INTERVIEWEE: Drew Pearson
INTERVIEWER: Joe B. Frantz
DATE: April 10, 1969

F: This is an interview with Mr. Drew Pearson, in his home in Washington D.C. on April 10, 1969. The interviewer is Joe B. Frantz.

Very briefly Mr. Pearson, for the sake of future historians, identify yourself, how you came to be what you are as of this date on April 10, 1969.

P: Well, I'm a newspaper man who has been working in Washington since 1925. That's about it.

F: You started off to be a geographer early in your career?

P: No, I didn't. I started out hoping to be a diplomat. I wanted to have some part in foreign affairs because I felt this was terribly important. But I didn't have any money in those days and, also, career diplomats had to have money. So I got into newspaper business abroad in order to get a background on foreign affairs and hoping then to get into diplomacy. I never suggested to Lyndon Johnson that I become an ambassador and don't believe I'd want to be one now. But that was my hope when I was about twenty-one, twenty-two years old. So then in between trips abroad and working my way around the world I did teach geography, industrial geography, in the University of Pennsylvania. And I came back from another trip around the world to teach economic geography at Columbia. But those were very brief periods, and I don't consider myself qualified really as a teacher.

F: Did you drift into political reporting, or did you start out to do just regular reporting?

P: I started the way nearly all newspaper men start, as a sports reporter many years ago. When I was in Swathmore, Pennsylvania, I worked for the Philadelphia papers part time, but I drifted into political reporting when I was here in Washington.

F: By the time the New Deal came on, you were established as a syndicated columnist, as a national reporter. I remember when you wrote out that first book on the Washington Merry-Go-Round.

P: I wouldn't call myself established. I was just beginning with the New Deal, I had started a column with Robert S. Allen in December, 1932, just as Hoover was leaving office. And the column was beginning to get going when Roosevelt came in in March of 1933.

F: When did you first become aware of Congressman Johnson, or do we have to come down forward of that?

P: I don't remember exactly. I've known him for about thirty-five years. The most vivid recollection I have was when he invited me to his home over there around 32nd Street or

30th Place, to see some pictures, some home movies that he had taken in the Pacific. Now prior to that I'm pretty sure I'd met him or otherwise he wouldn't have invited me to his home.

F: Could this have been when he had come home from service?

P: Yes, he was home on leave, I think, but prior to that I had met him at the home of Charlie Marsh, over here on Massachusetts Avenue.

F: Publisher of the American Statesman in Austin [Texas]?

P: Yes. Charlie Marsh, was as you know, a very good friend of Lyndon's, and he was a very good friend of mine. He used to have sort of cocktail parties or sometimes dinners which were attended by Lyndon Johnson; Henry Wallace, who was then Secretary of Agriculture; Claude Pepper, Senator from Florida, are the ones that I chiefly remember. That was where I first met Lyndon, but I can't remember the details of it.

F: In these interviews I have gotten two sides of a picture. One is that he was marked early as someone to reckon with on a national scene. The other is that he was no more than just another Congressman. Did you have any early impressions?

P: No, I would have remembered him as a very vivacious, fast talking young Congressman whom you could tell was full of energy and pep. But I never thought of him as being Vice President or President. I never thought of him as being one of the great leaders of the United States and the world. When he came back from the war in the Pacific, or rather World War II it was, he had some of his friends there in his home and he was showing us all these movies and whenever there was a fellow from Texas he would point to him, and, "There's so-and-so from Austin, or so-and-so from Beaumont." Finally Ben Cohen said, "Lyndon, now why don't you just tell us the fellows that aren't from Texas. It would save you some time!"

F: He was definitely a Texas Congressman at that time.

P: Oh, he was a Texas Congressman, all right. I remember he was friendly with Warren Magnuson, who was then in the House of Representatives from Washington State, and also with Congressman Tad Walter of Pennsylvania. All three were in the Navy at the same period.

F: Is that the Walter of the McCarren-Walter Act?

P: He's dead now, yes. And I have some association, having luncheon with them when they were back on leave. Again, I can't remember the details.

F: Did he make any special effort to woo you as a newspaper man in those days?

P: No, I don't think so. He didn't think I was important, and I didn't think he was important.

F: When did you begin to decide he might be important?

P: After he became Senator, and he was gracious enough to thank me for getting him elected. I'm sure he thanked a lot of other people, quite rightly.

F: To what was he referring?

P: Well, when he was running against Coke Stevenson,

F: That's in 1948.

P: Yes--Coke Stevenson, then Governor, was in the position where in Texas he made it out that he was against the Taft-Hartley Act, though he had the support of organized labor--and was for it. And Lyndon was definitely against the Taft-Hartley--

F: Yes, Lyndon had had to declare himself through a vote. I mean, he was on record for voting for the Taft-Hartley. So labor was opposed to him.

P: When Coke Stevenson came up here, Lyndon tipped me off and I arranged a press conference for Coke Stevenson and had a question asked of him by one of my assistants about the Taft-Hartley Act. That put Coke on record publicly, where he stood. That supposedly turned a certain number of votes against Coke and maybe made the difference of the eighty-seven vote margin, by which Lyndon won. At any rate he was very grateful.

F: You weren't particularly trying to help Congressman Johnson in his race for the Senate so much as you were just trying to get Stevenson's true stand on the issue.

P: A little bit of both. I wanted to "hep" Lyndon, as he would say.

F: Then he thanked you, and he became just another junior Senator until 1954, really, when he became Senate Majority Leader. Well, before that of course he became Senate Minority Leader.

P: Yes, he became Senate Minority Leader earlier than that.

F: Yes. He did. He became that in 1952.

P: 1952. Well when he became Senate Minority Leader he nosed out Lister Hill of Alabama, who'd been in that position before. Lyndon and I, at that time, had a few run-ins over the fact that he did not in my opinion support Adali Stevenson adequately. I called him at that time--I gave him the nickname "Lyin' Down Lyndon" because he made two speeches for Adlai. And of course Adlai down in Texas was not very popular compared with Eisenhower. Eisenhower as the big man. He was pretty peeved at me for that. So

when he wanted to be Minority Leader I wrote some things about him which again he didn't like, because I pointed out to be Minority Leader of the Democratic Party you had to uphold the ticket and he did not uphold the ticket. He was lyin' down! Bill Fulbright and I did a little maneuvering in opposition to him, but he won, as usual. But he was pretty sore at me for a long while there.

F: Were you aware of any special circumstances why Richard Russell, who was more or less responsible for his being named Minority Leader, would have thrown it Johnson's way instead of Lister Hill, since Lister Hill's more of a deep South man?

P: I've forgotten the details of it. Dick Russell and Lyndon were very close and had been for years, and Lister Hill didn't really want it. He half-way wanted it, but not wholeheartedly and I think that was part of it. I think actually Lister, who was a great Senator, was a little bit lazy. Lyndon is certainly not lazy!

F: Right. Did you patch up your relationships with the Minority Leader, once you had this new man in the position?

P: Not right away. No, he looked at me with great disapproval. I might say that it was partly mutual on my part. What happened was--I've forgotten the year, but I think it was about 1951, maybe it was 1950--he was then I think Minority Leader—

F: He may have been from 1950. I'd have to check that fact.

P: I went in to see him and told him that Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin was going to deliver a speech attacking me the next day, calling me a Communist. And I said, "Lyndon you know that I'm not a Communist. You were good enough when you were running against Coke Stevenson to express your appreciation of me, and I assume that I might have a little help from you on the Senate floor tomorrow showing that I'm not a Communist."

And he looked at me with considerable disapproval and said, "Drew, you've not been kind to me lately." So that ended the interview.

But then I went back to my files and looked up--rather painstakingly--all that I had written about him, and I had written about ninety stories of which only five or six were unfriendly. I sent him a cross-index of the record, but the next day when McCarthy did go after me for about an hour and a half Lyndon did not go to my defense.

So we continued to be somewhat at swords points for sometime, chiefly over the McCarthy issue, because at that time--about a year later I think it was--Senator Tom Hennings of Missouri and Senator Carl Hayden of Arizona, together with Senator Hendrickson, a Republican from New Jersey, were on a sub-committee entrusted with investing McCarthy's finances which were deplorable, in that he had received a great deal of money from well-meaning citizens to investigate Communist activities and he used them

on the commodity exchange market for his personal profit. They had worked out a very painstaking report going into great detail on these things and they thought they had finished it, only around December 28 or 29 and the Senate went out of session on the 31st of December. There was some worry about whether they could get that report out in time before the end of the Senate.

So I talked to Lyndon about that. He was very neutral, very neutral, indeed. It was doubtful whether--you couldn't tell where he stood on McCarthyism at that time. That did not endear me to him and I increased my description of him as "Lyin' Down Lyndon." But subsequently--I've forgotten the exact date--thought that after he became Majority Leader, I thought that he did a superb job. This was approximately 1954.

F: That's right, in the mid-term election.

P: He did, he really took command of things, and he put across constructive programs. I had to say, in all conscience, that he was not "Lyin' Down Lyndon" anymore. He was very much on the ball and doing a great thing for the Senate, for the Democratic Party, and for the country.

F: Before we leave McCarthy, do you think that Senator Johnson was scared to take on McCarthy as so many people were? Do you think that he was playing a patient game as they often said Mr. Eisenhower was in the White House? What do you think lay behind this silence?

P: He was as you indicated, playing the same kind of Eisenhower game which I thought was a tragedy. Eisenhower ducked out on this issue which hurt him, hurt the country, hurt the State Department, hurt American foreign policy, and Johnson was doing the same thing.

Now, the reason why Johnson was doing that, I think I know why, because later when he became President he and I used to have some frank talks. Once I was telling him--I've forgotten how it came up--about some of my problems with the Southwest newspapers particularly, the Shreveport Journal, and President Johnson remarked, "You know that is an area which has the most right-wing isolationist people in the United States." He said, "I had to deal with those people in Texas and Louisiana--particularly in Texas--for years when I was in the Senate and in the House." And he said, "Thank God, I don't have to deal with them anymore." And I think he felt that he was a political prisoner to the McCarthyites. Now he was following a principal--which is well established and I think probably an accurate principal which a newspaperman, a war correspondent has to follow--the rule that you don't get killed in the war. You have to live to tell the story. And as a Senator, he had to live to be effective. In other words, he couldn't afford to die politically but not be re-elected.

F: And, particularly, he was re-elected in 1954, which comes right in the midst of all of this, so that he did have a problem there of being re-elected and particularly for a second term.

P: Well after 1954 he had six years ahead of him and he did much better.

F: When did you two reconcile?

P: I can't remember exactly, I think it was in 1954--around in there. I know I went up to see him and told him I thought he was doing a good job. I went up to see him actually, and I didn't see him because he kept me waiting forty-five minutes and I walked out. Then he called me up and asked me to come back, which I did, and we had a nice talk. Then I wrote a story, a very laudatory story, about him, telling what he had been doing as Majority Leader which was not only accurate but I don't think was exaggerated because he was doing a great job. From that time on, most of the time when he was in the Senate I could conscientiously praise him and report it in that vein.

F: Do you think then that a sort of steady stream of praise is necessary to maintain his good will?

P: No, he doesn't like to be criticized but, still, as the years have progressed he's become much more broadminded I've found. I didn't have occasion to criticize Mr. Johnson very often. But he took it in his stride.

F: Do you believe that this alleged vindictiveness is real, or is that just something that his critics charge?

P: I don't think he's vindictive. I've heard that. He can get irritated but he gets over it, gets over it pretty quickly. He can be very forgiving.

F: He's a pro in the sense that he'll work with the people that have been his critics?

P: Oh yes, oh yes, he'll work with them.

F: There have been several versions of the 1957 Civil Rights Act and his role in it, whether he watered it down or whether he gets the lion's share of the credit for anything at all being passed, the first time you know since Reconstruction days. Did you have any particular observations during that period that this bill was under consideration?

P: Yes, I talked to him about that and I talked to Hubert Humphrey and others like Senator Wayne Morse and Senator Paul Douglas of Illinois, who were all very active. My belief is that it was a composite job for which they all deserve great credit. Lyndon deserved credit because, of course, he was a Southerner, but in addition to that he had the strategy to get it across. While he did his sails a little bit I think he probably had to, I think, in order to get the bill passed. It was necessary. Some of the Negroes gave a lot of credit to him--the Negro leaders I'm talking about--and I don't know whether they were unfair to Hubert Humphrey or not, but I think they really gave more credit to Johnson.

F: Did you see any evidence that this was an emotional commitment on his part or just a piece of good practical politics in view of the way things were going?

P: I don't remember that I thought one way or the other. But looking back on it I believe that he had a very deep conviction that this was good for the country.

F: Did you ever get the feeling during his Senate Majority days that he was trying to use you as a kind of a carrier for certain views of his that he, in a sense, wanted to write your stories?

P: Lyndon will always try to write your stories if you'll let him. That's no more than a lot of other Senators. Sure, he has ideas about what you should write, and he is not bashful about expressing them. But that's typical of many, many people--not unusual.

F: That's the difference between a politician's need and a journalist's need.

P: Right.

F: As you come down to 1960 did you get any feeling at all that the Johnson campaign for the Presidential nomination at Los Angeles would get off the ground?

P: I was for Lyndon in that race for his nomination, and I wasn't too optimistic.

F: What was the trouble?

P: There were several troubles. Number one, he figured his work in the Senate was more important than going out to campaign, and he didn't do hardly any campaigning. He stayed in Washington and he didn't go out to corral delegates. He was given warnings by Senator Earl Clements of Kentucky, who was one of his unofficial campaign managers, that he had to get out, but he stayed around here. My stepson was very active in his campaign and they were all hoping that there might be a deadlock between Stevenson and Kennedy in which Lyndon would then step in as the nominee. But I didn't think it would happen. This was my private opinion. I didn't express it openly.

F: Do you think that he misgauged the importance of his Senatorial connections and his Congressional connections, in general, and that he underestimated the role of the governors, the state organizations?

P: Yes, he did. There's no question about it. He put more emphasis on the Senate role than the public did and the Democratic delegates did. This is the fault of many Senators who stay in the Senate and don't go home to campaign.

F: They're a little like university people who talk to each other and think that's the world. Did you go to Los Angeles?

P: Yes.

F: Were you surprised? Did you have any foreknowledge that the Vice President would be Lyndon Johnson or that Mr. Johnson would take it if offered?

P: No, I didn't think about that at all. I just wasn't worried about it at the time.

F: So that you received the news just about like everyone else on that.

P: That's right. I thought it was a good choice, an excellent choice. It was smart for Kennedy's part.

F: Did you cover the campaign on the scene?

P: I might say in regard to that Democratic convention in Los Angeles, I talked to Senator Johnson at the time and in fact to some of his colleagues and staff, and it was pretty much a hopeless case. He had no chance of stopping Kennedy even on a deadlock. I took a full-page ad in the Los Angeles Mirror going into some of the efforts by the Kennedy people and others to suppress the news, because the news was suppressed and was very carefully managed. Johnson, as President, was later accused of managing the news but there was no one more adept at managing the news than the two Kennedy brothers at that convention and sometimes later.

F: In what way did they do it?

P: Well, it's a long story and I can't remember the details, but they would announce one day that this delegation had suddenly come out for Kennedy. Well of course, they had been pledged for weeks. They they would bring out the next day that another delegation would suddenly come for Kennedy.

But then there was a certain amount of suppression of the news where I was not permitted to speak on one television station and a few things like that that all added together made quite an indictment, partly of the Kennedy forces, but partly of the television industry.

F: You mean the television people were eager enough to work with the Kennedy forces that they would go along with suggestions that you and perhaps people like you were not quite suitable at this time?

P: No, I don't think it went that far. I don't think the Kennedy's were trying to bar me from the air. I think this was just an accident, but station KHJA, owned by the General Tire and Rubber--I had a contract with a sponsor there and they intervened and wouldn't let me go on. I think it was a hangover of the Joe McCarthy days, because they were great McCarthyites. But all these things added together--the Kennedy's were not to blame for that even remotely--but that full-page ad in the Los Angeles Mirror was reprinted.

Oh, I know another thing that was suppressed at the time. I had written a column about Kennedy which was suppressed for some reason or another--I don't know why--in the local paper. That was reprinted too in this full page ad that I took. That was distributed around to a lot of the Democratic delegates. I don't think it changed many votes but it occurred.

F: Let's go back just a moment, you brought up McCarthy again. "Lyin' Down Lyndon" didn't do anything. Did the Kennedy's ever do anything to hold Mr. McCarthy in check or to diminish his stature?

P: No, not at that time. In fact, Bobby was on the McCarthy committee and although I talked to John F. Kennedy about McCarthy, and, I believe later, some time in there--I don't remember the exact date--he did use influence inside the committee. I couldn't tell how active it was, but it wasn't very much.

F: As I recall, Bobby never did break with McCarthy and even accompanied the body to the funeral--which may or may not be correct information.

P: I don't think he ever broke with him.

F: Did you cover the campaign in--

P: I was going to say, Lyndon Johnson, of course, when he was Senate Majority Leader in 1956, 1 believe, 1955, he did take a strong stand for the censure of McCarthy.

F: This was after the Army hearings?

P: Immediately afterwards.

F: He was re-elected, I presume, and at least for five years had no fear for his position back in Texas.

P: That was one way to construe it. That, I'm sure, had a part to play. In addition to that, he had come along to realize what a menace McCarthy was, but he was a slow starter on that.

F: Yes. Well, I think a lot of people were. I know this isn't an interview on McCarthy, except that he figures large in that period in the 1950's. What sort of person was McCarthy--personally?

P: I knew him quite well. He could be very charming.

F: I judge he had all the vaunted Irish geniality when he wanted to turn it on?

P: Yes, he did. He was very alert, very smart, also mean and vindictive--really mean, a very dangerous fellow. He could threaten you bodily harm, and he did attack me physically one time. One time he threatened to mutilate me so I couldn't go on television. There wasn't anything that he wouldn't stoop to.

F: Do you think that his relationship with Roy Cohn and the Schine fellow was, shall we say, sinister?

P: Yes, it was sinister.

F: Back to 1960 now, we have a very exciting campaign between Nixon on the one hand and Kennedy on the other with Johnson playing a very active role, of course, in the campaigning. Did you cover Mr. Johnson's activities at all during this campaign?

P: Yes, I covered one speech he made in Newark, New Jersey.

F: Now, this isn't considered Johnson territory,

P: No, it wasn't, although he did very well there. There was one speech I think where he and Kennedy both spoke down in Virginia. I did not get around too much with him.

F: Were you present at Kennedy's confrontation with the Protestant ministers in Houston?

P: No.

F: Did you see much of Mr. Johnson while he was Vice President?

P: Yes, I saw him frequently.

F: Working on news and analysis, or just see him socially?

P: I'd go up to his office to see him.

F: Now the popular opinion is that he was shunted aside and was frustrated and underused. Would you comment on that?

P: There's no question that he was underused, and I think he was somewhat frustrated, but--

F: Can you use a Vice President? I mean, is there something basically faulty in the system that means your number two man is somewhere lower--

P: In the first place, here was the situation where a man who had been Senate Majority Leader, extremely active working until midnight, sometimes 2 A.M. in his office. I remember when he was Senate Majority Leader on one occasion he called me at 2:00 o'clock in the morning to report to me on something which I was interested in as to how it

had worked out. The vote had just been taken. You transpose a man from that to the job of Vice President where he has only one official duty presiding over the Senate, which is very boring, and another unofficial duty, waiting for the President to die, which is disagreeable, and you have normally an unhappy man.

Now, I quickly say that Mr. Johnson as Vice President did a terrific job in many respects, far beyond what a normal Vice President could do. First, as Chairman of the Equal Opportunities Committee he called in the big defense contractors and said, "Now look, you are going to employ Negroes, or you will not get more defense contracts from the Defense Department." Nixon when he was Vice President had given a few little piddling stenographic jobs to a handful of Negroes for which he got headlines. Johnson, although I don't think he got headlines, did a terrific job on this, and it took courage and it took some initiative.

Now, secondly, he did a reasonably good job as a good will ambassador abroad. When I said reasonably good job, I mean any Vice President can do that. It doesn't take a great statesman, and he did all right. In fact I'm sure he did better than some because he had some little gimmicks that he worked out, such as bringing that camel driver back from Pakistan and he gave the fisherman in Senegal a motor boat for fishing. He had imagination and he did all right.

Then finally, and this was where there was some disappointment on his part, I think he had hoped that he could be sort of the Majority Leader and still be Vice President, and a number of the Senators didn't like this. Mansfield didn't like it, and they had a showdown with him and he retreated.

But again I say, he was underused. When I say that, it was no criticism of Kennedy. It was no criticism of Kennedy because the Vice President, as you said, is not much of a job. And Kennedy did invite Lyndon to the White House on almost every occasion. One time Mr. Johnson told me, said, "Kennedy is going out of his way to invite me to every dinner, every conference," and he always defended Kennedy in regard to this. He never let on to his intimate friends that I know of--maybe there were a few--that he was unhappy, though I had the suspicion that he wasn't too happy. I won't say that he was vastly unhappy because he's not that kind of a fellow. He digs in--

F: He works within his particular medium, yes.

P: He works. But he was not as happy as he had been before.

F: There's some talk that his inviting the camel driver was a distinct embarrassment to the Kennedy Administration. Did you see any evidence of that?

P: Quite the contrary. Kennedy was pleased over it. So pleased that he told Lyndon, "Why didn't we think of that!"

F: From your vantage point, did you ever see Mr. Kennedy use Vice President Johnson as a sort of Congressional liaison person when certain necessary legislation was pending?

P: I don't remember. He probably did. There were those in the White House who didn't like the Vice President, Mr. Johnson. Some of the little fellows around Kennedy didn't like him at all and they made fun of him. I suspect, though I never had any evidence of it directly, that Bobby was one of them. But I'm quite sure that President Kennedy was not among them.

F, You never sensed any tension then between Kennedy and Johnson--that is John Kennedy and Johnson.

P: Never.

F: Did you think that Kennedy might dump Johnson in 1964?

P: There were some rumors about it, but I never thought he would. He had a winning, ticket there. He needed the South. After all Johnson was a loyal and good Vice President. I don't think he would have done it.

F: Where were you on November 22, 1963, when the assassination occurred?

P: In Dallas.

F: Let's recount that, your day.

P: My day was not very important. I was in Dallas changing planes actually. I'd been invited by the Vice President, Mr. Johnson, to go to the Ranch that afternoon--or, no, I guess that evening, late, late that
evening. I was due to speak in San Marcos College--

F: Southwest Texas State.

P: That evening when I got to Austin to change planes it was--I was in Dallas I think probably at the time of the assassination, but I was at the airport and I didn't know about it. I caught my plane on and when I got into Austin I was notified of it. My speaking engagement, naturally, was cancelled immediately and I went to the hotel to write a special story about the assassination and do a special broadcast. I met there Rhea Howard of Wichita Falls, an old friend of Lyndon Johnson's, and an old friend of mine. We had dinner together. We worked on this for some time, and it was such a blow that we could hardly, hardly believe it. I remember when the airport manager met me at the airport to tell me this, I thought he was joking. I've never gone in through Dallas since without thinking about this. But I flew back to Washington that night, got in around 2:00 o'clock in the morning with my daughter-in-law, who was Mrs. Johnson's secretary then, and became social secretary at the White House.

F: Bess Abell?

P: Yes. She had all the baggage from Mrs. Johnson to bring back and it was just one of these things there you could hardly--like the rest of the world, we were stunned.

F: What was your reaction as far as the new President was concerned?

P: I don't know what my reaction was then. I didn't think much about it.

F: Did you see Mr. Johnson fairly shortly after that?

P: Yes, I had dinner with him about a week afterwards.

F: Can you disclose the nature of the dinner?

P: It was a very small family dinner. The most important thing that he talked to me about at that time was his desire to get along with the Russians. He hadn't worked out his policy yet but he did make one very important statement. He said that Premier Khrushchev had sent him the file on Oswald and this was the first time that any foreign government had ever given the files, a secret file like that on a national, and he was appreciative of it. He therefore said he was going to send a letter to Khrushchev thanking him. He said the State Department didn't want him to do advised against it, but nevertheless he was doing it, and he did. He signed it in my presence.

We talked about--I've forgotten, a lot of different things. Lady Bird talked to me about conflicts of interest, whether or not she could rightly accept presents from people--well meaning people--such as cheeses, turkey, gifts of that kind, and she was rather inclined to be against it, thought she ought not to do it. I told her I didn't think that made any difference. If people of Taswell County, Virginia, had a prize turkey they wanted to bring in there was nothing wrong with her accepting it, or a cheese from the monks down in Kentucky, there was nothing wrong with it. I've forgotten what else we talked about.

F: Did you get any glimmering early that these next two years were going to be a period of real activity in the domestic legislative field?

P: I can't say that I did at that time. I just don't remember. We were all suffering from shock. The new President didn't really discuss his plans to any great extent. He did talk a little bit about his press relations, I believe, and what he was going to do. He didn't have any very firm ideas and I didn't either.

F: Now he started out with a press that was for him and gradually the press became disenchanted. What do you think happened?

P: The press always becomes disenchanted with every President. This was not Johnson's fault entirely--a little bit his fault. They became very disenchanted with Kennedy. They became very disenchanted with Roosevelt. The only fellow they didn't really become disenchanted with was Eisenhower and he never said anything or gave them a chance really. Johnson's press relations were not particularly good, but on the other hand they were no worse than any other President. I would say that actually my experience is that he did well in making news available. When he had these press conferences of the old fashion type that Truman did, and Roosevelt and Hoover and Coolidge, he was excellent. No President has ever been better than he. But he had one fault that the newspapermen didn't like. He didn't give them much advance notice. They were critical of him on that point, and perhaps with some justice, because of course he figured that if he sent word out a day in advance he'd have the whole troop coming in, four hundred or five hundred newspapermen, and he wouldn't have room for them. So he would call a conference in a few minute's notice as the news developed, and the fellows who were there regularly attended, and the others didn't. The others got sore.

Now he was not very good on these big televised press conferences, chiefly because he's not very photogenic and chiefly because he studied it too carefully. He was too stilted. He was trying too hard. On television I have the same problem myself. On television if you're not able to relax you're no good on it. Some of these fellows who have been on for years like Ronald Reagan, they're good at it. They know how, but it doesn't mean they're great statesmen. He was better at it when he carried the microphone around on a neck chain--

F: And acted like Lyndon Johnson.

P: Yeah. Then he was much better. But I don't believe that he tried to manage the news more than most Presidents. Most Presidents want the news to be favorable and they try to make it favorable. You can't blame them for that.

F: Have you found in your long experience that one press secretary or two press secretaries have been eminently better than the others, or do they all run more or less a pattern?

P: The best fellow that I have known was George Christian, Johnson's last press secretary. The other fellow who was good, though ruthless, was Jim Haggerty under Eisenhower.

F: I get good reports on Haggerty all the time.

P: Now, Haggerty would really manage the news. He was the most adept news manager I've ever seen in Washington. He was doing it for Eisenhower. He did a good job, but he deceived the public?

F: What do you think made Christian good?

P: He was frank. He knew what the score was. He worked hard and he produced. You asked him a question and you got an answer. He'd go to some pains to look it up--if he couldn't tell you he'd say so frankly. He had an easy going disposition and he didn't get mad at anyone, even though you were against him. You couldn't help but feel that he was trying to do his job.

F: What about Bill Moyers?

P: Bill was good, too. Bill I don't believe liked the job particularly. Bill was good. He wasn't as easy going as George Christian. I don't think he was really fitted to the job quite as well, but I would say that in the years that I covered the White House--which is forty-five years I think, forty-four years--Bill was one of the best.

F: Did you ever see any evidence of Mr. Johnson just flat lying to the press?

P: No, I haven't. Doubtless he has maybe fuzzed things up at times,

F: Mislead them.

P: Every President has. I don't think he ever did that with me. Quite possibly--I would have to look over my stories over a period of years, but nothing stands out in my mind.

F: Did he create undue resentment by holding press conferences on seemingly routine material and at the end just sort of off-hand telling something important of which there had been no briefing, no buildup?

P: If anybody got sore at that they were crazy, because every President has a right to do that. I don't know. Some people got sore, maybe they did.

F: You would tend to think then that Mr. Johnson's plummeting acceptance by the people was not so much due to the fact of a disenchanted press as it was the war in Viet Nam and just people tiring of looking at the same face.

P: Yes. It was the inevitable looking at the same face, plus the war--a very serious factor. The South didn't like him because of his stand on Civil Rights and others didn't like him for some other reason--

F: The onus of office and burdens.

P: This happens with every President.

F: When Johnson and Bobby Kennedy had that more or less final definite break after Bobby came home from Europe, were you privy to any particular activity between the two men?

P: No, I don't think so.

F: Did you get the feeling or did you have any direct evidence that Bobby was out, in a sense, to gut Johnson as President.

P: Yes. Yes, I had that feeling.

F: Any reason for it--besides your own sensitivity?

P: The fellows around Bobby Kennedy made no bones about it. While they didn't actually say that this was Bobby's policy, it was obvious that it was.

F: Would you buy the statement that is sometimes made that there was an "Eastern Press Establishment," that didn't like any President that failed to come from east of the Appalachians?

P: That's probably true. Your description is perhaps better than mine there. Certainly the eastern press was rooting for Bobby Kennedy and not for Johnson.

F: After Mr. Johnson divorced himself from being a Texan--that is got beyond the Senate--did he show any evidence so far as you know of favoring the Texas oil interest?

P: No, quite the contrary. I had some talks with him about that and he was a little bit--

F: Or any oil interests for that matter.

P: No, no, he didn't. He appointed White Chairman of the Federal Power Commission, who has done a very excellent job, an impartial job, and he was a consumer's man. He was not an oil man. I think the President had to be a little careful about that. I think he had some of his friends talking to him in the oil industry. But no, I don't believe he did. I think he was very, very neutral.

F: Johnson continued in the Kennedy Cabinet and most of them throughout the remainder of his Presidency. Do you think that was a mistake?

P: No, I think it was not. I think Kennedy had some pretty good men in there and Johnson wanted continuity of office and he was trying to promote the Kennedy program, though actually it became the Johnson program and was a much greater program under him than under Kennedy. There was some criticism, not justified in my opinion, that the Kennedy men were not loyal to Johnson. Actually, I think they were. I think they were very loyal to him.

F: Did you see any evidence that Sargent Shriver was somewhat, oh, say, denigrated by the Kennedy clan because he showed such evident willingness to work with Mr. Johnson.

P: Yes. I don't think the Kennedy clan had much love for Sargent Shriver.

F: Did it seem to bother Sargent Shriver?

P: No, no, he took it in his stride.

F: Do you think the charge is true that Mr. Johnson totally neglected the national party machinery or failed to understand its function while he was President?

P: Johnson has had a long record of being his own political boss. He doesn't bother much with party machinery. I think it's actually a mistake. I think that he let the Democratic Committee run down and didn't use it.

F: Did you have any connection at all with John Bailey during this period? Did Bailey seem to feel that he was bypassed, neglected?

P: No, I wouldn't be able to say anything about that because I don't know. I think that Bailey was a very loyal chairman and he was bypassed to some extent. But I don't know that first hand.

F: Do you think that Mr. Johnson's various so-called poverty programs were well founded, even though not all of them have worked? In other words, how much of the current problems in the cities, the problems of poverty, are due to poorly thought through legislation? How much of them are just a matter of times coming to a head?

P: I thought his anti-poverty program was very far-sighted, very imaginative, and very constructive. It had some defects, but whenever you put a program like that together in a hurry it's bound to have some inefficiencies just as Harry Hopkins' program during the Depression did. But by-and-large it was a great program and could still be if Nixon doesn't gut it.

F: You really emerged back about 1932, 1933, so that you saw the New Deal in its beginnings and you've seen it amplified and extended through the years. Is Mr. Johnson a culmination of the New Deal? In a sense is he the last relic of a past, or do you consider him a contemporary President?

P: His program was a continuation of the New Deal, but in my opinion he went further than the New Deal. He was a disciple of Franklin Roosevelt, a great admirer of Franklin Roosevelt, but he had greater drive, greater imagination in many respects. Frank Roosevelt would have been very proud of him. Now, we're going to have to continue these policies in one form or another, in my opinion, for some time to some because we haven't really begun to scratch the problems of the big cities and Johnson had just made a start on it.

F: On the international scene, did you look on Mr. Johnson as too unsophisticated, because of his coming from the hinterland, to understand the international problems?

P: No. He had something to learn, but he learned quickly. I thought with the exception of Viet Nam he did an excellent job.

F: Do you think he was captured by the military and maybe Secretary McNamara--and Rusk--in the case of Viet Nam? Or do you think that he arrived at these decisions through a reasonably logic from his standpoint at least?

P: I thought he was captured by the military. I used to argue with him about Viet Nam, not very effectively.

F: Would he listen to arguments?

P: Yes, he would, not always. He was a better talker than a listener. But then, after all, a newspaperman is there to listen and not to talk. I felt when he was in the Senate, when he was Vice President, and when he was President, that he was always too much enraptured with the military. He was chairman of the Senate Preparedness Committee. He was on the Armed Services Committee. He was trained as a sort of a civilian supporter of the military and the military did all right by him, because they gave him more bases in Texas almost than they gave Dick Russell in Georgia. So it was a team. I think that was his great mistake in Viet Nam. On the rest of the world I thought he did well.

To elaborate I thought that he was cool and proper with De Gaulle. He never got sore at De Gaulle publicly. He might have been irritated privately, but he'd let De Gaulle pick on him but he wouldn't say a thing.

In regard to the Russians he used to get irritated then. They used to pan him in their newspapers, but you'd never know it from the outside. That policy paid off. The present Administration, Mr. Nixon is going to capitalize on that policy, or the American people I think will capitalize on it because I think that we'll have a policy of peace. But Johnson really hammered that policy out. It took him a little while at first. He started in immediately with that in mind. Once in awhile he would worry about it, but he would always come back to it, the policy that if the United States and Russia, the two strongest powers, could get together the peace of the world could be kept.

Now in Latin America he was also good. I think he made one mistake by going into the Dominican Republic with troops, but aside from that he was consistent and statesmanlike. When he had that summit conference down there--

F: Punta del Este.

P: Punta del Este, he worked on that and made a great impression on all those presidents. He continued it on his trips to Mexico, and so on. He never forgot those things. No, on the whole, he was new and naive on foreign policy. He learned fast and he just looked at it from a common sense point of view.

F: Why do you think that the NASA installation went to Houston? Do you think that's some of Mr. Johnson's manipulations?

P: I thought it was more Albert Thomas, who was Chairman of the Appropriations Committee and was the Congressman from Houston.

F: Which is not without a certain leverage!

P: That he got it down there.

F: You have seen at least six or seven presidents, on fairly intimate terms. How do you think Mr. Johnson is going to stack up when we look down that long gunsight of history?

P: History will be much kinder to him than the immediate present has been. I think he will stack up very well. I think he will stack up as one of our greatest Presidents on the domestic front and on much of our foreign policy. Unfortunately, his success was partly hurt by the war in Viet Nam. If it wasn't for that he would be head and shoulders over many other Presidents. Well I don't know how many but one of our greatest presidents.

F: Well, thank you, Mr. Pearson.

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Discusses his long association with Lyndon Johnson