the Democratic Party, I think there is a tradition that goes back to Truman and the recognition of Israel. There are a lot of Democrats, a lot of great Democrats like Dean Acheson, who thought that was a big mistake, but it's been the majority position of Democrats. So as a national Democrat, I think he would have been pro-Israel and therefore sensitive to Jewish issues. He was not rawly sensitive. I mean, he wasn't as quick to respond as somebody from New York or Illinois or Pennsylvania would have been. But there was some Jew in Texas whom Johnson referred to as the fellow who first got him interested in Jewish matters.

G: Was it Louis Novy?

M: Yes, I believe that's right.

G: What did he say about Novy, do you remember?

M: I don't remember very much except that "I've always been a friend of Israel. Louis Novy made me a friend," that sort of thing. But you know, with Johnson, here was a man coming into Washington, into political life in 1937-38 when the concentration camps were operating. He had a lot to do, I believe, with--I think he introduced an immigration bill to bring in Erich Leinsdorf, and that was through Jewish friends urging that on him. So even before the war, as a young congressman from Texas, his sensitivities, as we'd say nowadays, his consciousness was raised on the Jewish issue and the anti-Semitism issue.

G: Well, in Texas politics was there a degree of anti-Semitism that LBJ had to deal with?

M: Oh, there's always been. In the South and Southwest, there's always been a degree of anti-Semitism latent in both the Ku Klux Klan kind of politics and southern populism. The old populists were very often strongly anti-Semitic, and a lot of that had to do with their feeling that the fortunes of southern farmers were being controlled by New York banks and New York factors who were largely Jewish. You know, that runs parallel to a lot of very open tolerance of Jews in the South. My dear friend, John Roche, Professor Roche who was in the Johnson White House, once wrote a brilliant essay--I don't know whether it's original to him, probably not, but it's the first time I'd ever seen it put together--about how in any society a politician does all right if he subscribes to the prevailing idol in that society, and he's free to have views on all kinds of things otherwise. So if a southern Jew in Civil War times was pro-slavery, he was tolerated quite openly. Well, Judah Benjamin was the secretary of state, secretary of war, and that was okay. So you have that strain, but you also have the populist strain that came later that was I think pretty strongly anti-Semitic, a lot of it. So that was probably latent in Texas politics. I wouldn't be surprised to find it coming out in a number of Texas populist leaders of the past.

G: 1957 also seems to have been a time when LBJ was more involved in foreign policy in general. He's more assertive, taking more of a leadership role. I guess Walter George was ailing or about to die--he did die that year, I think. Was this the case? Did you observe this?

M: It seemed to me that he was very much involved in it; he was involved in everything.1957 was kind of a banner year for the Johnson legislative technique. Why don't we just run through this thing, your chronology here, and I'll tell you things that come to mind.

On page 2, January 8, Johnson put Kennedy on the Foreign Relations Committee, passing over [Estes] Kefauver who complained about it. Johnson and Kefauver were just oil and water. Kefauver was a loose cannon, he was an outsider. He voted on the same side with Johnson, I imagine--my guess is that their voting patterns on an awful lot of issues were just identical. But there wasn't a lot of love lost between the two, and it was [due to] the unpredictability of Kefauver and his open kicking of a lot of Democratic regimes, his pursuit of popularity through the use of television, all of which was a little bit

nervous-making to Johnson and the others. But just largely the fact that you couldn't depend on the guy. He wasn't somebody that you could rely on really to do anything.

G: Was publicity a factor here, too, that Kefauver seemed to leak things for his own public relations that Johnson wanted him to not leak?

M: Oh, yes. I'm sure that's so; I'm sure that's so. Interesting that Johnson here already was working to advance the cause of John Kennedy.

G: Why did he do that, do you think?

M: Well, I don't know. Joe Kennedy was a big fan of Lyndon Johnson's, and they had had many a talk together. Johnson of course spoke on behalf of Kennedy against Kefauver in the 1956 [Democratic National] Convention, for vice president. It takes us back to the Jewish issue because when Johnson accepted the nomination of vice president in 1960, Ed Weisl, Sr. and Eliot Janeway denounced him to his face, because they could not imagine their friend Lyndon Johnson going on a ticket with the son of Joe Kennedy. Joe Kennedy was a vitriolic anti-Semite and had been on the board of Paramount with Ed Weisl, Sr. At one point, in one crucial meeting involving the future of Paramount, I think, Ed Weisl took a position opposed to that of Joe Kennedy, Sr. and Kennedy said, "I don't have to sit here and listen to some kike lawyer." And that finished it forever with Ed Weisl. And that his friend Lyndon Johnson could go on the ticket with the son of such a man was inconceivable to him.

Johnson on Rule 22, the filibuster rule, on January 9, he and [William] Knowland were modifying the filibuster rule to some degree, not much. Johnson always had to look out at the beginning of a new session for a fight on Rule 22, and Nixon was always on the lookout for a way to make himself a hero with those who wanted to change Rule 22. Nixon was really, I think, trying--it was assumed that he was trying--to win the black vote for the Republicans. I think he really thought that was the way to crack the Democratic grip on a lot of states. If he could put together the traditional Republican vote and bring in the black vote, bring it back to the party of Lincoln, that you could really do yourself a lot of good as a Republican. And Nixon issued, as vice president, a ruling one time on Rule 22 that was quite radical in terms of the Senate, in effect saying that the Senate at the beginning of each session, each new Congress, could change its rules and cut off debate by a majority vote. In other words, the Senate was not bound by the old two-thirds rule, cloture, when it came to adopting that rule as well as the others at the beginning of a session. It couldn't bind itself forever, from one Congress to the next. This set off fireworks, a lot of grand arguments, and they went on for days on both sides. What it really came down to on Johnson's part was trying to protect his friends, the southern committee chairmen, so that he didn't see them go over and clinch their relationship, their alliance with the Republicans forever. So he tried to protect them.

G: Let me ask you about one other appointment here, LBJ himself moving from Finance to Appropriations. Why did he do that?

M: I don't remember. He had been on Finance in 1956 when the natural gas bill came up, and I think the feeling was that he had inevitably suffered some scars during that natural gas fight, not because of anything he had done, at least the bill was defeated in 1956 largely because of the money that was being thrown around by the oil and gas industry. I think he must have felt that he would never be a national politician as long as he was on that committee, voting to sustain the tax benefits for the oil and gas industry. He could still help them, but he would do so off that committee. That would be my guess. I don't know.

G: How about the naming of [Mike] Mansfield as whip? I guess Mansfield was elected; I assume it's an elective office.

M: Elective, but it was Johnson's choice. I recommended it. God knows, he wasn't going to listen to any particular twenty-seven-year-old lawyer just a year out of law school in that matter. But I did write a memorandum to him and to Gerry Siegel recommending Mansfield when Earle Clements was defeated. I had worked with Mansfield on something, I can't remember what. But he was asked to occupy the Majority Leader's chair for a couple of days and I served as his counsel and I got to know him a little; he struck me as not only a wonderfully decent man but as a moderate. He was liberal enough to satisfy all but the most demanding liberals, the Paul Douglases and the Joe Clarks in the Senate, but he was not radically liberal himself and had a lot of sympathy and fellow-feeling for certainly the southwesterners and was as good as the southerners were likely to get. They couldn't have another one of their own. That wouldn't work. There wasn't any one of them who was trusted quite enough and was young enough. I guess Lister Hill at one point would have been, and he had wanted to be the leader, I believe, much earlier, but he was older now. And the civil rights issue was coming up; it was too much of a burning national issue to have a southerner. So Mansfield seemed like the right fellow, and I'm sure a lot of people, Lyndon Johnson first of all, had thought that that was a good idea.

G: Did Johnson have a good rapport with Mansfield at this point?

M: Yes, it was good. It was very much boss and subordinate. He didn't treat--Mansfield was not Clements; he didn't perform the role that Clements performed. Earle Clements was a superb whip for Johnson in that he was deeply involved in fund-raising and in the distribution of funds to senators and that sort of thing. So when he went around looking for votes, he was like an elected Bobby Baker. Bobby did the same thing; Bobby was always looking for money for guys. You know, he was working for Bob Kerr, and he would go see senators from, let's say, a northeastern state, a New England state, who had a tough re-election campaign coming up. Bobby would find him oil and gas money.

Clements I think did the same; I'm not sure with oil and gas money, but with money from other sources. And as whip, that position of leadership with Johnson and position of knowledge about money was a natural and made Clements a natural. Mansfield was not a money guy at all. I mean when he ran himself, I believe the process largely amounted to Jim Rowe going out to Montana and organizing, telling people that "Mike's going to run again, we need a few bucks." [He was] getting the labor unions organized, getting the schoolteachers and a few other people. And Mansfield would win with enormous majorities and that would be over for a while. Mansfield had very, very little ostensible involvement with political money, with blocs and factions and that sort of thing and their power. He was simply--he was a very fair, very straight-shooting fellow who was made leader because no one could think of a better. And once he was leader, it would have been embarrassing to make him un-leader. But the relationship with Johnson was very friendly, but more arm's length than it was between Johnson and Clements. That was full of profanity and real locker room kind of camaraderie.

G: Well, he was an old football coach, I guess it was [the same thing].

M: Somewhere, as I'm telling that about Clements, and I'm sure you've got this on somebody's tapes, there was one huge break in the Johnson-Clements relationship, which occurred when Johnson was in the hospital with his heart attack and Clements went into the Policy Committee and scheduled--it has something to do with the gas bill, and what I'm not sure. Maybe he wouldn't bring it up to ask the Policy Committee to schedule the bill because he had problems with it in Kentucky. Something that threw a wrench into their relationship. But anyway it was much more of a political, locker room kind of thing than the Mansfield one was.

G: Was the relationship repaired after that?

M: With Clements?

G: Yes.

M: I think so. But Clements was beaten in the 1956 election.

On labor in Texas, have you had an opportunity to interview Bob Oliver?

G: Yes.

M: You have. Fine, then you know everything that I know, or you know a lot more than I know, because I didn't know why--I knew there was a lot of fussing.

Up on the Hill this morning, I was at a breakfast and I ran into Jake Pickle and I said, "I was reading about you, Pickle. I'm about to see Mike Gillette, and he sent me a

chronology of 1957 and there's something in there about Frankie Randolph criticizing funds going to the Democrats, because some of it would go to you and you were the unfriendly head of the Democratic [State] Executive Committee, I guess, of Texas. And he said, "As Ralph Yarborough would say, 'Dollars for Democrats, but not a nickel for Pickle.'"

(Laughter)

G: Well, Yarborough was elected this year in the special election. Let me ask you to recount what you know about that, beginning with [William] Blakley's appointment.Price Daniel resigns at midnight and [Allan] Shivers names Blakley.Is it clear that Blakley is going to vote as a Democrat in organizing the Senate?

M: Well, Johnson went to work right away--

G: I notice he met Shivers and Blakley at the train station when they came up, or the airport.

M: Oh, yes, this was in days when it was such a close thing that you couldn't afford to have a seat lost. Price Daniel had campaigned for Eisenhower on the tidelands issue and all that. Shivers had campaigned for Eisenhower. So you might think they'd send somebody up there who might have organized with the Republicans. But by the time Blakley got into the Senate, Johnson had persuaded him that this was really where he belonged, where he ought to be.

G: Do you think this was part of an accommodation between Johnson and Shivers as well, that Johnson had--

M: I don't know.

G: --some arrangement with Shivers to make sure that, well, he didn't appoint a card-carrying Republican?

M: I just don't know. Wasn't it just a year before, 1956, when Johnson had beaten Shivers?

G: Yes. Now, what about Yarborough and Johnson at this time? Did LBJ have any--that was a special election with [Martin] Dies and [Thad] Hutcheson and Yarborough [inaudible].

M: I think I've been reading in your chronology, those luncheons and dinners and all that stuff that Johnson was doing for Yarborough just makes you realize how much politicians must have the ability to swallow, to tamp down their real feelings.

I remember one time sitting with Johnson in the White House at night in the

Mansion. I'd had dinner with him and Mrs. Johnson and we were sitting on the sofa and he was looking over a lot of photographs that [Yoichi] Okamoto had sent up. And there were among them pictures of him and some guy that I had never seen before, some fellow from the Midwest representing some industry or cause, and Johnson said, "That's really a terrible picture of me. Look at that face. Have you ever seen any less sincere face in your life? Have you ever seen a face more full of lies than that one?" He was talking about his own. I laughed and said, "No, I don't think I have." And he said, "You know, I'm that way when I--I can't stand that fellow, but I had to be with him. So-and-so made me do this, they said I had to." You know, there was some reason why the President of the United States had to meet with this guy. And he said, "You can see right through me. I've always been that way. What was really going on in my mind has always been right on my face, no matter how hard I work to prevent it, and it seems like sometimes that the harder I work, the more obvious it is." Which was an incredible bit of self-awareness, because I knew that to be true but I didn't know he knew it to be true. In fact when he would put on that what I used to regard as his Methodist bishop's face, you know, he was filled with rage at some committee chairman or at Ho Chi Minh or somebody for something, and he would go on and just sound like butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. He was rising above it. He would sound like Billy Graham. And you could just read it, you could read the duplicity, the deviousness, the hidden--or the unhidden--but the attempt to hide true feelings in his face. And I've always thought that was one of the reasons why the country was suspicious of him, because it could also see that.

G: Fascinating.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 2

G: What is your next--?

M: Well, I'm just flipping through and I see March 11 that this is right in the middle of all this, right toward the end of the Mideast Resolution. It was right after it had passed. It says that afternoon LBJ, Rayburn, Joe Martin and Knowland joined the President for drinks at the White House. Stuart Eizenstat, who was the head domestic adviser for President Carter, once told me that he had told Carter that Lyndon Johnson used to could go down and have drinks with Dwight Eisenhower all the time, and it was an essential part of their relationship, just to have a social relationship with President Eisenhower. Johnson was afraid of Eisenhower, he was afraid of his popularity and he was afraid not to [go]--he didn't want to be seen as somebody who was unkind to Eisenhower, for political reasons he didn't. But also he and Eisenhower got along. He knew that he was smarter than Eisenhower, quite a lot smarter politically and knew more about Washington and the town here, and he probably also understood that, as fate would have it, Eisenhower was much more popular than he would ever be, he, Johnson. Those drinks downtown with Rayburn and Johnson and Knowland and Joe Martin were very important. But Carter could never do it, he could never--even when he did it I think it was--you could hear the hinges creak,

it was so mechanical. He just couldn't do it.

The next day it says Jim Rowe sends Johnson a memo saying don't set up these task forces on national issues, and so we haven't got time to do it. Get the Policy Committee to do it. Jim Rowe was constantly fighting off Johnson, who wanted him to leave his law firm and go to the Hill and work for him. He loved Jim Rowe and he knew that Jim Rowe was up-front; Jim was strong-minded, he had all the guts in the world, and he had a lot of political sagacity.

G: Well, Rowe did come for a while, didn't he?

M: He came for a while, and the reason is--Libby Rowe will tell that story. She says that Jim Rowe for all his life afterwards would tell the story and his teeth would get on edge when he would tell it. He said, "Lyndon Johnson went after me to come down there and run the Policy Committee, and I said, 'I'm not going to do it.' He caused all kinds of people to get in touch with me and say that 'I think you have an obligation to our nation and to our party and to the Congress to go to help Lyndon Johnson.'" He said, "It was embarrassing. I had to sound like someone who didn't care about any of those things to a lot of very nice people, very well-meaning people, but I could stand it until one night at dinner my wife wasn't speaking to me--Libby--and I said, 'What is wrong?' and she said, 'I just can't imagine why you're doing this to Lyndon.'"

(Laughter)

And so Jim Rowe threw in the towel. He went down and worked for Johnson. But here clearly this thing about it's a bad idea to set up national issues task forces--this is March 12--he's clearly trying to get out from under that obligation to go work for Johnson more.

March 22, George Reedy is sending a memo that the Democratic Party doesn't need new faces and doesn't need new ideas and so on. No one has come up with a new idea with popular appeal. George Reedy, looking over his memos--which I'd like to do sometime, look at the memos from those days--my guess is that the majority of them were right on target. They were very, very shrewd. George lived a life that only a political junkie could live. He would get to work very late in the day, late morning, and he would work, turn out these memos and stuff like that. He would leave the office about, I don't know, six-thirty, something like that, and he would go over to northeast Washington to Gusti's, an Italian restaurant that used to be over on the Market, the Farmer's Market in northeast Washington, Florida Avenue market. And he would drink an enormous number of martinis and he would hold court either with a secretary or whatever, a labor leader, Andy Biemiller or somebody like that. And he sometimes would come back at eleven o'clock at night and dictate [to] people. I've always thought one of the reasons that Bob Novak has written nasty things about LBJ is that Reedy would keep Geraldine [Williams], now Geraldine Novak, waiting unmercifully up there until eleven-thirty or twelve o'clock

at night and then come back and dictate to her. Poor woman.

Reedy was of that 10 per cent--where I think Reedy would not read so well today would be on things like this "Democratic Party doesn't need [new faces], there are no new ideas with popular appeal." The guy, as your chronology shows, who was telling Lyndon Johnson that he *had* to see a civil rights bill through was Jim Rowe and not George Reedy. George was profoundly conservative not on labor issues, liberal issues, things like that. He was an old UPI fellow from Chicago; he had a lot of liberalism in him, but [not] of the radical kind.

George Reedy was quite appropriately dismissed by Johnson as Johnson began to take off with the Great Society. He was just not the guy to be the spokesman. For all the complaints that people have made about [Bill] Moyers, self-serving, serving himself as against Johnson and all the rest of it, he was a far better proclaimer of the Great Society message, far more in tune with that kind of politics than George would have been. And I think you see that here in these early memos. You see a George Reedy who understood the Senate and wanted to help Johnson function within the Senate. But [he] was not a great counselor for Johnson, I think, the presidential candidate, which may only reflect the fact that Johnson was in an almost intolerable bind, trying to run for the presidency while still trying to be the majority leader of the Senate. It sounded good to be this tremendously successful majority leader who could make everybody jump through hoops and, you know, swallow fire and do whatever, but in practice you had to not only stay in the Senate and run the damn thing but you had to work constantly with the factions in the Senate and particularly you had to work with the southern group, who were the chairmen of the committees. And they simply didn't have the votes in the primaries and in the convention, so Johnson was in a real bind and I think he recognized that. I guess he thought by force of personality and brains and all that, he could overcome it, but he couldn't.

G: In talking about Reedy and Johnson, and Rowe and Johnson during this period, was each relationship pretty up-front in terms of being able to offer frank, negative advice or did Johnson expect a certain amount of affirmative praise, this sort of thing from his advisers?

M: Well, you know, Jim Rowe would--looking at a memo in here, Jim Rowe is saying, "I see you're a foreign policy expert." Now, that would have been inconceivable for George Reedy or for most other people. But he had been a big figure in the New Deal; he had his own law practice. The Johnsons and the Rowes were very fond of one another. They were equals and much more equals. He wasn't going to do everything Jim Rowe wanted him to do, and Jim had his own lobbying clients that he was getting help from Johnson on. Johnson had to weigh that, keep that in mind. But there was much more of an equality and Johnson dealt on terms of equality with Jim much more than with George.

I believe ***The Twilight of the Presidency*** and the later book that George

wrote--neither of which I've read but I generally know the message in them--I regard them not only as exaggerated attacks on Johnson and on Johnson as king, that sort of thing, and as inaccurate in that respect because I do not believe George understood the relationship that a lot of us had with Johnson in the White House. When he came back to the White House and had no role, he was simply kind of parked there by Johnson while others negotiated with Johnson, dealt with him and did have responsibility.

But I've always thought that a lot of that bitterness that is in the books came out of the reprehensible way he was treated by Johnson on many occasions. I remember one time--George had hammertoes, and it was very painful for him to walk sometimes. He was well overweight. He was out drinking at night and he had all the signs of a man who was headed for stroke, heart attack or whatever. And he was under terrific pressure when he had to produce a statement in ten minutes or something, and he was up there desperately typing away. I remember one time standing with Johnson on the floor and George came heavily almost like Willy Loman down the halls and off to the chamber, the Senate Chamber, perspiration coming down his face, face white, painfully coming across the floor, Johnson was saying, "Look at George moving his fat ass across the floor." I mean it was said with real contempt for this guy who was just busting his tail in every way for Lyndon Johnson and who adored him, who thought he was the greatest of all men.

Johnson thought George was very, very smart and he thought he wrote for him more as he wished to be written for than anybody could. I was a pretty good writer, but I didn't know anything about political writing at this time and I sure didn't know how to write for Lyndon Johnson. I exaggerated and I did the usual young man's high rhetoric when George was much, much more clean and full of words like reasonable and responsible and prudent and all this stuff that Johnson loved to talk about being, which was mainly don't get nervous now. It's like putting a saddle on a horse that's never been ridden, you know, you kind of bump up next to him and you bump the saddle against him and you talk and then you put the saddle on, you very gently tie the girth and all the time before you ride him. But, anyway, it was a very painful and very human relationship between those two.

G: The incident that you describe on the floor of the Senate, how characteristic was that? Was that likely to happen daily, monthly--?

M: Oh, I don't know. There were some times when it was excruciatingly funny. Johnson mocked people; he was, as we all know, one of the great mimics, I mean really an incredible mimic. One day in his office he was talking to a couple of senators or--I don't know who it was--he was talking a mile a minute, talking about all his problems, he couldn't get something done, and here somebody gave it to "old Willie Day Taylor." Willie Day had a deformed leg and when she walked, one leg was almost as if she didn't have a leg; it was a great, huge limp there on that side. And Johnson went across the room walking exactly like Willie Day Taylor, and against every fiber of decency in me, I

just was convulsed with laughter, so was everybody else in the room. I mean it just made you weep with laughter. It wasn't anti-Willie Day Taylor--I mean, Willie Day took care of his children and he was good to Willie Day. But then he would do that. He was really a--you name it, Johnson was that way toward that staff person. A lot of people who deal with their staffs on terms of decency and kindness and consideration and so on would have just thought he was appalling. And he was. But he was also very yeasty.

When I was in the White House one time, I had just gotten there, been there three weeks, had a physical and the doctor determined that I had a very large hernia. He said, "You're going to get it fixed Monday." Well, I was just nervous as hell. I'd just only been there three weeks, how am I going to take off two or three weeks to recuperate from a hernia operation? So I sent Johnson, in fear and trembling, a note about it. I was still an assistant secretary of state and I was still on the State Department payroll. I got back a long handwritten letter from President Johnson, handwritten. My little three-line memo was at the top but the rest of the page was filled with writing from him saying, "We'd better move you over to the White House staff from the State Department right away, because if you need to go to Bethesda, we can get you out there and that will save you a lot on your insurance, because they're going to sock it to you if you go and bill this to your insurance." Well, it was 1964 or 1965, and Johnson had all this stuff on [his mind] and here he is, writing all this stuff about how to get an operation done not too expensively.

So there was that Johnson, who would then no doubt mock me. I'm sure he mocked me with other people; he mocked everybody else I know.

G: Was the staff afraid of him during this period, would you say, 1957?

M: Yes, probably so. I mean, he was so funny and outrageous that that took some of the edge of fear out of it. He wasn't L. B. Johnson, he was old Lyndon. I mean, he wasn't the chairman of the board of the great corporation who terrifies everybody. He was very human.

One Saturday we were in the office and I had been at a party the night before and had a terrible hangover. Jim Wilson from Austin was just sleepy and the two of us--Jim was reading something and I had my eyes closed. We were in the office, the Democratic Policy Committee office. Johnson barrels through and we both just hit the fan, and he later said, "Yes, my boys are in the office, but Harry's in there asleep and Jim's reading ***Pathfinder*** magazine," which was a Boy Scout magazine [or] something.

(Laughter)

We were scared to death.

Moyers I remember one time--poor Walter Jenkins had been working on Johnson's

taxes. And as usual when you got near April 15, Walter just was invisible; he was always working on the Johnson taxes. Poor man went to sleep on the couch one afternoon. He'd been working all night, I think. Moyers came in and saw him there, and he backed off, went out of the room, and then he came back, slammed the door open and said, "Goddamn it, Walter, what are you doing out here? Aren't you working on my taxes?" And Moyers says that Walter Jenkins came off the sofa levitating, his body was about two feet parallel to the sofa, just came right straight up off of it in total terror of Lyndon Johnson. You know, he always had those blotches on his face. He was also another victim of the Johnson passion and demands and I'm sure mockery and all that, although at the same time extremely close to him.

G: How about Bill Brammer? As long as we're talking about the staff, let me ask you to discuss Brammer's work, his relationship.

M: Yes. Oh, I think Johnson liked Brammer, enjoyed Brammer, loved Brammer's writing. Brammer and Booth Mooney worked over in an office, Room 201 of the Senate Office Building. I described in my book how Brammer would work all night at his apartment, drinking warm Jello and eating Butterfingers. He'd write till six o'clock in the morning and then he'd come over to that Room 201 and sleep till about nine. Then he'd get up and start writing, typing, and I guess then he'd go back home at six and sleep till midnight and he'd start writing at midnight and that's how he wrote ***The Gay Place***, which Johnson did not like at all, I take it. I don't know whether he ever read it or just heard that it had this outrageous character named Arthur Fenstemaker in it. Brammer held Johnson in great affection; I think Johnson did him. I think Johnson was taken with Brammer's wife, Nadine, and that probably complicated the relationship with him.

G: What did Brammer do for Johnson?

M: Wrote letters to people in Texas, wrote newsletter kind of things for Johnson, wrote speeches for Johnson about Texas things. It was almost entirely concerned with Texas.

G: Did Brammer's presence on the staff give LBJ a tie with the Texas liberal crowd or the [***Texas***] ***Observer*** crowd?

M: Yes, I think so. I think somewhat. You know, Brammer and [Ronnie] Dugger, Brammer had worked for the ***Observer***. That was probably in Johnson's mind, that that would help with the ***Observer***, might cool them down some.

G: Anything else on Brammer's work there that you recall?

M: Not that I can remember. [It] must be around, some of it.

In April there's a classic LBJ thing. James Reston says, "Well, there's not very

much happening in the Senate," and do-nothing label and that sort of thing. And then Reston points out in a later message that 229 measures have been passed compared to 140 by Easter of 1953. That's classic Johnson. He always had numbers of bills that he had passed and he always kept a running numerical total. He must have leaned hard on Scotty Reston.

Let's see, where else did I make [notes]? I'm struck by those talks with the IRS. He must have had some tax problems.

The July memo from Jim Rowe about the civil rights bill is certainly--I've seen that memo and it must have had a very substantial effect. And I think not only Johnson and his presidential ambitions, which must have been very substantial at the time, but the desire that was I'm sure conveyed to Johnson, that the Democratic Party not permit this, the loss of its liberal and black members to the Republicans, and a lot of pressure from labor, and all that I think had a substantial effect on getting him to take it up.

G: Do you think that [Richard] Russell was appreciative of this fact, is what I want to know.

M: Well, they certainly talked a lot, and you know, Russell could not have liked it, but I think he recognized the pressures on Johnson. He just didn't consider them to be ones that ought to be yielded to.

I'm going to stop just a minute and check on some phone calls. LBJ speaks to Noah Dietrich. Is that the Howard Hughes' [aide]?

G: Yes.

M: That's interesting.

G: Yes, I wonder about that one.

(Interruption)

Okay, we were talking about Russell and the 1957 civil rights [bill].

M: I don't really know. Russell was a great professional politician, he would not have been the effective figure that he was in the Senate had it not been for his understanding of other people's problems. He didn't share them, and there were some people he just thought had the kind of views that would hurt the country. It wasn't just so much that they were contrary to Georgia's interests, he just thought they were bad for America.

G: Why didn't he lead a filibuster?

M: Well, they did in a way have a filibuster, but Johnson persuaded Russell that a filibuster, if it were successful, would so embitter the nonsouthern Democrats that they would change the rules on the filibuster and there was a fair chance that there would be a majority cloture as a result. And so, far better to negotiate, never to describe it as a filibuster, always to say negotiations are going on and that sort of thing. It took a long time to reach agreement, to take Title III out of the bill, and to introduce the jury trial amendment.

Incidentally, one thing that Johnson was very proud of having, of receiving and used widely, was a memorandum from Dean Acheson on Title III. And I think it was from Acheson and Cohen saying that the elimination of Title III would be an unmitigated gain for the bill; it would make the bill far better to do that. That was something he could wave around.

G: Strom Thurmond did launch a--

M: Filibuster.

G: --one-man filibuster.

M: Yes, I remember that.

G: My impression is that the other southern senators were almost scornful of him.

M: Oh, they were furious, they were furious. You know, it made them, as it was intended to make them, look as if they had just crumbled and had permitted this thing to happen. So the response from Herman Talmadge was typical of how they felt. I mean, Talmadge just went ahead and said it. He spoke very harshly.

G: What did he say?

M: Oh, he made a speech after Thurmond's and he talked about showboating and we have dealt with this matter; we have produced legislation which, while it's reprehensible, is far better and if we had gone the way of the Senator from South Carolina, we'd be faced with far worse. It was a very harsh denunciation of Thurmond.

Let me talk about two things, and then I'll have to run. Just two recollections.

On October 23 Johnson went to Abilene and then went out to the Diamond M Ranch. I was one of the advance men for this western swing; this was to kind of "go see our friends out West." I went out to Abilene with Cliff Carter and Lloyd Hand. And when we got out there, we split up and each of us took a car and we went off to different towns and got people to come to the [C. T.] McLaughlin Diamond M Ranch, which is near I think Big Spring. But what's memorable about that trip to me was that in Abilene,

Johnson had breakfast with about, my recollection is it was about thirty district directors and managers of the REA in West Texas. These were farmers who also took a role in the REA district. They had already had breakfast. Johnson came down about eight-thirty and was looking for breakfast. He was kind of angry that everybody else had already eaten a long time before. These guys got up, you know, at five-thirty or whatever. But he went ahead and had a big bowl of oatmeal. I remember he listened to them, they were talking about their problems and that kind of thing.

He was muttering and eating his oatmeal and then as he finished his oatmeal, he launched into a talk that I recall today as being one of the best extemporaneous political talks I've ever heard in my life, by anybody. He talked about the commonality of stake, of interest between you men and the automobile worker and the small farmer in Iowa and the little woman that sews dresses up there on Seventh Avenue in New York. He talked about high interest rates and he talked about the stake that the average American had in driving them down. He talked about the Republicans' just irresistible drive, their endemic love of high interest. Republicans are bankers and Republicans like high-interest loans. "You may have all kinds of problems with some of those working people up there, but one thing you do have a common stake in, and that is keeping interest rates down."

He talked about what had to go into the making of a coalition. He said, "The only way you're going to get it done is by joining with people like that who have that same interest and voting with them, and you've got to support them sometimes on some things that make you kind of uncomfortable. When they say, 'We've got to have a little civil rights bill, we've got to have a little voting rights. Make it possible for people to vote,' you know that may stir people up in your area, but you've got to go along with that a little bit. And when they say, 'I got to have a little minimum wage increase here for these women that sit in these hot shops and sew all day long,' my old friend, David Dubinsky of the [International] Ladies Garment Workers Union"--that's another Jewish contact; some of the first money Johnson ever got [was] from the ILGWU--"When those people say, 'I've got to have a little of that,' you got to be sympathetic, you've got to think, 'Well, there's my friend and there's somebody that I'm on the same side with when it really counts.' And if we stick together, and if we vote together some, we might be able to bring about lower interest rates and that'll make it possible for Grandma to have that new refrigerator and that'll make it possible for you to have--" and so on.

It was a masterpiece. It was, you know, the kind of political speech that is believed and known in all its detail, right down in the guts, and so when it comes out, it just flows. It was all there, and the parallels, the analogies just come as naturally as they can, and the metaphors come because they're all part of a whole. It's like Reagan talking about the things that he really cares about; that's why he's such a good communicator, because I mean--watching him last night at the end of that long ABC program I was thinking, "You know, he really doesn't know much about anything." But he does. Boy, when you get on free enterprise and stuff like that, you know, then you're really on

Reagan's main chords. And Johnson was talking the Democratic big D, capital D, Democratic Party lingo in that, and it was wonderful to hear.

G: How did his audience react?

M: Oh, just absolutely spellbound, just absolutely. And they applauded him and you could see that that talk about civil rights and so they weren't really ready to just yell and cheer, but they really knew.

G: Was he pleased with it? Did he. . . ?

M: Oh, I'm sure he was. I mean, he shook hands, he felt much better and he shook hands. He had had his breakfast, but he'd really done this talking. You know, these guys would go back and they'd talk to their farmers and they'd go to the REA, they'd talk about lower interest rates. I'd say that he went a long way toward liberalizing some part of those guys that day. I remember that from that--

G: Marvelous.

M: Okay, I guess I better run.

G: Well, I really appreciate it. Did you go to Tyler when he--?

M: No.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview VII

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BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION: HARRY MCPHERSON

Lawyer; b. Tyler, Tex., Aug. 22, 1929; B.A., U. South, 1949; D.C.I. (hon), 1965; student Columbia, 1949-50; LL.B., U. Tex., 1956; admitted to Texas bar, 1955; asst. gen. counsel Democratic policy com., U.S. Senate, 1956-59; asso. counsel, 1959-61; gen. counsel, 1961-63; dep. under sec. internat. affairs Dept. Army, 1963-64; asst. sec. state ednl. and cultural affairs, 1964-65; spl. asst. and counsel to Pres. Johnson, 1965-66; spl. counsel to Pres. Johnson, 1966-69; private practice law, Washington, 1969-.